

EXCHANGE LECTURE WITH THE ACADEMY OF ATHENS

## THE CULT CENTRE OF MYCENAE

By G. E. MYLONAS

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It is a great honour to be with you today in this special gathering, to bring to you the fraternal greetings of the Academy of Athens and to lay before you the results of the final clearing of an important section of the west slope of the acropolis of Mycenae.

The title of my presentation contains two provocative elements. The first deals with the locality involved: Mycenae, as is well known, has kept the interest of scholars and laymen alike ever since Heinrich Schliemann, in 1876, and Christos Tsountas, in 1886, brought to light the royal tombs of Grave Circle A and the reputed Palace of Atreus respectively. Since then the extensive excavations and publications of British scholars, especially of Alan B. Wace, and of Greek and American scholars in Mycenae and Pylos, especially of C. W. Blegen, have kept interest alive. The second element deals with the religion of the Mycenaean world in contrast to the Minoan. We know less about the second subject than we do about the life story of the Cyclopean city, in spite of the pioneer work of Sir Arthur Evans and Martin P. Nilsson, the monumental achievement of Ventris and Chadwick, the important studies of Professor Palmer, and the efforts of a pleiad of international scholars. Consequently every piece of evidence, however small, that can add to our knowledge is, I believe, of great interest and of the utmost importance. Such evidence was obtained in the last thirty years by British and Greek scholars on the west slope of the acropolis of Mycenae; part of this evidence will form the substance of my discussion today, which is also offered as a tribute to the memory of Alan B. Wace.

The section of the west slope that is of interest to us at present lies to the east of the so-called Hellenistic Tower of the West Cyclopean Fortification wall. In 1886 the area was tested by Tsountas. Within the space of 30 × 28 m, he uncovered foundations of structures partially published in the *Praktika* of 1886 with an architectural drawing by Wilhelm Doerpfeld. Since that early time, Wace, his collaborators, and Greek scholars have further

explored the slope. The foundations revealed by Tsountas seem to have belonged to two different structures, occupying three rising terraces. Those on the higher level are indicated by the letter *T* on Doerpfeld's plan. The foundations on the middle and lower terrace level are known now as Tsountas's House.<sup>1</sup>

Among the maze of foundations that were in evidence at the beginning of my investigation, the dark end of a conglomerate block which covered the calvert of the drain was visible high up the slope. The westward flow of the drain was uncovered by Tsountas along the stepped street that lines the south-west wall of the house named after him. A massive wall built across the conglomerate block, covering its upper face, proved to be of Hellenistic date and served to retain the slope of the hillside. The removal of a small part of this massive wall revealed the complete block and proved that it was a threshold measuring 2.5 m in length and 0.9 m in width. Cut ledges and two pivot holes, some 0.12 m in diameter, indicate that a two-leaf wooden door swung inward. Burnt remnants of the door were found on the threshold. The area behind the doorway, as proved by the threshold, was filled with a mass of calcined debris that had rolled from higher levels. Evidently the burning mass caused the destruction of the doorway and its prothyron, 1.15 m in depth. The east-flanking wall of this prothyron is preserved to a good height, while the west-flanking wall was destroyed at the time of the building of the Hellenistic retaining wall. On the lower part of the surviving east-flanking wall of the prothyron were found the remains of a painted dado. A chariot procession is painted on one fragment and on another multi-coloured wavy bands.<sup>2</sup>

A lane some 1.9 m in width and 9.0 m in length leads to the prothyron and doorway. At its southern end it turns at right angles to the east and forms a raised platform 1.75 m in length, 3.2 m in width, and 0.1 m in height. That lower landing did terminate in a stairway, running approximately from north to south, which is partially preserved. Originally it seems to have had fourteen steps, eight of which are partially preserved. The remnants are sufficient, however, to prove that the stairway had a width of 1.7 m, that its steps were 0.36 m broad, and had a rise of only

<sup>1</sup> The remains of the structure on the higher level were investigated again by Wace in 1950. His brief report in the *JHS* (1951) was only known to me in 1968 when I began to clear the area again. That work continued till 1975.

<sup>2</sup> Conglomerate thresholds in private houses have not as yet been found at Mycenae. Our example also precedes that found by Lord William Taylour in the so-called 'anteroom' of his 'two cult areas'.

0.1 m. The dimensions give the stairway a monumental aspect. Above the steps were found traces of a larger landing, at which a path from the Palace apparently ended. Unfortunately the excavation could not proceed beyond the higher landing.

