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978-1-108-06104-9 - The Palace of Minos: A Comparative Account of the Successive Stages of the Early Cretan Civilization as Illustrated by the Discoveries at Knossos: Volume 3: The Great Transitional Age in the Northern and Eastern Sections of the Palace

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Excerpt

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§ 68. 'NORTH-WEST INSULA' NORTH OF CENTRAL COURT, WITH RAMP PASSAGE FROM N.W. PORTICO AND LUSTRAL AREA: BASEMENT CHAMBERS ABOVE EARLY KEEP.

'North-West Insula'—its artistic revelations; Functional importance—supplements that of Western borders of Central Court; Area West of Central Court chief Cult Centre—retrospective view; 'Stepped Porch', built over earlier Cists; Block North of Porch, of L. M. II date: Includes 'Room of the Throne'; N.E. Corner of old façade and of Early Western 'Insula'; North-Western 'Insula' formed by 'Early Keep'; Elements of fortification in Early Palace; Ramp passage round Keep from N.W. Entrance; 'Initiatory Area' and 'Votaries' entrance; 'North-West Lustral Basin' of M. M. III a date; Restored plan and elevation of 'Lustral Basin' and Superstructures; Isolation of Sunken Area from other buildings; Minoan bronze 'key' found in doorway of later passage; 'North-West Entrance' partially blocked; Basement Chambers above 'Early Keep'; Plinth bordering Court, and steps down; M. M. II a paved floor over Walled Pits, belonging to large basement Chamber; Later dividing wall—M. M. II b; Gypsum steps re-used for pavement; Central Pillar of Western Basement in M. M. II b; Exceptional evidences of stratification in 'Room of Knobbed Pithos'; Large black steatite vessel with spiral reliefs; 'Saffron-Gatherer' Fresco; Later floors with stone lamps and tablets of Class B; L. M. III a floors above these; Basements bordering Central Court; Rearrangement of supporting pier; Further evidence supplied by 'Room of Knobbed Pithos'; M. M. III a pottery below later pavement (M. M. III b); Extension of M. M. III b floor, its continuous use in restored Palace; 'Miniature Frescoes' and Spiral Ceiling fallen on this level; Stone lamps, and basins for ritual sprinkling.

THE Palace region to which we are now led, to the North of the Central Court, may be fittingly described as the 'North-West Insula'. Its Eastern and Western boundaries are indeed well defined, on the one side by the 'North Entrance Passage', on the other by a ramp passage winding up from the North-West Portico round the massive outer walling of the 'Early Keep', which forms the nucleus of the 'insula' (see Plan, Fig. 1 B, facing p. 7). As regards its upper structures this region had suffered much dilapidation, but it proved to be of the first importance in the revelations that it has afforded of certain classes of artistic work.

Here was brought to light the 'Saffron-Gatherer' fresco, the earliest figured painting of which any record has been left at Knossos. Here, too,

III.

B

The
'N.W.
Insula'.

Its artistic
revela-
tions.

derived from a corner sanctuary, lay the fallen remains of the 'Miniature' frescoes, illustrating an astonishingly lively development of pictorial design in the transitional Age that heralds the 'New Era'. On the Northern borders of this area, beneath and near a later threshing-floor, great heaps of pieces of painted plaster were uncovered, some of them—like those depicting parts of an embroidered robe—of exceptional interest. On the other hand, by the bastions of the adjoining Corridor East, precipitated from the back wall of the portico above overlooking the 'North Entrance Passage', there occurred a series of fragments of painted stucco reliefs belonging to an extensive frieze representing bull-catching scenes and, included among them, the noble head of what to the Minoans was the King of Beasts. Various comparisons, as will be shown below, enable us to recover the general character of this composition. Together with a companion frieze on the opposite side of the Entrance Passage, it seems in a special way to have impressed the imagination both of contemporary and later beholders, and a reminiscence of its designs is traceable on the Vapheio Cups as well as in two sculptured plaques brought by Lord Elgin from the 'Tomb of Agamemnon'.

