

§ 50. 'HOUSE OF THE CHANCEL SCREEN' AND 'ROYAL VILLA'.

M. M. III a features of South-East House; Neighbouring 'House of the Chancel Screen'; Entrance and Plan; 'Megaron' with 'Chancel Screen' and dais for 'Seat of Honour'; Parallel with 'Royal Villa'; Earliest Pottery on floors M. M. III b; The 'Royal Villa'—its dramatic discovery; Plan of House; Double flights of Stairs; Fine Painted Jar in 'Palace Style' on landing; Lower Entrance System; Small private Court for householder; The 'Megaron'—Platform and niche within Balustrade; 'Seat of Honour'; Interspace designed as light-well; Analogies with Christian Basilica; Pillar Crypt—Channels and Vats for liquid offerings; Timber beams restored from indications preserved; One-columned Sanctuary above, connected by special staircase; Upper flights of main stairs; Principal Entrance probably from Upper Terrace; Upper 'Megaron' with Balustrade and Double Window (restored); Upper 'Megaron' within hail of Lower; Careful Choice of Site; Villa well adapted to be Summer Pleasance of Priest-Kings.

'The House of the Chancel Screen.'

THE 'South-East House' has already been referred to as presenting in its Megaron porch column-bases of variegated stone of the earlier M. M. III class.¹ It may also be observed that the back wall of its pillar crypt shows, though in a restored condition, remains of ashlar masonry contained in wooden panels,² a typical M. M. III a form of structure, well illustrated in the Hall of the Double Axes.³ This house, which still held M. M. III b pottery on some of its floors⁴ and was distinguished by its early naturalistic wall-paintings of flowering reeds and Madonna lilies,⁵ occupies an unique position among the private houses of this site. It seems to have been largely restored in M. M. III b and to have been cut finally short within the limits of the same epoch. While, on the one hand, it presents many structural resemblances to the houses with which we are at present concerned, it was, on the other hand, distinguished from them by the absence of any evidence of occupation during the early L. M. I phase.⁶

M. M.
III a
features
of 'S.E.'
house.

¹ *P. of M.*, i, pp. 425, 426. For the S.E. House, see, too, A. E., *Knossos, Report*, 1903, p. 4 seqq.

² See *P. of M.*, i, p. 428, Fig. 307.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 349, Fig. 251.

⁴ E. g. in the Pillar Room: *ibid.*, p. 429,

and p. 537.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 537, 539, Fig. 390 and Coloured Plate VI.

⁶ Some of its inner spaces were tenanted by squatters in the period of Reoccupation.

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Neigh- In this latter respect more continuity was displayed by a house that lay
bouring on the terrace immediately above it, occupying the space between its
'House of the Western borders and the South-East Palace Angle on that side.

