

*With Compliments*  
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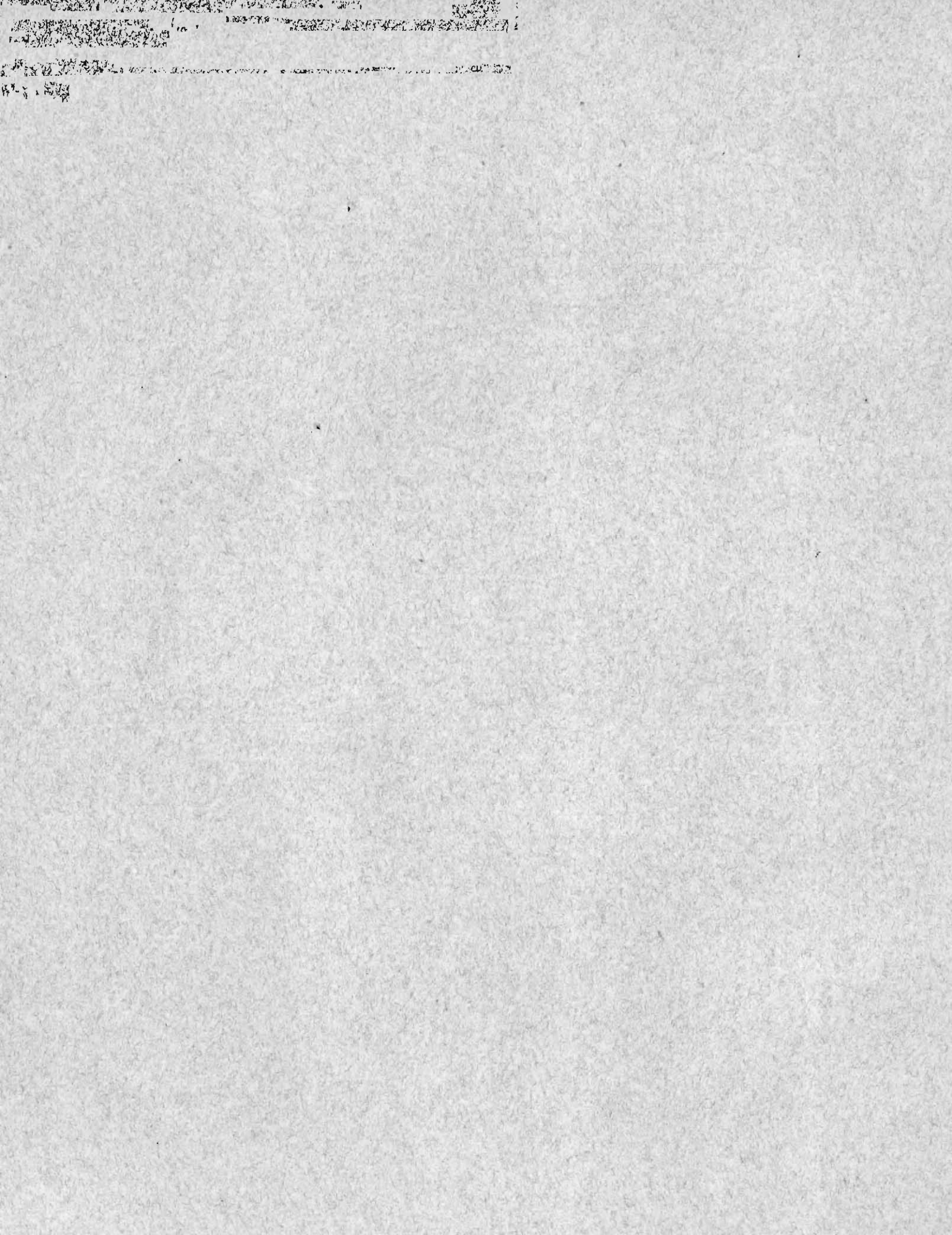
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# RESTORED SHRINE ON CENTRAL COURT OF THE PALACE OF KNOSSOS

By ARTHUR J. EVANS, D.Litt., F.R.S.