Func-
tional im-
portance
of 'N.W.
Insula'.

The functional importance of this 'Insula' was also great, owing to the fact that what is *ex hypothesi* a pilgrims' entrance from the 'Initiatory Area' beyond, with its 'lustral basin', led here, as already mentioned, by a winding ramp and passage way to the N.W. Corner of the Central Court and thus to the sanctuary region on its Western side. That this sanctuary character was shared by a large part of this 'North-West Insula' bordering the Court on the North appears from the data supplied by a series of finds made within it. This region in fact takes up and illustrates on its own lines the religious functions fulfilled in a pre-eminent degree by that West of the Court. These have received detailed consideration in the concluding Sections of the preceding Volume of this work, but it may be well to recall here the salient features of the sanctuary quarter on that side to which the ramp passage primarily led.

Retrospective View of Sanctuary Area W. of Court.

Area
West of
Central
Court :
chief cult
centre :
retro-
spective
view.

The Palace region between the Upper Long Corridor and the Northern section of the façade bordering the Central Court, as shown in the restored plan (Fig. 1 A), includes within it a group of structures that sufficiently mark it as the true cult centre of the restored building.

Its nucleus is the 'Tri-Columnar Hall' which forms the principal objective of a splendid architectural suite, beginning with the 'West Porch' and the 'Corridor of the Procession' and directly approached by the 'South

