THE LION GATE RELIEF OF MYCENAE RECONSIDERED
(Pls. 3-4)

Like other outstanding and intriguing works of Bronze Age art, the famous Lion Gate Relief at Mycenae has puzzled generations of scholars as to its exact meaning (pl. 3b; fig. 2). This, still another periodic consideration, has been prompted by a new parallel to be seen in an architectural representation in a miniature fresco from the Late Cycladic I site of Akrotiri at Thera (pl. 3a; fig. 1)\(^1\). The connecting link between the two instances, which are separated by some 250 years, is the altar with incurved sides, which is known through both real and depicted examples spanning that period. This corpus of altars, significantly augmented by recent discoveries, provides much of the context of the discussion.

If we first turn to the Lion Gate at Mycenae we find that the two adjacent altars occupy a prominent central position, together being 1/3 the width of the base of the relieving triangle. Proportionately, each altar is wider than it is tall, the ratio of width to height being about 1.16:1.\(^2\) Above them is a course of masonry marked by projections and recesses. The projections are probably meant to be thought of as bases, one for the column, the other two to support the forward front legs of the lions. The legs, therefore, like the column, assume, symbolically in this case, a structural, supportive function. Above the capital and what is probably its abacus (unless it is an abbreviated epistyle course), is a row of discs (ends of transverse beams) and another slab the same size as the abacus. The beams and the block above them surely represent a small part of a more extended superstructure, shortened here because of the diminishing space in the triangle. The course above the altars may have been abbreviated too.

As at Mycenae, an altar appears in the same relative position above an entranceway in a scene in a fresco frieze with peopled sea- and land-scenes from the West House at Thera. Specifically, the altar there can be seen in the long, oblong transom of the door of a building facing on the sea in what has been labelled by the excavator the «Third Town», occupying the west side of the south frieze\(^3\) (pl. 3a; fig. 1). Like the door, the

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1. Because of its connection with Mycenae, the site which Professor G. Mylonas has so extensively explored and interpreted, this article is offered as a small token of appreciation to him. Not least among Professor Mylonas's many contributions is his thorough investigation of the Lion Gate and the sensible interpretation of its relief. For the latter see Ancient Mycenae (Princeton, 1957) 26 ff. and Mycenae and the Mycenaean Age (Princeton, 1966) 17-18 and 173-176.

2. The width of the relieving triangle is given by A.J. WACE as being 3.60 m. (Mycenae, New York, 1964, p. 52). The altars should be about 0.65 m. wide and 0.56 m. tall each.

3. The detail of the Third Town can be seen at the right end of the frieze illustrated in colour in Thera VI, pl. 9. The entire fresco has been admirably discussed by its discoverer, S. Marinatos in Thera VI, 38-60. Of the numerous studies on the subject written since then only the more pertinent are mentioned below. Fig. 1 is a partial tracing of a detail of the Third Town. It varies from the original illustration only
transom has a wooden frame within which appear two horizontal rows of discs and two ochre brown projections with rounded ends. The stucco surface is badly damaged in the area of the right projection and in the centre of the frame. The white space thus confined by the wooden frame and the projections clearly describes the familiar Aegean altar with incurved sides, here exceptionally wide. It is possible, on the other hand, that, as at Mycenae, there were once actually two adjacent altars rather than a single elongated one, also represented at Thera⁴. In the tentative alternative restoration of this detail of the fresco the smaller altars would match very closely the proportions of the Mycenaean altars (fig. 1).

At first sight, the choice of white for the altar in the fresco suggests an open space, since white seems to be used here for openings, such as doors and windows and also for the landscape. The red discs, however, probably representing beam ends, exclude this idea, for in that case the upper row would have no structural support, while the lower row would have nothing to support. In other words, there is no apparent practical function for such an arrangement of beams in the transom. One possible solution is that the transom was screened by a white-painted, probably wooden, panel on which

slightly, where missing plaster and damaged surface allow alternative interpretations. Actual oblong transoms are preserved in a pier and door partition in the case of Xeste 3 at Akrotiri (IAE 1978, p. 293, fig. 3).

