



Excavations at the Menelaion, Sparta, 1973-1976

Author(s): H. W. Catling

Source: *Archaeological Reports*, 1976 - 1977, No. 23 (1976 - 1977), pp. 24-42

Published by: The Society for the Promotion of Hellenic Studies

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/581107>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

The Society for the Promotion of Hellenic Studies is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Archaeological Reports*

EXCAVATIONS AT THE MENELAION, SPARTA, 1973–1976

The following is a summary (and provisional) account of four seasons of excavation by the British School at Athens at the Bronze Age and post-Bronze Age site at the Menelaion, Sparta. The work, supported by grants from the Universities of Cambridge, Edinburgh and Oxford, and from the British Academy, has been directed by H. W. Catling, assisted in particular by Professor A. M. Snodgrass. Mr David Smyth, Honorary Surveyor to the British School, has drawn the area and site plans; some of his drawings illustrate this account. Mrs Elizabeth Catling has been in charge of the work room, and has supervised the drawing of pottery and objects. The excavation has been conducted in accordance with the terms of an annually renewed permit granted by the Archaeological Service (Ministry of Culture and Science). Gratitude is expressed to Dr D. Lazarides, Inspector-General of the Archaeological Service, for his encouragement and support, and to the memory of his three predecessors in office—Professor S. Marinatos, Professor N. Kontoleon and Mr I. Kondis who had each in their turn given the work their sympathetic help. Throughout the course of the excavation most generous help and encouragement has been received from Mr George Steinhauer, in charge of the Archaeological Ephorate of Arkadia-Lakonia. Short accounts of the progress of the work have been published in *AR* 1973–74 14f.; *AR* 1974–75 12–15; *AR* 1975–76 13–15; *BCH* xcvi (1974) 613; *BCH* xcix (1975), 621–24; *BCH* c (1976), 614–616; *Lakonikai Spoudai* ii (1975) 258–69, and see also F. Schachermeyr, *Die ägäische Frühzeit* Band 2 *Die mykenische Zeit und die Gesittung von Thera*, 46f.; 136–38.

Previous activity of the British School in Lakonia is chiefly concentrated in two periods in the first half of the present century. In the first period, from 1904 to 1911, excavation was undertaken in and around Sparta on the City Walls, at the Heroön, at the Great Altar near the Eurotas, at the Shrine of Athena Chalkioikos on the Akropolis, at the alleged shrine of Menelaos and Helen, and at the Eleusinion of Kalyvia tis Psokhas. Accounts of this work appear in *BSA* xii–xvi (1905–1910). The most important project of this first period was the excavation of the rich sanctuary of Artemis Orthia on the east side of the ancient city, immediately on the west bank of the Eurotas. The definitive account of this excavation (R. M. Dawkins and others, *Artemis Orthia*) was not published until 1929. The second phase of field research lasted from 1919 to 1929 when, under the leadership of A. M. Woodward, then Director of the School, much work was done on the Roman Theatre on the south slope of the Akropolis Hill; successive reports on this work were published in *BSA* xxvi–xxx (1923–1930). With the exception of two brief rescue operations undertaken by J. M. Cook and R. V. Nicholls respectively, in 1949 (*BSA* xlv [1950]), no

further work was attempted by the British School at Sparta for more than forty years.

One of the first classical sites to attract attention in the vicinity of Sparta was a large monument built in a conspicuous position on a narrow plateau high above the east bank of the Eurotas three kilometres east-south-east of the centre of modern Sparta (Fig. 1). Ludwig Ross in 1833 (*Arch. Aufsätze* ii, 341 ff.) proposed that this building should be identified as the Shrine of Menelaos and Helen referred to relatively frequently in the literary *testimonia*, starting with the well-known tale of the ugly baby girl in Herodotus vi 61. Many of these sources agreed in calling the region where this shrine stood Therapne. Some recorded the tradition that Menelaos and Helen were buried there.

Ross had undertaken a few days' excavation at the alleged Menelaion, finding lead votives of types later recognized as peculiarly Lakonian. Later in the nineteenth century it was visited by Heinrich Schliemann who hoped that a site apparently associated with a great hero such as Menelaos might yield ancient remains comparable with those at Mycenae. Schliemann went away disappointed, asserting that nothing of Mycenaean date was to be found at the Menelaion. But his judgement was contradicted not long after by Christos Tsountas who reported traces of Mycenaean occupation in the fields of the ridge on which the Menelaion stands (Fig. 1). He dug a few tests, but was not encouraged by the results. In 1899 the classical shrine was partly cleared by the Greek archaeologist P. Kastriotis, who published a summary account of his results in *Praktika* 1900, 74 ff. He partly exposed a large conglomerate platform surrounding a high foundation for a *naiskos* or monumental altar. He found many more of the lead figures previously reported by Ross.

Farmers working their fields round the Menelaion continued to find a variety of votive offerings of metal and clay, a fact which attracted the interest of the British School in 1909, when a concentrated excavation was made on and in the immediate vicinity of the standing monument under the joint direction of J. P. Droop, M. S. Thompson and A. J. B. Wace. This work (published in *BSA* xv [1909] 108–157) established for the first time that the life of the shrine had been a long one, at least from Late Geometric times until the Hellenistic period. A date in the fifth century B.C. was suggested for the standing monument. Quite rich deposits of bronze, lead and terracotta objects were found.

It was during the 1909 excavations that further light was shed on the Bronze Age occupation first identified by Tsountas. Close to the shrine building a pure Mycenaean level was found immediately over bedrock; though it contained no structures, pottery and painted terracotta statuettes suggested

