

BLOCKHOUSES IN THE ARGOLID

During the week August 7-12, 1939, I investigated three small fragmentary structures in Argolis with funds supplied by the Archaeological Institute of America. The work was done under the auspices of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens. The excavations were conducted by Miss Alison Frantz, Fellow of the Agora, and Mr. Carl A. Roebuck, Fellow of the American School.¹ This investigation was a continuation of that conducted by me two years ago.²

I

About two hundred meters north of the railroad station of Mycenae on the west side of the track lie the foundations of a structure 9.30 m. \times 9.40 m.—outside measurements. It is oriented almost exactly with the points of the compass. The foundations are preserved almost intact except for short spaces on the south and west sides and a break at the northeast corner (Fig. 1). This break and the destruction of the southwest corner are due to blasting as is proved by drill marks. Other stones of the structure were destroyed in this way probably by the builders of the railway line. The foundations are bedded on the solid rock.

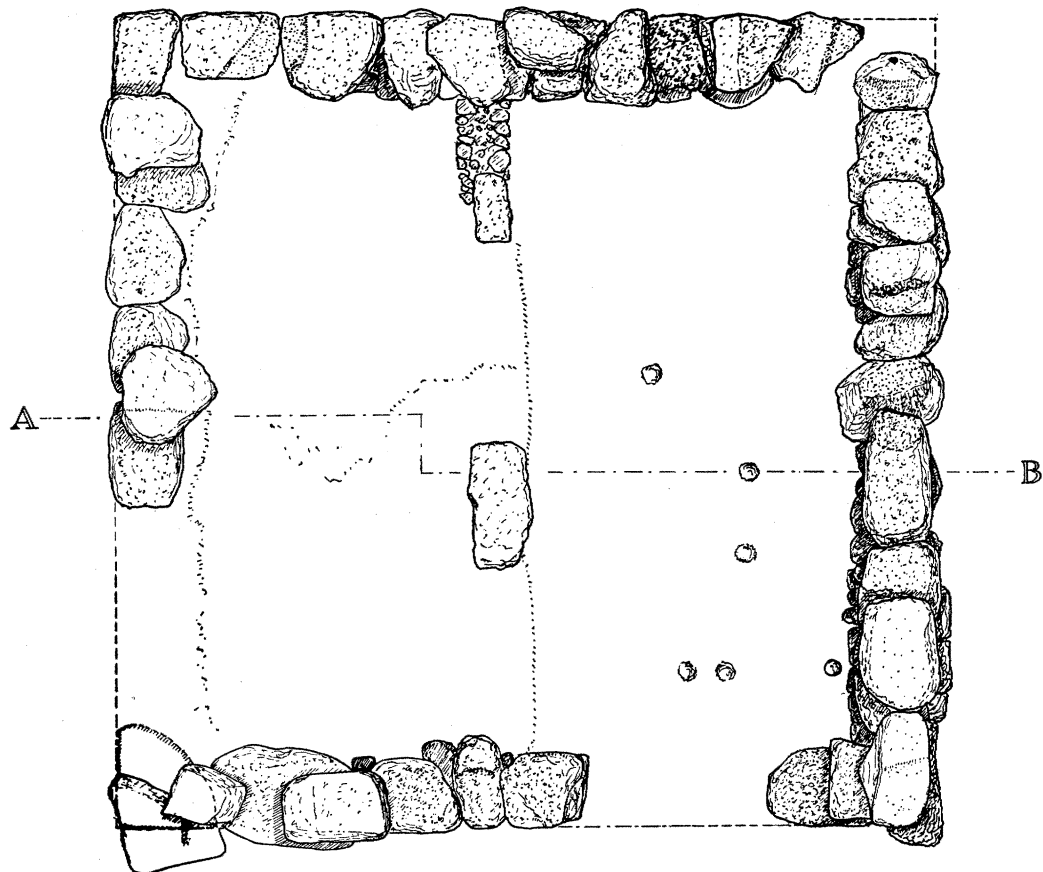
The walls, which are of large polygonal blocks of conglomerate, are preserved for two courses at the southeast corner (Fig. 2), for one course along most of the east and north sides and for two courses along part of the west side at the north end. The blocks are somewhat carefully cut, but the construction—though massive—is not the best type of polygonal work.

