

Mycenaean Trade in Action

From Mycenae
to Britain and Sudan



The Asahi Shimbun
Displays in Room 3

Marie-Louise von Motesiczky Charitable Trust -
Aall Foundation

Mycenaean Stirrup Jars



1. Stirrup jar found in Gurob Egypt



2



3. Sherd from a Mycenaean stirrup jar from House EI 3.7 in Amara West

Mycenaean stirrup jars are wheel-made vessels in several different shapes like globular, squat, and piriform body shape. The name refers to the two strap handles resembling a double stirrup. In the centre of the handle often a false spout was applied, whereas the true spout was in fact to the side and separated from the handle. The vessels are often painted in a reddish-brown to black colour and decorated in several parallel bands running along the body (1). Stirrup jars had first appeared on Crete in the 16th c. BC but they became much more common from the 14th c. BC. Larger vessels of this type were used to transport wine, while smaller vessels were used for luxurious oils.

Many Mycenaean stirrup jars were found in Egypt and Nubia (Northern Sudan) in archaeological sites as for example Buhen, Semna, Sai, Sesebi, Tombos and Amara West (2). The last one was a pharaonic colony between 1500 and 1070 BC in Upper Nubia.

A group of fine Mycenaean stirrup jars found in the town of Amara West is likely to have been used for storing luxury ointments. Neutron Activation Analysis of the clay fabrics indicates they were produced in Cyprus and the Greek mainland, rather than being imitations made in Egypt.

The sherds found in Amara West (3) can help to discover and explain the supply and trade networks of the Late Bronze Age in the areas of Egypt and Nubia with the eastern Mediterranean.

The Topsham Double Axe



This bronze double axe (1) from Greece was found on a ridge overlooking Topsham in South Devon in 1865. Only two such axes are known in the British Isles. The oval shaft hole indicates that the Topsham axe came from the Greek mainland and dates to about the 15th - 13th c. BC during the Aegean Late Bronze Age.

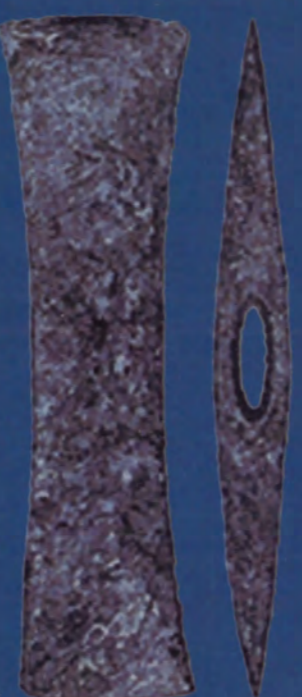
Similar double axes include the one found at Mycenae by H. Schliemann (2) and another also from Mycenae (3), found by K. Mylonas in the Tomb of Clytemnestra (13th c. BC).

Topsham is on the estuary of the River Exe, where the conditions were favorable for the anchorage, loading and unloading of ships in the Bronze Age. The area was a source for tin, a highly desired commodity during that era which was mixed with copper to make the more durable metal bronze.

This double axe may have arrived at Topsham during the Bronze Age as a result of indirect Mycenaean trade sometime between the 15th and 12th c. BC. Perhaps it was used as partial payment for a load of tin, or given as a present to a person presumably of some importance that was buried here. The axe appears to have been placed in his burial.



3



2

1



1. The Warriors Vase from Mycenae, 13th c. BC (National Archaeological Museum, Athens)

Who Were the Mycenaean?

Mycenae 



The Mycenaean culture flourished in mainland Greece and on the Aegean islands in the Late Bronze Age, from about 1600 to 1100 BC. The name derives from the site of Mycenae in Peloponnese where the culture was first identified. This culture was influenced by the older Minoan civilization (ca. 2000-1450 BC) which originated in Crete. The Mycenaean were excellent warriors (1), merchants and sailors and their products travelled all around the Mediterranean Sea.

Mycenaean merchants had trade connections with a northern people - the Cimmerians, as Homer calls them (*Odyssey*: XI 13-19).

Ancient sources indicate that they were familiar with the Cassiterides islands at the extreme borders of the ancient world, from which tin (in Greek = *kassíteros*) was coming to Greece (Herodotus, IV).

These islands are identified today with the Isles of Scilly, off the Cornish Peninsula in SW England.

In the Eastern Mediterranean, the Mycenaean also traded with the Egyptians, exchanging tin, olive oil, wine and fragrant unguents for gold and other precious products. Mycenaean pottery was a popular export and could be found not only throughout the Aegean, but also in places as far afield as Anatolia, Syria, Egypt and Spain.

"She came to deep-flowing Oceanus, that bounds the Earth, where is the land and city of the Cimmerians, wrapped in mist and cloud. Never does the bright sun look down on them with his rays either when he mounts the starry heaven or when he turns again to earth from heaven, but baneful night is spread over wretched mortals." (Homer, *Odyssey*, XI, 13-19).

Mycenaean stirrup jar

From Greece, 1400 BC - 1200 BC

Found in Gurob, Egypt

This stirrup jar is wheel made, has a piriform body on a high stem and a false neck with two strap handles.

It is decorated with red-brown painted bands and can have chevrons on the shoulder. Such vessels have been used for the storage and transport of luxury ointments and oils. Although shapes and decorative styles were of Cretan origin, the final decoration of the Mycenaean vessel was not quite as finely executed as in Minoan centers such as Knossos and Phaistos.

Registration Number 1912,020.292

Height: 8.89 cm

Diameter: 11.43 cm

Topsham Axe Britain

This Mycenaean double axe made of bronze was discovered in 1865 at Topsham, Mount Howe, in South Devon. It is of a Greek mainland type with parallels found in Mycenae and dated to the 15th – 13th century BC.

Registration number: 1933, 0406.126

Dimensions:

Length: 167 mm

Width: 60 mm (blade)

Width: 40 mm (shaft hole)