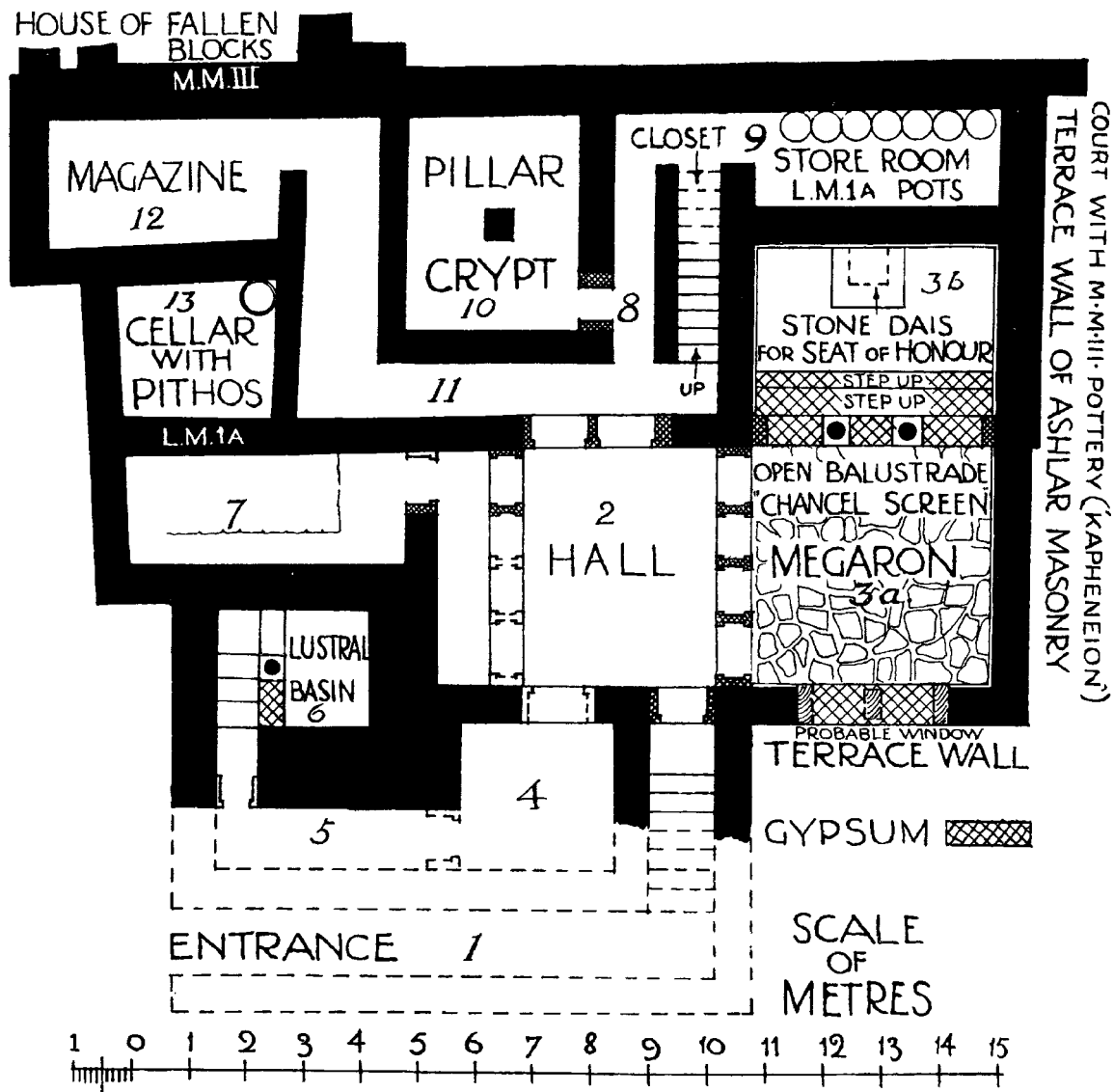


FIG. 224. PLAN OF 'HOUSE OF CHANCEL SCREEN' (WESTERN BORDER ABOVE).

Chancel Happily, in this case, we have a better clue to the position of the
Screen'. entrance than is usually forthcoming among the Minoan house-plans of
Entrance Knossos. As will be seen from the Plan, Fig. 224, the central feature
and plan.

‘HOUSE OF CHANCEL SCREEN’: DAIS FOR SEAT 393

of the building is a square Hall (2) with a doorway, controlled from within, in its North-East corner, opening on a stepped passage descending East. Owing to the situation on the slope and the proximity, beyond, of the South-East House, it is clear that this passage, after a descent of about eight steps, must have turned South and have reached the entrance by a short prolongation in that direction at the South-East angle of the building.

Another doorway in the South-East corner of the Central Hall would have given access to a ‘Lustral Basin’ on that side, of the usual form (6).¹ As in several other instances, its purificatory basins here stand in relation to the entrance system of the building.

A passage (11) behind the hall also gave easy access to another constantly recurring religious feature, the Pillar Crypt (10), and a small base found in this space evidently belonged to the column of a similar room above, an arrangement paralleled by the South House and the Royal Villa. As in those cases, too, it was flanked by a small staircase, giving convenient access to the upper floor.

The ‘Megaron’ or main living-room of the ground floor of the ‘Megaron.’ house (3 a, b) was entered by a row of four doorways on the North side of the Central Hall, its first section being probably lit by a window in its East wall, which runs above a terrace.

But the chief interest of the whole house centres in the approach and arrangement of the second section of the Megaron. This was entered by an opening between two wide projecting balustrades of the usual type with gypsum bases and a woodwork support of the upper slabs, from the ends of which rise square bases for columns (see Fig. 225). The whole might thus be said to form a kind of ‘chancel screen’, of the same kind as is illustrated below in the more perfect example in the Royal Villa. Parallel with ‘Royal Villa’.