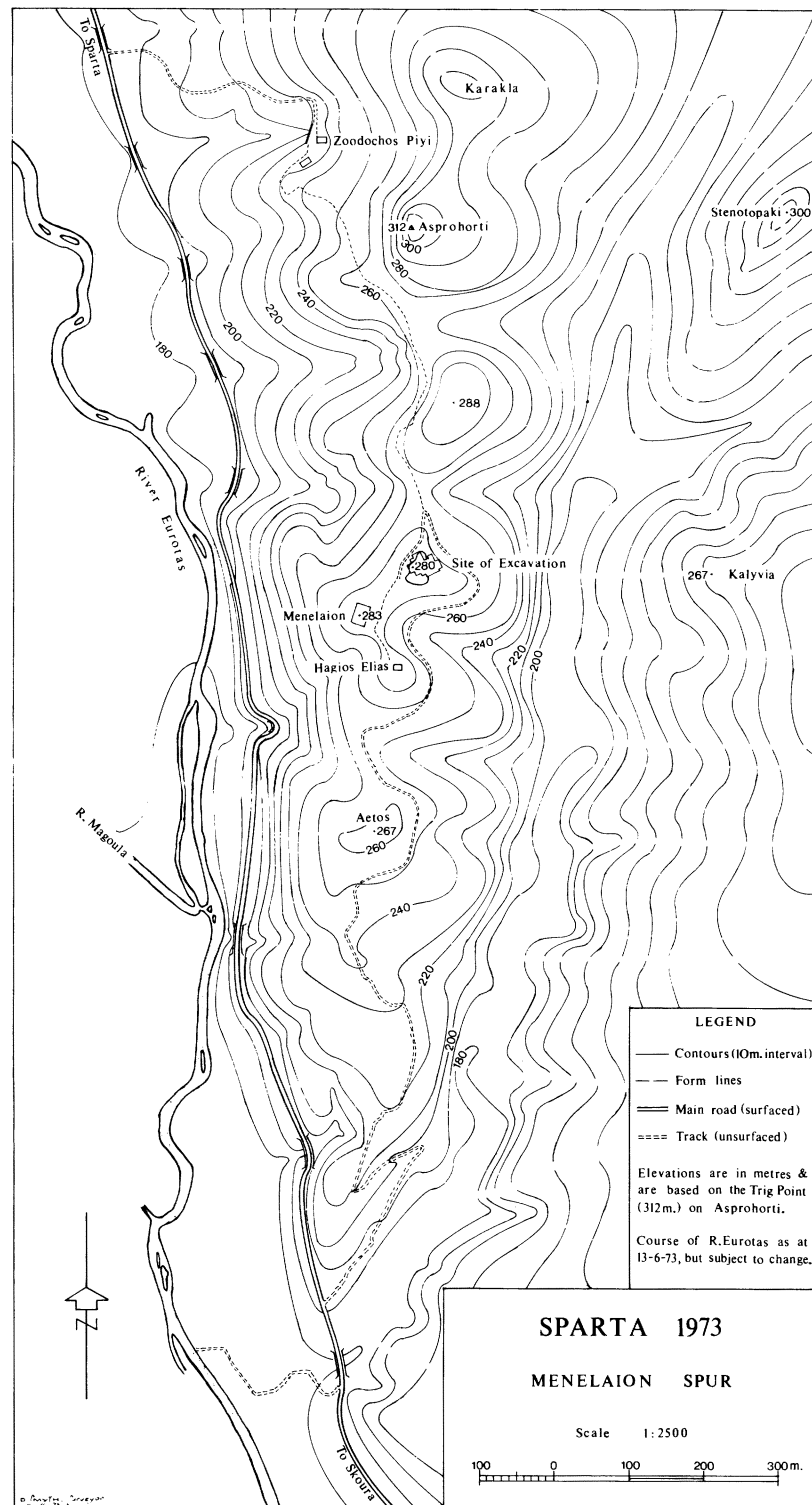


Fig. 1

the presence of buildings nearby. This discovery led to a wider scrutiny of the neighbourhood and the location at several points of probable Mycenaean buildings. Under the leadership of R. M. Dawkins this evidence was examined with more care in 1910, and part of a Mycenaean building was

uncovered 100 metres away from the shrine, on the eastern tip of the Menelaion plateau; it had evidently been destroyed by fire. Relatively few finds were reported from its ruins, but they included two clay jar-sealings with multiple seal-impressions. Dawkins also partly tested badly

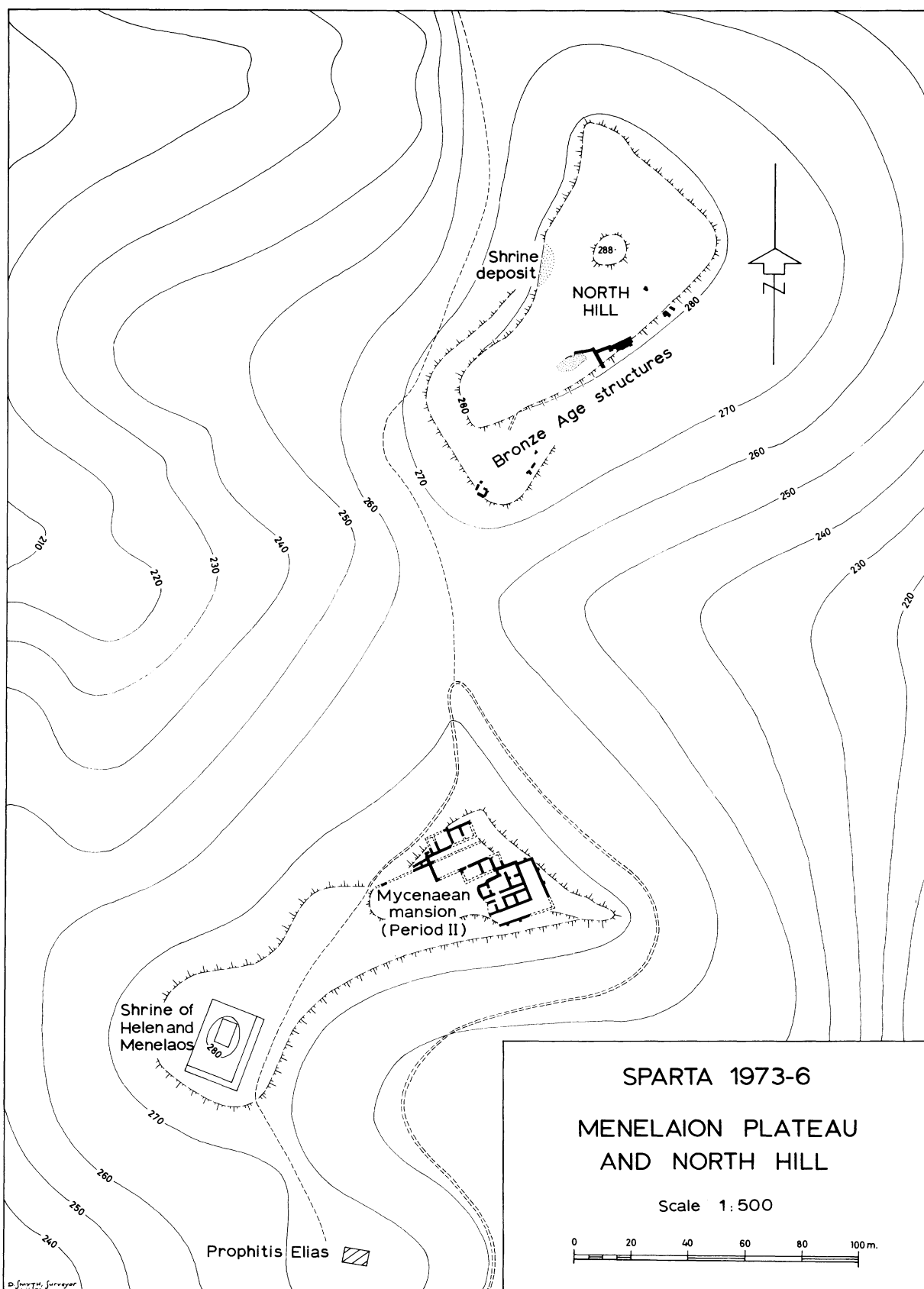


Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4

destroyed Mycenaean buildings on a hill (*Aetos*) nearly 400 metres south of the shrine (Fig. 1). A brief report on these Mycenaean finds was published in *BSA* xvi (1910) 4-11.

Though never quite forgotten, these Mycenaean finds at the Menelaion were largely allowed to lie fallow; their importance was in any event soon eclipsed by the finds of Carl Blegen and Alan Wace in the Corinthia and the Argolid. Subsequent writing, so far as it took any account of these finds, was chiefly concerned with the date of the final abandonment of the Mycenaean settlement. Furumark (*CMP* 70), Desborough (*LMS* 88, 221) and Waterhouse and Hope-Simpson (*BSA* lv [1960] 72) considered the problem and were unable to determine whether the site ended with LH IIIB (ca. 1200 BC) or whether LH IIIC pottery was in use before the end.

In 1973, acting upon a suggestion from Miss A. Demakopoulou (now Mrs Papantoniou), formerly

Epimeletria in the Archaeological Service at Sparta (at present serving in the ephorate of Boeotia) where she had made a special study of Mycenaean Lakonia, the British School resolved upon a reinvestigation at the Menelaion. Originally intended as little more than a stratigraphic control upon R. M. Dawkins' results in the Mycenaean part of the site, the work developed into an extended research project in which both the Mycenaean buildings and the post-Bronze Age shrine have been thoroughly re-examined, and a supplementary programme of test excavation carried out on a plateau adjacent to the north.

The prehistoric site at the Menelaion (Fig. 1) occupies a long ridge immediately overhanging the east bank of the Eurotas, falling steadily from north to south. The main focus of the Bronze Age settlement is over 100 metres above the river. To the east is a deep torrent bed that ultimately drains the western Parnon foothills further east. The Menelaion ridge terminates at the junction of this torrent with the Eurotas. The part of the ridge occupied in antiquity measures at least a kilometre north-south and is up to 400 metres from east to west. The geology consists of a succession of almost horizontal bands of fairly loose conglomerate interleaved within deeper beds of yellowish-red marls. The effect of differential weathering on these alternating strata is a very distinctive landscape of broad natural terraces with, occasionally, sheer escarpments where there are exceptionally deep marly strata. On the Eurotas flank, the most important part of the settlement is protected by a particularly high escarpment.