Fragments of pottery found indicate that the stairway as well as the doorway were constructed in the second half of the LH III B period, that the doorway was abandoned, after its destruction by fire at the very end of that period, and that the stairway continued to be in use, perhaps serving a different purpose, until the end of the LH III C period. Under the slab of step No. 2 (counting from the top) the grave of a small child was found belonging to the end of that period, and at the north-east edge of the lower platform a column base typical of LH III C times. A deep crater, pieced together from many fragments, painted in the dense style, is the most important vase found of those times.

From the doorway an interior corridor or passageway leading northward begins. It was noted by Tsountas, who, however, uncovered but a small section of its length. In the area around the doorway and even at a length of 10 m, its width is destroyed but along its eastern edge survive traces of the lime-plaster pavement which enable us to follow its course.<sup>1</sup> The clear-cut edge of the fragment of pavement by the doorway made possible the examination of the fill below it and proved the existence of an earlier coated pavement, some 0.23 m below the uppermost, proving two periods of use of the corridor. From the doorway the corridor proceeds northward in a gradual and easy incline. At a distance of 12 m from its beginning, the west-flanking wall is preserved to the level of its upper pavement, thus establishing the width of the corridor at 1.90 m. At its 18th metre of length, the course of the corridor is interrupted by a cross-wall built at a higher level, at whose base, still above the level of the corridor, was revealed a stretch of cobble-stone pavement strewn with sherds of the LH III C2 period establishing the date of the cross wall. Below the cobble-stone pavement, only 0.09 m above the uppermost pavement of the corridor, set in a thick layer of plesia the greater part of a circular hearth, made of clay enclosed by a solid ring of lime, was found. Its greatest diameter is 0.81 m. On either side of the hearth stone bases of wooden columns, some 0.18 m in diameter were still

<sup>1</sup> The corridor was found covered with calcined debris, similar in character to that noted around the doorway, for a length of 1.5 m from the doorway. The Hellenistic retaining wall noted before was built on this calcined debris. Clearance of the debris brought to light the Mycenaean east-flanking wall of the corridor plastered with a thick coat of clay and chopped straw.

*in situ*. The stratigraphy of the area proves that the corridor was abandoned at the end of the LH III B period and that shortly afterwards a building was constructed over its area to which the hearth belonged; in still later times in the LH III C<sub>2</sub> period, a building was constructed over the area of the hearth to which the cross-wall and cobble-stone pavement belong. The last building was destroyed at the end of the LH III C period.

Evidence of modern disturbance of the lime-plaster pavement of the corridor was revealed at a short distance from the area of the hearth and at that point along the east edge of the pavement a drain was found leading northward and continuing its course into the gallery of Wace's building (the Citadel House). The corridor in its northward course and at its 28th metre reaches a broad platform. The gallery of Wace's building seems to have terminated at that same platform. The relation of that gallery to the platform and the corridor, indicated also by the drain, will be determined when Wace's observations and final reports are published.

On reaching the platform and at its 28th metre from the conglomerate threshold, the corridor turns at an acute angle to the south proceeding southward in an opposite direction to that originally followed. Near its turn, at a distance of 1.5 m from the platform and against its west-retaining wall, a bench survives to a length of 2.3 m, 0.4–0.45 m wide and with an average height of 0.4 m. It is made of clay interspersed with tiny stones and is coated with white earth mixed with a small quantity of lime.<sup>1</sup>

At the 8th metre of its southern course the corridor is flanked by a stairway, five steps of which survive; to this we shall return later. From that point the corridor continues southward to terminate at the façade of Tsountas's building *F*. That building has a complex history and is of great importance. Most of it was excavated by Tsountas in 1886; in 1950 Wace continued its exploration which was completed by us between the years 1966 and 1975. The building is composed of two parts, the smaller of which to the south was called by Tsountas Building *F*. It measures 4.9 × 3.2 m and its area to the rock level was dug by Tsountas. From it he

<sup>1</sup> Almost across the corridor from the bench and along the west side of the corridor the floor of a room is exposed opening to the south-west. It stands on an artificial terrace and at its centre, standing 0.1 m above the floor, there is a small frame of clay recalling a hearth or altar. No information is available about that building, which we may call Building X. It stands almost above and to the side of the 'Room of the Idols'.