At the inner edge of the interval between the balustrades were two shallow steps of gypsum, and against the centre of the back wall of the inner area was a raised square of rough stones which had evidently formed the basis of a stucco covering. Of the ‘Seat of Honour’ itself, that had rested on this little dais, there were in this case unfortunately no such remains as were found in the inner niche of the Megaron of the Royal Villa. It may well have been of wood, as was that of the Antechamber of the ‘Room of the Throne’; indeed, the throne itself was an imitation of a wooden model. The inner chamber here was not a mere niche and

¹ Four steps, divided from the basin by a two more steps. The gypsum slabbing was parapet with a column-base, lead down to much decayed. a landing, whence the floor was reached by
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narrow elongated space, as in the case of the Villa, but was almost equal in dimensions to the outer section of the hall.¹ The floor had been covered with plaster, remains of which were visible on the edge of the central dais. A restored view of the arrangement is given in Fig. 225, and, the better to

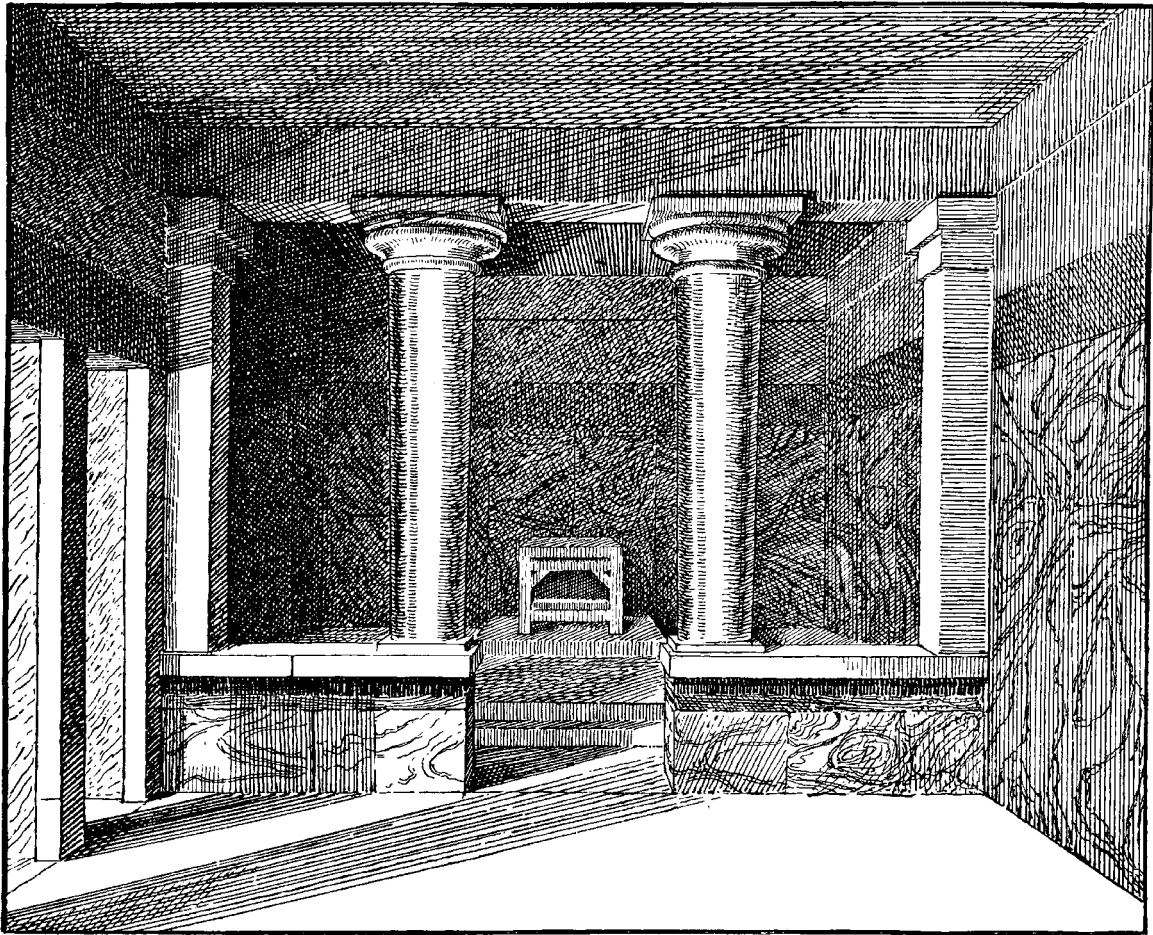


FIG. 225. WEST END OF MEGARON SHOWING ‘CHANCEL SCREEN’ AND DAIS, WITH SEAT OF HONOUR RESTORED.

preserve this interesting structure, the columns of the balustrades have been completed and the whole roofed over.

Taken in connexion with the parallel arrangement in the Royal Villa, to be described below, we have here a very interesting illustration of the

¹ The inner section was 4·25 m. wide (N. to S.) and 3·05 m. deep (E. to W.). The dimensions of the outer section were of the same width and 4·50 E. to W.

‘HOUSE OF CHANCEL SCREEN’: M.M. III *b* JAR 395

worshipful position of the head of the family in the Minoan household. As in Ancient Rome and in other primitive communities he seems indeed to have been endowed with priestly functions in regard to the household. Our workmen called the house *τοῦ παπὰ τὸ σπίτι*—‘the house of the priest’.

A distinctly archaic impression is given by the paving of the outer section of the Megaron. This is not of gypsum slabs as usual at Knossos in the New Era—at least round the borders of such halls—down to the close of the last Palace epoch. The paving here consists of an irregular mosaic of a kind of ‘iron-stone’ (*ἀμυγδαλόλιθος*),¹ characteristic of an earlier Middle Minoan stage, extending in every direction right up to the walls.²

