

THE EAST WING OF THE PALACE OF MYCENAE

(PLATES 94-96)

IT is only fitting that the preliminary description of a newly recovered section of the "Palace of Agamemnon" should be dedicated to the revealer of the "Palace of Nestor." It is offered to Carl W. Blegen, the *prytanis* of Greek excavators, on his 80th birthday as a small token of esteem, affection and admiration for his lifelong inspired service to the Greek antiquities, to scholarship and to the American School of Classical Studies at Athens. May the *'Αγαθὴ Τύχη*, that has crowned his efforts thus far, continue to be with him and may the Lords of Olympos grant him many more happy years of health, achievement and success.

As is well known, of the "Palace of Agamemnon" at Mycenae only the official quarters have been preserved in ruins. The extent of the Palace, as revealed in the plan drawn by Leicester Holland for Alan J. B. Wace, who published its remains, measured some 60 m. from north to south and about 55 m. from east to west.¹ Chrestos Tsountas, who revealed the Palace and who gave us a first description with a plan by Wilhelm Dörpfeld,² suggested that the domestic quarters, which must have formed part of it, were located on the east section of the summit, that access to them from the Megaron was obtained through the "Gallery of Curtains," as I call it, or the "Vestibule to the Domestic Quarters," as Wace called it. A study of the terrain will prove that the only direction to which the Palace could have been extended was the east slope. To the west, south and north of the area over which we find its remains the slope descends abruptly to the ravine Chavos or to the plain. The east slope was explored by Tsountas between the years 1889 and 1890; no report, however, of his work was ever published. A section of the ruins revealed by him, above the so-called South Cyclopean Tower, were cleared again, mapped, studied and published by Wace as the "House of Columns."³ The rest, covered once more with earth with only a few Hellenistic walls projecting above the new fill, remained unrecorded. In his description of the "House of Columns," page 91, Wace remarked: "on either side of the path (leading from the summit of the hill to the 'House' and the North-east Extension) . . . are ruined buildings and shattered walls, but most of what is now visible is Hellenistic in date."

In the summer of 1965 we undertook the clearing of the east section of the summit and of the slope between it and the "House of Columns." The incentive for

¹ A. J. B. Wace, *B.S.A.*, XXV, 1921-1923, pp. 147-282, pl. II and *Mycenae*, plan 4 opp. p. 78.

² *Πρακτικά*, 1886, pp. 59-74.

³ *Mycenae*, pp. 91-100, figs. 32-33.

this work was provided by a number of rooms on the west side of the "House of Columns" included in Wace's plan under the letters W-1, W-2, W-3, and W-4. Their study revealed the fact that they could not have belonged to the "House" because, due to the rocky formation of the ground, their floors, as revealed by traces left on the standing walls, must have lain at least one meter above the level of the corridor of that "House." No trace of possible placements of stairways leading to them from that corridor exist.⁴ Furthermore, a narrow passage or vestibule on the north side of W-1 remained unexplained.

The excavation of the area proved that in Mycenaean times the slope above the "House of Columns" was artificially transformed into three terraces of varying size. The uppermost of these begins at the struggling almond tree which forms the unique landmark of the summit. On that terrace and on the one immediately below it we found scanty remnants of Mycenaean structures—fragments of walls and fill of small stones and earth in crevices and cavities between projecting rocks—which do not yield a ground plan, but which prove that the Palace extended in their direction. On the terrace second from the top were revealed the remains of a long rectangular structure, possibly a stoa, of the third century B.C. with its open front facing east. It measures 23.50 m. in length from north to south and 5.50 m. in maximum preserved width. Its foundations are in the main built of large poros blocks apparently taken from a Mycenaean building destroyed by fire. The east side of this second terrace is marked by a well preserved corridor, some 1.70 m. wide in the first phase of its use. At a later period, still in Mycenaean times however, its width was reduced to only 75 cm. by the extension eastward of the circular terrace (Fig. 1, D). The corridor, paved with hard-pressed earth, including pebbles and gross-grained sand, separated the second from the third terrace spreading to the east of it.