The natural defences of the site are so effective that it is not surprising that no Bronze Age fortification wall has been identified. The water resources of the site itself are poor; in classical times a large cistern was dug for the sanctuary. In the Bronze Age water from house-roofs may have been collected in pithoi. Two springs exist not far away, but would have been difficult of access if the site were under attack. In undisturbed days, of course, there would have been an inexhaustible water supply in the Eurotas.

Preliminary study of the faunal remains from the Bronze Age levels suggests domestic animals provided all but an insignificant proportion of the population's animal protein. The environs even at the present time are admirably suited to the needs of shepherd and goatherd; these animals, and an appreciable number of cattle, seem only to have been slaughtered for food after they had fully matured. Only swine were killed before they were fully mature. It may be supposed that the other livestock were at least as important for dairy products, for wool, for hair, for hides and (in the case of the cattle) for traction. Only one equid bone has so far been identified. The chief hunted animal was the Red Deer. Despite systematic soil sampling with a view to carbonised grain and seed

this period, which was probably contemporary with the earlier burials in Circle B at Mycenae. Attributable to this phase is a single burial without grave offerings found below the earliest Late Bronze Age level. The Middle Helladic pottery is almost exclusively of local type, and recalls the material from the Swedish excavations at Asea; only one fragment of Matt Painted ware has been found, and no Grey or Yellow Minyan has been identified.

Although the evidence of decorated pottery shows that the site was continuously occupied during LH I and LH IIA (*ca.* 1550-1450 B.C.), no structural remains of these periods have survived. Several dressed poros blocks, however, re-used in the construction of subsequent buildings, seem probably to have belonged to a completely vanished monumental building of the late sixteenth or early fifteenth century B.C. This evidence, in combination with the discovery of fragments of several fine Palace Style jars (Fig. 3), suggests the site was already of some consequence in the earlier fifteenth century B.C.

However that may be, there can be no doubt of its importance during the second half of the fifteenth century B.C. On a natural terrace (Fig. 4) on the east edge of the Menelaion plateau has been recovered, well below the level of the hill-top, the plan of a large building, categorized as a Mansion. To distinguish it from its successor, it is known as 'Mansion 1'. The ground-floor plan (Fig. 5) has been found of what must have been a two-storeyed building planned as three parallel units separated from each other by two passages or corridors (Fig. 6). The building faced the south; erosion has destroyed the detail of the south facade and the courtyard(s) upon which it must in all probability have faced. The central unit was apparently of megaron-type, with porch, ante-room and inner room; there was no sign of columns either in the porch or in the main room, which lacked any trace of a hearth. Nevertheless, a loose column base to be found by the church of Prophitis Elias is certainly Mycenaean, and must belong either to this Mansion, or its successor. The wings on either side of the central unit were divided into several



Fig. 6

rooms; on each side there was a strong hint that one 'room' had in fact served as the well for a wooden staircase giving access to the upper floor. Though proof is lacking, it nevertheless seems quite probable that the basic plan of the upper storey will have followed the main lines of the ground floor. What remains of the building was substantially built of well chosen rubble which, in some rooms at least, must have been rendered in painted plaster. Where the floors are preserved, they were made of carefully laid flattish water-worn pebbles rammed into the surface of undisturbed clean marl.

Not very long after it had been built, Mansion 1 suffered some calamity in which it was evidently too seriously damaged for repair to be justified. There is no sign that human violence was responsible; earthquake damage is quite possible, producing the collapse of the whole of the east wall down the hillside. Whatever the cause of the trouble, it was decided to rebuild the Mansion on the same site, preserving the main features of the original plan, but taking steps to minimise the damage that future earth tremors might cause. The old ruined mansion could be stripped completely of its contents and the damaged fabric dismantled in an orderly fashion, with re-usable materials available for the systematic reconstruction. Although the builders of the new Mansion used many cubic metres of fill in their work, they seem almost without exception to have used clean material, and not debris from the demolition of Mansion 1—which has robbed us of valuable information about the earlier building.

The architect of Mansion 2, seeking for greater stability for his building, reorientated it so that it faced west instead of south, and withdrew it nearly ten metres from its original building line. He designed another tripartite building (Fig. 2) but was unable to fit its full width on the terrace, which had been adequate for the width of Mansion 1 (Fig. 5). He solved his problem by designing a split-level building, with two wings on the lower terrace, and the third on the higher terrace, with a short, steep flight of steps for communication between the two levels. To east and south, where the building line had retreated, he added a substantial terrace (total area nearly 200 sq. metres) retained by a wall strengthened at intervals by smallish buttresses. This measure, which reflects a desire for greater stability, is matched by the way in which the new walls were everywhere buried in more than a metre of fill, on the top of which the ground-level floors were spread. The architect had evidently ordered the stumps of the demolished Mansion 1's walls to be left *in situ*, buried in the fill, as an additional stabilizing element.

There is regrettably little evidence for the date of the construction and occupation of Mansion 1, for reasons already explained. Fragments of



Fig. 7



Fig. 8

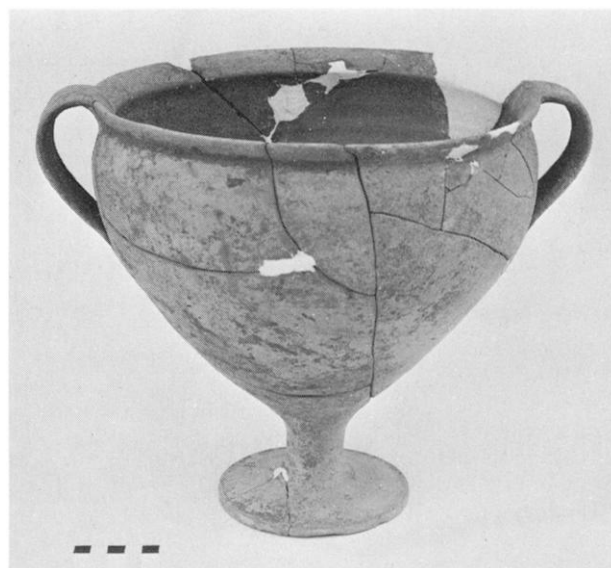


Fig. 10

imported LM IB pottery from its foundation trenches suggest it could not have been built earlier than the first half of the fifteenth century B.C. (Fig. 7). The date of the construction of Mansion 2 (which must, presumably, follow very quickly upon the abandonment of Mansion 1) is suggested by a number of deposits of complete or fragmentary vases (Fig. 8) from the floor surfaces of the demolished Mansion 1, which can only represent material abandoned by the builders of Mansion 2 before these old floors were covered