It is also an interesting fact that the back wall of the old ‘House of the Fallen Blocks’, a M.M. III *a* construction overwhelmed at the time of the earthquake, was used for the Magazine (12) that occupies the South-West angle of the house. In the space East of this is a square, doorless cellar to which access must have been obtained by a ladder from the floor above. In this was found a *pithos* of a transitional M.M. III *b* type such as recurs at Tylissos and in the ‘North-East House’, the conventional rope moulding on which is illustrated below,³ and beside it a L.M. I *a* ewer with spiral decoration and details in the evanescent white then in use. The best remains of pottery, however, came to light on the floor of a magazine behind the inner section of the Megaron. Its character was remarkable, since, besides many cups of the ‘Vapheio’ shape with a roll round their middle and the usual spiral, dark on light, decoration of L.M. I *a*, there was a series of one-handled pitchers ranged along the West wall, with the purplish brown, lack-lustre glaze of M.M. III and metallic ring-collar, practically indistinguishable from those of the Temple

Earliest
pottery
M.M.
III *b*.

¹ A ‘mosaiko’ central panel of ‘almond-stone’ is, of course, of frequent occurrence at times, as in the ‘House of the Frescoes’, surrounded by plaster. In the earlier period of the excavation such paved ‘panels’ were at times taken for ‘altar bases’, e.g. West of the bastion of the Upper Propylon and West of the system to which the Shrine of the Double Axes belongs. We also see these panels in the ‘Room of the Throne’ and its ante-room, belonging to the last Palace period.

² The early date of this pavement was proved by supplementary excavations conducted by me here in 1926. In the N.E. corner, where some disturbance had occurred

the superficial deposit beneath the slabs contained M.M. II, M.M. III *a*, and one or two M.M. III *b* sherds, and at about 30 cm. down the pottery became almost entirely M.M. III *a*. Under a large slab of the same hard stone immediately in front of the opening in the balustrade, where intrusive elements could hardly have made their way, the pottery was pure M.M. I *a*. There seems to have been a lacuna in the story of its occupation, but the evidence tends to show that the pavement was not later than the beginning of M.M. III *b* and may have been earlier.

³ See pp. 418, 419 and Figs. 241 *a*, 241 *b*

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Repositories. They obviously represented the class of pottery still in vogue when the house was rebuilt after the great catastrophe, and afford an exact parallel to the presence of some M. M. III *b* 'medallion' *pithoi* in the restored Magazines of the Palace and, again, in the 'North-East House' described below.¹ The earliest Late Minoan ceramic style had not yet declared itself at the time when they were placed in this store-room.

