

WELL BUILT MYCENAE

*The Helleno-British Excavations
within the Citadel at Mycenae, 1959–1969*

W. D. Taylour, E. B. French, K. A. Wardle

FASCICULE 14

Tsountas House Area

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*For Lisa
who inspired and encouraged me*

CONTENTS

TEXT

Foreword (<i>E. B. French and K. A. Wardle</i>)	xi
Acknowledgements	xiii

INTRODUCTION	1
Note on the Polygonal Tower	3
Historiography of Excavation and Publication	3
Chronological Theories	5

PART 1. THE HOUSE	11
Description and Excavation	11
The House	11
The Entrance	12
Court A	13
Room B	14
Megaron C	15
Rooms D ¹ and D ²	16
Stairs G	17
Basement (Rooms F ¹⁻³ and Corridor E)	17
Forecourt H	19
Walls J , K , and M	20
Wall N and Offset O	21
The Forecourt Deposit	22
The Finds	22
The House	22
Forecourt H	22
Wall K	25
Summary	27
Use of the House	27

PART 2. THE TSOUNTAS HOUSE SHRINE (Γ)	31
Terminology	31
Description and Excavation	31
The Shrine	31
Room Γ	34
The Shrine — Lower Floor	36
The Shrine — Upper Floor	40
Area Q	41

The Finds	44
Room Γ	44
The Shrine	48
Area Q	51
Summary	52
Use of the Shrine	52
PART 3. ACCESS TO THE AREA	55
Description and Excavation	55
Stairway and Central Drain K	56
The Culvert	59
Lower End of Stairway and Drain K	59
The Sacred Way	60
The Upper Ramp from Threshold m to the Middle Ramp	60
The Upper Ramp	61
The Middle Ramp	68
The Lower Ramp and Passage J	74
Area Z	75
The West Cyclopean Wall	76
The Finds	77
Stairway and Drain K	77
The Upper Ramp	80
The Middle Ramp	85
The Lower Ramp and Passage J	87
Area Z	89
Summary and Use	90
PART 4. CONCLUSION	93
Endnotes	99
Bibliography	109

TEXT ILLUSTRATIONS

FIGURES

Fig. 1	Tsountas House Area, detail state plan (C. K. Williams, 1960).	6
Fig. 2	Tsountas House Area, letter key (C. K. Williams, 1960).	7
Fig. 3	Tsountas House Area (W. Dörpfeld; after Tsountas 1886, pl. 4).	8
Fig. 4	The Cult Centre, Greek excavations plan (after Iakovidis 1997).	9
Fig. 5	Plan of Shrine Γ (E. Olympios; after Mylonas 1983 <i>b</i> , fig. 103).	32
Fig. 6	Plaster plaque from Room Γ : (a) After Tsountas 1887, pl. 10.2. (b) Drawing by M. Reid; after S. Immerwahr, <i>Aegean Painting in the Bronze Age</i> , pl. 63 (1990).	35
Fig. 7	Plan of Mycenaean citadel in LH IIIA2 with position of Shrine Γ (after French 2002, fig. 16).	55
Fig. 8	The Cult Centre, showing access routes (after French 2002, fig. 33).	56
Fig. 9	Elevation and section of Upper Ramp surfaces (Trench T2C).	63
Fig. 10	Plan with Lower Ramp indicated (after French 2002, fig. 31).	75
Fig. 11	The Cult Centre, with access and circulation routes in LH IIIB2 (after Iakovidis 1997).	91

PLATES

(for Key to image reference numbers see Supplementary Data p. 492)