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*Yours faithfully  
Arthur J. Evans.*

ARTHUR JOHN EVANS, D.Litt., F.R.S., *Hon. Associate R.I.B.A.*  
ROYAL GOLD MEDALLIST 1909



View of Part of West Wall of Palace, Knossos, from West Porch.

## RESTORED SHRINE ON CENTRAL COURT OF THE PALACE OF KNOSSOS.

By ARTHUR J. EVANS, D.Litt., F.R.S. [*Hon.A.*]

**I**N the area immediately west of the great northern entrance passage of the Palace of Knossos had been found already in 1900 a heap of fresco fragments that originally belonged to one or more upper halls and chambers in that quarter.

Among these were a series of fragments to which, from the diminutive scale in which the details were rendered, the general name of the "Miniature Frescoes" has been conveniently applied. A principal feature of these paintings is the appearance of large crowds of people of both sexes grouped about the walls, courts, and terraces of an extensive building which may be reasonably supposed to represent the Palace Sanctuary of Knossos itself.

The frescoes were unfortunately broken into isolated bits, and a good deal was evidently wanting. It was only, indeed, as the result of prolonged consideration of the problems involved that I at last conceived the possibility of reconstructing the general scheme of two panels. Both of these have clearly a religious intent. One panel, with which we are less concerned on the present occasion, represents a crowd of spectators seated in a walled enclosure with olive trees—evidently the *temenos* of a sacred grove—overlooking an orgiastic dance, such as were held in honour of the Minoan Mother-Goddess. The centre of the other design is a pillar shrine of the type already made familiar by the gold plates from Mycenæ and by certain signet rings and seal impressions. This has the appearance of rising above the borders of a court which is thronged with people.

The façade of this shrine, as of others of the class, shows a raised central cell and two lower wings. In the present case the central compartment contains two columns and the wings

a single column each. Sufficient fragments of the shrine were pieced together shortly after their excavation in 1900 to render possible an exact restoration of the lower part, including the two wings. The upper part of the central cell, however, was still wanting, and in my monograph on *Mycenæan Tree and Pillar Cult*,\* published in 1901, I therefore attempted to complete the façade by placing over it an entablature copied from that visible on the two wings, the middle space of which was occupied by a chequer design of black and white.

It was not till some years later that a fragment of painted plaster, which had been set aside in a wrong connexion, was recognised as belonging to the top of the central cell and was found to supply the missing capital of one of its columns and to complete the other. By the addition of this piece it has been possible to recover the true original form of the upper part of the cell, and thus to correct my former restoration in an important particular. This restoration is shown in fig. 1, from a drawing by Monsieur E. Gilliéron.

It will be seen from this that in the original design the entablature of the central cell is distinguished from those of the side wings by showing, above the architrave and immediately over the two capitals, what appear to be the round ends of beams, flanked on either side by square beam-ends.

That what was actually visible on the façade of the building may have been rather painted discs on a plaster face than actual beam-ends is probable enough. But these may none the less be reasonably taken to have a real structural significance, and to indicate that four round beams ran back from the architrave and, together with the square beams on either side, formed the roof beams of the central *cella*. On the other hand, the absence of this structural feature from the entablature of the two wings affords a strong suggestion that they were of wholly different character. In other words, they were either entirely open colonnades or backed by a quite shallow area behind. Thus the building with which we have to deal should be regarded as one with a recessed central *cella* flanked by two more or less open wings.

The newly recognised fragment also shows that the top of the *cella*, as well as that of the two wings, was surmounted by a row of sacral ox-horns such as appear in front or beside the columns below, though of smaller dimensions. These "horns of consecration" are constantly found in the Minoan shrines, and were usually made of painted plaster, though they are sometimes of stone or terra-cotta. Four such horns, preserved in whole or part, appear above the central part of the sanctuary; but though they do not sufficiently fill the available space, there would not be room for an outer pair on either side, unless we are to imagine that the coping of the *cella* somewhat stepped forward on either side. That this was the case, however, is rendered probable from a number of small representations of Minoan and Mycæan shrines known to us from signet seals and their impressions. The projection of the upper member of the entablature is, for instance, clearly visible in the small shrine that appears in connexion with a lion-guarded Goddess on a series of seal impressions found in a sanctuary on the Central Court of the Knossian palace, to be described below. In view of these analogies, the coping of the *cella* is made to step forward in the restored drawing of the façade, and place is thus obtained for an extra pair of horns on either side.