The third and easternmost terrace is the largest of the three and on it we revealed again the remains of a substantial Mycenaean building, over which a large house was constructed in the third century B.C. (Fig. 1). Both these structures had been excavated in the main by Tsountas, but they were again filled up with earth and in our day only the tops of a few Hellenistic walls could be seen above the fill. A number of other Hellenistic walls were destroyed in the course of the years since their exposure and this made it possible for us to excavate the undisturbed fill preserved below them and to reveal completely for the first time the Mycenaean remains on the terrace.

These prove the existence of a large building of an almost square form measuring some 27 m. from east to west and 28 m. from north to south (Fig. 1). The central element of the building is a long court (No. 6) open to the sky, averaging 2.50 m. in width and some 19 m. in length (Pl. 94, a). Its floor was found covered with Mycenaean lime-cement below which was found a coat of a harder and thicker pave-

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 92, fig. 32.

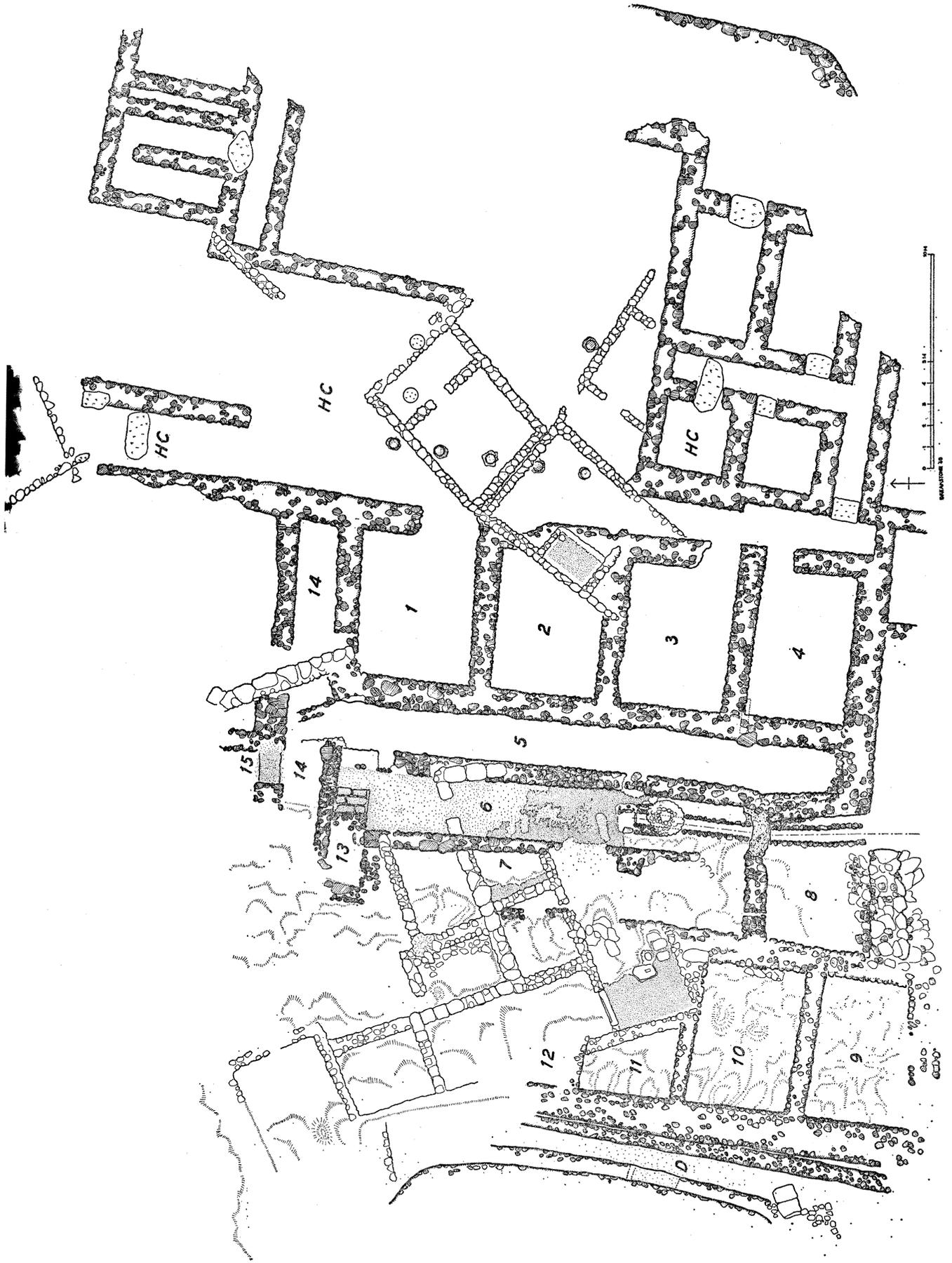


FIG. 1. East Wing of the Palace of Mycenae. Hatched Foundations: Mycenaean; Outline Foundations: Hellenistic. HC: House of Columns; D: Corridor between Terraces 2 and 3. (Drawn by J. A. Breakstone)

ment; apparently they were laid at different times. Towards the south end of the court was constructed in stone a large circular storage-pithos in Hellenistic times (Pl. 94, a, p), interrupting the extent of the court. A drain of Mycenaean times begins just to the north of this pithos (Pl. 94, a, o) indicating that the court, whose floor slopes towards the drain, was open to the sky; its catch-pit was originally closed by a poros slab, pierced by holes, reminiscent of similar covers in the courts of the Palace of Nestor. In later times the slab was placed vertically against the north side of the catch-pit. The drain, following a southward direction, passed under the floor of Room 8 and terminated at the South Cyclopean Wall.