Pl. 1	(a) Aerial view of the Cult Centre (after <i>Mylonas Guide</i> , fig. 34; photograph: Whittlesey Foundation, 1975). (b) Tsountas House Area, showing the Shrine on the upper terrace of the Cult Centre. From SW. 60/35/17/26A.	xiv
Pl. 2	(a) The House, ground floor showing Megaron C , Court A and basement stairs. From SW. 50-W18. (b) The House, showing Megaron C , Court A , basement rooms and stairway. From SE. 50-W21.	10
Pl. 3	(a) The Forecourt deposit: pottery, bones and teeth <i>in situ</i> . 1781. (b) The Forecourt deposit: terracotta figurines (60-584, 60/35/13/18A; 60-585, 60/35/13/20A; 60-589, 60/35/13/21A), reworked pot scraper (60-586, 11/DIG/6322) and clay counter (60-588, 60/35/11/19A).	23
Pl. 4	(a) Tsountas House complex, general view of lower Shrine, ashlar altar and House. From N. 50-W12. (b) Room Γ and Shrine, with the House on terrace below. From SE. 50-W16.	30
Pl. 5	(a) 1950: Room Γ and Shrine looking towards Tsountas's dump, Passage S-N to entrance. From SE. 50-W15. (b) 1960: Tsountas House area, ramp and Shrine, with South House Annex excavations in background. From S. 60/35/17/18A.	33
Pl. 6	(a) Lower Shrine with plaster altar. From N. 50-W23. (b) Lower Shrine with plaster altar and boulder <i>in situ</i> . From E. 50-W24.	38

Pl. 7	(a) Pots associated with the Lower Shrine and plaster altar (50-234, 50-E32; 50-322, 50-E34).	39
	(b) Pots from Drain (50-184), Shrine (50-287) and Wall K (50-314). 50-E9.	
Pl. 8	(a) Tsountas House complex, Lower Shrine and view of Area Q with ashlar altar. From N. 50-W14.	43
	(b) Tsountas House, general view from S with Area Q 's terrace substructure and Middle Ramp in background. 59/35/5/3A.	
	(c) Area Q , with ashlar altar and terminus of Middle Ramp. From N. 59-Q2.	
	(d) Shrine floors with intermediate fill. Ashlar exterior altar. From SW. 1474a.	
Pl. 9	Objects from Room Γ :	46
	(a) Animal figurines (50-109, 11/DIG/6549–50; 50-98, 60/35/1/13), Psi figurine (50-99, 60/35/1/14), ivory helmet crest (50-94, 50-E77).	
	(b) Inlays, appliques and beads after Tsountas 1887, pl. 13.	
Pl. 10	(a) Objects from the Shrine: plaster wall fragment (50-313, 11/DIG/6422), clay counter (59-505, 11/DIG/5857), faience fragment (50-579, 60/35/14/29), bronze pin fragments (50-274, 11/DIG/6151).	50
	(b) Objects from Area Q : terracotta figurines (50-219, 57/35/2/24; 59-501, 59/35/7/15A), stone conuli (50-236, 11/DIG/6147; 50-237, 11/DIG/6024), lead clamp (50-231, 11/DIG/5887).	
Pl. 11	(a) Drain and Stairway K . From SW. 50-W10.	58
	(b) Lower part of Stairway K . From SE. 60/35/17/22A.	
	(c) Upper Ramp, S end at threshold m , showing ramp floors 1–3. From S. 60-R27.	
	(d) Threshold m and culvert at top of Stairway K , showing ramp floors 1–2. From NW. 60/35/17/36A.	
Pl. 12	(a) T2C test trench below Ramp 2 with earlier surfaces (3–5) to bedrock. 1831.	62
	(b) Upper and Middle Ramps from S. 60/35/17/13A; (<i>inset</i>) Upper Ramp, detail of square poros base n for post. From NE. 1800.	
Pl. 13	Turn of Upper Ramp to Middle Ramp with bench h . From SW. 59/35/5/7A.	69
Pl. 14	(a) Area Q and Middle Ramp with poros steps e . From W. 1476a.	72
	(b) Middle Ramp with steps to Lower Ramp. Area Q with exterior altar. From W. 59/35/5/7.	
Pl. 15	(a) Area Q and Middle Ramp with poros steps e . From SW. 59-Q4.	73
	(b) Lower ramp from stairs to Forecourt. From SW. 1543b.	
Pl. 16	(a) 1950 fine ware sherds from Street K and Drain. 60-R20.	78
	(b) 1950 fine ware sherds from Street K and Drain. 60-R21.	
Pl. 17	Tau figurine (50-193, 60/35/1/15), steatite bead (50-6, 11/DIG/6051) and miniature jar (50-185, 50-E9) from Drain; obsidian point (60-179, 60/35/10/28A), animal figurines (60-168, 60/35/12/31; 60-178, 60/35/14/13) and stone loomweight (60-61, 98-R3) from Upper Ramp; horse figurine (59-172, 59/35/6/4) from Middle Ramp; unusual figurine head (59-510, 59/35/7/24A) from Lower Ramp.	83