The horns above are smaller than those in front of the columns, and, judging from the latter and the female figures seated immediately to the right of the sanctuary,† it would appear that the height of the central cell, including the white *podium* above which it rises, would not have been more than about nine feet; while the whole width of the façade would have approached twelve. It is possible, indeed, that the human figures were somewhat exaggerated in proportion to the actual scale of the building; but, even allowing for this, it is evident it must have been

\* *Mycenæan Tree and Pillar Worship*, pp. 96, 97 (J.H. S., vol. xx. pp. 194, 195).

† Other figures from the same panel are on a somewhat

smaller scale, but it is best to judge by those in closest association with the shrine itself.

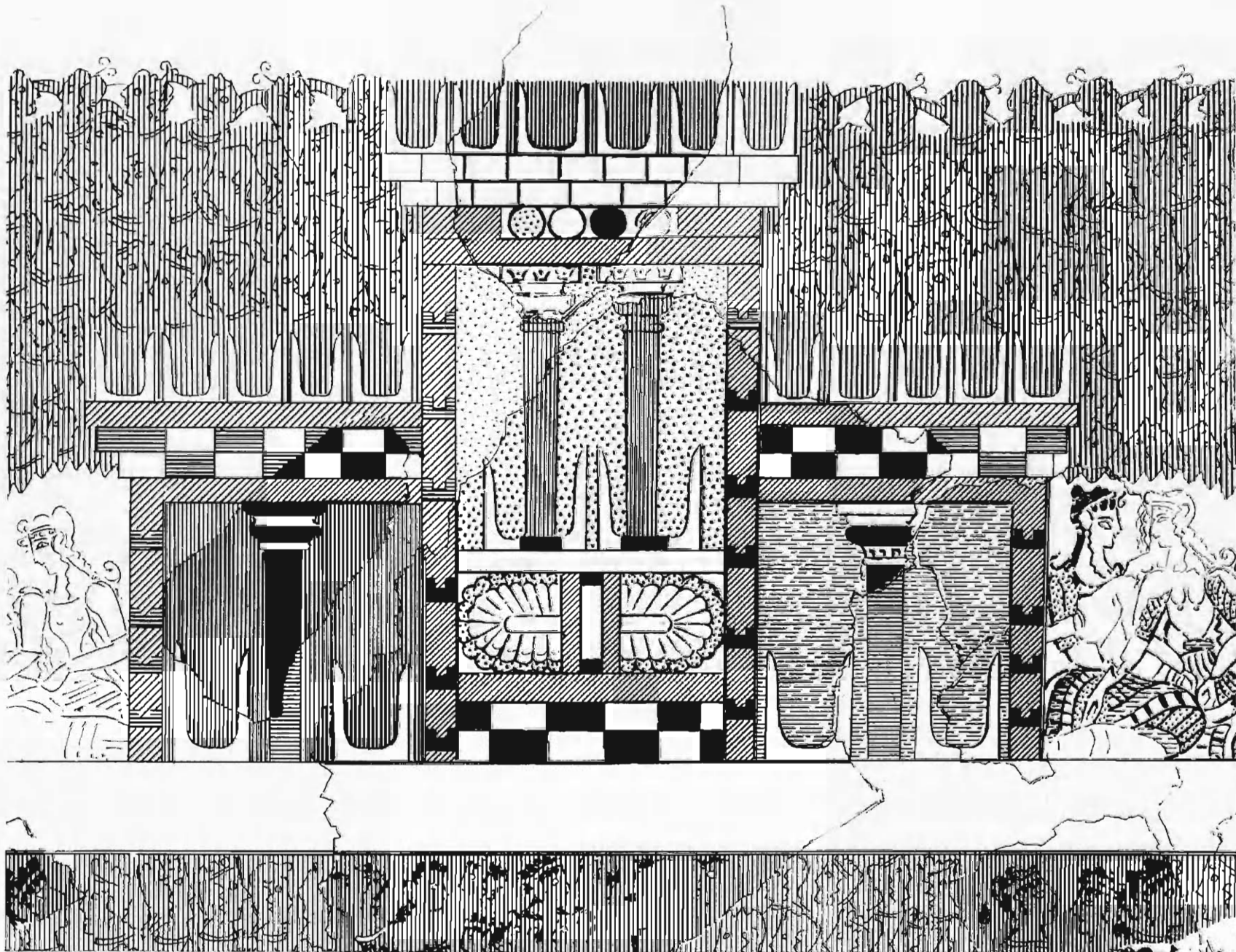


FIG. 1.—SMALL PALACE SHRINE ON A COURT  
FROM CENTRE OF "MINIATURE FRESCO," KNOSSOS.



of very small size. These exiguous dimensions are quite consistent with the evidence as to the size of the Minoan and Mycenæan shrines supplied from other sources.

As already pointed out in my earlier account of this design, the little sanctuary here delineated must have been largely composed of timber and painted plaster. Like the roundels visible on the part of the entablature of the central cell now recovered, the chequer work which occupies the same place on the wings should be rather regarded as representing a face of painted plaster than actual masonry. The columns and capitals were of wood, distinctively coloured in each case by a coating of tinted stucco. Elsewhere the wooden part of the structure is indicated by an orange-brown colour; while the suggestion of the ends of side beams mortised into the posts forming the uprights of the frame is given in black.

The wooden framework is especially interesting in connexion with what appears to have been a decorative relief in front of the lower parts of the *cella*. This consists of two elongated half-rosettes, and the white ground of this with its blue insets, as well as the design, at once recalls the alabaster "frieze" found in the vestibule of the palace at Tiryns with its blue glass (*κύανος χυτός*) inlaying.