On either side of the Central Court and parallel to it were revealed corridors 5 and 7, averaging 2 m. wide (Fig. 1). The floors of these corridors were paved with well-pressed earth. To the east of Corridor 5 are to be found the rooms mapped by Wace, four in number (1-4) to which no entrance way from the corridor was found. The rooms at the ground level, perhaps, were entered from the north passage No. 14. A Hellenistic wall disclosed at the south end of Corridor 5 gave the impression that it was a street, between the "House of Columns" and the building above it, blocked in the third century B.C. The complete clearing of that wall proved that it was placed in front of the outer wall of the building to strengthen it since the latter had been weakened by the fire that destroyed the Mycenaean construction and consequently proved that No. 5 was a corridor and not a street.

Corridor 7, running also from north to south, is stopped at its south end by a rear room No. 8 short of the outer wall of the building (Fig. 1). Thus its length is only 17.40 m. while that of Corridor 5, which runs through the entire width of the building, amounts to 23 m., inner dimensions. Beyond these corridors to the east and to the west we find rows of rooms similarly arranged; four along the east side, Nos. 1-4, four completely or partially preserved on the west side, Nos. 9-12 (Fig. 1). Another room No. 8 is to be found immediately to the south of Corridor 7 and the Court. The rooms are almost similar in dimensions; thus East Room 3, whose walls are well preserved, measures 6.60 m. from east to west by 4.90 m. from north to south, while West Room 10 measures 6.60 by 4.70 m., inner dimensions. Perhaps a fifth room existed at the northwest corner of the building, but its walls were destroyed when a section of the Hellenistic building was constructed over them.

The entrance to the building was on the north side, No. 15 (Fig. 1), and averages 1.95 m. in width. The side walls on either side of the entrance are well preserved for some distance, so its existence is clear. To it led a ramp, preserved for a distance of 5 m. It is noteworthy that no threshold block was found *in situ* and it seems to me that it did not exist, since we found burned debris covering the entrance way that excludes the possibility of its having been removed in later Hellenistic times. In the same way no threshold block was found in the entrance opening of Room 8. That entrance was entered from a lane that existed along the south side of the building