Six metres beyond the sharp turn the corridor narrows to 1.4 m.

reported a number of small objects most important of which is the well-known plaster tablet with the painted representation of a scene of worship. The painted fragment of a goddess(?) with a griffin, found by us in the fill dumped by Tsountas beyond the south wall of the room, may also have belonged to this room. In the general area of  $\Gamma$ , not specified exactly, Tsountas found the plaster female head usually called the head of a sphinx. In his diary Tsountas states that it was found in the fill of the stepped way. The date of  $\Gamma$  was not determined by its excavator,<sup>1</sup> but its location and its relation to the megaron of the House of Tsountas, indicate that it is the oldest structure in the area.

Another room,  $\Gamma_1$ , was added at a later stage to Room  $\Gamma$  as an extension to the north-west, in such a way that Room  $\Gamma$  was enclosed by the walls of that extension; apparently a special meaning was attributed to  $\Gamma$ .

Tsountas revealed the length and what was surviving of the east, west, and south walls of  $\Gamma_1$  so that a tentative ground plan of the composite structure could be drawn, but he did not clear its area to rock level, as he had done in the case of Room  $\Gamma$ . Apparently he found a floor some 0.57 m above rock level and there stopped his work. It is unfortunate that he did not give details regarding the nature of that floor, but the surviving fragment of pavement around the circular object drawn by Doerpfeld, at the north-east corner of  $\Gamma_1$ , some 2 m in length and with a maximum width of 1 m, indicates that this may have been Tsountas's floor.

In 1950 Wace, realizing that  $\Gamma_1$  was not fully excavated, again cleared the part revealed by Tsountas and dug below the level reached by the early explorer. Some 0.37 m below that level Wace found the pavement of lime-plaster considered to be the floor of the extension of Room  $\Gamma_1$ . On that floor he found important remains which he described briefly in his note published in the *JHS* for 1951, concluding that the building was a 'shrine, the first of its kind to be discovered at Mycenae'. The complete second clearing of Room  $\Gamma_1$  in 1971-2 proved his conclusion to be correct. Room  $\Gamma_1$  stretches from north-east to south-west with its entrance at the north-east. (For easier and clearer description hereafter we shall use the cardinal points of the compass, north, south, etc., instead of north-east and south-west.) The west side of Room  $\Gamma_1$  is not entirely preserved, but the bottom course of its foundation

<sup>1</sup> He did mention the discovery of sherds in its fill though these apparently were not studied.

still exists making certain the dimensions of the extension; its length is 6.45 m and its average width 4.5 m. The north side is entirely open, and with it the interior corridor comes to an end. The damaged end of the corridor again gave us the chance to examine its fill and to find the existence of two pavements with a distance of 0.21 m between them. The lowest pavement belonged to  $\Gamma_1$  and stood 0.36 m above its floor. Traces of two steps of smoothed flat stones, running along the entire front of the building, bridged the difference between the end of the corridor and the pavement of  $\Gamma_1$ . Thus a stepped open entrance occupied the north side of  $\Gamma_1$ .

At a distance of 0.8 m from the south rear wall of Room  $\Gamma_1$  is preserved a horseshoe-shaped low altar, cleared first by Wace in 1950 and again by us in 1972. Built of clay mixed with plesia it has walls covered with seven different coats of lime plaster; none of these was painted. It rises, at an average, 0.2 m from the pavement and possesses a slightly concave surface exhibiting three thin coats of lime plaster. From north to south it measures 1.33 m and from east to west 1.29 m. At its south-west end was added a circular projection (0.57 × 0.4 m) in the middle of which is preserved a circular hole 0.16 m in diameter and 0.12 m in depth. The walls of the cavity are not vertical, but lean slightly and are coated with lime. At its bottom there was a very soft fill, ashy in colour, 0.07 m in depth; between it and the rock below a compact fill of earth contained a few sherds of MH times. To the side of the altar is also attached a bulk of clay leaving a groove of 0.08 m in width between it and the circular projection. The groove was also plastered, and proceeded away from the altar. It is now preserved to a length of 0.6 m. Wace reported that the neck of an amphora, set in the floor, terminated the groove.<sup>1</sup> On the concave surface of the altar can now be detected slight traces of smoke proving that the structure could not have been used for household needs, such as cooking or heating, but was used for religious rites. Wace assumed that the round hole of the circular projection at the south-west edge was used to secure a rhyton, reporting that in the area he found a fragment of such a vessel. The large diameter of the hole, its small depth, and its slanting walls rule out such a use. Apparently the hole was used for libations and this use agrees well with its function as an altar. Besides, near the altar Wace found a 'shallow dish probably

<sup>1</sup> We found neither trace of that fragment nor indications of its previous existence.

intended for offerings, and in or near this room were two small vases not much larger than thimbles and probably votives'. He also reported a thick layer of plesia in the space between the south side of the altar and the south wall of the room. (This should be borne in mind for later reference.)