SUPPLEMENTARY DATA PDF

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CONTENTS

Room Sheets, Materials Lists and Illustrations

The Entrance	101
Court A	103
Room B (<i>prodomos</i>)	106
Megaron C	109
Room D ¹	113
Room D ²	115
Corridor E & Stairs G	117
Basement Room F ¹	120
Basement Room F ²	122
Basement Room F ³	124
Forecourt H	127
Room I	133
Shrine	136
Additional Illustrations	140

Catalogues

Registered Pottery, Other Materials and Finds	150
Non-Registered Pottery and the Painted Plaster	397
Bagged Sherds	415

Concordances

Registered Find numbers/Mycenae Museum (BE) numbers	481
Non-Registered Pottery & Painted Plaster/Mycenae Museum (BE) numbers	483
Bagged Sherds/Mycenae Museum (BE) numbers	484
Mycenae Museum (BE) numbers/Pottery, Finds & Bagged Sherds	485

Indexes

Index of Registered Pottery, Other Materials and Finds (in Catalogue)	488
Index of Site Photographs (in Supplementary Data)	491

General Bibliography

493



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FOREWORD

It was clear from Tsountas's first reports on his work to the SE of the Grave Circle (Tsountas 1886) that this area contained important buildings and unusual finds including an Egyptian scarab of Queen Tiy, appliqués in ivory or gold leaf and the painted plaster plaque that seems to depict the worship of a goddess. Wace recognised their importance and revisited this area with further excavation in 1950.

The full publication of this work was entrusted to Barbara Craig in 1958 who, with the resumption of excavation in 1959 by Taylour in cooperation with the Archaeological Society represented by Papademetriou, conducted further tests while C.K. Williams prepared a new detailed plan. Mylonas continued excavation between 1966 and 1972 (see below, p. 3). All these excavations contributed more to the story of the development of the area and of the Cult Centre, as Mylonas christened the complex following Taylour's discovery of the Temple and the Room with the Fresco (Mylonas 1972*b*).

However the full significance of Tsountas House and the Shrine, their role in the origin of the Cult Centre outside the Citadel Wall and its subsequent history, have only become fully apparent with the painstaking study presented in this fascicule by Dr Kim Shelton. She has carefully assembled and exactly analysed all the available information in order to trace the histories of construction, repair and alteration of Tsountas House, situated on the two lowest terraces of the slope, of the Tsountas House Shrine, on the upper Terrace, and of the interconnecting ramps which form the 'Processional Way' which descended to the complex from the East.

On the basis of the reports and studies by Tsountas and Wace and analysis of the finds made by Craig and Mylonas, Dr Shelton has been able to compile the first comprehensive and detailed account of these discoveries. In the House itself, there were few finds to show its function, but its quality and unusual internal features both demonstrate that it was a better than average residence, whilst its location, opening on to the same courtyard which gave access to all the cult rooms, makes the hypothesis that its occupants had some ritual responsibilities entirely possible.

Most significantly, Dr Shelton has established beyond reasonable doubt that the Shrine (also known as Shrine Γ) was the earliest cult installation constructed in this part of the site, *outside* the circuit wall. She has shown that it continued to be used when the Temple and the Room with the Fresco Complex were added to the N. These lay beyond an open courtyard which could readily be reached by anyone from the town of Mycenae outside the Citadel and which gave access to all the different parts of the cult complex. During this period, from early in the 14th to the middle of the 13th century BC, the Shrine, equipped with a curiously elaborate hearth or altar, provided an interior space for ritual activity and received valuable, even exotic offerings.