and of the "House of Columns" and between them and the South Cyclopean Wall. Both entrances were covered with a thick layer of lime-cement. The main north entrance opened onto a front passageway, No. 14 (Fig. 1), through which one reached Corridors 5 and 7, the Court 6, and the narrow vestibule to the north of Room 1. There can be no doubt that the vestibule is a continuation of Passage 14 interrupted by the Hellenistic wall built over it. At the north end of Court 6 and immediately to the south of Passage 14, from which it is separated by a wall terminating at the east end at a column base, existed a staircase, three steps of which were found *in situ* (Fig. 1, No. 13; Pl. 94, b). The staircase averages 1.60 m. in width, exhibits the regular Mycenaean double "pi" plan, Π, with the north wall of the building forming its outer side, and the wall blocking the south side of the passageway forming its middle support. The steps are made of poros and present strong traces of firing. A small landing about 1.50 m. in length was formed in front of the lowermost step. Thus entrance to the Court from the front passage was obtained by means of the beginning of Corridor 5 and around the landing through the area where the east wall of the Court terminates.

The preserved steps of the staircase were found covered with fill which had not been dug before because it was lying under a Hellenistic wall destroyed by visitors since the days of Tsountas' excavations. Its clearing yielded a good many ivory chips, sherds, half a stone vessel, a well preserved bronze dagger, small objects made of glass paste and one small ivory rosette.

The walls of some of the rooms are preserved to a considerable height (Pl. 95, a), illustrating the well-known method of Mycenaean construction recently discussed again by our honored scholar.⁵ What must be stressed here is that the rocky formation over which the rooms of the west side were built falls abruptly from west to east (cf. Pl. 95, a). Consequently the floors of those rooms were at a considerably higher level than the floor of the Court and of the rooms on the east side. In the first excavation of the building the floors of the west rooms were removed and their area was dug to the rock. Their exact positions, however, are determined by the traces they left on the face of the walls (Pl. 95, b). Thus, it can be accurately calculated that the floors of the west rooms (Nos. 9-12) rose 3 m. above the level of the Court. This difference in levels, the staircase on the north side, and the fill that was found intact impose the conclusion that the structure over the corridors and of the rooms on the east side was at least two stories high. The arrangement of the two stories is suggested in Figure 2 that gives, at the same time, the section of the terrain. This arrangement will explain the purpose of the long and narrow corridors on either side of the open court; on the ground floor they must have been used for storing purposes, while on the upper story they served to provide access, light and air to the rooms both on the east and on the west side of the building. Entrance to Rooms 1-4 on the

⁵ C. W. Blegen, *Χαριστήριον εις 'Α. Κ. 'Ορλάνδον*, pp. 117-125.