⁴ I owe this idea, evolved in a discussion in a seminar, to J.W. Shaw.
the reddish discs would have been painted as an ornament or to simulate a comparable situation where beams may have been necessary structurally. A structural use is likely in the case of two faience plaques from the Town Mosaic from Knossos where discs frame areas above and below a space centrally marked by a stylized altar, to be further discussed below (fig. 8)⁵. That this apparent lack of clarity may be only in the eye of the beholder, however, is suspected when we find the artist recording other realistic
details surprisingly meticulously in the same Theran painting. One such instance is the indication of transverse squared beams under the lintel (only the left is preserved), or the recording of the detail that the wooden door jambs were built on top of masonry, perhaps a necessary expedient against dampness due to the proximity to the sea. What is puzzling here, however, is the unequal level of the bases of the jambs. Since the base

Fig. 2. Lion Gate and fortification wall, Mycenae (G. Mylonas, *Mycenae and the Mycenaean Age*, fig. 13).

⁵ The exact architectural role of these two plaques being uncertain, it is difficult there as well to determine the function of the discs. Two other fragments of faience found with, but obviously belonging to another composition than the Town Mosaic because of their large scale, outline a similar rectangle. See K. Polinger Foster, *Aegean Faience of the Bronze Age* (London, 1979) 104, fig. 49, where it is described as a capital.
of the right jamb is missing, however, this inconsistency may be a matter of modern restoration. Thus, the non-joining section of the fresco depicting a row of men with a segment of the blue ashlar wall above them, now placed immediately to the right of the entrance, could be moved further right, so that the right jamb could be lowered to match the level of the existing left jamb. The base line of the masonry would still have to be higher than the jamb, suggesting, perhaps, that the wall was set back (fig. 1).

The entrance just described in the Theran fresco is part of an obviously outstanding building in the represented town, both in terms of scale and position. For easy reference I shall label it a «pylon», in the sense of a distinct edifice incorporating a major entrance, the only one visible here from the seaside. It is a wide, two storied building with extensive timber incorporated in its masonry, for the panels of slit windows and for shutters upstairs, as well as for frames of windows and the door. Next to the door is a window, unusually tall, but in its position reminiscent of such door/window arrangements frequently encountered in actual buildings at Akrotiri⁶. The large window upstairs reaching almost to the floor can even be compared with the windows in the very room in which the fresco frieze appeared. Here, as there, the men looking out may be sitting on wide low sills which could serve as benches⁷. The row of beams above the transom marks, I believe, the level of the floor of the upper storey.

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6. See, for instance, the Millhouse D15, the facade next to the northwest corner of Xeste 2, or the Pylon. See Thera VI,pls. 14 b; 25 a; Thera VI, pl. 23.
7. Thera VI, pls. 38-39. Cf. also the Queen’s Megaron at the palace at Knossos: PM III, Frontispiece.
The pylon is attached to what Marinatos correctly interpreted as the city wall. His identification, which is often ignored, has to be further emphasized and defined. The wall is attached to either side of the towering pylon, and is painted blue with black lines indicating its ashlar masonry. Its right section is crowned by a white cornice and white horns of consecration. Behind this section of the wall, but also behind the pylon itself, there are no buildings. Instead, one gets glimpses of the landscape, rendered white with occasional spectators dispersed here and there among oval-shaped forms evoking a rocky terrain. It is important to note that the ashlar wall attached to the pylon has no doors and that the buildings of the town are meant to be seen, I believe, as being behind and within it, rather than built on top of it. The slight projection of this wall beyond the facades of the buildings to the left makes it clear that they are independent (pl. 3a). This relationship becomes more explicit when we compare this depiction with an analogous one of similar date, the besieged city on the Silver Siege Rhyton from Mycenae, where a similar wall or bastion projects beyond a cluster of towering buildings (fig. 3). The fortified character of the Third Town becomes even more apparent by contrasting it with the Second Town at the east end of the same fresco frieze, where a number of houses have doors facing straight on to the marshy shore. As to the part of the blue wall bestowed with the sacred horns in the Third Town, there is no reason why it may not have done double duty, as fortification wall and temenos. Probably rightly B. Rutkowski suggested the presence of a cult area behind that part of the wall.