There are indications that, besides the 'South-East House', a further series of private dwellings of more or less contemporary date, starting from below this, extended beneath the lower wall-lines of the Palace along the Eastern slope. Approaching the point where the main built drain of the Domestic Quarter found its issue down the steep, the incomplete and inarticulate remains of another house are visible containing a small light-area, and North of the exit below the East Bastion there are traces of other houses. It was, however, still farther to the North along the slope that some chance indications led to the discovery of a Minoan residence of quite exceptional interest.

The Royal Villa.

Well-chosen site of 'Royal Villa'.

Its dramatic discovery.

Built into a cutting in the hill-side and overlooking the glen of the ancient Kairatos stream, there came to light, about a hundred metres N.N.E. of the North-East Palace Angle, a Minoan house which, though it cannot compare in size with the 'Little Palace' described below, presents a specially elegant aspect in its material and arrangements. The 'Royal Villa', as it has been called, was discovered in a quite dramatic manner. Two pairs of protruding door-jambs at the foot of the steep bank below a mule path having been brought out by autumn rains, an exploratory tunnel was started between the more Northerly of these. By a fortunate coincidence this followed the inner course of the original entrance passage, with a wall of good masonry on the right side that helped to support the superincumbent materials. At a distance of 5·70 metres, a double doorway appeared in this, afterwards known to be the entrance of the principal Megaron, and the tunnel was continued along the well-paved gangway till, at 9·80 metres, its progress was stopped in this direction by the appearance of a crosswall, the fine gypsum blocks of which, as seen by the light of our candles, had a very promising appearance. A flight of gypsum stairs now appeared on the left, up which our workmen mined their way to a landing ten steps up. The remains had by now assumed such importance that no other course was open to us, if the work was to be continued, than to divert the mule path to the terrace level above by building a supporting wall 7 to 8 metres high

¹ See below, p. 415 seqq.

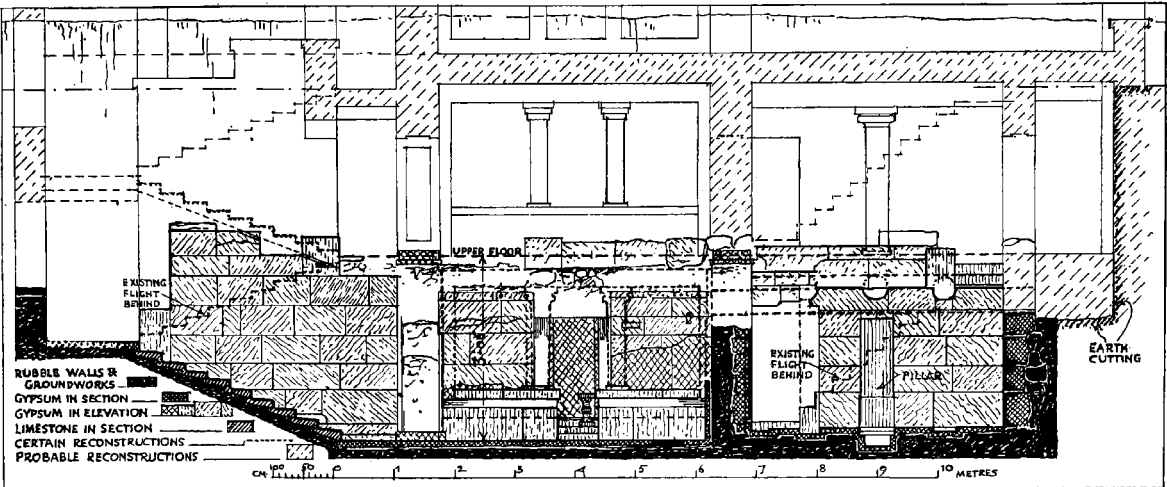


FIG. 226. LONGITUDINAL SECTION OF 'ROYAL VILLA' ; BY THEODORE FYFE, F.R.I.B.A.