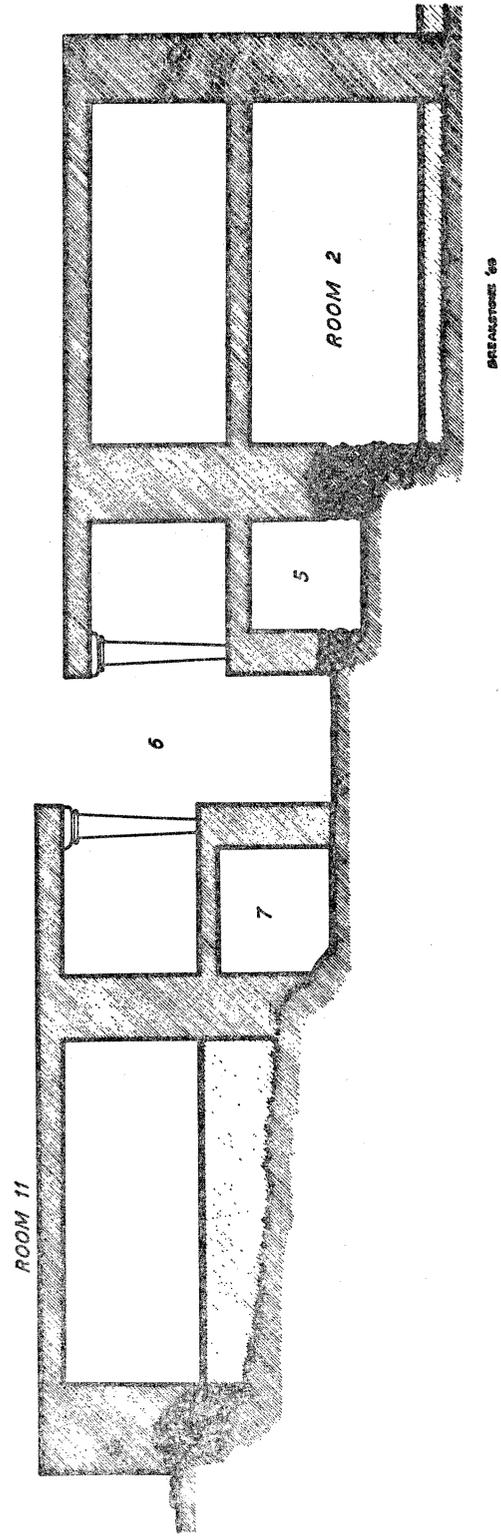
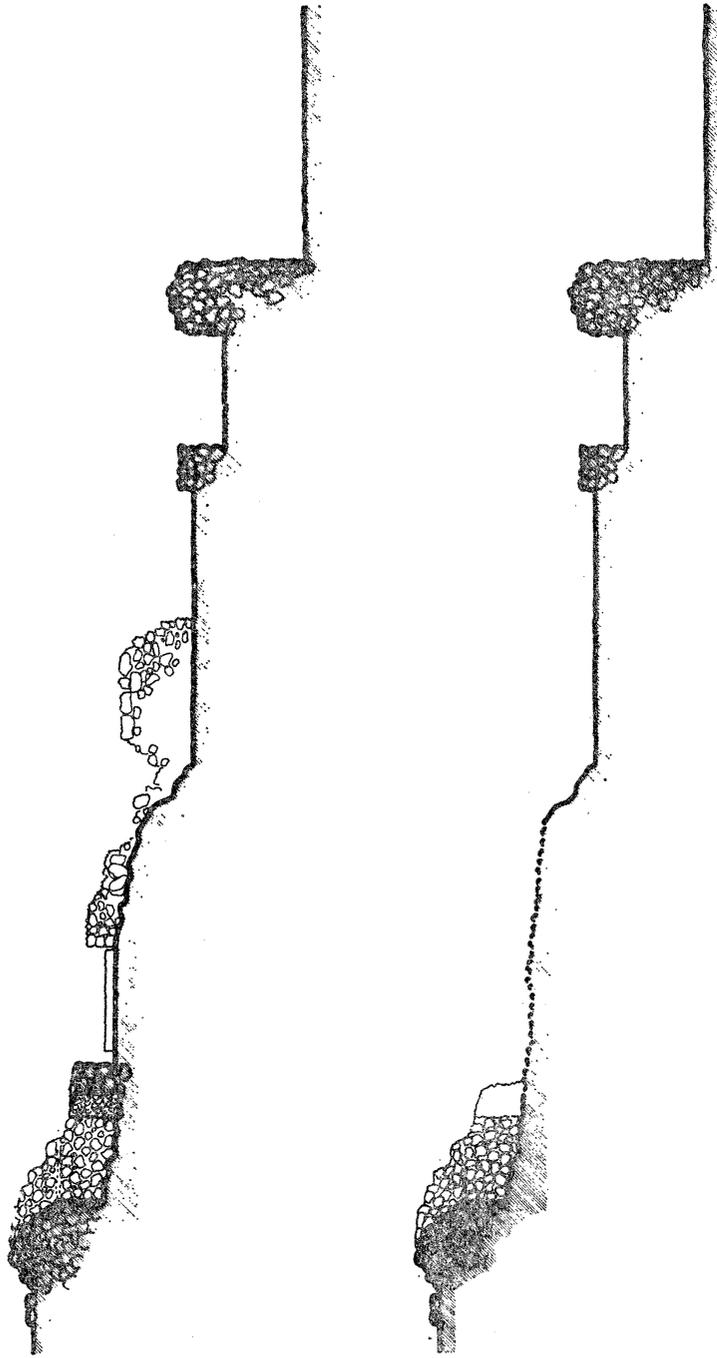