Fig. 9

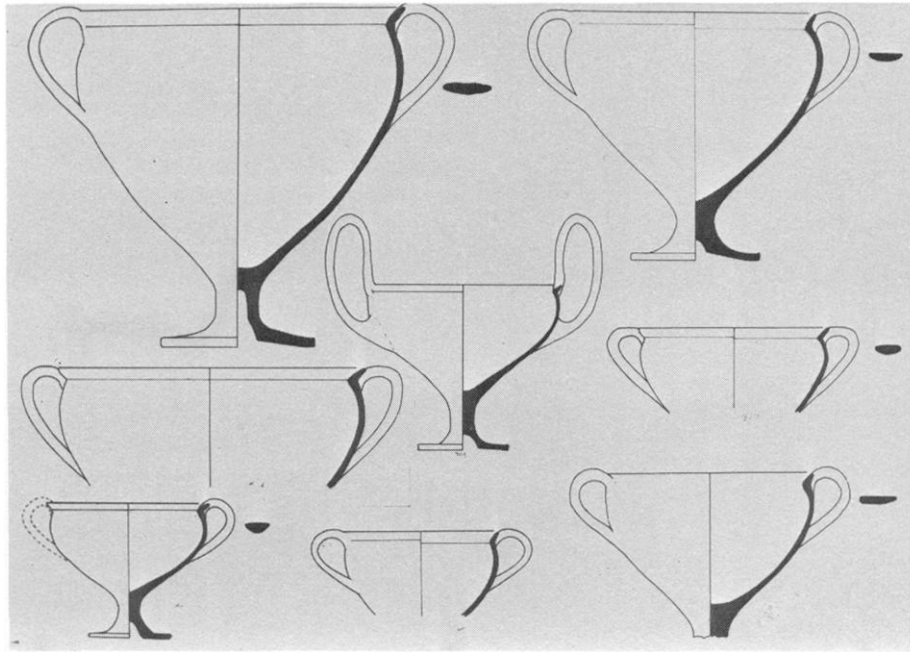


Fig. 11

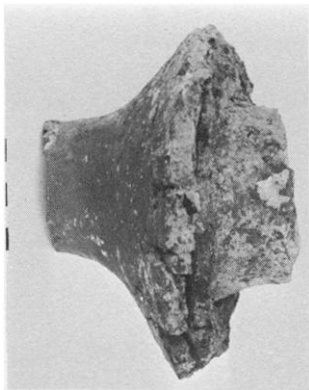


Fig. 12

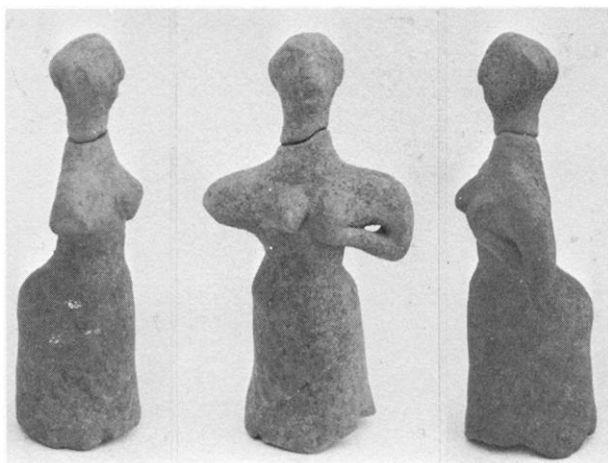


Fig. 13

over by the deep fill already mentioned. This pottery includes plain and decorated goblets, decorated kylikes, a crater painted in Ephyraean fashion, as well as alabastra of two types (Figs. 9, 10, 11), all of which is of LH IIIA1 type, and indicates that Mansion 2 was under construction late in the fifteenth century B.C.

The building of Mansion 2 had not advanced very far when, for reasons that can never be known, there came a temporary halt. This is shown by the discovery of the remains of a stone-built hut constructed over the foundations of the south-east corner of the Mansion which close stratigraphic analysis has proved to be intermediate in the process of building. Once the main building could advance again, this hut was demolished, leaving its foundations to be buried under the same fill that covered the remains of Mansion 1. Nor was this the only trace the builders left behind them. In a corner of the ante-room of the old megaron was a roughly built stone work-bench, handy for who knows what trivial tasks with which masons and carpenters were busy all day as Mansion 2 rose from the ground. Not far off, on the floor of the old east corridor, a metalsmith set up a little melting furnace, no doubt for metal to cast tools or fittings that were needed on the site. A heavily fire-blackened nozzle from a set of bellows (Fig. 12) was found in the levelling fill, and could even have been used at this very furnace.

Though very little material was recovered from the fills within Mansion 2, and making up the terrace to south and east, one or two objects of interest were recovered, and are almost certainly to be attributed to the period of occupation of



Fig. 14



Fig. 15



Fig. 16

Mansion 1. This includes a painted terracotta model of a house, or shrine, with flat roof, mullioned windows and, apparently, porch with walls *in antis*. There is no mainland parallel for this model which may, in fact, be of Minoan origin. Three terracotta female figures were also found,

one of which, with bell-skirt and hands to the breasts (Fig. 13) certainly seems either to be Minoan or Minoanizing. A second figure, found with it, is a good example of Mrs E. French's 'Proto-Phi' class (Fig. 14). A third figure, though evidently of Mycenaean type, must stand very early indeed in the sequence of Mycenaean terracotta statuettes. It is tempting to deduce from these finds the presence of a shrine of some kind within the Mansion 1 complex.

Mansion 2 and ancillary buildings integral to its plan covered an area over 50.0 m. east-west and 38.0 m. north-south, at the very least. Serious erosion of the north and south flanks of the hill prevent a full understanding of its design, but its scheme may have involved the main, tripartite element (Fig. 2) fronting a sub-triangular court flanked by buildings to north and south (only part of the northern buildings have survived) with—possibly—some kind of pro-pylon (now totally vanished) marking its western limit.

Mansion 2, unfortunately, was abandoned in such a fashion that little evidence of its original contents has survived. As will be seen, reoccupation of part of it in LH IIIB removed all trace of the original floors in the rooms affected. Only in the ancillary buildings do rather meagre floor deposits of pottery suggest a date of abandonment that must be before the close of LH IIIA1 (Figs. 15, 16). This pottery includes distinctive types of goblets, as well as some less closely datable domestic vessels (Fig. 17).

The evidence of occupation now fails for a period of a hundred years. No pottery of LH IIIA2 type has been identified, nor does there seem to have been an occupation in LH IIIB1. Nothing has been found to explain why there should have been such an interruption. But at some indeterminate date

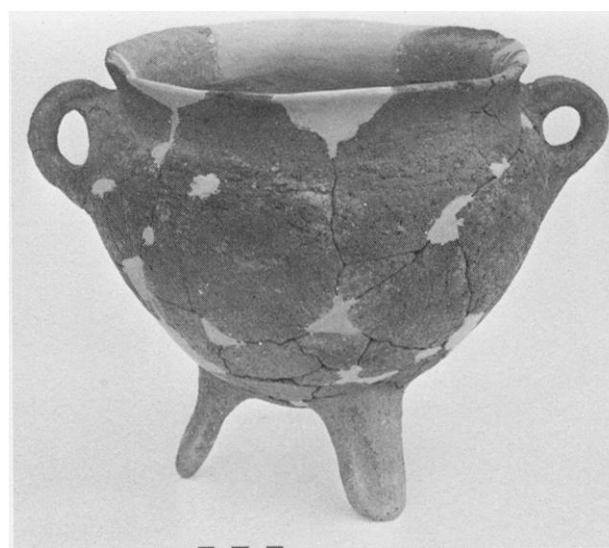


Fig. 17



Fig. 18



Fig. 19

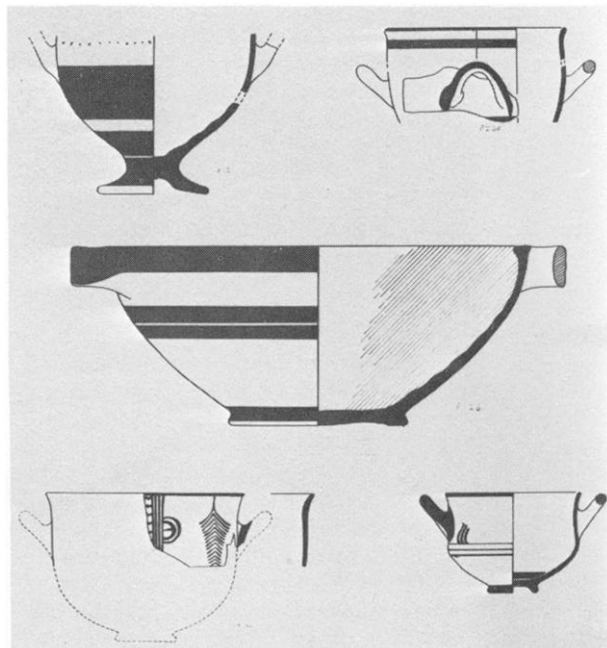


Fig. 20

in the thirteenth century B.C. the site was taken in hand again. What by then must have been a very ruinous Mansion 2 was partly refurbished. Those responsible decided to repair only the two wings on the lower terrace. The terrace made for Mansion 2 was evidently in good shape still, and the rehabilitated building ('Mansion 3') was almost certainly opened to the east. The upper terrace was left undeveloped, and presumably presented a rather ugly vista of largely ruined buildings. The linking flight of steps was blocked, and it is not known how communication between the two terraces worked.