The three structures examined in 1937 showed two interior walls crossing at right angles near the center (Fig. 3). In this blockhouse only one could be traced (Figs. 4-5). There was found no trace of the characteristic fortress entrance so well defined in the three structures excavated in 1937. The entrance might have been at either the east end of the south side or the south end of the west side. All evidence that might lead to a decision is lacking.

The fill within was shallow—varying from 0.30 to 0.60 m. It consisted of broken tiles, coarse pottery, and field stones (Fig. 6). No Greek sherds were found. The earliest pottery consisted of fragments of late Roman and early Christian lamps.

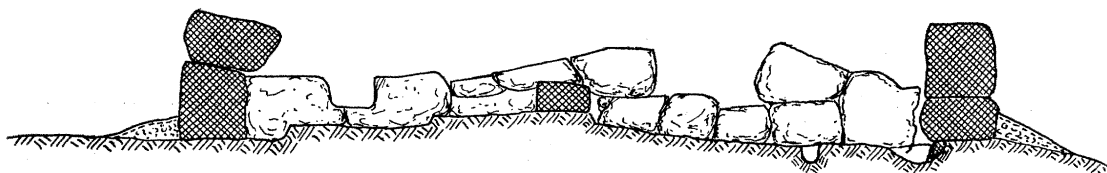
¹ The finds—pottery and coins—are deposited with the American School of Classical Studies at their excavations in Corinth. The notebooks are at the American School in Athens.

² *Hesperia*, VII, 1938, pp. 481-538; *A.J.A.*, XLIV, 1939, pp. 78-84. In the excavation of 1937 a well discovered in the “pyramid” at Ligurio was only partially cleared owing to lack of time. This summer I completed its clearance. It was sunk to a depth of 1.86 m. in the solid rock.



S C A L E

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 METRES



S E C T I O N A - B

Fig. 1. Plan and Section of Blockhouse Near Mycenae Station

A Byzantine coin found on the bedrock showed that the structure had been completely cleared in early Christian times. The original east-west cross wall, if it ever existed, had been entirely removed and its place taken by a late wall of small stones (Fig. 7). Other interior walls of similar construction were also found (Fig. 8).

Across the track to the east lie two large conglomerate stones. One of them (Fig. 9) clearly belongs to a mill. It has a central boss—partly broken—around the base of which is a shallow channel for a turning stone. The other is an oval block partially buried in the soil, well smoothed on the top and sides. Its diameters are



Fig. 2. Blockhouse Near Mycenae Station, S. E. Corner

1.53 and 1.40 m. Its use is not known, but it may have some connection with the mill which seems to have served the blockhouse. Ten meters north of the blockhouse are traces of walls which may have belonged to a cistern.

II

The "Pyramid" of Kenchreae³ is situated 2½ kilometers beyond the fountain of Cephalaria on the slope of Mt. Chaon. Four hundred and twenty-five meters south-east of it is a building of polygonal masonry. When excavations began it was largely overgrown with weeds and bushes (Fig. 10).

The interior fill consisted of countless small stones evidently piled here in the futile hope of clearing the near-by fields, of broken tiles and coarse pottery, and a

³ See *Hesperia*, VII, 1938, pp. 496 ff.