Fig. 2. Sections and Restored Section from West to East (Drawn by J. A. Breakstone).

ground floor could be obtained through the Vestibule 14 and not through the corridor of the "House of Columns." On the upper level, they could be entered through Corridor 5. The formation of the ground is such that we can assume that Rooms 3 and 4 had basements. This assumption was proved correct by the objects we found when the area of these rooms was excavated again in 1965. In the basement of Room 3 among other things we found a good number of tiny fragments of gold foil, evidently the discarded croppings from important works of art. They seem to have entered the basement of Room 3 from the corridor of the "House of Columns" through a doorway on its east wall suggested by Wace. It is not clear, from the remains preserved, whether a similar arrangement existed in Room 4. But if the opening to the basement of Room 3 was correctly figured out by Wace,⁶ then it serves to tie the building uncovered again with the "House of Columns." The relation of that "House" to the building has to be determined after careful study and further clearing of its area and of the lane beyond its south side towards the South Cyclopean Wall. It can be seen easily, however, that the "house" was accommodated in the space between our building and the South Cyclopean Wall and perhaps was constructed after the erection of the former.

The plan of the building uncovered is rather unique in Mycenaean architecture. The arrangement of court, corridors, and series of rooms is unparalleled thus far and points, I believe, to a marked advance in building arrangement. It differs from the plans of houses we know and of public buildings excavated thus far. Its use, therefore, must have been a special one that can be suggested by the objects found in it.

As stated above, the greater part of the building was dug in the nineties; here and there, however, fill was left and more was preserved beneath Hellenistic walls which were destroyed in the meantime. In the undisturbed fill, limited though it was, we found many objects, most conspicuous among which are a great quantity of discarded ivory chips, resulting from the making of works of art in that material (Pl. 96, a); some 778 pieces have been cleaned and counted thus far, most of which were found in the upper layers of the fill and very few on the floors. This may indicate that the ivory work was being carried on in the upper story of the building. Other objects found include discarded fragments of opal stones with evident signs of flaws that excluded them from further use; a large piece of green steatite from which many smaller pieces had been severed; large chunks of blue paint; fragments of copper ore from which the metal had been extracted by firing; pieces of unworked quartz; half a bowl of rock crystal reminiscent of the duck bowl from Grave Circle B, apparently discarded because of a break developed at the time it was being produced, and a great many tiny fragments of gold leaf evidently discarded. Special mention should be made of pieces of a yellowish substance which, when heated, turned into a strong

⁶ *Mycenae*, p. 94. In the plan a plaster door jamb is indicated as existing in the basement of Room 3.

glue of a brownish color. It brings to mind the brown stains at the back of the gold petals from the shaft graves of Grave Circle A, which perhaps were attached to clothes, and the brownish matter often seen in inlaid work. Perhaps this substance, which contains sulphur, was used in the inlaying of metal figures on bronze and other metals. A great many fragments of painted plaster were found in the preserved areas and especially many pieces of painted stucco belonging to tables of offerings. Of objects found complete are a number of small beads of ivory and glass beautifully carved, a dagger and a chisel of bronze.

The objects found in but a few sections of the building which were not excavated before, the position of the building and its ground plan indicate that it formed part of the Palace of Mycenae, that it formed its east wing. Thus the Palace seems to have covered an area of at least 130 m. from east to west and 60 to 80 m. from north to south. Its dimensions will have to be increased if the so-called "House of Columns" is proved to have been part of this wing. But, as was stated above, the relation of that "house" to our building has to be determined after further investigation and study of the area. It is perhaps interesting to note that the north entrance to our building lacked the regular stone threshold while such a block is found in the entrance to the "House of Columns." Was the newly revealed north entrance, in spite of its ramp, a secondary entrance to the complex?

The ground plan of the east wing of the Palace and the objects found in it seem to indicate that it did not serve ceremonial or domestic purposes, that it was neither a house nor a reception center, but that it served as the workshop and residence building of the royal artists and artisans. Room 8, on the ground level, has no connection with any other part of the building, but opens to a lane that runs along the South Cyclopean Wall. One wonders whether it served as a storeroom for supplies or even as a guardroom for the warriors and sentinels entrusted with the defense and supervision of that wall and the so-called South Tower which is located below the lane.