Fig. 1 here, through my intentional omission of the town buildings inside the wall, clarifies what structures were in the foreground of the scene.

The cluster of buildings and the wall below them face directly into a bay or small harbour to the left in which two red boats are stationed. The sea appears also in front

8. In «Religious Elements in the Thera Frescoes», *Thera and the Aegean World*, vol. I (1978) 661-664, especially p. 662. Rutkowski, however, disassociates the wall with the sacred horns from the «city wall», i.e., that left of our «pylon». The identical rendition of both sections of the wall, in terms of colour and masonry, suggests to me that they are part of one wall interrupted only by the pylon.
of the town which is obviously built next to the shore. Surrounded as it is on two sides by water, the town may well have been on a peninsula beyond which two more land projections are indicated, one just beyond the bay previously mentioned and one beyond another harbour to its left, above which rises the large building conventionally known as the Dove Cote because of its triangular markings. The last promontory juts into the sea, forbiddingly rocky and uninhabited. It has been rightly noted that there is much in the topography of the fresco which could reflect the coastal morphology of the area south and west of Akrotiri⁹.

Fig. 6. Altar from House of High Priest, Knossos (PM IV, p. 209, fig. 160, a).

Fig. 7. Two views of altar from palace of Mallia (traced from Études Crétoises, vol. XII, 1962, pl. XVIII 1 and 2).

As to the direct approach from the sea and the presence of a monumental building in the fresco, there are good parallels in two LBI sites in Crete, namely the palace at Kato Zakro, where a road leading to it from the northeast must surely lead to the sea, or, in a closer analogy, Building J/T at Kommos on the southern coast of Crete, built right on the shore of the Libyan sea and fronted by a slab-paved road¹⁰. On the other hand, the combination of the immediate proximity of the town to the sea and of a fortification wall in the Theran fresco corresponds more closely to the kind of arrangement we have on the island of Kea in the LCI phase of the Hagia Irini settlement, where an occasionally towered fortification wall surrounds a town built on a small

⁹. See H. Pichler and W.L. Friedrich, «Mechanism of the Minoan Eruption of Santorini», in Thera and The Aegean World, Vol. II (1980) 16, where the possibility of a harbour directly west of Akrotiri has been suggested on the basis of the morphology of the island in pre-eruption times. See also C. Doumas, Thera (London, 1983) 55-56 and the map pointing to a possible location of the harbour (p. 13).

promontory. Although fortification walls of this period are known only fragmentarily on other Cycladic islands, such as Melos and possibly Tenos, there are none certainly known either in Crete or on the Mainland, which provides one more reason to believe that the Third Town should be thought of as being located on a Cycladic island and, perhaps, therefore, Thera itself. Interestingly, a distinct entrance, a smaller scale pylon, was found in the actual town of Akrotiri. Like the fresco pylon the real one has a second floor, which, to judge by the presence of frescoes, must have also served as living quarters.

Fig. 8. Faience plaque from Town Mosaic, Knossos (PM 1, fig. 226, N).

Fig. 9. Gold leaf shrine, Mycenae (traced from S. Marinatos, Crete and Mycenae, 1960, pl. 205).

The type of altar encountered in the two entrances discussed so far has a long history and a wide distribution in the Bronze Age. Evans, to my knowledge, was the first person to point out that these altars, or «sacred bases», as he otherwise labelled them, could often be connected with entrances, and as was to be expected, were found in spaces closely linked with ritual, some times identifiable as shrines. His analysis included one actual limestone altar from the House of the High Priest at Knossos (fig. 6).

11. J.L. Caskey, «Investigations in Keos», Hesperia 40 (1971) 373-377 and J. Davis, Fortifications at Ayia Irini, Keos (Ph. D. dissertation, University of Cincinnati, 1977). The frescoes from the northeast bastion at Kea bear a number of similarities to the Theran frieze, such as the presence of tower-like buildings, buildings and men next to a body of water, a river or the sea and depictions of boats, in one case with dolphins painted on the hull. See K. Abramovitz, «Frescos from Ayia Irini, Keos», Hesperia 49 (1980) 66 and pl. 6, a-c.