\* In the present case the red veins indicate some further colouring or inlaying. As I have elsewhere pointed out, the alabaster "triglyphs" which locked together the slabs of the Tirynthian frieze are here, as regards at least the two outermost, replaced by wooden bars—distinguished by their brown colour—which no doubt represent the earlier arrangement. That the prototypes of the Doric metopes were of wood is indeed sufficiently shown by the *guttae* below them, which represent the original wooden pegs that compacted the fabric.

The structural analogies presented by the Palace at Knossos enable us to recognise in the white *podium* on which the whole building rests a stone basis either of gypsum or limestone blocks. The white band forming the sill of the central opening beneath the columns answers to the limestone slab usual in such positions, and the masonry of the coping at the top must also be regarded as having consisted of limestone blocks. In neither of these positions would gypsum be used, as it weathers too quickly. When this material was used as an outside facing, as in the case of the orthostats that form the base of the west wall at Knossos, it was originally protected by a thick cement, of which some traces may be detected. This coating would have obscured the divisions between the separate blocks, and may account for the fact that the low basis line of white material on which the little temple stands, and which extends beyond it on either side, shows no such divisions.

The appearance of this low line of wall and the great crowds of people of both sexes collected within it suggested from the first that we had here the delineation of an existing shrine the façade of which overlooked one of the palace courts. From numerous indications that have since come to light it looks as if small chapels of this kind had been constructed in various parts of the building, which was itself as much a sanctuary as a palace. Noteworthy evidence of the existence of a similar pillar shrine, in connexion apparently with a large upper hall, came out in the northernmost section of the West Court. Here, moreover, were found parts of a small frieze of purple gypsum, showing strong decorative analogies with that depicted on the temple fresco. On the present occasion, however, it is my object to direct special attention to some very interesting structural remains on the eastern border of the Central Court which seem to give us the complete ground-plan of one of these Minoan pillar shrines.

