

Major archaeological discovery near Orchomenos in Boeotia, central Greece

A monumental Mycenaean rock-cut chamber tomb came to light this summer at Prosilio near Orchomenos in Boeotia, central Greece, during the excavations conducted there by the Ministry of Culture & Sports of Greece/Ephorate of Antiquities of Boeotia and of the British School at Athens/University of Cambridge.

The tomb, known as Prosilio tomb 2, is one of the largest of its kind ever to have been discovered in Greece. A rock-cut passageway (dromos), 20m in length, leads to a monumental façade 5.40m in depth. The façade gives access, through a doorway (stomion), to the burial chamber which has an area of 42sqm, making this example the 9th largest out of c. 4000 Mycenaean chamber tombs that have been excavated in Greece in the last 150 years. The chamber's roof was originally gabled and had a height of c. 3.5m. Over the years, and perhaps even since Mycenaean times, the original roof started to crumble creating a cavernous interior with an existing height of 6.5m. The crumbling of the original roof disturbed, to some extent, the burial and its furnishings in the chamber but also helped seal the burial layer. Inside the chamber, a rock-cut bench was carved on all four sides of the rectangular tomb. The bench was enhanced by the addition of mud-plaster.

The construction of the tomb dates to the middle of the 14th century BC. Its excavation has yielded one of the best documented assemblages of a Mycenaean palatial individual burial on mainland Greece. The presence in tomb 2 of a single burial with important finds is an extraordinary discovery, rarely attested in monumental Mycenaean chamber tombs. Tombs of this type are used for many burials making it difficult to associate particular objects with individual burials. In the case of tomb 2 at Prosilio, however, the discovery of a single burial allows for the association of the objects placed in the tomb with the dead individual buried there.

On the chamber floor, the Prosilio team discovered the burial of a man, 40-50 years old, accompanied by a number of objects, the study and conservation of which has just begun. The assemblage includes 'tinned' clay vessels of various shapes, a pair of horse bits, arrows, pins, jewellery of various materials, combs, a sealstone and a signet ring. The discovery of this burial and its associated finds will allow the researchers to understand better funeral practices in the region during the Mycenaean period. The first examination of the finds suggests a conscious selection of the objects interred with the body by the tomb-using group that was responsible for the burial's preparation. As in the case of the 'griffin warrior' discovered at Bronze Age Pylos in 2015 – chronologically earlier by at least a century to the burial in Prosilio tomb 2 – the placement of different shapes and types of jewellery with a male burial contests the, until now widely held, belief that jewellery should mostly be associated with female burials. It is also worth noting that, with the exception of two painted stirrup jars, commonly used to store aromatic oils, no painted pottery was discovered in the tomb – a feature which is otherwise widely attested in tombs of this period.