12. For Cycladic fortifications see J. Davis, op. cit., n. 11 above, especially p. 180 ff.


14. For extensive references to studies of altars see H. Reusch, «Zum Wandschmuck des Thronsaales in Knossos», in Minoica und Homer (Berlin, 1958) 349, n. 106. For more recent bibliography see J. Sakellarakis in AA 20 (1965) 560 and notes 24 and 25.
several illustrations on seals and sealings from Crete and the mainland, ranging in date from LBI-III (figs. 12-14), gold leaf shrines from Shaft Grave IV at Mycenae (one in fig. 9, where we can also recognize an altar under the horns at the very top), two identical faience plaques from the Town Mosaic (one in fig. 8) and a clay model of an altar from Knossos, both dated by him to the MMII period, as well as the LMII fresco of the Throne Room of the palace at Knossos. One of the sealings excavated by D. Hogarth at Kato Zakro, depicting two lions on either side of a portal, of which the lintel carried a simplified version of the altar as at Thera, clearly provides the closest comparison with the Lion Gate (fig. 13a).

These representations vary in their degree of stylization, but where the altar appears in an architectural setting it tends to be shown basically as two opposing concave curves, set within a squared frame. In the case of the Town Mosaic, where the altar form appears on the facade of a structure, Evans hypothesized that it copied a construction in woodwork with openings used for light (fig. 8). The rounded spaces on either side of the altar, when the latter was incorporated in a stylized form in a wall, Evans argued next, would at some point have been filled with the so-called half-rosette motif, examples of which in carved stone relief were already known to him both from the palace and the Atreus tholos tomb at Mycenae, from the palace at Tiryns and from his own excavations in the palace at Knossos. This stylized floral pattern was also represented in wallpainting, either as actual architectural decoration (as a frieze, probably above doors, and as a dado) and in pictorial representations of buildings, mostly in frescoes. The best known example among several is that of the Tripartite Shrine.

15. For the examples cited by Evans and his discussion of the altar see *PM* I, 220-222 and 308; *PM* II, 607-609, 664, n. 1, and 767; *PM* III, 92; *PM* IV, 202-214, 608, 612.
16. *PM* II, 607-608 and fig. 381 c.
Fresco from the Palace of Knossos, where a dado of two half-rosettes adorns the central part of the shrine represented. Wherever the context of the carved or painted motif was known it suggested a connection with vestibules, doors, entrances – an impression further strengthened by mural and other pictorial representations. In the case of the pylon in the Thera fresco, the half-rounded brown spaces on either side of the altar within the transom, would have also been perfectly suitable frames for half-rosette patterns. Perhaps one reason why rosettes do not appear here is that their use had not become popular yet, or, as perhaps at Mycenae, the realistic depiction of the altars was more in keeping with the sober intention of the representation than their dissolution into pure ornament would have been.

Since Evans’s days only a few more examples of half-rosettes have been added to those then known, such as a few fragments of stone reliefs from the vicinity of the Palace of Knossos and, in painted versions, in the frescoes of the Mycenaean palace at Pylos. Our state of knowledge and understanding of the use of this motif, therefore, remains essentially unaltered. A small note I can add here, however, is that there may have been at some point a choice between alternative «fillers» for the spaces on either side of the motif of the altar. One such case may be represented in the architectural facade in miniature style on a small fragment of stucco found by Evans in the palace of Knossos in the so-called Ivory Deposit and partially restored here in fig. 11. This drawing makes it clear that what Evans described as brackets are, more precisely, the spaces between successive altars. Because of their horizontal markings these altars are

18. For the new relief fragments from Knossos see JHS (1956-57) 21, figs. 18, 19. At Pylos fresco fragments with a half-rosette motif were found in Room 20, along with a depiction of a partially preserved altar. See M. Lang, The Palace of Nestor at Pylos: vol. II, The Frescoes (Princeton, 1969) 191 and 198. For the altar see no. 3C20 and pls. 46 and 132.