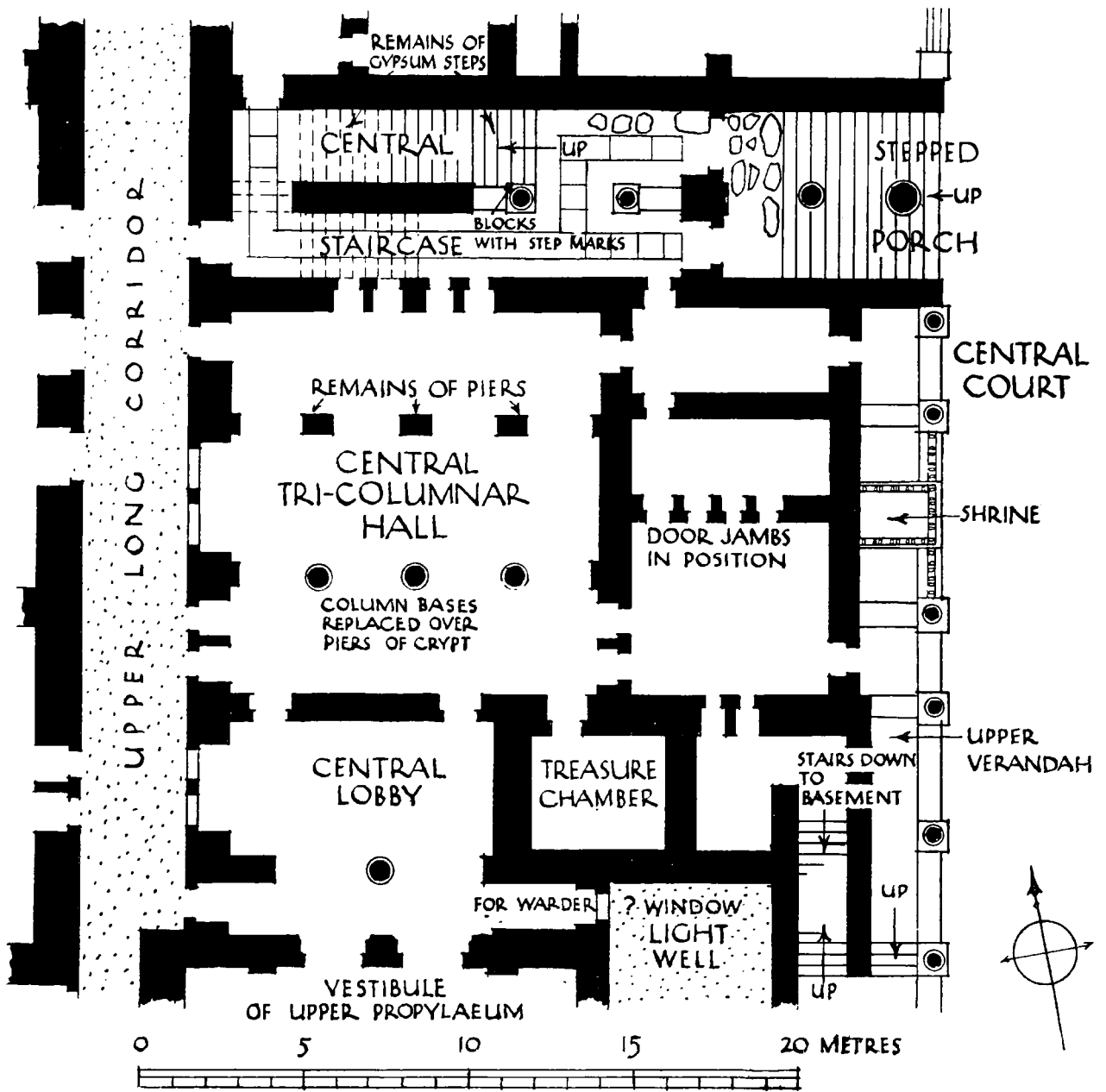


FIG. 1 A. RESTORED PLAN SHOWING UPPER FLOOR OF SANCTUARY QUARTER, WEST OF CENTRAL COURT. (REPRODUCED FROM PLAN C AT THE END OF VOL. II, PART 2.)

4 SANCTUARY AREA W. OF CENTRAL COURT

Retro-spect of Sanctuary Area to West.

Propylaeum' and its stepped continuation above, through a Central Lobby. At the South-East angle of this Hall opens, as described above, a small chamber which, as its contents show,—including the finely carved 'rhytons' in the shape of lions' and lionesses' heads—served as the Treasury of a Sanctuary. Two of the columns of the Hall were in fact supported by the stone pillars of corresponding crypts below, to which—in view of the vats for the blood of victims, the double axes repeated on the pillars themselves, and the numerous analogies now available—a sacral character must certainly be assigned. These dark vaults, dedicated to the cult of the sacred weapon and its associated divinity, led in turn on the Court side to a small columnar shrine of the Minoan kind, in the North wing of which was found a whole deposit of clay seal-impressions depicting the Minoan 'Rhea' herself on her lion-guarded peak.

'Stepped Porch' built over earlier cists.

The adjoining 'Temple Repositories' of the preceding Palace sanctuary, the date of which goes back within the borders of the earlier phase (*a*) of M. M. III, had been paved over by the restored basement floors. At the same time, too, the contemporary system of cists containing similar ceramic remains that ran North from the Eastern Repository had been covered over by the newly constructed 'Stepped Porch' which gave access from the Court to the Central Staircase of this wing of the building. The steps of this Porch also form a break in the double façade that runs South along the whole border of this Section of the Central Court.¹

Intrusive structural block N. of Porch.

The inner façade belonging to the earlier Palace and consisting of gypsum orthostats on a limestone plinth can still be traced beneath the steps of the Porch. Beyond this point, however, both it as well as the Northern series of M. M. III Cists, and indeed the whole palatial unit to which the Central Staircase belongs, are entirely broken off by an intrusive block of somewhat later date and which in fact bears every evidence of dating from the latest Palace period (L. M. II).

Including 'Room of Throne'.

The principal chambers of this block are the 'Room of the Throne' and its Ante-room, but, as the decoration and contents of these connect themselves with the closing phase of the building, it has been thought better to reserve a description of them to a later Section.² Here it need only be observed that this conglomeration of Chambers, following on to the earlier remains of the sanctuary quarter of the Palace, presents itself a strong religious character, as is clearly shown by the lustral area and small 'Consistory' hall round which it centres.