The religious character of this palace region, of which the two Pillar Rooms form the central feature, had been noted from an early period of the excavations. The Pillar Rooms themselves, as is now made clear by a series of parallels in other Minoan buildings, were certainly bound up

\* See Dörpfeld in Schliemann's *Tiryns*, p. 284 *seqq.* and Pl. iv., and Perrot and Chipiez, *L'Art de.*, vol. vi. p. 698 *seqq.* Also Fyfe, "Painted Plaster Decoration at

Knossos, with special reference to the Architectural Schemes" [JOURNAL R.I.B.A., 20th Dec. 1902].

with some sacral usage, and may be regarded as the "crypts" of upper halls devoted to religious purposes. The double axe, repeated in this case on the blocks of the pillars, had probably here a sanctifying significance as the special emblem of the great Minoan Goddess. The immediately adjoining area, the Room of the Stone Vases, contained "rhytons" and other vessels clearly intended for ritual purposes\* ; and in the same way a similar phenomenon was associated with the Pillar Room of the "Little Palace" on the west. That the special sanctity attaching to this quarter of the palace went back to the earliest period of its history was further shown by the discovery in 1908 in a small chamber, to the north of that in which the large column bases were found, of two capacious stone repositories containing the faience figures of the snake Goddess and her votaries and other accessories of what seems to have been an important shrine belonging to the First Palace Period.

There is, moreover, an interesting indication that the religious continuity was not broken at this spot when, about the beginning of the Late Minoan Age, the palace was remodelled. The old "Temple Repositories" were filled in and covered by the later pavement, but immediately over them were constructed two smaller cists so as to preserve the religious tradition.

At this epoch—probably about 1600 B.C.—the front line of the western wing of the palace was carried outwards about two and a half metres so as slightly to encroach on the original borders of the Central Court, a small space being thus left between the older wall and the new line, which at this point has the appearance of a low stylobate.

The result of this extension was to create, immediately west of the chamber containing the Temple Repositories, an elongated space representing a section of the interval between the earlier and later boundary lines on this side (see plan, fig. 2), and it was on the cement floor of this that a series of very interesting clay seal impressions were found in the second year of excavation. These sealings, which seem to have been broken from documents of a perishable nature, were in a very fragmentary condition ; but, supplementing one with another, I was able to reconstitute from them an almost complete design exhibiting a Goddess—the Minoan Rhea—on a peak between lion supporters, while on one side is an adoring male figure and on the other a pillar shrine with two pairs of sacral horns. The Goddess holds out a staff-like object, the upper end of which, however, is incomplete, towards her votary. Obviously it is the shaft of a weapon, and there is a high probability that it represents her sacred double axe.

In my Annual Report † of the excavations I observed that the depth of the space in which these relics were found "is too shallow for it to have been an ordinary room," and that "on the other hand, the finely cut limestone blocks by which it is flanked and partly faced, as well as its conspicuous position on the great court, indicate that there was here an important structure." I even ventured to suggest that we might have here "a clue to the site of the miniature temple depicted on the fresco." Since this was written some wholly unexpected pieces of evidence have come out which corroborate this conclusion in so far as there seems to have been here a pillar shrine of the same general kind as that of the wall-painting.

On the upper surface of the section of the stylobate between the oblong recess that contained the sealings and the later border of the Central Court successive seasons' rains brought out more and more clearly two circular impressions, if such a term may be applied to them, evidently marking the places where column bases had stood. Separated again, from these by an interval of about equal distance two further impressions of a similar kind made themselves apparent, showing that at this point too a pair of columns had once stood.

In view of this symmetrical disposition, the question naturally suggested itself: Might not these pairs of columns correspond with the two wings of a small pillar shrine, like that of the Miniature Fresco, facing this side of the Central Court? A further circumstance greatly

\* See tail-piece, p. 295.

† *Knossos Report*, 1901, p. 28.