19. PM III, 207-208, 403 and fig. 141; Knossos Atlas, pl. IV, fig. 4 and pl. E, g.
comparable to the one depicted on the Sanctuary Rhyton from the palace of Zakro (fig. 10). Within one of the spaces appears a double axe, a motif which may have been repeated in the fresco frieze. In fact this alternation reflects the arrangement in the House of the High Priest at Knossos, where, Evans suggested, an altar was set between two stands with double axes\textsuperscript{20}. Fillers, like the double axes, may have been eventually eliminated through competition with the ultimately more popular half-rosettes. Sometimes there are horizontal bands in lieu of the rosettes, as in a new

![Seal from Idaean Cave (PM IV, 210, fig. 162).](image)

painting from Thera (fig. 16) and in the Throne Room at Knossos (fig. 15)\textsuperscript{21}. On the latter the bands are further marked by X-patterns.

Recent evidence relating to such altars further corroborates the idea that they were connected with entrances, where they were placed either at or near a door. Among actual examples discovered since Evans’s days the most impressive are the four altars, placed one next to the other upon the stylobate of a major entrance into the important LMI building at Archanes (fig. 5). Just northwest of this entrance hall were rooms clearly connected with religious activity, to judge from the rich ritual furnishings and deposits. The strongly sacred character of the adjacent area is further indicated by the very recent discovery nearby of a large and differently shaped altar\textsuperscript{22}. The full significance of all these finds and of their context will, naturally have to await further publication. The proportions of the altars at Archanes, at any rate, are very close to those of the Mycenae Lion Gate relief, though slightly wider than tall by comparison. Since their combined width is almost exactly that of the stylobate on which they stood, it is

\textsuperscript{20} PM IV, 202 ff. and fig. 157.

\textsuperscript{21} REUSCH (op. cit., n. 14, p. 351) rightly, I believe, detected another example of an altar on a sealing from the Hieroglyphic Deposit from the palace of Knossos. This too had a horizontal band on either side with zig-zag-like markings. See PM IV, 626, fig. 617, b.

\textsuperscript{22} J. SAKELLARAKIS, op. cit., n. 14 above and ILA 1979, 331 ff. and ILN, March 26, 1966, pp. 32-33, especially fig. 2. For the new, large altar see the Greek newspaper, Tà Néa, August 10, 1983.
likely that this was intended as their usual position, although, since they were not fixed fixtures, their placement here was not necessarily permanent. They could be moved on certain occasions to other places and used singly or jointly.

Another altar is that found in the south sector of the Palace at Mallia, in Room XVIII, which is part of a complex of rooms interpreted by the French excavators as a sanctuary (fig. 7a, b). This altar, made of sandstone and marked by two «incised» signs, a star and a cross, was apparently placed right on the axis of the door to this room, thus almost blocking the entrance. It was set between two upright bricks, as if in a niche23. Its proportions (0.43 m. high and 0.32 m. maximum width) are similar to those of the altar from the House of the High Priest at Knossos (0.56 m. high and 0.42 m. wide) but different from those of the altars at Mycenae and Archanes, being taller than wider. Proportions between altars obviously varied, though not necessarily as a result of a chronological development.

New pictorial representations, besides the one already discussed from Thera, include, foremost, the Peak Sanctuary rhyton from the LMI palace at Kato Zakro where such an altar appears in the relief in front of a tripartite shrine on some steps and along the axis of the building24. Then there is a fragmentary LHIII fresco from the palace at Pylos, found in Room 20 opening into an exterior space, of which is preserved part of an altar with incurved sides with the foot of an animal, perhaps a deer, resting on it (pl. 4c). The original composition may well have been heraldic, as in the case of the Lion Gate relief, or in seal examples where altars are flanked by a variety of animals (figs. 13b, c and 14)25.

The other example, known only through a drawing in a preliminary publication (fig. 16), is part of the Crocus Gathering scene in a wallpainting which adorned the room.