The east wing was destroyed by fire, evidently at the same time as the "House of Columns." The few pieces of datable, painted pottery found in undisturbed fill may indicate the date of the destruction. All of them are illustrated in Plate 96, b. Five of these sherds (Nos. 2, 3, 7, 8, 9) are painted on the inside with a wash of dark gray to black or red color; the sherds seem to belong to the same category in which are placed the vases and sherds found in the destruction level of the buildings in the northeast extension. They seem to indicate the transitional phase from LH III B to LH III C-1 as the period of the destruction of the East Wing of the Palace and of the "House of Columns."



a. Court 6. o. Mycenaean Drain, p. Hellenistic Built Pithos.



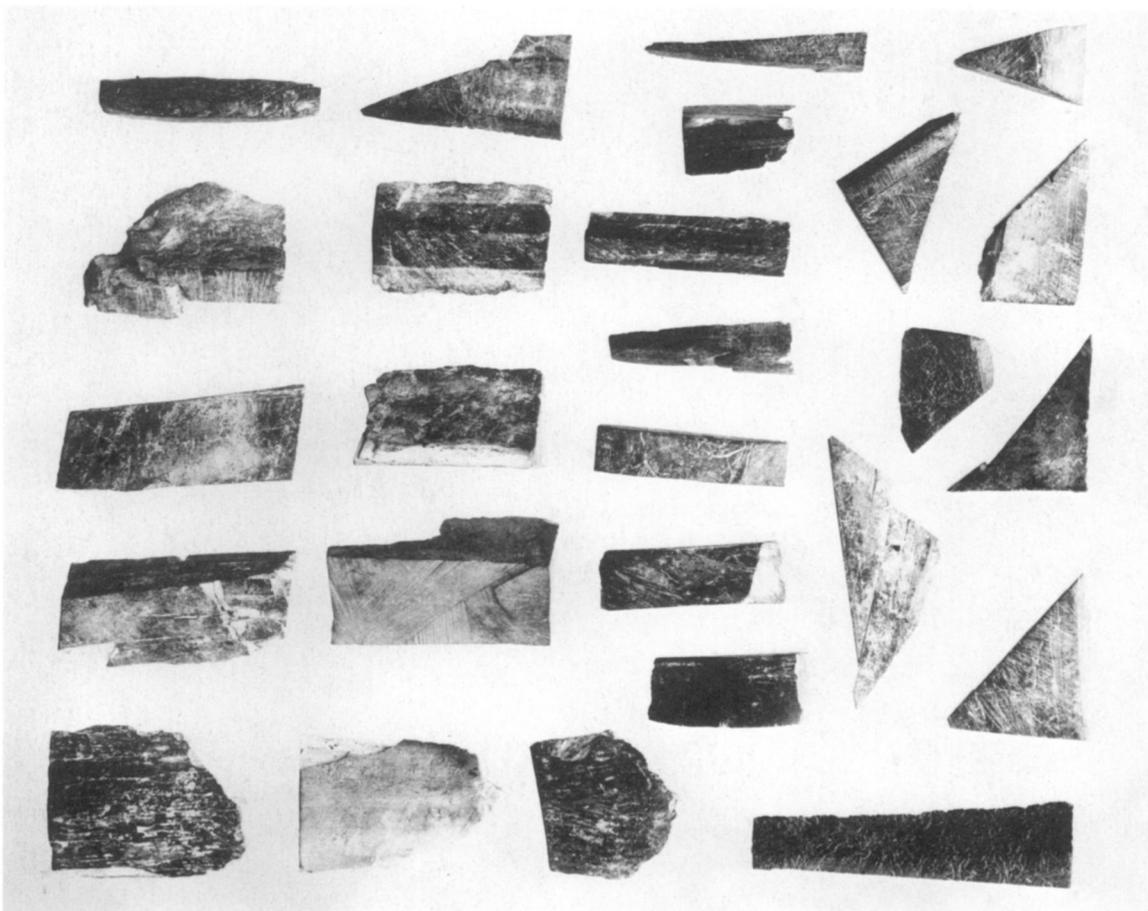
b. Preserved Steps of North Staircase N-13.