Mansion 3 had been almost totally excavated by R. M. Dawkins in 1910 (Fig. 18). Unfortunately both his daybook and his published account are extremely laconic, and the most that can be deduced is that he found abundant traces of the fire destruction in which Mansion 3 had perished. During the 1973 excavation a minute area of Mansion 3 was excavated that had escaped Dawkins' notice. It certainly contained evidence of a fire destruction and—most fortunately—two plain angular kylikes that cannot be earlier than LH IIIB, and could readily be matched with vases from the destruction level at Pano Englianos.

A more representative selection of material associable with the final Mycenaean occupation in the region of the Mansions is provided by a deep rubbish tip beyond the north-east corner of the Mansions, from which large quantities of pottery and domestic rubbish have been recovered. Within this tip in 1974 three human skeletons were found (Fig. 19), perhaps victims of the final destruction. The LH IIIB pottery included very large quantities of plain dishes and kylikes—particularly angular kylikes—again closely recalling pottery from the destruction level at Pano Englianos. There was very much less decorated pottery, but it included a few deep bowl fragments, one of which may be an import from the Argolid (Fig. 20).

During the 1976 season quite extensive tests were made on the North Hill (Fig. 2). Unfortunately the ancient remains brought to light here were found to have been even more severely affected by erosion than those so far described on the Menelaion Hill. On the North Hill, the remains of prehistoric houses are associated in every case with wash levels, at times very deep, containing quantities of very worn LH IIIB2 pottery, suggesting a fairly intensive occupation of the North Hill simultaneously with the life of Mansion 3. Further evidence for the extent of the settlement at the end of LH IIIB comes from pottery (including fragments of deep bowls, and stemmed bowls with panel pattern which have their best parallels at Mycenae) collected on the surface of the Aetos Hill, 400 metres south of the Menelaion (Fig. 1). The cumulative effect of the evidence from the three hills strongly suggests that the Mycenaean site here was of considerable importance in the later

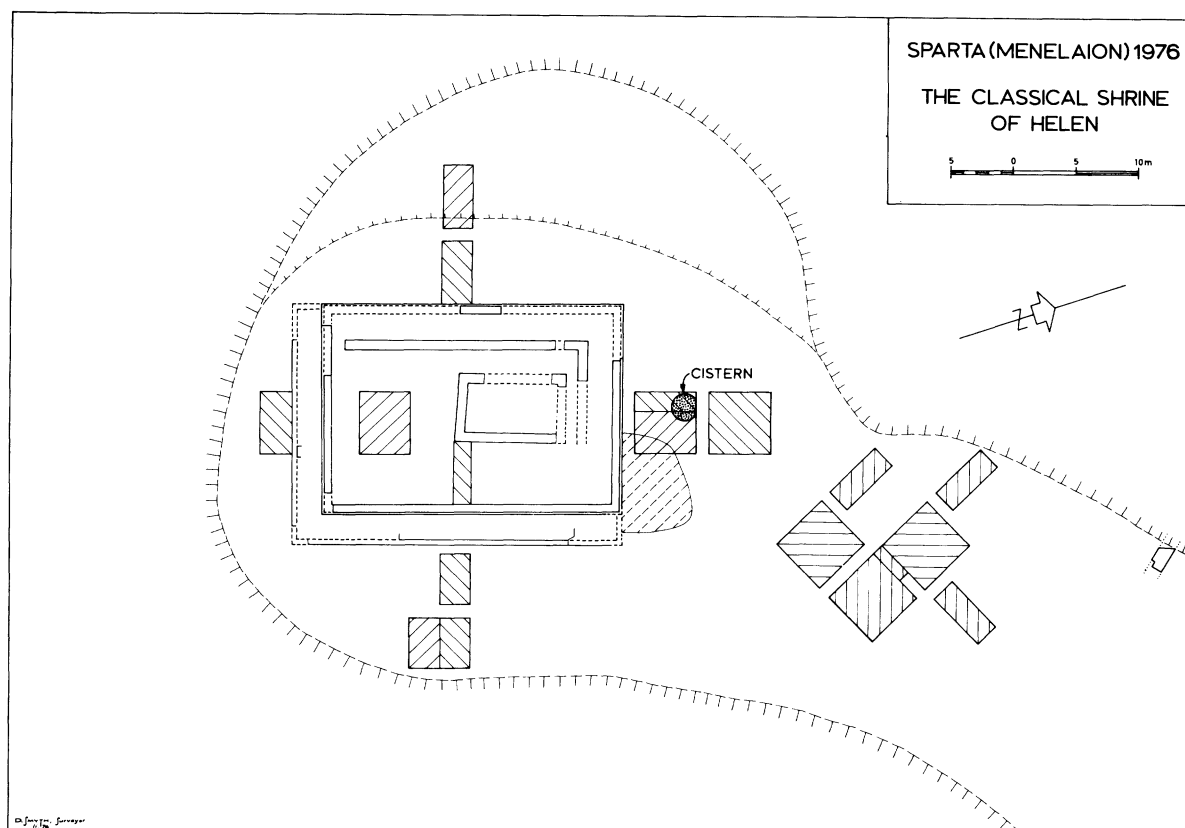


Fig. 21

thirteenth century B.C., but that its administrative centre may no longer have been on the same site as it had been in the fifteenth century B.C. The only sign of literacy in the whole occupation of the site is a fragment of a storage stirrup jar that had evidently carried a painted Linear B inscription.

From the area of the Mansions and from the North Hill no material later than LH IIIB2 has been found. As one of the objectives of the excavation had been to show whether or not any sign of continuity existed between the Mycenaean settlement and the later sanctuary, attention was early directed to the immediate vicinity of the standing monument, the clearance of which had been the chief preoccupation of the earlier excavators. Here we were anxious to follow up a clue given by A. J. B. Wace who describes the discovery of a pure Mycenaean level over *stereo* close to the shrine, covered by Late Geometric and Archaic levels of the period of use of the shrine. This hinted that the shrine might have been built amid the ruin of Late Helladic buildings—perhaps occupied long after the destruction of Mansion 3.

Though a considerable area close to the shrine has now been excavated (Fig. 21), no sign of continuity has been forthcoming. Wace's Mycenaean level was identified at several points; the latest pottery proved to be of LH IIIB2 date. It seems to be a wash level, without any associated structures.

There remains, therefore, an interval of nearly 500 years between the disappearance of Lakonian Mycenaean from the Menelaion Hill, and the founding of the hero-shrine. The shrine is thus a classic instance of cult created deliberately out of nostalgia for the Heroic past which Professors Snodgrass and Coldstream have severally seen to have been characteristic of the late eighth century B.C. It must be assumed that still in the eighth century B.C. there remained signs of the vanished splendours of Therapne that would have identified it as a Hero's home; it could have been that the natural knoll now enclosed by the classical shrine may have been identified as the tomb of Menelaos and Helen.