To the north of the altar and slightly west of the axis of Rooms  $\Gamma$  and  $\Gamma_1$  a large boulder is still *in situ* (1.15 × 0.7 × 0.65 m) wedged securely in place against the rock that rises below it. Its top is not worked, but presents a rough, anomalous surface. On average, that surface is 0.24 m above the floor. Its size and its surface prove that the boulder could neither have been used as the base of a column or similar support, nor was it lowered subsequently into position to serve a later structure, as has been assumed. Its surface is some 0.12 m below the floor of the later structure, and furthermore on its vertical sides can be seen even to this day traces of the lime plaster of the floor of  $\Gamma_1$ . These definitely prove that boulder and altar, surrounded by the same pavement, are contemporary. The inescapable conclusion is that both were used for religious rites, and I suggest that the boulder is a 'slaughtering stone' on which sacrificial animals were laid to be killed and their blood carefully collected to be used for libations.

Along the east side of the shrine its builders left the rock of the slope to project within the area of the room; in fact the foundations of its east wall were built on the projecting rock. The top of that rock was hammered level to take a pavement, a method used by the Mycenaean in other similar situations, as is proved in particular by the working of the rocks in the area between the south and north corridors of the Palace on the summit of the citadel. It is now important to note that the levelled top of the rock is in line with the fragment of pavement, the existence of which is marked in our plan of the north-east corner of the room. It is on the same level as the uppermost pavement at the end of the corridor before the east front of the shrine and it is at this level that Tsountas stopped his excavation. All indications point to the conclusion that some time in the life of the structure and for some reason that cannot be definitely proved Room  $\Gamma_1$ , i.e. the area of the shrine, was filled in and another floor was laid 0.37 m above its pavement to serve a room of a later period. That room we may call  $\Gamma_2$ , since it was enclosed by the same walls and had the same dimensions as  $\Gamma_1$ . The entrances of the south wall of  $\Gamma_1$  and north wall of  $\Gamma$  were raised to the new level and new wooden thresholds were placed. That the new Room  $\Gamma_2$  served the same rites as those celebrated in Room  $\Gamma_1$  is indicated by another structure revealed

in front of the north-east corner of  $\Gamma_2$ , and at the east side of the end of the corridor ending at the shrine.

The structure is only partially preserved, but its two parts are evident. Facing the corridor we find a rectangular platform made of clay and earth mixed with a few sherds which rises 0.3 m above the pavement of the corridor. Its surface and the vertical walls of its sides are covered with three layers of fine lime plaster of excellent quality, the nearest approach to stucco. At present the platform measures 1.15 m from east to west and 1.55 m from north to south. Apparently its south side is not preserved to its original extent and in consequence we cannot be certain about the right dimension of its width. At the broken edge of the south side, and what could be near its south-west corner, is preserved the greater part of a round hole, originally 0.24 m in diameter, at the bottom of which were found ashes, fragments of burnt bones of small animals, and a few plain unidentifiable sherds.

Along the east side of the platform, forming its second part, two worked porous blocks are *in situ* measuring together 1.75 m in length from north to south and from 0.58 to 0.44 m in width. A third block, now missing, is indicated by the cuttings on the porous blocks. These consist of shallow rectangular dowel holes and a wide band worked along the edge. These further prove that the blocks served as a base on which a light structure was secured, possibly of wood. The rear ends of the blocks toward the slope were secured by rough stones wedged against each other, against the rocks and the porous blocks. Finally we should note that beyond the south side of the porous blocks and in the north-east corner of Room  $\Gamma_2$ , an almost elliptical ring was again cleared. With a diameter of some 0.75 m at its widest, it was made of thick clay strengthened with sherds, and was noted first by Tsountas and then by Wace. In 1971 it still contained ashes and burned matter. There can be no doubt that the surviving remains of the structure belong to a rectangular altar, perhaps similar in form to that depicted on the gem from Myrsinochorion-Routsis found by Marinatos. In that composition, a woman worshipper places flowers, her offering, on a small rectangular altar. Our rectangular altar with a wooden table could have been used for similar offerings of flowers and fruit. Its first section, the platform of earth, was the prothesis of the altar. We should perhaps note that a ditch was dug in modern times along the north side of the platform damaging the area.

