

Warrior rises from grave after 3,500 years

An archaeologist couple working on a Greek site have uncovered a spectacular hoard, **Anthee Carassava** writes

The remains of a 3,500-year-old warrior complete with his sword and a stunning hoard of treasure have been unearthed in southwest Greece in one of the most remarkable archaeological discoveries since the Second World War.

The fighter, thought to have been aged between 30 and 35 when he died, was discovered in the coastal city of Pylos, laid to rest beside his metre-long bronze sword and a dazzling collection of precious jewels, silver vases and ivory combs.

Archaeologists made the find this summer during an excavation on the site of the Mycenaean-era Palace of Nestor, when they hit a structure that they initially believed to be a Bronze Age house. Days later the researchers found the ancient grave. They were astonished to discover that it had lain intact for 35 centuries despite the area being subject to excavation work for decades by other experts.

"It is mindboggling that we were first," said Jack Davis of the University of Cincinnati, who led the team with his wife Sharon Stocker. The pair have been excavating the area for 25 years.

"I'm still shaking my head in disbelief," Dr Davis said. "So many walked over it so many times, including our own teams."

The find was hailed by the Greek culture ministry as "the most spectacular discovery of its kind from the Mycenaean era, in 65 years".

James Wright, director of the American School of Classical Studies in Athens, said: "Probably not since the 1950s have we found such a rich tomb."

Seeing the tomb "was a real highlight of my archaeological career," added Thomas Brogan, director of the Institute for Aegean Prehistory Study Centre for East Crete. "You can count on one hand the number of tombs as wealthy as this one."

Although the lid of the wooden coffin was found crushed, the grave contained 1,400 artefacts,



Sharon Stocker with the skull. The warrior was a member of the palace of Pylos and his grave

contained 1,400 artefacts, including a gold necklace, rings and ivory combs



including a fine collection of gold and silver jewellery and more than 1,000 beads of carnelian, amethyst, jasper and agate, the Greek ministry said.

The jewellery was decorated with the figures of deities, animals and floral motifs in the style of the Minoans, the civilisation that flourished on the island of Crete from about 2,000 BC.

Experts said that the pieces would shed light on the extent of the influence the Minoans had on the later Mycenaean, whose civilisation spread across the eastern Mediterranean, giving rise to classical Greek culture.

Gold cups were found resting on the warrior's chest and stomach while four gold rings lay scattered near his feet. An ivory plaque carved with a griffin, a



mythical animal supposed to protect goddesses and kings, was found lying between his legs — leading the team who discovered his corpse to dub the man the "griffin warrior".

The dead man would have been a leading member of the palace of Pylos, which was one of the most important administrative centres of the Mycenaean civilisation, the ministry said. Built between 1300BC and 1200BC, the palace's ruins were discovered in 1939.

Maria Vlazaki, general secretary of the culture ministry, said that experts were still "documenting and reviewing the finds" from the tomb, which stands at 2.4 metres (7ft 10in) long and 1.5 metres wide.

"The aim is to complete this procedure and present the stunning artefacts to the public as soon as possible," she told *The Times*. She said that the finds would eventually be displayed at the local museum in Pylos.

Foreign archaeological schools heading excavations in Greece do not have rights of ownership.

"It's a mystery, what Greece's earth holds," Mrs Vlazaki said. "It has rewarded us with some of the world's most spectacular finds, throughout the years."