Excavation of the Mycenaean site at the Menelaion produced a meagre yield of pottery and other finds; the physical condition of the pottery is poor, so that its repair, study and analysis is slow and laborious. These disadvantages, however, are more than outweighed by the importance of the architectural discoveries of the new excavations, for the plans of the successive Mansions offer for the first time an insight into sophisticated Mycenaean building of the fifteenth century B.C. They may well have been built for the Masters of Lakonia of the day, kinsmen, perhaps, of the princeling buried in the Vaphio tholos. It may have been that a growing feeling of insecurity caused

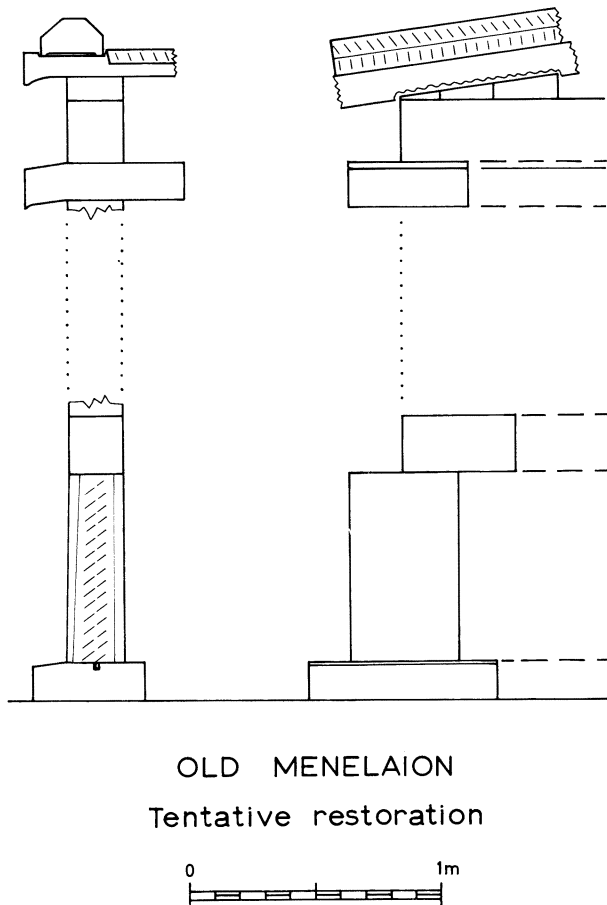


Fig. 22

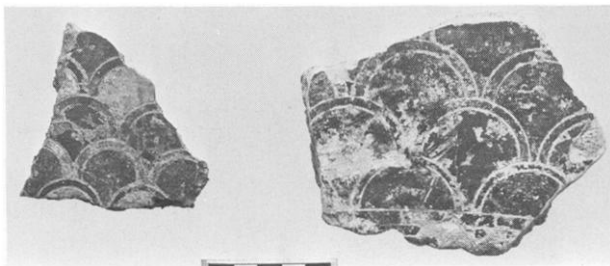


Fig. 23

the chief site of Lakonia to shift from the relatively accessible hill at **Palaeopyrghi** to something much more of an acropolis at the Menelaion.

Excavation and study of the post-Bronze Age remains at the Menelaion have in their fashion been almost as productive as the work on the Bronze Age occupation just described. During 1976 a second shrine was identified, on the North Hill, of which, unfortunately, virtually nothing is left following heavy erosion of the site. It must have stood on the west or south-west side of the small natural knoll (Fig. 2) that is the counterpart of the knoll on the Menelaion Hill. It cannot be coincidence that both the shrines are located on or

beside these knolls. The presence of the new shrine had been suspected since 1974 when fragments of votives were observed in the scarp adjacent to the west. A test dug close to the scarp uncovered a deposit rich in miniature vases, with a very few fragmentary terracotta horse-and-rider figures of sixth-century B.C. type. It must have been a deposit much like that described by Guy Dickins from his sanctuary on the Megalopolis Road (*BSA* xiii [1907] 169-73). The life of this little shrine must have been much shorter than the Menelaion's; it attracted very restricted types of offerings. But its presence is a reminder that Pausanias, at least, refers to more than one shrine at Therapne.

Results at the Menelaion itself (Fig. 21) now make it possible to recognize a continuous history of some 700 years, yet this long period can only be divided, stratigraphically or architecturally, into four or five stages. The evidence for the first phase comes almost entirely from the offerings of painted pottery, bronzes, lead votives, etc., found by the 1909 excavators in a very rich deposit of dark earth on the north-east side of the later shrine, a deposit they were able to follow some distance down the steep slope to the east. They reported several blocks of soft white poros 'carefully cut to shape' which they attributed to this earliest phase. There is in fact no evidence for the form of the late eighth-earlier seventh century B.C. shrine; it need have been no more than an altar surrounded by an unsophisticated *temenos*



Fig. 24

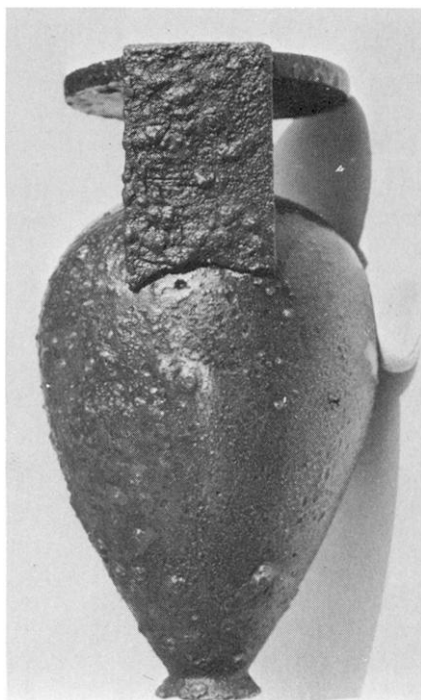


Fig. 25



Fig. 26



Fig. 27

wall; it probably stood on or very near the knoll. The new excavation, though finding numerous votives out of context that must date to this phase, has only located scraps of undisturbed deposits; the earlier excavators evidently cleared this horizon very thoroughly.

The next identifiable phase at the Menelaion saw the construction of a smallish building, essentially monumental in character, built of well-cut poros blocks (Fig. 22). The building was pedimental, roofed with terracotta tiles and embellished with at least one large painted terracotta disk-acroterion (Figs. 23, 24), recalling other fragments from Artemis Orthia and, further afield, the well-known example from the Temple of Hera at Olympia. A good many wall-blocks have been recovered, part of the raking cornice, and probably a horizontal cornice. Not a stone was found *in situ*. Though some of the blocks were found in fills north-east of the shrine, the most important were found in the fill of a large bottle-shaped cistern near the shrine. This building may for convenience be called the 'Old Menelaion'. Though its original position is unknown, it is conceivable that it stood on the conglomerate foundation that now encloses the top of the knoll, the date of which is uncertain. It was presumably completely demolished when the existing shrine building was constructed.

The remains of the Old Menelaion, which are to be dated to the late seventh or early sixth century B.C., appear to provide the earliest evidence for monumental building in Lakonia, at least above foundation level. (Only the foundation survives of the Archaic temple of Orthia, apart from a scrap of Doric capital and a column fragment conjecturally assigned to it.)

In AR 1975-76 14, reference was made to the two inscribed bronzes found in 1975 with dedications to Helen (Figs. 25, 26, the aryballo, Fig. 27, the *harpax*) confirming the correctness of the assumption made from Ross onwards that here is the shrine of Helen referred to in the literary *testimonia*, and, by inference, that the area must be Therapne—all the sources are agreed in placing the sanctuary at Therapne. A frustrating discovery made in 1976 consisted of two non-joining fragments of a ? wide-mouthed bronze vase each with two or three letters of an Archaic inscription written retrograde. More rewarding was the find in the same year, at the very bottom of the cistern, of a small blue limestone stela (Fig. 28) on which had once been mounted a large bronze statuette - a lion perhaps, or sphinx, to judge from the lead-filled cuttings for the tenons by which the bronze was attached (Fig. 29). The stela is inscribed (in lettering that suggests an early fifth century B.C. date)

Euthikrenes/dedicated (this)/to Menelaos

We are thus assured that both Menelaos and Helen were separate recipients of dedications at the

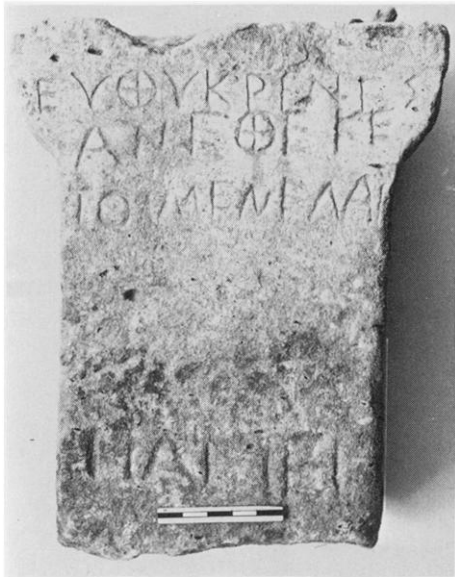


Fig. 28

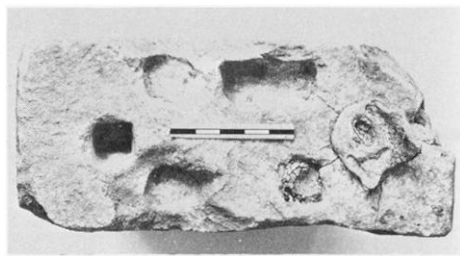


Fig. 29

shrine, and it is even possible that each of them had their own altar.