But in the general outline and arrangement this shrine of the Central Court must have closely resembled that of the fresco, and in one important respect we have evidence of a remarkable conformity. It has been already noticed that the architectural features of the façade as given in the painting tend to show that while the central opening led to a small chamber, the round ends of the roof beams of which are visible above the architrave, the two wings were open, or at most fronted shallow recesses. The traces of the shrine before us indicate a precisely similar arrangement. We have evidence of a central cell, but the two wings must obviously have been open. The northern of these is simply backed by the narrow oblong space in front of the older palace wall, in which the seal impressions were found. The southern pillar wing really performs a structural function in supplying light to what seems to have been a little inner area serving as a fore-court to the "Room of the Column Bases," a kind of ante-chamber to the Pillar Rooms. At the southern end of this little area, flanking the flight of steps that led down from the Central Court to the ante-chamber and Pillar Rooms beyond, was a small stone bench looking towards the recess in which I have recognised the lower part of the central *cella* of the shrine. It may therefore have served some similar use to the watching stations beside mediæval shrines, and the sacred contents of the lower compartment of the *cella* were possibly visible from it.

In the restored elevation of the shrine, as shown in fig. 3, the system of colouring is taken over from that seen on the fresco. The orange-brown colour, as noted above, represents the woodwork frame of the building, and in a perspective drawing Mr. Fyfe has made the tenons shown in the upright supports of each section to correspond with the ends of horizontal beams (or, in the case of the wings, of shorter pieces), running along the sides. According to this view, these side beams divided the uprights into a series of sections. On the other hand, it is possible that they did not come through as far as the front surface, but were simply socketed at intervals into posts that ran up the full height of the façade, forming one continuous piece. As has been already pointed out above, we may, at any rate, be fairly sure from the general analogies presented by the palace that what was actually seen on the surface of the building was not the woodwork construction itself but the coating of coloured plaster that masked and protected it. As a matter of fact the plaster coating, apparently with a white facing, that covered the limestone blocks of the podium is still visible in places at its base.\*

The height of the central *cella* of the shrine as shown in the restored elevation is somewhat over that indicated by the proportion borne by the seated figures to the shrine on the fresco. It is 13 feet, or a little over 4 metres, as compared with about 9 feet. It is possible, however, as suggested above, that the size of the court ladies on the fresco was somewhat exaggerated in proportion to the building. The fresco design itself can certainly not be regarded as a nicely measured architectural elevation, and some latitude is allowable as to the proportions given. Neither is it necessary to suppose that the dimensions of the shrine on the Central Court exactly corresponded with that depicted on the fresco. The plan itself is variant in the two cases, the present building having, *ex hypothesi*, only a single column in the central compartment.

The reconstructed shrine is 16 feet 6 inches (about 5 metres) in width, and the two wings 9 feet (or 2¾ metres) in height. This latter result is interesting, as the measurement exactly corresponds with the depth of the central compartment. A comparison of the plan [fig. 2] with the façade as restored in fig. 3 will give a good idea of the character of the little shrine such as we are able to reconstruct it on the basis of the existing remains and by the light of the miniature fresco. The *cella*, which apparently had another small chamber beneath it, must have been very small; but at the same time it would have been large enough to contain such cult objects as were found in position in a little shrine of somewhat later date in the south-eastern

\* This stucco facing is seen at the base of the left wing of the shrine, as reconstructed, along the borders of the pavement, here preserved, of the Central Court. It goes

down behind the cement slip of the edge of the pavement, a fact observed by Mr. Noel Heaton.