24. N. PLATON, Zakros (New York, 1971) 165 and 167. The small altar is seen here in association with two more rectangular structures, apparently altars, a small one on the left and a large one below. See also, J.W. SHAW, «Evidence for the Minoan Tripartite Shrine», AJA 82 (1978) 429-448.
25. LANG, op. cit., n. 18 above. Compare also with scenes on seals, in PM IV, 611, fig. 599.
above the lustral basin in Xeste 3, one of the best appointed buildings excavated so far at Thera\textsuperscript{26}. At least two altars, possibly four, seem to be preserved, placed symmetrically below (presumably in front of) a tripartite structure and acting as support for a double cornice. Behind the altars is a broad border. Over the central part of what is clearly a tripartite shrine is a seat on which is perched a female figure, with a griffin and a monkey in back and in front of her, the latter apparently handing her something and probably acting as an intermediary between her and the girls who are collecting the crocus flowers. The scheme of the altars with the band behind them is quite reminiscent of the stylized altars in the dado, on either side of the throne, in the Throne Room at Knossos (fig. 15). Further links between the two rooms include pictorial and actual furnishings such as the stone benches in the room in Knossos, which perhaps correspond to the bench-like structure supported by the altars in the Theran fresco, and the central seat on which the goddess seats, which is equivalent to the Knossian throne. Only the goddess/priestess is missing from the Knossian fresco, but, as H. Reusch suggested a while ago, this is the very room in which she may have made her epiphany, assuming her rightful position on the throne\textsuperscript{27}. The griffins in the fresco of the Throne Room imply her imminent presence. Given also the proximity of the Knossian and Theran rooms to a lustral basin, one wonders if there may have been earlier representations in Crete of the same cycle and possibly in the Throne Room itself of which we now possess only the later, LMII, version\textsuperscript{28}.

Despite this new knowledge, however, the question of how the altars were actually

\textsuperscript{26} PIAE 1980, 295.
\textsuperscript{27} REUSCH, \textit{op. cit.}, n. 14 above.
\textsuperscript{28} A recent publication suggests that the Knossian Throne Room Complex as we now see it is a later remodelling of an earlier predecessor, with much the same plan and fixed features (ex. throne, benches). See S. MIRÉ, \textit{Das Throneaumareal des Palastes von Knossos} (Bonn, 1979). See also review by R. HÄGG in \textit{Classical Journal} 78 (1982) 77-79.
used remains. A few thoughts can be offered. If altars, they could have served as tables for offerings. In two cases where such altars were shown independently of architecture, one, on a gem from the Idaean Cave (fig. 12) has plants and horns of consecration above it, while the other, a very poorly preserved relief on a pithos fragment from the Cave of Psychro, has what may be also a pair of horns with fruit or plants in its centre. Elsewhere the altars are consistently shown as pedestals and structural supports. This special function may explain why they often occur not singly, but in pairs and groups. As architectural supports they appear under a cornice or bench top, as in the fresco of Xeste 3, or under a column, as shown in the relief of the Mycenaean gate and in glyptic art. The shape of such an altar is also echoed, I believe, in carpen-

![Diagram of Throne Room, Knossos](image)

Fig. 15. Detail of Throne Room, Knossos (H. Reusch, *Minoica und Homer*, 1958, pl. 6, b).

try, as under the bench on which a lion crouches on the so-called Nestor’s ring and, perhaps, under the Captain’s cabin in the Flagship of the Ship Procession from the south wall frieze of the Theran miniature fresco. In all these cases the «altars» may have provided physical as well as religious support. At Archanes the four altars could have been used as actually found, placed next to each other to provide a square surface at the top, or, if the occasion was an appropriate one, they could have been lined up as pedestals for a board or a cornice to be placed on top of them to form a platform or a bench. Horns of consecration could have been placed on them occasionally, as on the altars seen at the top of the gold leaf shrine from Mycenae and in the example from the Idaean cave (figs. 9 and 12, respectively). By analogy to Archanes there may be two

30. For a glyptic example see G. Mylonas, *Mycenae and the Mycenaean Age*, pl. 124, no. 44.
31. For Nestor’s ring see *PM* III, 145-157, especially fig. 95 and col. pl. XX A. See also a special study by J. Sakellarakis, «Über die Echtheit des sogenannten Nestorringes», *Proceedings of the 3rd Cretological Congress*, vol. A (1973) 303-319. For the Theran ship see *Thera* VII, pl. 9.
more altars implied behind those visible in the Mycenae relief and, in combination with the course above them, they may represent a bench or a platform.