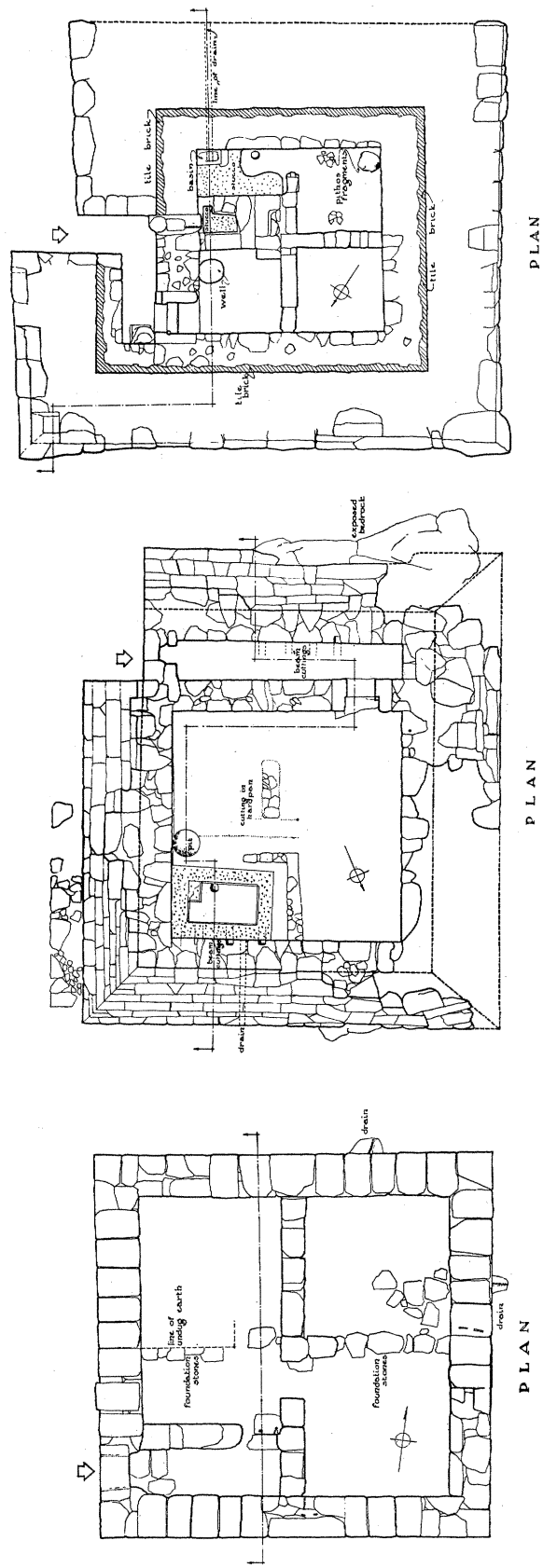


Fig. 3. Left: Blockhouse Near Nemea. Center: "Pyramid" Near Cephalaria. Right: "Pyramid" Near Ligurio



Fig. 4. Blockhouse at Mycenae, N. W. Corner, Showing Cross Wall



Fig. 5. Blockhouse at Mycenae, N. E. Corner, Showing Cross Wall



Fig. 6. Blockhouse at Mycenae, Section of Interior Fill



Fig. 7. Blockhouse at Mycenae, Late E.-W. Cross Wall



Fig. 8. Blockhouse at Mycenae, Late Interior Walls



Fig. 9. Millstone Near Blockhouse at Mycenae

few late Roman sherds. There were also found 87 coins. Of these 81 were minute bronze Vandal coins of the 5th and 6th century after Christ.

The exterior walls were made of the local hard gray limestone. The blocks were about 0.65 m. \times 0.70 m. \times 1.00 m. to 1.35 m. The polygonal work was not first class. The building was an almost exact square, 10.20 m., oriented slightly off the points of the compass (Fig. 11). On the west side and the west end of the north side the



Fig. 10. Blockhouse Near Cephalaria Before Excavation

external walls are preserved (Fig. 12), in some places to a height of two courses. On the east and south they had been removed entirely or toppled into the fields.

These walls were bedded on a poros foundation which was complete except for breaks in the north and south walls. At the southeast corner a supplementary building had been built—its walls made of small stones (Fig. 13). At the time this later building was constructed the southeast corner of the poros foundation had disappeared or was removed. The limestone blocks which are apparently a continuation of the east wall have no poros foundation and are part of the external later building. The break in the wall is clearly shown in the photograph (Fig. 14).