¹ See *P. of M.*, ii, Pt. II, p. 798 seqq., and Fig. 525, p. 803.

² In the concluding volume of this work.

N.E. CORNER OF FAÇADE

5

A *terminus a quo* for the dating of this intrusive block of buildings was supplied by the remains of pottery found under the second and third thresholds (from the South) of the doorways leading down to this Ante-chamber from the borders of the Central Court, which in addition to some L. M. I fragments contained others of the best 'Palace Style' belonging to the early part of L. M. II.¹ These doorways preserved the line of the outer façade and abutted on the slabs of the same limestone pavement that occurred elsewhere on this side of the Central Court. This pavement, of which the best preserved remains lay, as already noticed,² in the North-West angle of the Court, was itself clearly contemporary with the earliest elements of the restored building. In this angle, as has been shown, it had displaced an earlier M. M. III pavement immediately superposed on a well-marked stratum the latest elements of which belonged to M. M. II and which itself immediately overlay the Neolithic—another proof of the levelling away of the intermediate strata on this part of the hill in order to lay out the Central Court and the adjoining regions of the Minoan Palace.³ In this stratum, in a M. M. II *b* medium, was found the lower part of the diorite Middle Empire statuette of User.⁴

L. M. II
pottery
under
thres-
holds of
ante-
room.

In the same layer, at depths varying from 50 to 70 centimetres, there came to light two small stone drains which converged on a common channel running East to a larger stone-built tributary of the main 'Cloaca' of the Central Court (see Fig. 9). The more Southern⁵ of the two small conduits, running from the South-West, had been cut off by the front line of the Ante-chamber of the 'Room of the Throne'. The more Northern proceeded from a cistern bordering the North-West corner of the earlier façade. In it occurred M. M. II *b* pottery including a polychrome cup. The cistern for which it provided an overflow channel had been, no doubt, filled by rain-water from the roof-terraces of the earlier façade line.

Cistern
and
drains.

On the Northern border of the Ante-room of the 'Room of the Throne' to which the later frontage line here belonged, the older line—blocked up to this point by these intrusive structures of the concluding Palace period—reappears for a short distance. Its plinth and orthostats, however, almost at once curve Westwards forming a rounded outline which, as already observed, corresponds with what seems to have been a similar feature at the diagonally

N.E.
corner
of old
façade
and early
'insula'.

¹ 1913 tests 59, 60.

² *P. of M.*, ii, Pt. II, p. 800, Fig. 522.

³ See *P. of M.*, ii, Pt. I, p. 5.

⁴ *Ibid.*, i, p. 286 seqq.

⁵ The more Southern of these drains, which

was better preserved, was 30 cm. deep and 12 cm. wide. The upper border of its side slabs was 50 cm. beneath the surface, that of the other drain 70 cm.

6 N.W. INSULA FORMED BY EARLY KEEP

opposed South-West Corner of an extensive 'insula' of the Palace in its original form.¹

North-Western 'Insula' formed by 'Early Keep'.

N.W.
'insula'
formed
by 'Early
Keep'.

The Corridor that follows the Western turn of this old angle of the façade—named from a stone basin found within it—separated the large West 'Insula' in question from another very characteristic structural island also dating in its inception from the earliest or 'proto-palatial' stage of the building. This is the 'North-West Insula' already mentioned as that with which we are in this place principally concerned. Its area, as we have seen, was originally composed of the 'Early Keep', which dominated the Northern approach to the Palace and at the same time the North-West Section of the Central Court.²

This building, with its massive walls and deep dungeon-like, walled pits, recalls the donjon of a Norman Castle. However comparatively open most of the building may from the first have been, it is difficult not to recognize in this tower-like structure, guarding the Sea-Gate of the Palace, a real stronghold for its early princes. It may be added, indeed, that the same fortificatory intention attaches to the adjoining Northern Entrance system and in a high degree to the mighty walls that run East of it in parallel lines, the more so as in the upper part of this area there was no such need as on the Eastern slope beyond of massive terrace walling. The blocks may well compare with those of the citadels of Tiryns or Mycenae.