Of the examples where the altar became an architectural ornament on a facade, that adorning the pylon in the Theran fresco may imply connections with the Lion Gate that go beyond iconographic resemblances. As at Mycenae, the Theran altar is placed above the main entrance of the particular site which also seems to be fortified. Next, the presence of horns of consecration on the wall surrounding that part of the town to the right of the pylon may suggest the presence of a sacred area in the immediate vicinity. The House of the High Priest at Knossos, the palace of Mallia, the LMI building at

![Fig. 16. Drawing of Fresco in Xeste 3, Thera (Praktika, 1980, 295).](image)

Archanes, all provide tangible examples of comparable associations. In the latter two cases the altars have been found near and at a major entrance. One wonders, therefore, if the venerated Shaft-Grave Circle A at the acropolis of Mycenae, apparently built at the same time as the Lion Gate, as well as the presence nearby of the Cult Centre, within a short distance of the Lion Gate, may not be more reasons why the altars were considered a particularly appropriate motif for the relief on the gate. At Kea, we can note, the main entrance through the fortification walls was not far from the important Temple within the settlement.

The architectural depiction of the Mycenae relief, which forms the focus of this paper, has been variously interpreted in the past as purely decorative, or as symbolic.

32. For the location of the Cult Centre at Mycenae see G. MYLONAS, Τὸ Θερασκευικὸν Κέντρον τῶν Μυκηνῶν (Πραγματεύει τῆς Ἀκαδημίας Ἀθηνῶν, τόμ. 33, Ἀθήναι, 1972). For the Temple at Kea, see J.L. CASKEY, «Investigations in Keos», Hesperia 40 (1971) 384-386 and 375, fig. 9.
with the column being the aniconic image of divinity, as a shrine, or as the Mycenaean palace. Of these solutions I favour the last one, but with the more specific suggestion that the column and entablature flanked by the lions constitute a complete architectural entity, perhaps an identifiable part of the palace. We should note here that although the heraldic scheme ultimately derives from earlier examples, especially from Crete, the column, according to Nilsson, is a more typically Mycenaean central motif. Although undoubtedly imbued with religious meaning this column may have also been given a more literal sense in Greece. If this is the case, I would like to propose that the architectural design in the Gate Relief may reflect an entrance of a type characterized by a central support, commonly a column. I like to further suggest that this may allude more specifically to the propylon which provides the main direct access to the palace. Such propylas are known from actual examples, as in the palace at Pylos, where each side has a single support and in a similar scheme restored at Mycenae. That entrances of this type may have received special attention is clear in the case at Pylos where the double propylon leading to the palace court was lavishly decorated with frescoes. Among the scenes depicted are two entrances, one partially preserved, guarded by two lions crouching over the door lintel, the other with a central column, mounted by two similarly seated sphinxes (pls. 4a, b). These paintings of entrances may refer to the inner and outer sides of the very propylas. The correspondence of these animals and their role as guardians placed at an entrance to the role of the lions of the Mycenaean relief is obvious, even if their position and postures vary; but then the triangular format of the relieving triangle required a different arrangement of the lions. It is to be further noted that several features of the entablature of the structure of the relief correspond closely to structural details in the two Pylian frescoes. If all these pictorial analogies