Within the blockhouse three walls were found (Fig. 15). First a north-south wall almost exactly in the middle of the structure. At its southern end it is joined to the poros foundation of the outer wall. In the middle it is broken by a doorway

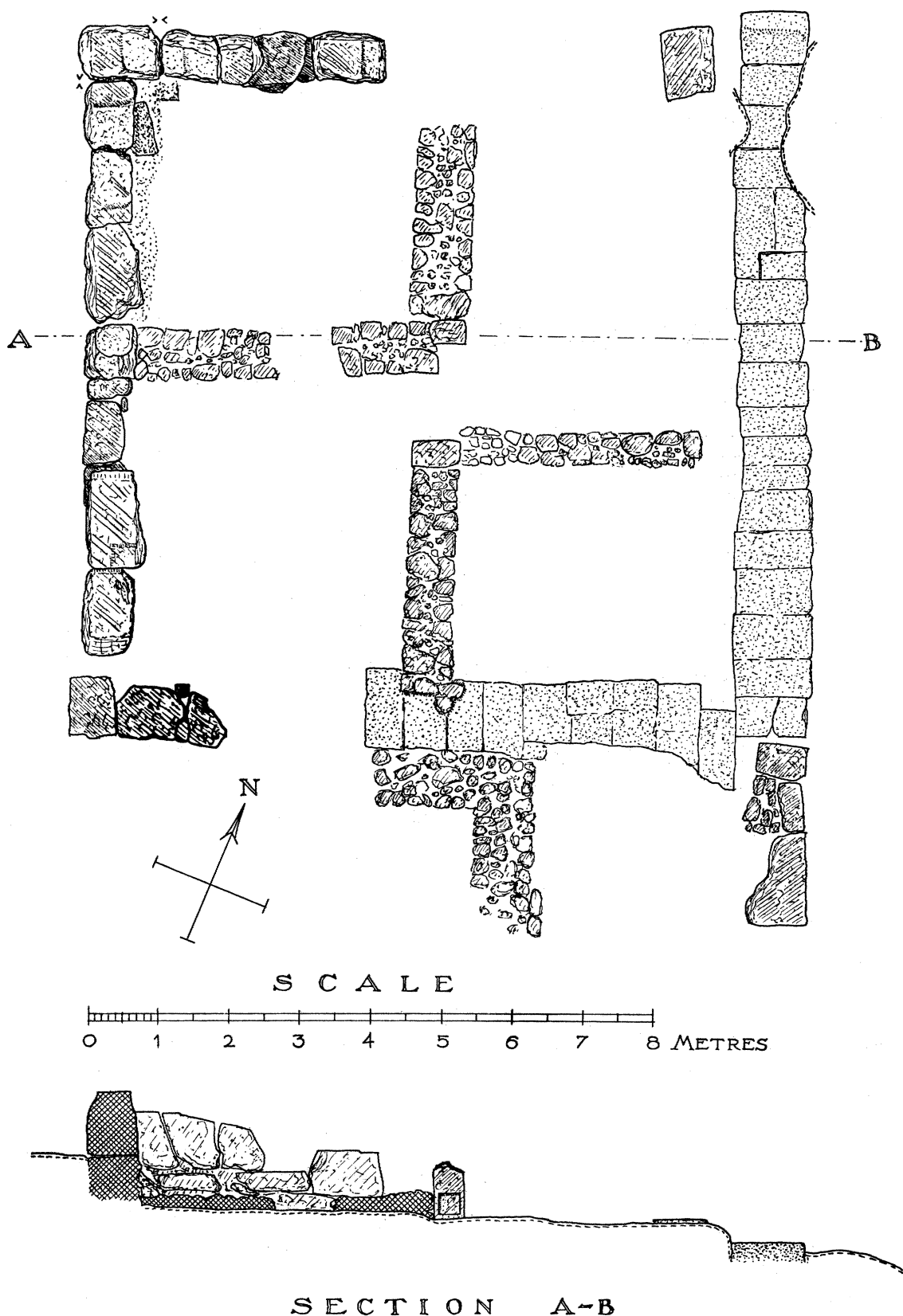


Fig. 11. Plan and Elevation of the Blockhouse Near Cephalaria



Fig. 12. Blockhouse Near Cephalaria, N. W. Corner



Fig. 13. Blockhouse Near Cephalaria, S. E. Corner, Showing
Walls of Supplementary Building

1.10 m. wide (Fig. 16). This is later than the rest of the wall, for the northern door stone jamb cuts into the east-west wall (Fig 17). Both this jamb and the southern one are reused blocks. Second, an east-west wall 3.50 m. from the north exterior wall. This joins the north-south wall at the north end of the door (Fig. 18), and is apparently contemporary with the north-south wall just mentioned. At its western end it is closely tied to the west outer wall (Fig. 19). Its construction prevents its being bonded in. This wall seems to have extended entirely across the blockhouse but it could not be traced east of the north-south wall. This portion was removed when the third interior wall was built. This third wall begins at the south side of the door in the north-south wall and extends nearly to the east outer wall. It is of small loose stones (Fig. 20) carelessly bedded. It probably dates from the Byzantine occupation.