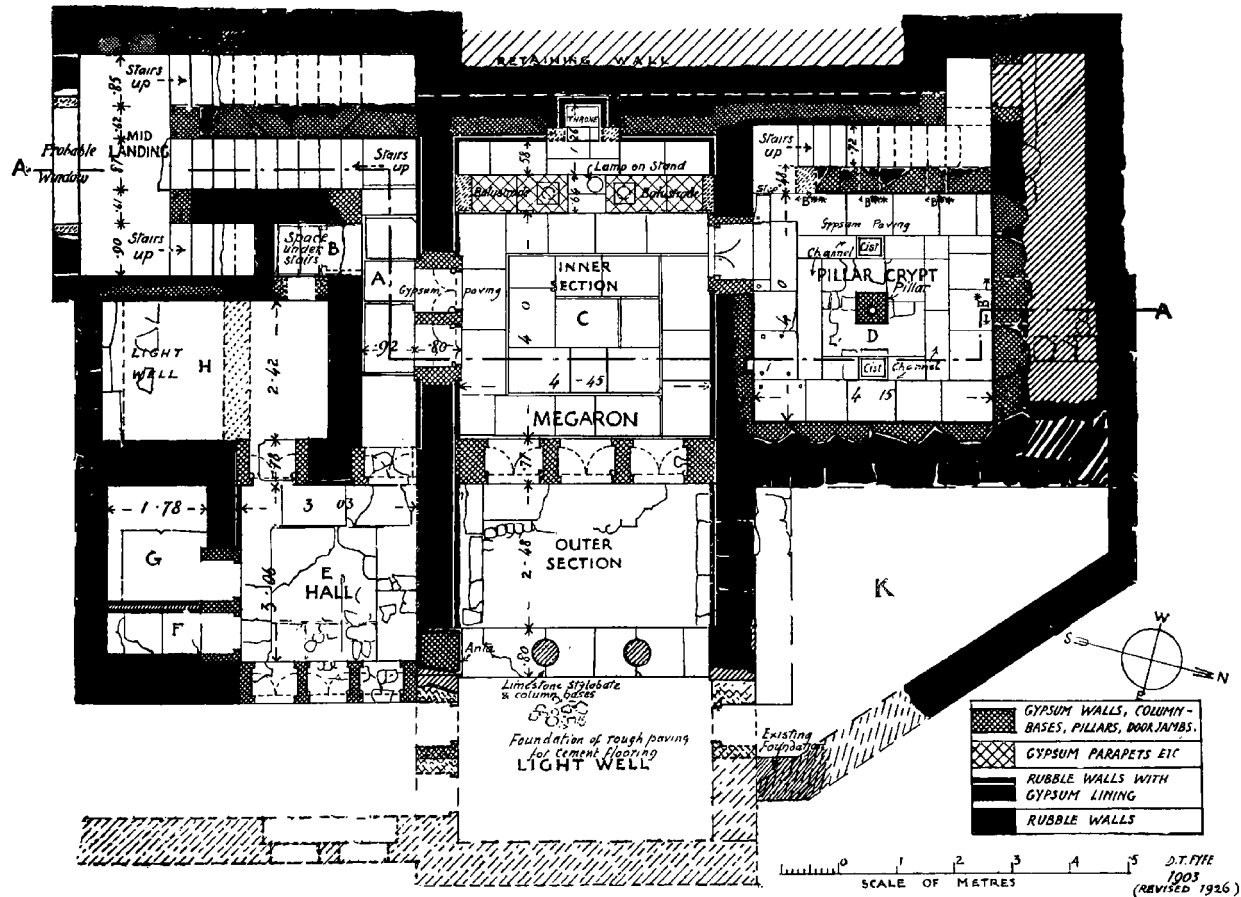


FIG. 227. PLAN OF GROUND FLOOR OF 'ROYAL VILLA' ; BY THEODORE FYFE.