The rectangular altar is certainly connected with Room  $\Gamma_2$ , built over the shrine, which suggests that Room  $\Gamma_2$  also served as





*a.* General air view of the central section of the west slope of the acropolis of Mycenae.

A Area below the lane to the conglomerate threshold. K Conglomerate threshold. EΔ Processional Way. Δ Lane to doorway. 0 Stepped lane. I Shrine. Y Room of the Idols. VIII Area of Round altar.



*b.* Blocked doorway of Room T<sub>7</sub>.

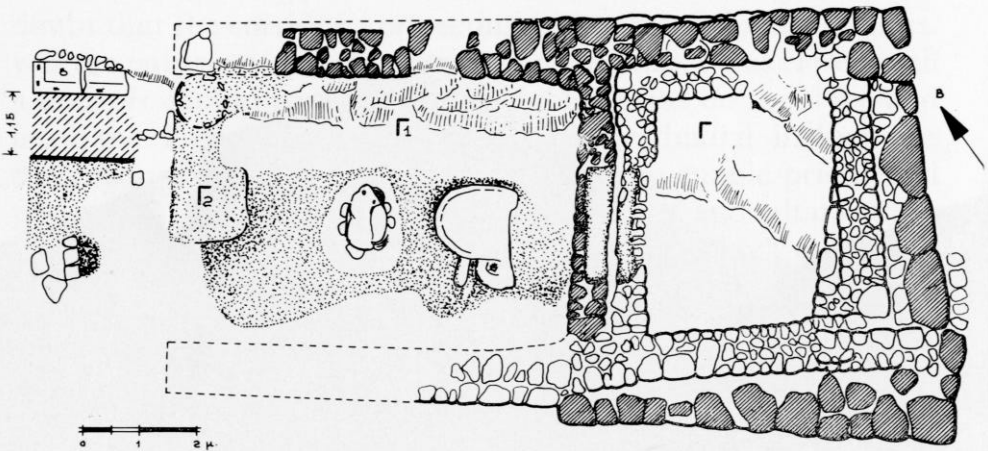
PLATE XIV



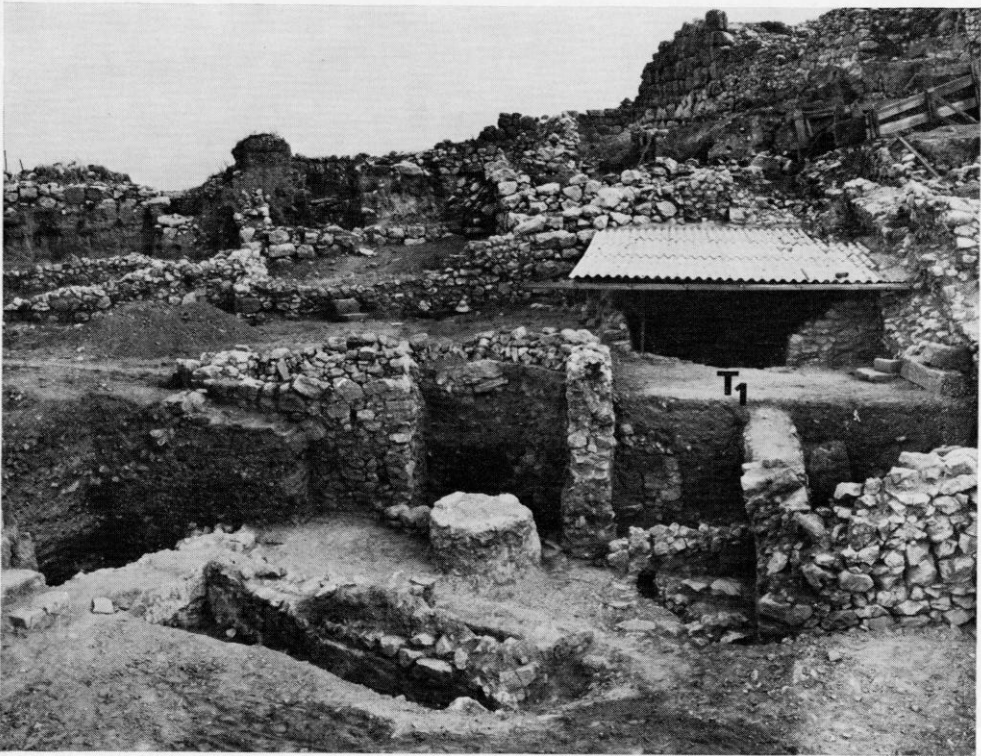
*a.* General view of Shrine  $\Gamma_1$  from the North. B. Rectangular altar.