No trace of an entrance to the blockhouse was discovered. It seems likely, however, that it was on the south side near the east end where the latest building was added. This would correspond to a similar addition at the entrance to the "pyramid" near Ligurio.⁴ The north-south interior wall, except for the late doorway, and the east-west wall connecting this with the west exterior wall are either contemporary with the outside walls or are built along the lines of earlier walls, thus giving the blockhouse somewhat the same interior arrangements as the "pyramids" and the blockhouse near Nemea.



Fig. 14. Blockhouse Near Cephalaria, S. E. Corner, Showing East Poros Foundation Wall and Beginning of Wall of Internal Building

III

Three kilometers beyond the spring of Lerna at Myloi, about 40 meters to the right of the modern road from Argos to Tripolis, just before it begins to climb the hills, there is another blockhouse. It is oriented on the lines of the compass.

⁴ *Hesperia*, VII, 1938, p. 515.



Fig. 15. Blockhouse Near Cephalaria, Interior Walls Looking Toward S. E.



Fig. 16. Blockhouse Near Cephalaria, Doorway in North-South Interior Wall



Fig. 17. Blockhouse Near Cephalaria, North Jamb of Door in North-South Interior Wall



Fig. 18. Blockhouse Near Cephalaria, Junction of East-West and North-South Interior Walls



Fig. 19. Blockhouse Near Cephalaria, West End of East-West Interior Wall, Showing Junction with Exterior Wall



Fig. 20. Blockhouse Near Cephalaria; Interior, Looking S. E., Showing Third Interior Wall of Later Construction

It is a square structure 7.10 m. \times 7.10 m. (Fig. 21). The walls are of local gray limestone. The blocks are polygonal, fairly large, about 0.70 m. \times 0.60 m. \times 1.85 m. Two courses of the wall are standing except on the eastern wall at the north end.