398 'THE ROYAL VILLA': TRIPLE STAIRCASE

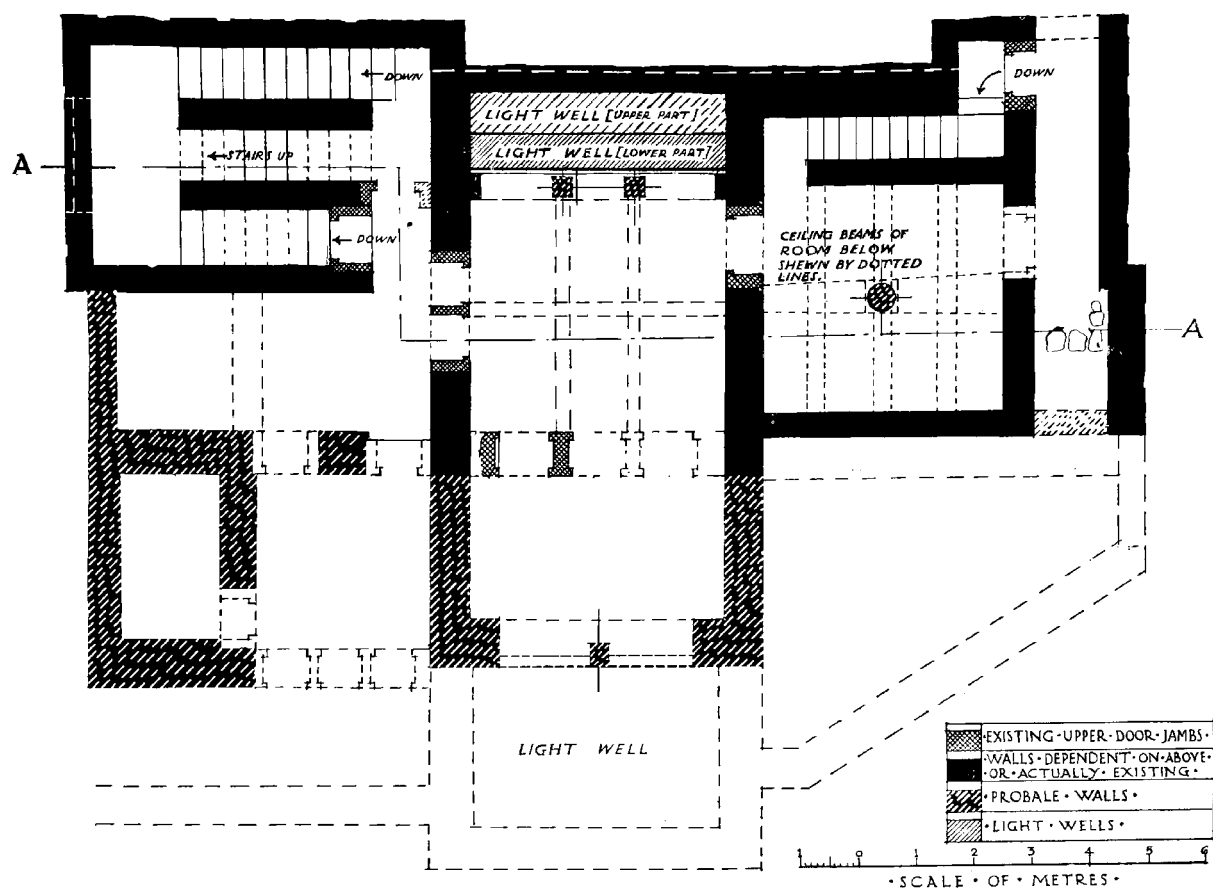


FIG. 228. PLAN OF UPPER STORY, 'ROYAL VILLA'; BY THEODORE FYFE, F.R.I.B.A.

This having been done, at the cost of much labour and expense, it was at last possible to begin an excavation from above, which finally brought out remains of a house in a singular state of preservation.¹

A plan and section of the ground floor and the story above, by Mr. Theodore Fyfe, is given in Figs. 226–8. The eye is at once struck by the triple formation of the main staircase, showing a central flight and two wings—a sumptuous and quite exceptional arrangement, surprising in a house of this size (see Fig. 229). Traces of the first steps of the central flight above, starting from a landing on the second floor, were preserved on its West wall,² and it is fairly clear that the whole system was repeated as far at

¹ A fuller account of the details of this excavation has been given by me in *Knossos, Report*, 1903, pp. 130–53. Further evidence came out in the course of supplementary re-

searches undertaken in 1926.

² A triangular ledge is seen on the landing block at the top on the E. side for the support of the first steps of an upper stairway and

Plan of house.