33. For a summary of views and further discussion see G. Mylonas, op. cit., n. 1 above.
34. Nilsson, op. cit., n. 29 above, pp. 252-255.
35. For plans of the Mycenaean palaces see G. Mylonas, Mycenae and the Mycenaean Age. For the propylon of the palace at Mycenae see fig. 15, rooms 9 and 96 and p. 67, fig. 17; for that at Pylos: p. 54, fig. 13, rooms 1 and 2. Tiryns (p. 13, fig. 1) has propyla of a different plan, with two columns.
36. See Lang, op. cit., n. 18 above. Pl. 143 shows the plan of the palace. The stucco fragments concerned were found in room 2, pls. 76, 136, no. 22 for the one with lions and pls. 75, 1, R, no. 1A2, for the one with the sphinxes. There was, apparently another fresco depicting a portal with two crouching lions found in room 20, which opened into an area outside the palace and where the fresco of the altar was also found (our pl. 4c). Here, however, Lang believes the fragments fell from a room upstairs. See pl. 77, no. 3A20 and discussion on pp. 199-200. Two lions on top of a structure, possibly a gate, appear also on a sealing from the Lustral Basin of the Little Palace at Knossos (PM II, 524, fig. 327).
37. The triangular frame of heraldic compositions involving animals, is well attested in seals and sealings (n. 15 above). That such a format may also have appeared in wallpainting is suggested by some designs in a series of miniature frescoes found out of their original context, north of the palace of Knossos. At least 2 compositions have a «pedimental» character with a central bucranium and flanking antithetical animals (PM III, 37-42, fig. 25). Whether these represent part of architectural facades or embroideries on the robe of a goddess, as Evans suggests, is unimportant. Even in the latter case the representations could be architectural.
are not accidental, the Lion Gate relief could represent the symbol of a protected entrance, perhaps the now badly destroyed propylon leading to the palace at the top of the citadel of Mycenae. If so, the symbol of a sanctified palace entrance would have appeared above the gate of the fortifications: a double blessing.\footnote{38}

\textit{Scarborough College, University of Toronto}  

\textit{MARIA C. SHAW}

38. One might object that the entrances in the Pylian frescoes could represent a shrine, but Bronze Age shrines of this specific form are not known and the presence of symbols of altars in the Theran Fleet Fresco and in the relief of the Mycenae gate make it clear that these religious symbols were attached to real entrances, which though religiously oriented, did not themselves stand for shrines. The sanctification or mystical protection of an important entrance is not an unusual phenomenon. It has been practiced in different forms in Europe, Greece and the East at various times. For the Bronze Age, see J. SAKELLARAKIS and R. DEMANGEAU in \textit{op. cit.}, in notes 14 and 17 above and \textsc{Sir Arthur Evans}, «Mycenaean Tree and Pillar Cult», \textit{AJA} 21 (1901) 99-204, and 181 ff., in particular. For a comparable practice in Classical Greece with several references to instances in various other parts of the world, see \textsc{M.C. Waites}, «The meaning of the “Dokana”», \textit{AJA} 23 (1919) 1-18.
A DANCE SCENE FROM MYCENAE

An unusual sherd was picked up near the area of the West House at Mycenae by one of the labourers who was working on the new road to the Citadel early in 1958. The sherd was handed over to the Swedish Institute in Athens, where it is at present deposited (fig. 1).

It is a lip and shoulder fragment of a deep bowl, 6.4 cm long, 4 cm wide and 0.6 cm thick. The lip is horizontal and almost T-shaped. Pinkish-buff clay and slip, lustrous, reddish-brown, painted decoration. There is a broad band on the lip and an encircling line below it. On the shoulder, two figures in silhouette. The upper part of the left-hand figure is preserved; the head is turned to the left. The figure is grasping the hand of the

![Fig. 1. Sherd from the area of the West House at Mycenae.](image)

figure on the right, who in turn seems to be holding the hand of another (missing) figure. The right-hand figure appears to be dressed in a long robe. The upper body is triangular, the neck is long and thin, the hair is straggling (unless it is a head-dress or wreath of some sort) and the nose is long and pointed.

It is clear that the scene represents a line — or ring — dance, a fitting decoration around the shoulder of a bowl.

The fragment is probably part of a deep bowl of Forumark's type 281 or 282. There is no reason to assume that the sherd is Geometric. Professor J.N. Coldstream has pointed out to me that there are two indications to the contrary: (1) the absence of any filling ornament, and (2) the absence of the usual strings attached to the girdle, which
a. Detail of Third Town in Thera fresco (part of *Thera VI*, pl. 9). b. Lion Gate relief, Mycenae (J.W. Graham, *Palaces of Crete*, fig. 135).
a. Lions over entrance in fresco from the Palace of Pylos (M. Lang, *Pylos II*, pl. 136, no. 2A2).
b. Sphinxes over entrance in fresco from the Palace of Pylos (M. Lang, *Pylos II*, pl. 1, no. 1A2).
c. Deer next to altar in fresco from the Palace of Pylos (M. Lang, *Pylos II*, pl. 132, no. 3C20).