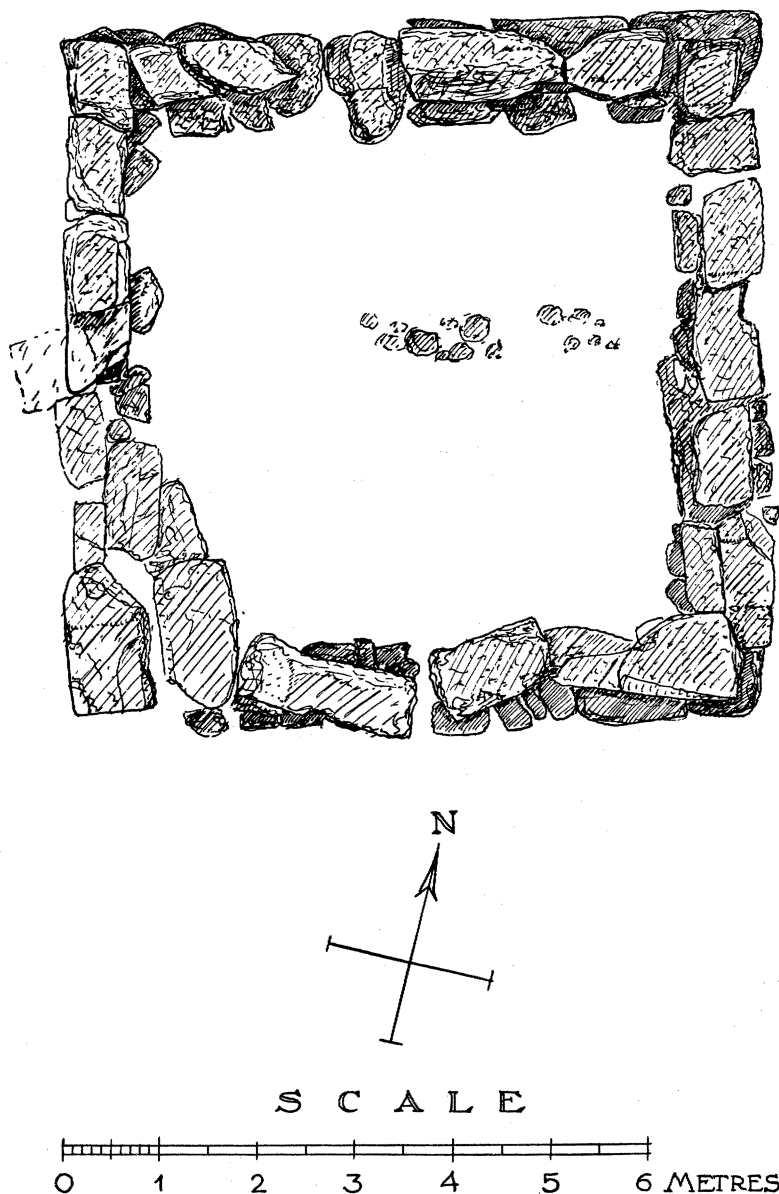


Fig. 21. Plan of Blockhouse Near Lerna

The walls are bedded neither on the bedrock as at Mycenae station nor in poros as at Cephalaria, but on small stones placed on hardpan. The polygonal masonry is inferior to the other two structures examined.

The walls were heavily overgrown with trees and shrubs. These were removed and the interior fill taken out till the foundations were exposed and hardpan reached at a depth of 0.40-0.50 m.

The entrance was apparently at the north end of the east wall (Fig. 22). It is marked by a doubtful socket hole, by a clear cutting as for a threshold, and by the fact that at all other points on the wall the first course is preserved and no cutting for a door appears. The door could not have been higher than the first course. The floor level is clearly marked at the northwest corner (Figs. 22-23). The wall at the southeast corner rises three courses and the corner stones show overlapping (Fig. 24).

No trace of interior cross walls was found. It seems possible that, because of its small size, the roof needed no interior supports.

No evidence for dating the structure was given by the fill. Many fragmentary tiles were found and a few sherds but none earlier than the late Roman period.

About 25 m. northeast of the blockhouse is a roughly dressed circular block, 1.40 m. in diameter, imbedded in the field. Its top is convex. Around the edge is a circular cutting and within that a square cutting. The circular cutting is 1.00 m. across and the square cutting is 0.30 m. across. The block is 0.76 m. thick. It appears to be part of a mill.



Fig. 23. Blockhouse Near Lerna, Floor Level, N. W. Corner



Fig. 22. Blockhouse Near Lerna, N. E. Corner, Showing Entrance

The investigation of these three structures serves to show that the two larger ones had interior arrangements like the "pyramids" and the blockhouse near Nemea, while the smaller structure showed absence of any interior walls. That the larger ones had entrances of the fortress type similar to the "pyramids" can not be assumed, for no trace of entrances was found.

This excavation furnished no evidence for the date of these blockhouses,

because they had been occupied in Roman and Byzantine times. The complete interior reconstruction of the two larger structures by the Byzantines seems to make it highly probable that the tile lining of the "pyramid" at Ligurio was done at that date rather than during the Roman epoch.⁵

During the excavation I discovered two more structures of this type. Both are on the old road from Argos to Tegea and Mantinea, leading up the valley beyond the Kenchreae "pyramid." They are both of the seven-meter size. The first has a wide outlook down the valley clear to the Gulf of Nauplia. It stands at the last point on the road from which the sea is visible (Fig. 25). The second is further west. It has absolutely no outlook but it does stand at the point where the road forks, the right branch going round the north end of Mt. Alesion to Mantinea and the left around the south end to Tegea. The situation of these two structures seems to confirm my view⁶ that they were control stations along the ancient roads.



Fig. 24. Blockhouse Near Lerna, S. E. Corner

The second structure has a well-preserved door with threshold still in place, the lintel block lying on the ground before it. All about in the field are Greek sherds. It seems likely that a simple investigation of this structure would throw a great deal of light on the date of construction of these control towers.