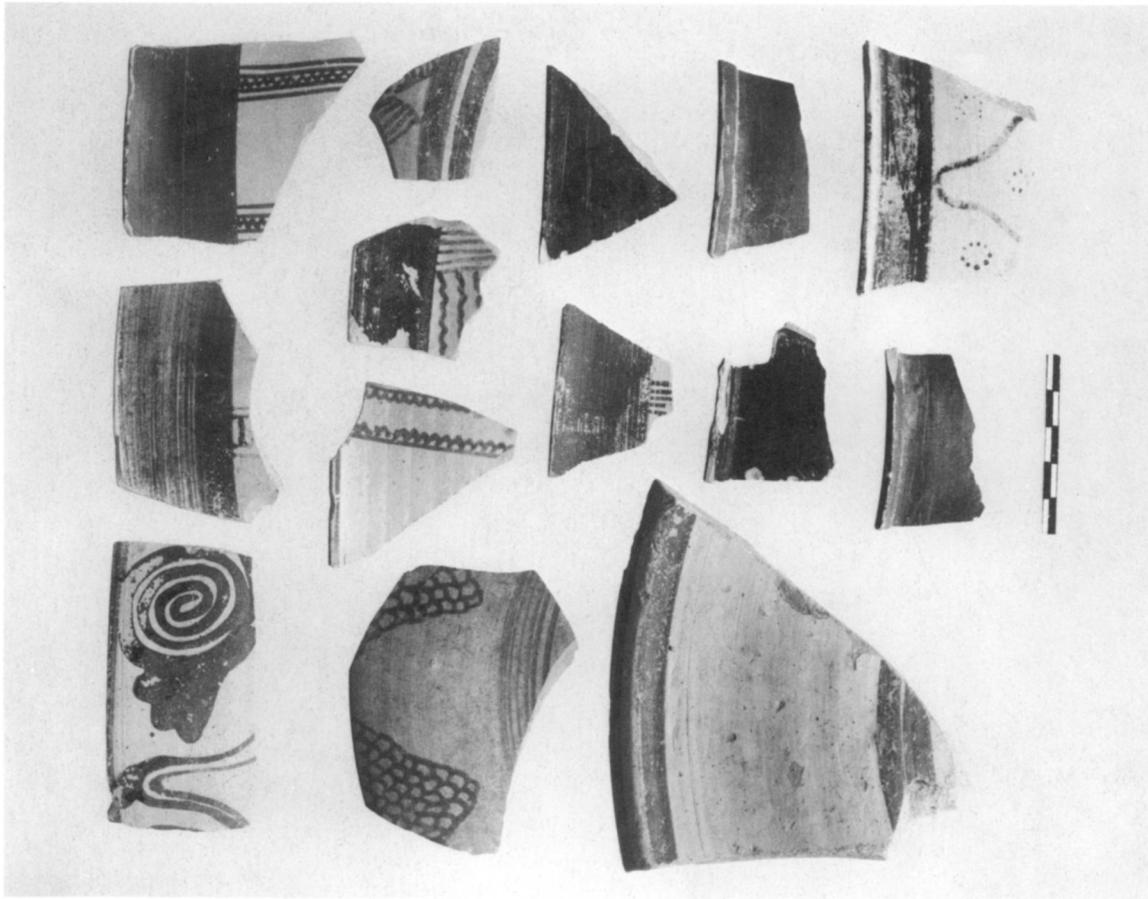
a. Walls of Room 11. Diagonal Wall and Threshold Block are Hellenistic.



b. Traces of Flooring on Side Wall of Room 10; Plaster reaching almost to Line of Flooring.
GEORGE E. MYLONAS: THE EAST WING OF THE PALACE OF MYCENAE



a. Discarded Ivory Chips from East Wing.



b. Sherds from Undisturbed Deposit of East Wing (numbered consecutively from upper left corner).