*b.* Remains of the rectangular altar in front of the north-east corner of Shrine  $\Gamma_1$ .



a. Ground plan of Shrines Γ, Γ<sub>1</sub> and Γ<sub>2</sub> of Mycenae.



b. Round altar of Mycenae T<sub>1</sub>. Area of the Room of the Idols.



PLATE XVI



North-west end of the Processional Way. α. LH III C Wall. δ. Platform and turn to south of Processional Way.

a shrine succeeding  $\Gamma_1$ , when it was filled in.<sup>1</sup> There can be no doubt that the corridor, connecting successive shrines and altars, was the only passage in Mycenae whose entrance was closed with a door. It could be reached from higher points on the slope and from the Palace itself. Its length and graduated incline was designed with much labour and ingenuity to enable priests and priestesses to process in state to the shrines and altars at its southern end: it was a veritable 'Processional Way'; a *πομπικὴ ὁδός*. We may now note that a *terminus ante quem* for the construction of the ensemble of corridor and shrines is provided by the calcined debris that was found filling its doorway, debris that should be placed to the end of the LH III B period. As a tentative general conclusion regarding this ensemble we can now state: (1) The corridor was a 'Processional Way' leading to shrines and altars on the west slope of the acropolis of Mycenae. (2) That 'Processional Way' was abandoned at the end of the LH III B period, when Tsountas's and Wace's buildings were destroyed and abandoned. (3) In LH III C1 times, a structure was built over the area of the abandoned corridor. To this structure belong the hearth with two columns, which was used for secular purposes, and the pavement of *plasia* overlying the pavement of the corridor. (4) In still later times, in the LH III C2 period, the cross-wall over the corridor with its pavement of cobble-stones was built. The child's grave under the main stairway also belongs to the end of the LH III C2 period. Sherds found everywhere in the area as well as structural details confirm this historical outline.

We have already noted the existence of a small stairway at the west edge of the 'Processional Way' and at a small distance from the rectangular altar. Five steps of that stairway are still *in situ*. Tsountas, who uncovered the stairway, speaks of six stairs and there must originally have been at least as many. The topmost step is still covered by the lime plaster of the pavement of the corridor, thus indicating that the two were in existence at the same time. From the foot of the stairway begins a narrow paved passage leading to the outer court of 'Tsountas's House' which occupies the second and third and lowest platforms of the slope.<sup>2</sup> The

<sup>1</sup> The raised door openings on the south wall of  $\Gamma_1$  and that on the north wall of  $\Gamma$ , corresponding in height to the depth of the fill, would indicate that  $\Gamma$  was in use continuously until the end of the LH III B period when the shrines were destroyed and the corridor was abandoned.

<sup>2</sup> In that outer court Tsountas found two porous stones so worked as to form a shallow basin some 0.4 m in diameter with a hole in its centre (0.16 m in diameter) in the shape of an ivy leaf. Below the opening, to a depth of 0.35 m, a

character of the building with its Megaron, side chambers, and basement rooms, cannot be definitely established; the use of the building remains uncertain, although Wace suggested that it might have served as the house of a priest. A test in the court of the Megaron proved that an older paved floor underlies the one in view today. Two periods of use are also indicated by the stairs leading to the basement rooms of the building; of these the uppermost three are an addition of later times. Thus we have a correspondence with the two periods represented by the pavement of the 'Processional Way' and of the shrines on the higher platform of the area.<sup>1</sup>

In the lowest terrace of the slope within the fortification walls a narrow area of fill was left unexcavated between the excavations of Tsountas and of Lord William Taylour and his collaborators. That strip we cleared in 1972-3. Within the area and some 0.25 m from the edge of Lord William Taylour's excavation, there came to light a round altar rising above the floor 0.68 m. Made of clay mixed with small stones, it has a diameter of 1.4 m and its sides were covered with a thick coat of plesia. Its surface, covered irregularly by larger stones, does not exhibit strong signs of burning. A thick layer of plesia, averaging 0.25 m, covered the altar and its immediate area, sealing and preserving them.