Elements
of forti-
fication in
Early
Palace.

It is true that the generally open character of this and other Cretan cities under the *Pax Minoica* of later days points to the neglect of such defensive works. But we are already warned by the massive *enceinte* walls of the 'City of Refuge' on the sacred height of Juktas, going back to the very beginning of the Middle Minoan Age,³ that the need of fortification was still recognized in Crete at the epoch answering to the 'proto-palatial' stage at Knossos.

In the Cyclades,⁴ at Phylakopi in Melos, at Chalandrianê in Syros, at St. Andreas in Siphnos, and elsewhere we have evidences of similar walled strongholds going back in some cases at least to the last Early Cycladic Period, contemporary with E. M. III. The faïence mosaic, moreover, in any case not later in date than the beginning of M. M. III, has given us a

¹ See *P. of M.*, ii, Pt. II, p. 661, and cf. Vol. i, p. 130, Fig. 96 (also Vol. ii, p. 799, Fig. 521).

² For the 'Early Keep' see Vol. i, pp. 136-9 and Figs. 100, 101. Its area is indicated by

a white line in the General Plan A at the end of Vol. ii.

³ See *P. of M.*, i, pp. 156, 157.

⁴ See especially D. Mackenzie, *Phylakopi*, pp. 255-8.

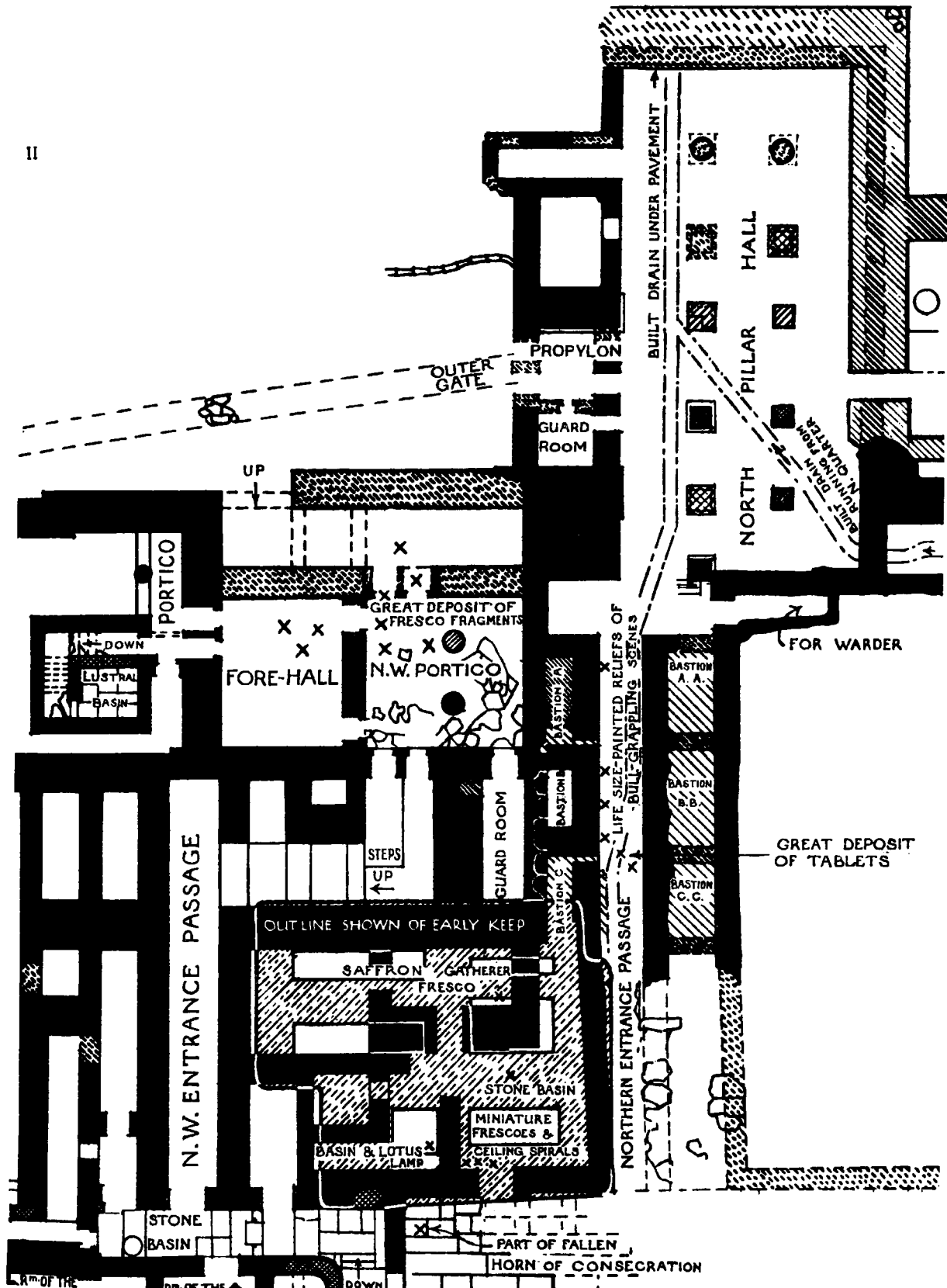


FIG. 1 B. PLAN OF PART OF NORTH PALACE SECTION SHOWING AREA OF 'EARLY KEEP', N.W. PORTICO AND ENTRANCE PASSAGE AND NORTHERN ENTRANCE SYSTEM.

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RAMP PASSAGE FROM PORTICO AND LUSTRAL AREA 7

glimpse of a fenced city, perhaps the port town of Knossos, with outer towers and houses on the wall, in addition to its street façades. If, moreover, during the later epoch, unified dominion and immunity from foreign attack led to the comparative disuse of such precautions in Crete itself, there is no reason to suppose that walled defences were neglected in the more outlying districts of the Minoan World. Certain traditions, indeed, of this older system of fortification clung to both the palatial and the civic architecture of Crete down to Late Minoan times. The system of successive returns in the wall line—a survival of projecting bastions such as we see them in early Anatolian sites like Sendjirli—so characteristic of the West façade at Knossos, recurs at Phaestos, Hagia Triada, and Gournià, and again in the early Palace of Mallia.¹