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NOTES ON THE EXCAVATION

In the excavation of the blockhouses near Mycenae, Myloi, and Cephalaria no evidence for the date of their construction nor of their occupancy prior to the Early Christian period was discovered. All the earlier filling had been removed from the three structures, apparently in a thorough cleaning and rebuilding of the interior, which in the case of the blockhouses at Mycenae and Cephalaria may be dated to the sixth century after Christ on the evidence of the lamp fragments and coins found in them. In the Mycenae and Lerna blockhouses there is some indication of a Byzantine use and in the Mycenae structure of a Turkish dwelling.

⁵ *Hesperia*, VII, 1938, p. 516.

⁶ *A.J.A.*, XLIV, 1939, p. 82.



Fig. 25. View From Blockhouse Above Kenchreae, Looking Toward Gulf of Nauplia

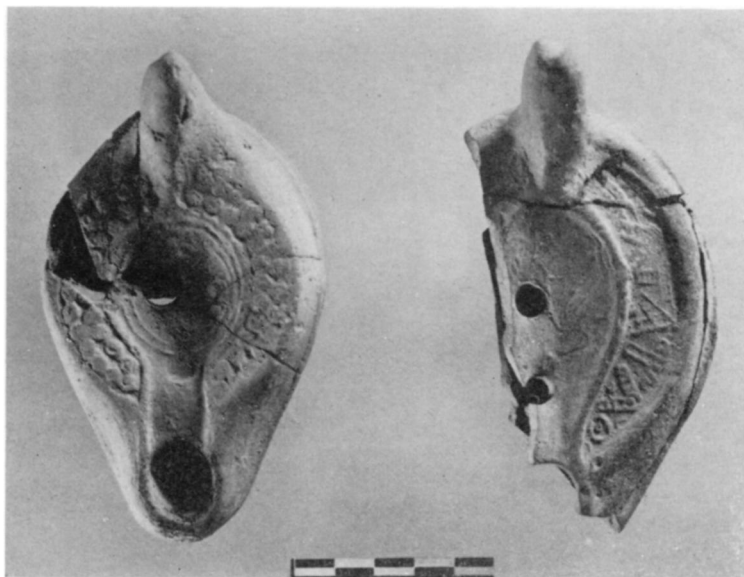


Fig. 26. Early Christian Lamps from Mycenae

THE MYCENAE BLOCKHOUSE⁷

A small patch of fill containing roof tiles and lumps of plaster lay on bedrock in the northeast corner of the building where the rock level is lower than elsewhere. In it were found two almost complete lamps⁸ (Fig. 26) of Broneer's Type XXXI. Accordingly it is probable that this fill is part of the destruction débris of the Early Christian structure in the blockhouse. Two other fragments from lamps of the same type came from a mixed fill in the south and west parts of the blockhouse. In the northeast corner this fill overlay the Early Christian accumulation and elsewhere rested on bedrock. Its sherds appeared for the most part to date from the Turkish period, but mixed with them were found some scraps of Early Christian pottery, a fragment of a Type XXVIII lamp, and three bronze coins. They were a coin of the Byzantine Emperor Manuel I, 1143-1180 A.D.⁹ which was found on the surface of the rock, a Frankish coin of the Princes of Achaea, and a small illegible piece. Its size indicates that it may be a Vandal coin.

It appeared then from the excavation that all the filling prior to the Early Christian period had been removed from the blockhouse, probably for the structure of that period, and that the débris from its destruction was partly removed in turn for some inhabitation of the Turkish period.