At a distance of 1.2 m west of the altar, below the level of plesia, a shallow pit was found, 0.3 m in depth, 1.0 m in width and 1.15 m in length. It was filled with ashes, bones of small animals, and sherds. It is evident that the contents were the remnants of offerings used in the rites performed at the altar. Superficial examination of these bones did not disclose signs of thorough burning or evidence of breaks or cuttings. Fragments of a three-legged pyxis, beautifully decorated in brilliant black with details in dull white, belong to the vases found below the sealing of plesia. In the upper layer of the fill of the pit, corresponding to the bottom of the plesia fill, there was found a spouted phiale which could have been used for pouring libations, while two deep skyphoi, with their interiors painted black, come from the second uppermost layer above the plesia sealing. Immediately above

hollow space was found filled with ashy earth mixed with burned pieces of charcoal and fragments of bones. He accepted this as a bothros in which libations were poured. This element is the only one found which might indicate a religious purpose for the building. However, it is not sufficient to establish that function.

<sup>1</sup> The building we have named Building X opened on to the outer court of Tsountas's House with which it communicated by a paved passage.

that sealing was found the fragment of a stirrup vase bearing an inscription in Linear B script, a two-letter word reading  $\kappa\alpha\text{-}\lambda\alpha$  or even  $\gamma\alpha\text{-}\lambda\alpha$ . The fragmentary figurines, found also in the fill below the plesia sealing, are of special interest. One, only 0.065 m tall, represents a man with hands extended forward and upwards in an attitude of worship. His long garment may indicate that he was a priest. The other, 0.07 m in height, is female with hands crossed on the chest covered by a shawl-like wrap that is carried around the back.<sup>1</sup>

It is interesting to note that on the floor of the room of Taylour's area, in Room T9 as we called it, we found the neck of an amphora embedded in the floor, used perhaps for libations, and near it a headless ivory female figurine, preserved to a height of 0.05 m and elaborately and delicately carved.

The characteristic sherds found in the area of the altar prove that it was used well into the LH III B2 period, and in those later years the altar was sealed by plesia. The fill above the plesia layer has not yielded evidence to prove that the area was again used for religious rites. No foundations or relics were found in the lowermost section of the upper fill, or in its topmost layers. Both contained only sherds and those in small numbers. Thus it seems that after the sealing of the altar its area was no longer used for religious rites. This was also indicated by the architectural evidence obtained in 1973 during the second clearing of rooms belonging to the complex first revealed by Lord William Taylour and his collaborators. It was found that originally these rooms opened on to the platform or area of the altar; later their original door openings were blocked by walls and, after raising the level of the floor, their users turned them away from the altar to the direction of what Taylour called the 'ante-room' and the later shrines of his complex. Changes in construction are evident in the walls of a number of rooms of the complex, including the west wall and the front south wall of the 'Room of the Idols'. All these and other characteristics and conclusions have to await the publication of Taylour and his collaborators' work, to which will then be added our own evidence. Meanwhile we may recall the layer of plesia, found by Wace in the shrine  $I_1$ . Could that have been part of an enveloping coat corresponding to that placed over the round altar, an enveloping coat with which shrine  $I_1$  was sealed and his area filled in to be replaced by shrine  $I_2$ ? We may now wonder what forced the Mycenaeans to fill in shrines and altars and

<sup>1</sup> It recalls the wrap of the famous ivory group of two seated women and a boy found by Wace high on the north slope of the acropolis of Mycenae.

maybe to abandon others. Certainly only an event of great destructive power which suddenly befell them can account for their action. They may have decided that the event caused the desecration of their shrines and forced them to fill in their areas or even abandon them. The destructive event could not have been caused by conflagration, since the evidence of fire is not indicated by the ruins. It seems to me that an earthquake is the most likely agent of destruction. Evidence of an earthquake is to be found in various parts of the Mycenaean territory. In the area of the round altar we have definite evidence. The south-west side of the court of the altar was lined by a shallow stoa roofed by thin slabs of schist. A number of these were found against the west side of the altar in different slanting and semi-erect positions indicating clearly that they slid from their position when a tremor caused the collapse of the slightly built south-west wall of the stoa. Let us also recall the dislocated corner of the shrine  $I_1$  which could have been caused by an earthquake. The skeleton of a man, crushed by the fallen north wall, was found in Room 2, of the Southwest House or the House of the High Priest. The house 'I', discovered and cleared by Mrs Ione Shear in the area of the Treasury of Atreus in 1962, provided further evidence. There, even the skeleton of a woman was found in the doorway with the skull broken by fallen stones. Even more striking evidence was revealed in 1975 in a house at a short distance north of the citadel at a place known today as 'Plakes'. In the basements of that house three victims of an earthquake were found below the fallen stones of its walls; furthermore, walls were displaced and their lining and corners were put out. The pottery found with the victims indicates that the earthquake must have occurred shortly before the end of the LH III B period.