Ramp Passage from N.W. Portico and Lustral Area.

It is clear that the 'Early Keep' must have blocked the direct access from the North-West Portico to the Central Court. The course of what was probably an open ramp may be traced, however, stepping up past its N.W. angle and thus abutting on a passage-way leading directly to the 'Corridor of the Stone Basin' referred to above and so to the adjoining angle of the Central Court.²

Ramp
passage
from
N.W.
entrance.

The access to this passage-way from below was through the double gateway opening on the 'North-West Portico'. From the inner vestibule, bordering this entrance on its Southern side, there opens West an elongated space that must always have been uncovered, of the same width as the entrance of about two and a half metres, representing the first section of the original ramp and somewhat overlapping the Northern substructures of the 'Keep'.³ The ramp, after running a little over four metres West, turned at right angles South, ascending still till it reached a level answering to the original level of the Central Court. Up to this point we must suppose it to have been open, but the passage now passed under cover, debouching by a doorway into the 'Corridor of the Stone Basin' above mentioned and thus gaining access to the North-West corner of the Central Court.

¹ See *P. of M.*, ii, Pt. I, p. 270.

² See Plan A at end of Vol. ii, and cf. Vol. i, pp. 422, 423.

³ A fine limestone corner block of the North wall of the passage-way marked with the 'spray' sign was brought out in 1928. Of the lower

sections of the ramp, the pavement had not been preserved, though there are some traces of the points where it stepped up. The interspace that it occupied was to a large extent excavated to a considerable depth in 1913 in tracing the substructures of the Keep.