Early in the fifth century B.C. the shrine of Menelaos and Helen was extensively redesigned and rebuilt. The Old Menelaion seems to have been completely dismantled and replaced by the conglomerate building, the ruins of which we see today (Fig. 30). The essence of this project seems to have been the construction of a lofty monument on the rectangular foundation already mentioned. As suggested, this foundation may already have done duty for the Old Menelaion. In its turn this monument was surrounded by a broad terrace held in place by a fine retaining wall of large ashlar blocks of conglomerate (Fig. 30) creating a structure 22×16 metres on ground plan (Fig. 21). Integrated with this was a ramp leading up from the west side (Fig. 31) from the south corner, probably doubling round the north and east sides to reach the level of the altar or whatever it was that crowned the structure. It seems possible that the retaining wall was crowned by a parapet finished in hard blue limestone and white marble. The total height of the structure may well have been in excess of eight metres; it is six metres high in its present state.

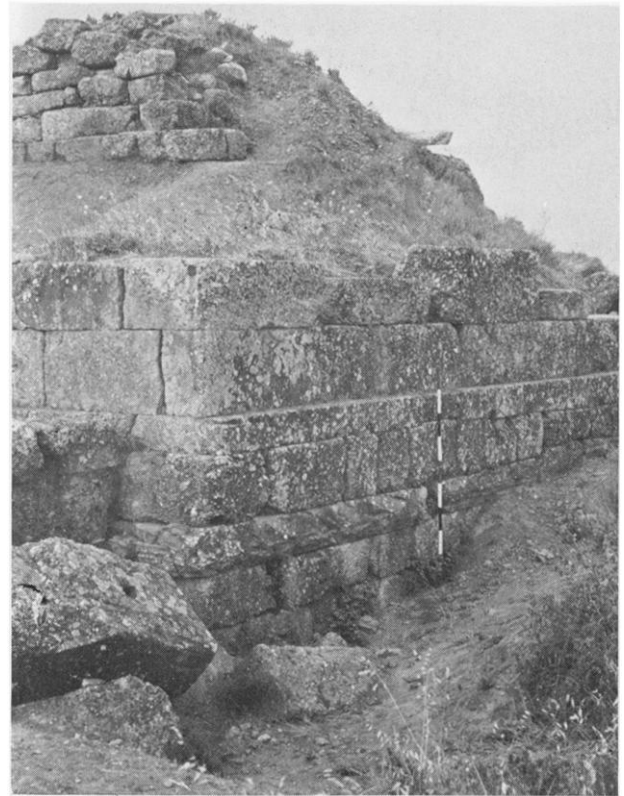


Fig. 30

Not long after this new Menelaion had been finished, the stability of the structure on the east and south sides evidently caused anxiety, for a broad buttressing conglomerate terrace was built in ashlar on these two sides (Figs. 21, 32), increasing the ground plan to 26.5×19.5 metres, a 25% enlargement. Such a terrace will have served, perhaps, as a stand for major dedications, fragments of several of which have been recovered.

With the construction of the conglomerate shrine is probably to be associated the cutting of the cistern already mentioned. It was dug two metres out from the north wall, on centre with the monument high above. The cistern, which had been dug through several earlier levels, is 5.50 m. deep, the bottom being 7.00 m. below modern surface (Fig. 33). It was evidently cut into marl, and, where the coating of hydraulic plaster has been lost, the marks made by the tools of the workmen who dug it are clearly visible. At capacity, it would have held some 35 cubic metres of water.

The cistern continued in use, and was kept clean and free of rubbish, until the very end of the life of the shrine. It was found full of a homogeneous deposit of soil, rubble, building stone and a few discarded votives. Though the building stone included many blocks and fragments from the Old Menelaion, the fill cannot be earlier than the end of the second century B.C., the date of a complete Megarian bowl found high up in the fill, and a second



Fig. 31

from further down (Fig. 34). A certain amount of other fine pottery came from the fill, as well as two smallish wine amphorae (Fig. 35). Other finds include fragments of inscribed marble statuette bases, perhaps of the third century B.C. A minute scrap of a sandcore glass scent bottle and an ivory seal recall the elegance of some of the votives dedicated here.

Twenty metres north-east of the conglomerate shrine lies the 'Great Pit', partly excavated between 1974 and 1976. This was untouched by earlier excavators; it has yielded the majority of the most interesting post-Bronze Age finds. With little more than half of it excavated, its exact shape is still uncertain. It seems to have been roughly saucer-shaped, at least 15·00 m. in diameter, and just over 2·0 m. deep at the greatest. It was dug into the succession of seams of marl and conglomerate which make up the *stereo* at this point. The filling consists of not easily differentiated tips of marly upcast, with occasional stony tips, including poros chips as though from a mason's working area. All the tip levels contained votives of one kind or another, representing almost every class of offering found on the site. These include several bronze vessels (a *phiale* *mesomphalos* and a miniature *oinochoe* are the

best preserved), miniature sculpture in bronze (an ox-head pendant (Fig. 36) and a crouching mouse (Fig. 37) are of fine quality, as, too, is a minute figure of a lion of Archaic style—Fig. 38) and quantities of sheet bronze, some decorated with repoussé patterns (Fig. 39) (including guilloché patterns from the borders of shields). There is also abundant iron, including many fragments of spits, spearheads, sword fragments, arrowheads and at least two ploughshares. Small lead votives of the well-known Lakonian types have been recovered in large quantities, particularly spike wreaths and warrior figures. Ivory is very rare; a choice figure of Nike in flight is of Hellenistic rather than classical type. Terracotta statuettes have been found in very large numbers, but unfortunately are very fragmentary; they include some very fine Daedalic pieces (Figs. 40, 41), and many horse-and-rider figurines of late Archaic type (the rider appears to be female) (Fig. 42). There are several grotesques (Fig. 43). The pottery represents every phase of Lakonian. Though the inescapable Lakonian miniatures are present, they are very much in a minority. There are many black glaze vases—the *lekaina* is the commonest shape (Fig. 44), but there are many *aryballoi* (Fig. 45). Some larger *bg* vases were also represented, including at least one column-crater. Figured Lakonian pottery was unfortunately not very plentiful. It included a nearly complete Lakonian I *pyxis*