‘ROYAL VILLA’: UPPER APPROACH AND STAIRS 399

least as the third floor. Since the chief intercourse of the occupants of the house would have been with the Palace and Town on the slope above, there are good reasons for supposing that, as in the case of the Domestic Quarter of the Palace, the principal entrance was on the terrace level above

Double flights of stairs.



FIG. 229. STONE STAIRS WITH DOUBLE WINGS, ‘ROYAL VILLA’.

the cutting in which the house is set. As a matter of fact there is evidence of a direct line of communication between the North-Western entrance system of the Palace and this house. Immediately above the stepped ‘Theatral Area’, the paved causeway that there appears, heading towards the North Gate, shows a North-East branch which, if prolonged, would run past the South-East angle of the ‘North Pillar Hall’ in a straight line to the a slanting groove for further steps on the second. At a somewhat higher level the continued course of the ascending stairs is found to pass immediately over the corner of the flat slab marked x in Mr. Fyfe’s original section.

400 'ROYAL VILLA': 'PALACE STYLE' JAR ON STAIRS

middle of the West wall of the 'Royal Villa',¹ a distance of about 160 metres. It was thus in a way, as the 'Little Palace' described below was in other respects, a real dependency of the Palace.

An exceptional feature of the staircase was the facing of the West wall of the lower flight and both walls of the Western wing above with gypsum masonry (Fig. 230). It is interesting to observe, however, that the gypsum blocks of the lower flight and of the adjoining part of the passage beyond were coated with red-faced plaster.²

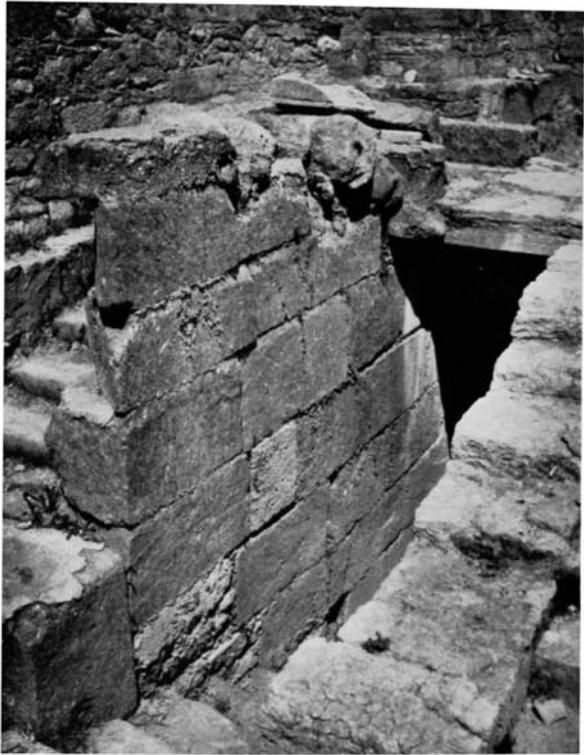


FIG. 230. CENTRAL LOWER FLIGHT OF STAIRCASE, SHOWING GYPSUM BLOCKS OF WEST WALL.

In keeping with the stately character of this triple staircase was the discovery above the first landing, and clearly sunken from that above, of a tall jar a metre and a fifth high, supplying an early example of the later 'Palace Style'. It presents magnificent painted decorations in relief, consisting of papyrus clumps, the stalks of which are linked by wavy lines in which we may recognize a reminiscence of the traditional Egyptian rendering of water in Nilotic scenes. With it was a very beautiful stirrup vase of the same L. M. II date with conventional flowers (Fig. 239, *a, b*, p. 413). Placed on the principal landing of the staircase, the jar may be regarded as having been intended to fulfil an architectonic function, and it is therefore reproduced here (Fig. 231), though it belongs to the closing epoch of the Villa. It supplies a fine illustration of the later 'Palace Style'.³

¹ See above, Sketch-plan of the Palace and its Surroundings, Fig. 71, p. 140.

² The steps and walls of the landing above were also originally covered with painted stucco.

³ The last pottery found here on the floor levels belonged to L. M. II *b*, though in the South-East rooms especially sherds of the Reoccupation period (L. M. III *b*) were found at a higher level.

Fine
painted
jar on
landing:
L. M. II.