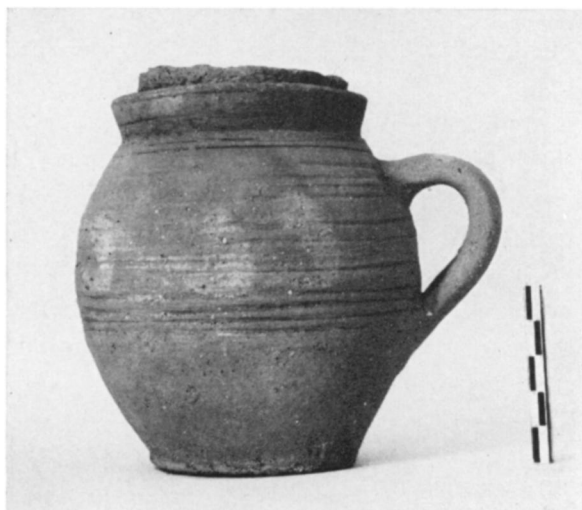


Fig. 27. Byzantine Jug from Lerna

THE BLOCKHOUSE NEAR LERNA

A layer of broken roof tiles and fragments of Early Christian pottery extended uniformly over the interior of the building and presumably represented the destruction débris of its latest inhabitation. This filling rested on the hardpan on which the blocks of the foundation were set. In it a complete jug¹⁰ (Fig. 27) of Byzantine date was

⁷ The objects mentioned in this report are in the storeroom of the Excavation at Corinth. The excavation notebooks are at the American School at Athens.

⁸ Inv. No. Myk. L. 3; length, 0.115 m.; width, 0.07 m.; height, 0.032 m. It is decorated on the rim with raised dots and on the discus with rosettes (?). The clay is reddish.

Inv. No. Myk. L. 4; length, 0.105 m.; height, 0.03 m. A pseudo-inscription, ATATA, is used as decoration on the rim. The design on the discus is indistinct. The clay is dark gray.

⁹ Edwards, *Corinth*, VI, *The Coins*, p. 146, no. 149.

¹⁰ Inv. No. Myl. P. 1; height, 0.11 m.; greatest diameter, 0.1 m.; diameter of mouth, 0.075 m.

found. The vessel contained nothing, although its stopper, cut from a piece of tile, sealed its mouth. Possibly it had contained some liquid which had evaporated. The jug apparently found its way there by some chance, for there appeared to be no other trace of a Byzantine use of the blockhouse, but only the Early Christian débris.

THE BLOCKHOUSE NEAR CEPHALARIA

The only object which could possibly be connected with the original period of the building was a lead plumb-bob¹¹ (Fig. 28) possibly used in its construction. Ample evidence, on the other hand, was provided for the time of its reuse by the coins. Within the building under a fill of broken roof tiles similar to those of Mycenae and Lerna were found eighty-seven coins: two of Justinian I, three of Justinian II, one of Athens, New Style; the remaining eighty-one were the small coins of the fifth and sixth centuries generally known as Vandal. The pottery, also, which was scanty and only fragmentary, was consistently Early Christian, and included two or three fragments of Type XXXI lamps.¹² It is probably safe therefore to assign a date in the sixth century after Christ to the rehabilitation of the blockhouse.

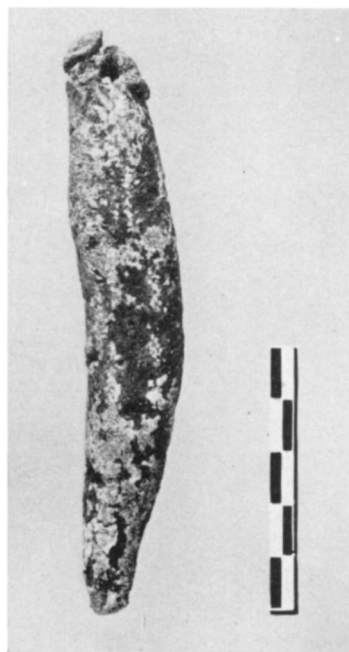


Fig. 28. Plumb-bob from Cephalaria

THE PYRAMID AT LIGURIO

During the excavation of this pyramid in 1937 a pit had been partially dug out.¹³ It was completed and found to contain a mixed fill consisting of some pieces of late Roman pottery, the nozzle of a Hellenistic lamp and a fragment from the rim of a black glazed cup of the fourth century B.C.

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The clay is reddish. The upper part of the jug is decorated with horizontal grooves. The jug is similar in type to jugs found in Byzantine contexts in Corinth.

¹¹ Length, 0.11 m.; thickness, 0.006-0.019 m. A slender piece of lead, somewhat battered; a small hole at one end, the other tapering almost to a point.

¹² Compare those found in the Mycenae blockhouse, Fig. 26.

¹³ Lord, *Hesperia*, VII, 1938, p. 522.