Whatever the explanation of the abandonment of earlier altars and shrines may be, the fact remains that two levels exist in the course of the 'Processional Way', that a new altar was constructed and the round altar was sealed just before the end of the LH III B period. The surviving 'Processional Way', with its doorway which only allowed entry to the area at certain times, and the accumulation of shrines and altars around it, leads one to the conclusions that the shrines were filled in and reorientated in the area excavated by Lord William Taylour and his collaborators before the end of the LH III B period, and that the area described was used for religious rites and that it was the Cult Centre of Mycenae.<sup>1</sup> The boundaries of that area are defined by the walls of Wace's building (or Citadel House), by the stepped street of Tsountas, to the north

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the 'Room of the Idols'.



and south, and by the higher reaches of the west slope of the hill and the West Cyclopean wall, to the east and west.

Further to the west and south of the cult area, Tsountas in 1886 brought to light a maze of foundations for which unfortunately no definite information exists. To obtain such information we cleared the area again revealing here and there some unexcavated parts. One of these was found against the Cyclopean West Fortification Wall, immediately to the south of Tsountas's stepped street. It comprised the well-preserved remains of three basements and rooms, with others stretching along the West Cyclopean Wall. I do not intend to discuss the work done there, but I must mention the discovery in the fill of these rooms of fragments of wall paintings of great beauty and significance. Among them is the large fragment of the well-known 'Mycenaean Lady' or 'Goddess with the necklace' and others belonging to figure-eight shields. Apparently these formed part of a frieze in a room above the basement No. 2, in the fill of which they were found. On another fragment we have a seated figure, almost three-quarters size, holding in her hand a figurine, evidently an offering. The striking painted decoration as well as the wealth of objects found, among which were fragments of elaborately carved ivory, indicate that the inhabitant of the building must have been an important personality. He lived in a remote corner, far from the Palace, located next to the cult centre. It is perhaps permissible to suggest that the personality was the High Priest of Mycenae in charge of its Cult Centre. The foundations stretching along the slope to the south separated from this house by a wide corridor remind one of cells in a medieval monastery and perhaps these cells were occupied by the personnel of the Cult Centre. Interestingly enough, in the centre of Room B<sub>1</sub> of that area a low rectangular frame, another altar-hearth revealed by Tsountas, is well preserved even today, while around the walls of the room survive remnants of a continuous low bench. Was the room used for rites or for religious instruction to younger members of the priesthood?

For our closing remarks I may use a photograph taken from the air by balloon at the completion of our work there. The striking accumulation of altars and shrines to which access was obtained through a Processional Way becomes clear; we can almost see processions of priests and priestesses coming slowly down the Processional Way to reach the altars and shrines for the performance of imposing rites.<sup>1</sup> The uncovering of the Cult Centre on

<sup>1</sup> As well as the evidence illustrated in the photograph, the important work

the west slope of the acropolis of Mycenae, with its shrines and altars and its monumental Processional Way, along with the information obtainable from the inscribed tablets of Linear B script which can now be read, thanks to the monumental work of Ventris and Chadwick, will establish a firm foundation for our knowledge and research of the Mycenaean religion. It will widen the religious horizon of the period and will help clear a number of notions developed into axioms that seemed not to require proof. The notion, for example, that the main Shrine of State was located in the Palace is now proved untenable; no shrine was uncovered in the Palace although its area to the rock below has been totally cleared and, in contrast, a cult centre was found away from the area of the Palace with what their characteristics would indicate are actual shrines. Consequently, the opinion that the Palace was considered sacred because the Shrine of State was incorporated in it now becomes unfounded. The possibility that the king should be considered sacred because he lived in an assumed sacred palace, and that he was the high priest as well as a king because he officiated in a non-existent shrine of state in the Palace, can no longer be maintained without further proof; this is not easily found. Such a high priest would have been stationed near the Cult Centre, near the shrines and altars he served: in the building covered with paintings may we not have his house? Let us hope that present knowledge will be enhanced, both in depth and in extent, by the work of younger scholars who will continue the search, and that they will find in the work of their predecessors a good and lasting foundation on which they and others will continue to build. To them I wish *‘Τύχην ἀγαθήν’*.

May I now be allowed to end my presentation by expressing my appreciation for the chance of placing before such a special audience the results of the work of Greek and British scholars of the last thirty years in only one corner of Mycenae, the capital city of Agamemnon.

of Lord William Taylour and his collaborators has contributed greatly to our knowledge of the area.