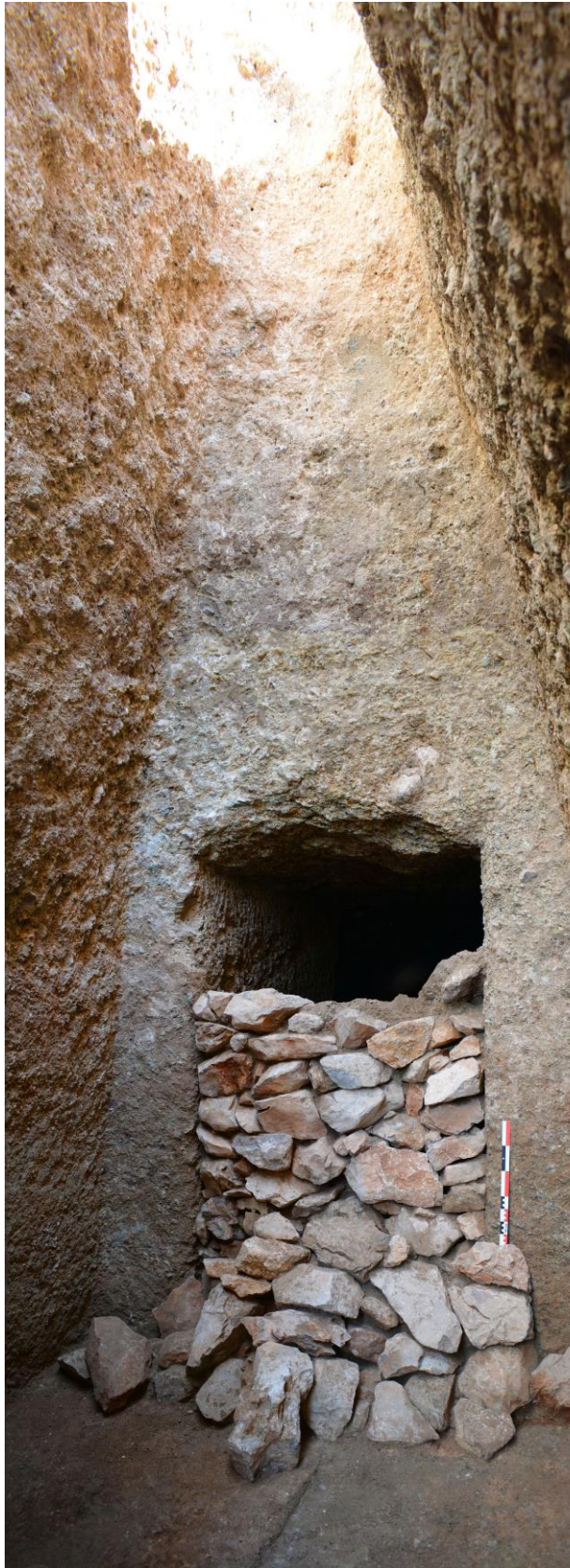
The Prosilio team believes that tomb 2 is associated with ancient Orchomenos, a major regional centre controlling northern Boeotia. Orchomenos, which is c. 3.5km away from

tomb 2, supervised and controlled during the 14th and 13th c. BC the partial drainage of Lake Kopais – a project that yielded sizeable land for agricultural activities. The power of this centre is reflected in its most famous monument, the tholos tomb of ‘Minyas’, first excavated by Heinrich Schliemann in the 19th century, and comparable only in size and refinement to the tholos tomb of ‘Atreus’ at Mycenae. Finds from earlier excavations at Orchomenos also attest to its power in Mycenaean times. The dead man from tomb 2 at Prosilio was most likely associated with the upper echelons of society at this major Mycenaean centre.

Directors of the inter-disciplinary five-year Prosilio project are Dr Alexandra Charami, Director of the Ephorate of Antiquities of Boeotia, and Dr Yannis Galanakis, Senior Lecturer in the Faculty of Classics, University of Cambridge. The Prosilio team also includes Kyriaki Kalliga, archaeologist of the Ephorate of Antiquities of Boeotia, Dr Panagiotis Karkanis, Director of the Wiener Laboratory at the American School of Classical Studies in Athens, Dr Ioanna Moutafi, bio-archaeologist and Senior Researcher at the Wiener Laboratory, and Emily Wright, field supervisor and PhD candidate in Archaeology at the University of Cambridge.

Special thanks for their enthusiastic support and hard work for the duration of the project are due to Yannis Panagiotopoulos, foreman, Sofia Perlepe, archaeologist, Maro Karadimou, conservator, of the Ephorate of Antiquities of Boeotia; and to the 25 archaeologists, experts, students and workers. The team of students, in particular, thoroughly sieved, in 4700 episodes, all 75 cubic metres of soil that were removed during the excavation of the tomb’s dromos and chamber.