8 'INITIATORY AREA' AND N. LUSTRAL BASIN

Palatial Function of 'Initiatory Area' and the N. Lustral Basin.

Initiatory Area and 'Votaries' entrance.

It has been already pointed out that this passage-way fulfilled a special function in bringing this part of the building—itsself, it appears, containing more than one shrine—into direct connexion with the entrance

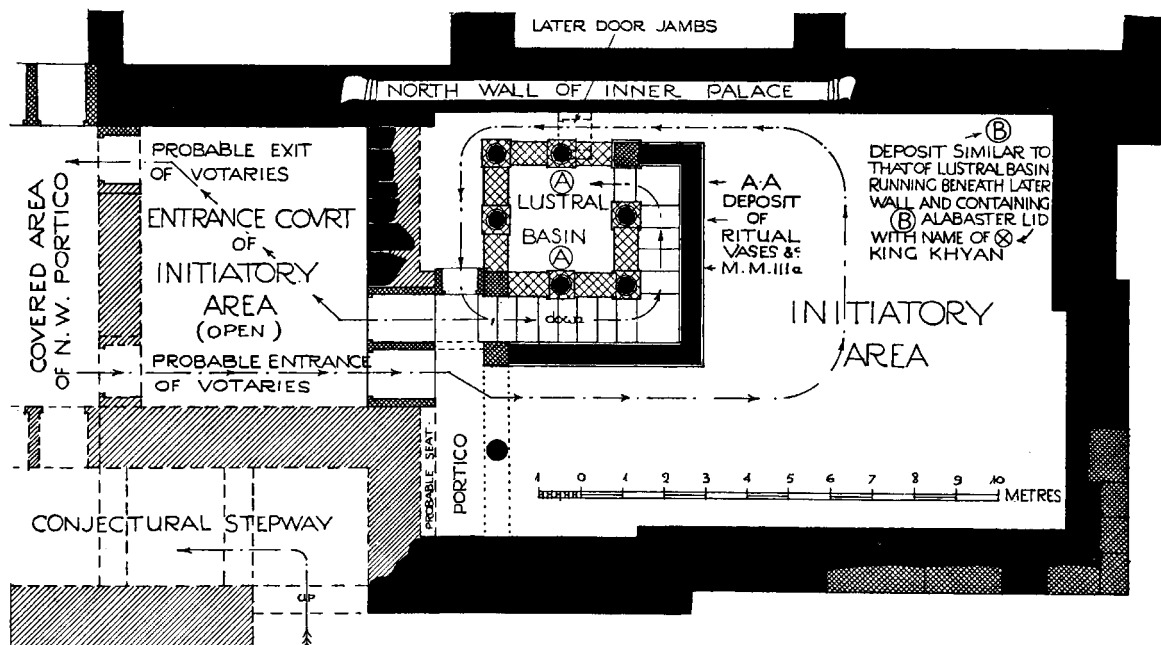


FIG. 2. REVISED PLAN OF 'INITIATORY AREA' AND LUSTRAL BASIN.

system that bordered the N.W. Portico—itsself essentially sacral in character. This entrance system indeed—forming as a whole the 'North-West Bailey'—seems to have been specially designed to suit the religious requirements of pilgrims or votaries entering the Palace-Sanctuary from that side. As shown in the revised Plan, Fig. 2,¹ it centres in the remarkable early example of a Lustral Basin, free-standing in a separate Court, described as the 'Initiatory Area', and approached by a kind of Entrance Court, recalling the Fore-hall of the 'Room of the Throne', which contained a similar sunken basin on a smaller scale. Within the 'Initiatory Area', in a contemporary stratum that covered its North-West corner, there came to light a series of remains of vessels such as decorative stone ewers and inlaid

The N. Lustral Basin: M. M. III a date.

¹ The original plan (*P. of M.*, i, p. 405 with observations made in the course of the work executed in 1928 and 1929. seq., and p. 406, Fig. 291) has been slightly modified by Mr. Piet de Jong, in accordance