This situation changed radically at some point after the middle of the 13th century BC when both the Room with the Fresco and the Temple can be shown to have suffered serious damage, perhaps as the result of an earthquake, and the West Circuit Wall was extended to the W to enclose both the Grave Circle to the N and the whole Cult Centre (Wardle 2003; 2015). As a result of these events, the whole character and focus of the Cult Centre changed, as can be seen most clearly from the history of the Tsountas House Shrine set out in this fascicule. The Room with the Fresco ceased to be used for cult purposes. The Temple was repaired but seems no longer to have been important. The altar in the Tsountas House Shrine was covered by a new

floor and replaced with a stone-built altar in the courtyard. An elaborate ‘Processional Way’ with a series of monumental gateways was constructed to lead up to (or down from) the Palace on the summit of the Citadel and decorated for at least part of its length with a processional fresco to match its function.

The orientation of those cult rooms which remained in use, including the Shrine, was now, in the terms introduced by Hägg (1981), palatial and official rather than popular. Access was restricted to those permitted entry to the Citadel and this arrangement continued until the destruction of the whole of the area at the end of the 13th century BC. These conclusions will require a radical reassessment of the nature and history of Mycenaean cult practice, since much of the current discussion is still erroneously based on the belief that the Mycenae Cult Centre was, from its creation, *intra muros*. Dr Shelton has demonstrated convincingly that the Cult Centre was created for the wider Mycenae community and that the manner of its use changed when it was incorporated into the Citadel.

E. B. French and K. A. Wardle

Very sadly, Lisa’s death in June at the age of 90, came before we could bring Tsountas House to press. As in so many ways with younger colleagues, she had encouraged and supported Kim Shelton’s work in the initial study, the elaboration of the text and the final stages of editorial oversight. Like her father before her, she was always generous with her knowledge and her time. She is already sorely missed as we continue the project she devised — the *Well Built Mycenae* publication. No small thanks are due to her and to Linda Witherill for the financial support which they have provided in recent years towards the completion of this and other fascicules.

KAW October 2021

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This research was undertaken with financial support first from the British Excavations at Mycenae and the Mediterranean Archaeological Trust and in the later stages from a Humanities Research Fellowship and the Department of Classics, University of California Berkeley. The manuscript would not have been completed without the tremendous intellectual and practical support I received from Elizabeth French, especially while I was on sabbatical in Cambridge. The proximity to the Mycenae Archive and her expertise was invaluable. I am also extremely grateful to Lisa, together with Ken Wardle, for allowing me to research and publish this material, and for being so incredibly patient. I hope it has been worth the wait since this has been one of the most challenging and complicated puzzles with which I have worked. I am honoured also to have been entrusted with the completion of the work begun by Barbara Craig, whose detailed study and insight created a solid foundation on which I could build using all the ‘building blocks of information’ we have amassed in Mycenaean archaeology and in archaeology at Mycenae since the 1960s.

Much of the research was completed in the Mycenae Museum and I would like to acknowledge the important assistance of the Δ' Ephoreia in Nauplion and thank the staff at Mycenae, especially Nikos Katsoulieris in the apotheke, for his unending dedication, resourcefulness, and photographic memory. My drawings were inked by several of my students at UCB who also helped with the object catalogue and its initial formatting. Thanks are due especially to Samantha Alford and Elizabeth Niespolo. Additional cataloging of non-context sherds from Tsountas's dump was tirelessly compiled by Lynne Kvapil and Francesco Iacono during a summer season at Mycenae with additional photographs taken by Debra Trusty.

PLATE 1



- A. Tsountas House
- B. Processional Way
- Γ. Shrine
- Δ. Exterior altar
- K. Courtyard with circular altar
- T. Temple Complex

(a)



(b)

(a) Aerial view of the Cult Centre (after *Mylonas Guide*, fig. 34; photograph: Whittlesey Foundation, 1975); (b) Tsountas House area, showing the Shrine on the upper terrace of the Cult Centre. From SW.