The Prosilio project was conducted with the permission of the Greek Ministry of Culture & Sports and of Ioannis Papadopoulos, owner of the land. The project was generously funded by, among other sources, the University of Cambridge (Faculty of Classics, the McDonald Institute, the Cambridge Humanities Research Grant scheme, and Sidney Sussex College), the Institute for Aegean Prehistory (INSTAP) and the British School at Athens. The study of the archaeological data and the conservation of objects and skeletal remains are in progress.



Photographs: [All photographs courtesy of the Prosilio Excavation Project](#)

1: The façade of the monumental chamber tomb 2 at Prosilio with the dry-stone wall blocking the access to the doorway and chamber. Photograph: Yannis Galanakis.

2: Pair of horse bits from Prosilio tomb 2 as found. Photograph: Yannis Galanakis.



3: Excavation around the tomb's dromos (passageway) in progress. Photograph: Yannis Galanakis.



4: A 'tinned' clay kylix (drinking cup) from Prosilio tomb 2. Photograph: Yannis Galanakis.

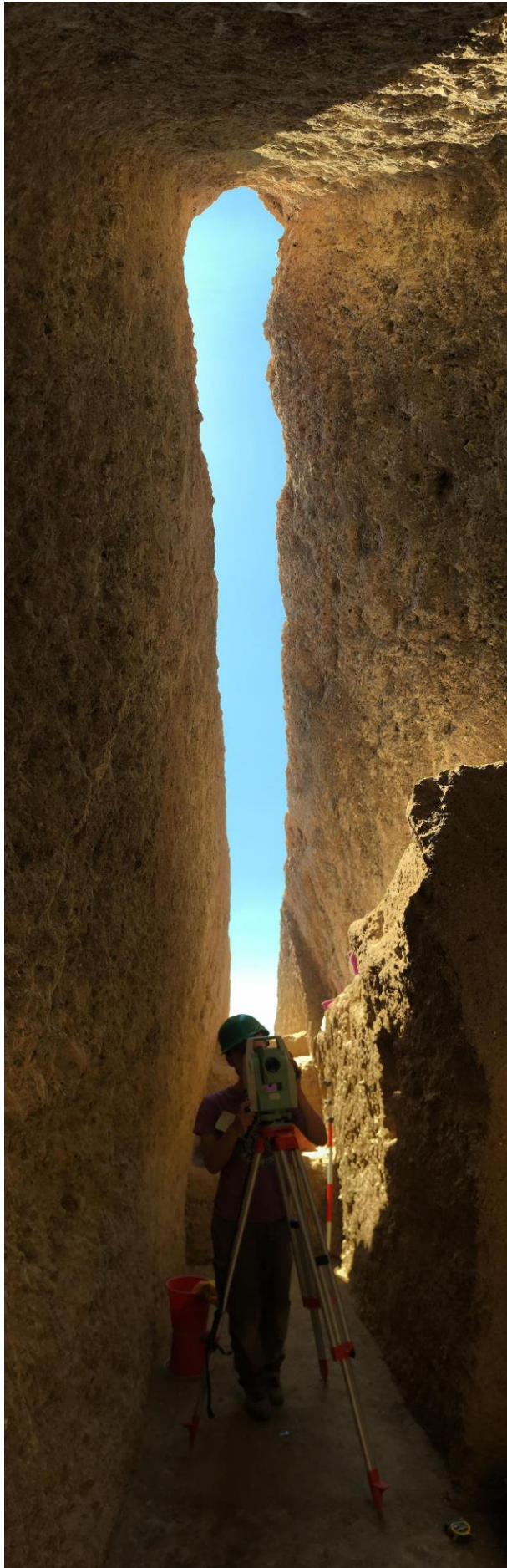


5: A clay stirrup jar used for storing aromatic oils from Prosilio tomb 2. Photograph: Yannis Galanakis.



6: Documenting human remains from the chamber of tomb 2 at Prosilio. Photograph: Yannis Galanakis.





7: Excavation documentation in progress in the dromos (passageway) of tomb 2 at Prosilio. Photograph: Yannis Galanakis.