Fig. 32

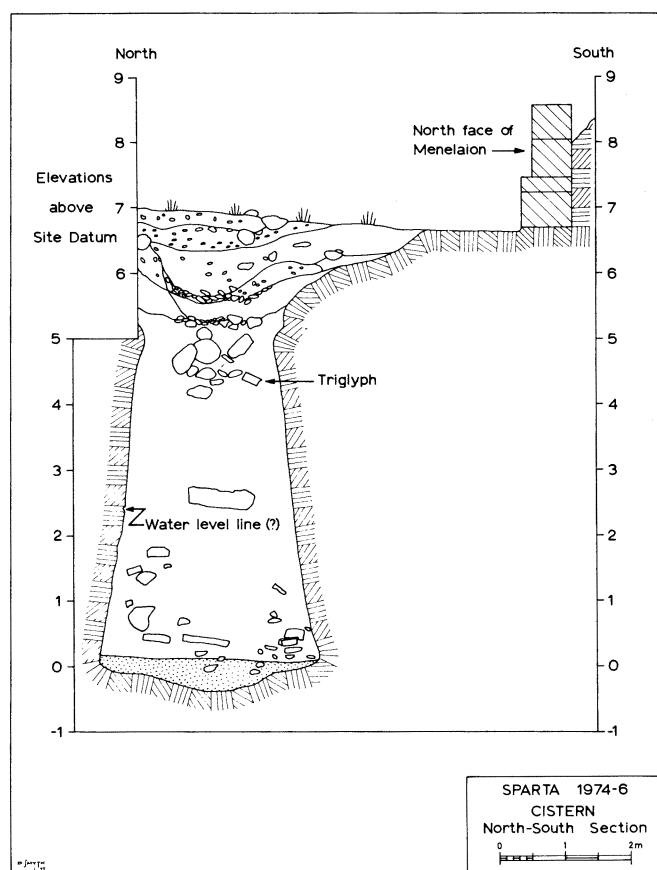


Fig. 33

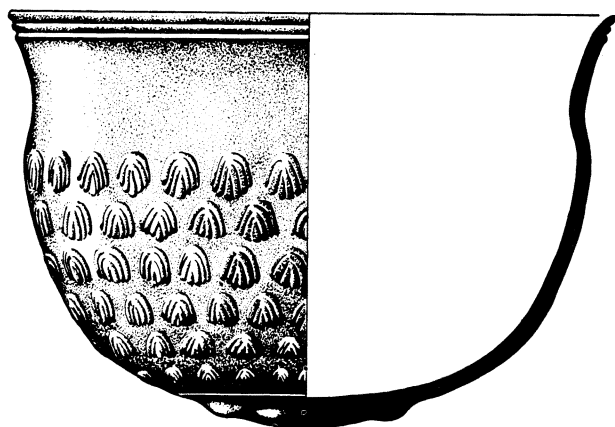


Fig. 34

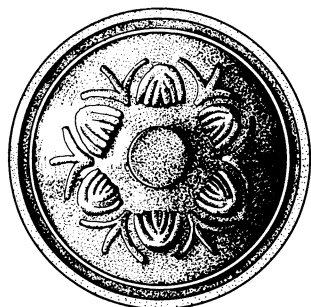


Fig. 35



Fig. 36



Fig. 37



Fig. 38



Fig. 39



Fig. 40



Fig. 43



Fig. 41



Fig. 44



Fig. 45



Fig. 42



Fig. 46

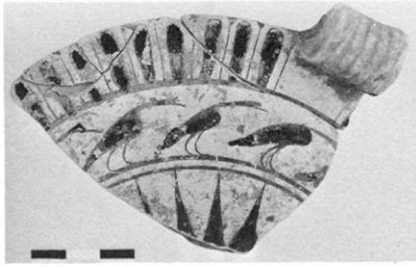


Fig. 47

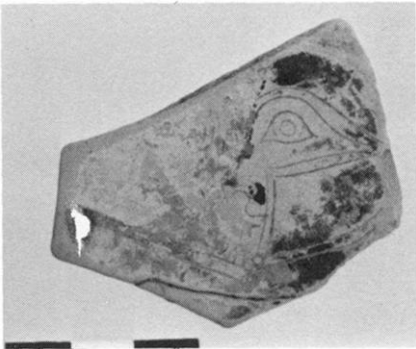


Fig. 48

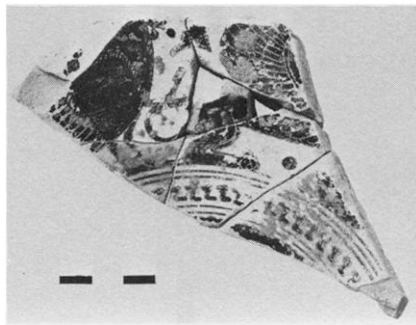


Fig. 49

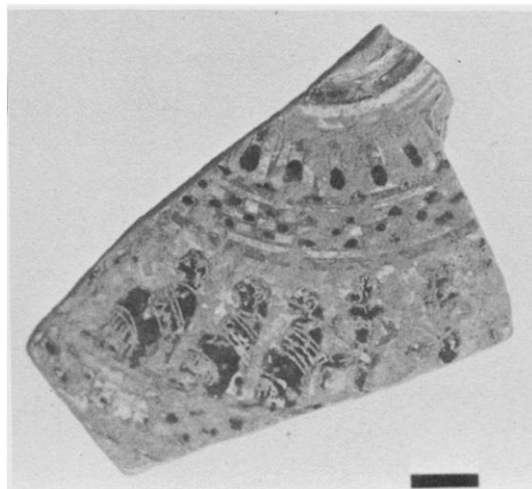


Fig. 50

(Fig. 46) with hounds coursing a hare (obviously inspired by a PC original), a fragment of a Lakonian II dish with frieze of water birds both in and out (Fig. 47). Figured Lakonian III pottery included a fine cup-fragment with warrior head from the tondo (Fig. 48), and another fragment decorated with orientalisising creatures (Fig. 49). Several fragments have been recovered from the decorated base of a stand of some kind (Fig. 50) decorated in a miniaturist style. There is the base of a gaudy stand (Fig. 51). The little imported pottery found is mainly Corinthian, though there are fragments of sixth and fifth century Panathenaics.

At some stage, late in the history of the site, one or more secondary pits seem to have been dug into the filling of the Great Pit, into which a mass of broken terracotta roof tiles were then tipped. It is difficult to explain this roof debris, for the conglomerate building was almost certainly unroofed, and the Old Menelaion should have been dismantled for centuries at the time these pits were dug and filled. A possible solution would be to conjecture a late wooden-framed stoa with tiled roof, but no other sign of it has come to light.

The Great Pit is not yet understood. In wider terms, little is known of the shrine's history from the time the conglomerate building was completed until the site was abandoned. Though there are many fewer votive offerings datable to the fifth century B.C. and later, inscribed statuette bases of the fourth or third century B.C. warn us against deducing that the shrine's importance passed with the earthquake of 464 B.C. People must have come here from time to time even after the desertion of the site, as can be inferred from the find of a bronze fibula of the second century A.D. high up in the fill of the Great Pit (Fig. 52).

The latest signs of human activity on the site (apart from the very recent past) consist of the remains of a little oven built near the area of the Mycenaean mansions, datable from pottery to the Early Christian period and, presumably, associable with a church of that date, of which today's little shed church of Prophitis Elias is the ultimate successor.

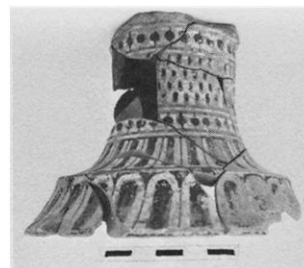


Fig. 51

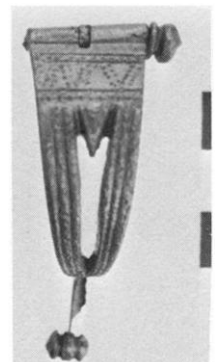


Fig. 52

It is tempting to try to relate some of the episodes recognizable at the Menelaion to the events of Spartan history, but this is difficult in view of the lack of precision in the Menelaion sequence. Possibly the founding of the shrine could be related to the conduct of the first Messenian War, but the building of the Old Menelaion is not closely datable enough to suggest a context (even though its acroteria are so close to those of the later Archaic temple of Artemis Orthia that the two buildings may well be closely contemporary). The reconstruction programme early in the fifth century that produced the conglomerate shrine may plausibly be connected with Spartan exhilaration at their part in the defeat of the Persians. It would be natural, particularly with Leonidas and his band in mind, to dedicate such a building simultaneously as a memorial to a warrior king and as a thank-offering

to Menelaos, the national military hero, for the final triumph at Plataea.

As Sparta lost first its military pre-eminence, and then its political independence, it is natural that such a state hero-shrine should suffer eclipse. Perhaps it is surprising that it should have lasted so long. Pausanias knew all about it (though almost certainly he never went there), but does not say whether it was active or not. In fact, by his time, the altar at the Menelaion had been cold and unattended for more than two centuries. In all probability the cult of Helen had been transferred to Sparta itself. Of Therapne indeed it could be said:-

'Alia tempora, alii mores.'

The British School at Athens

H. W. CATLING