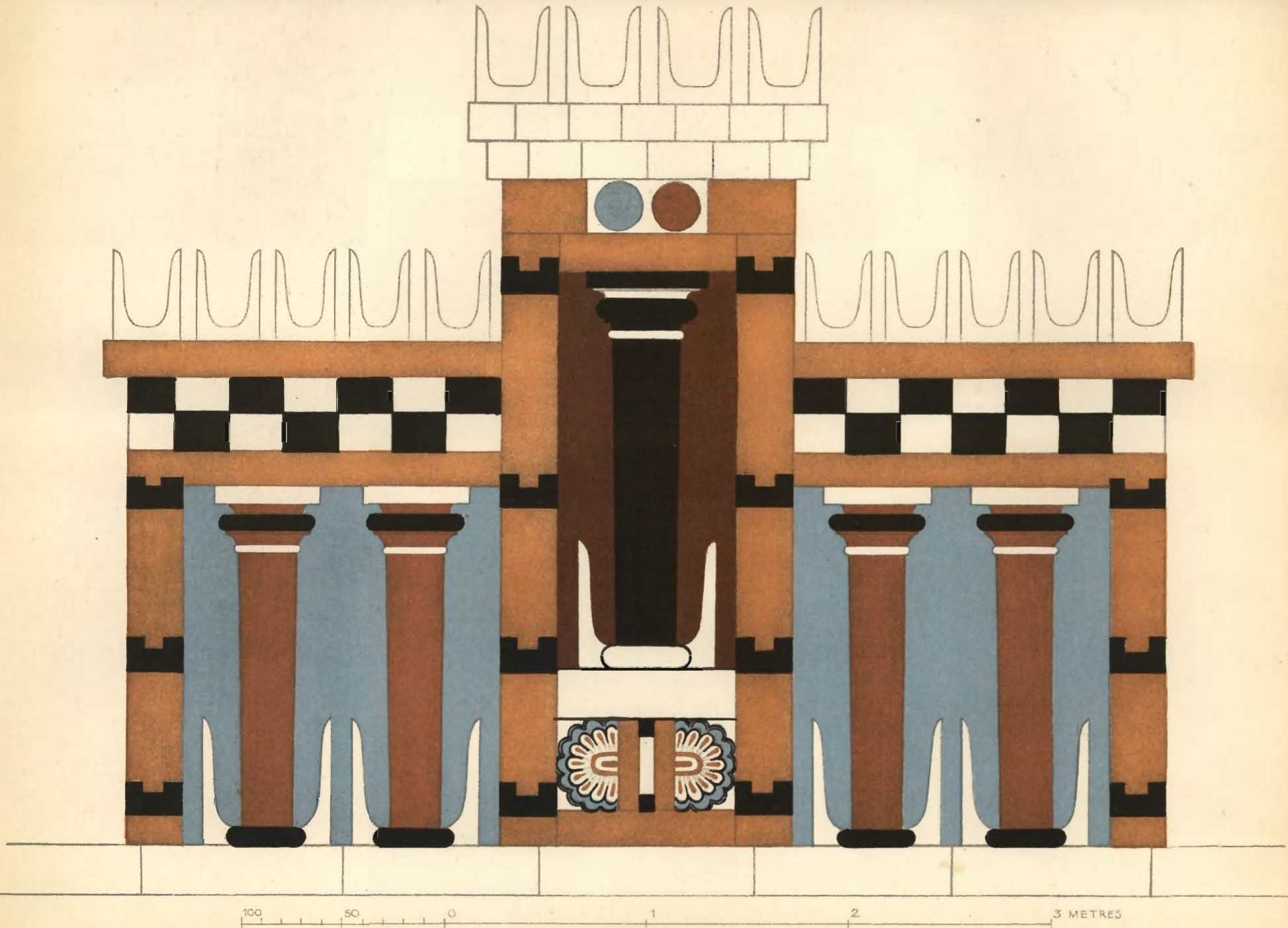


FIG. 3.—FAÇADE OF SHRINE ON CENTRAL COURT AS RESTORED ON THE ANALOGY OF "MINIATURE FRESCO."



quarter of the palace. These consisted of small terra-cotta images of the goddess and her votaries and two plaster "horns of consecration" of somewhat diminutive size, with sockets between them for the shafts of the "fetish" double axes, and the head of a miniature double axe of steatite.\* These objects stood on a ledge 1.50 metres long by 30 centimetres deep and about 60 high, within a small chamber about a metre and a half square. In this case, as in that of a small shrine with rude stone fetishes found in the Little Palace, the holy objects had been simply placed in an existing walled space belonging to the earlier building, and there was no specially constructed sanctuary.

The space in front of the ledge in the "Shrine of the Double Axes" referred to above was occupied by a plaster hearth and various vessels for food offerings or libations. It is quite possible that the little open area between the present *cella* as reconstructed and the neighbouring stone bench may have been made use of for offertory vessels of the same kind.

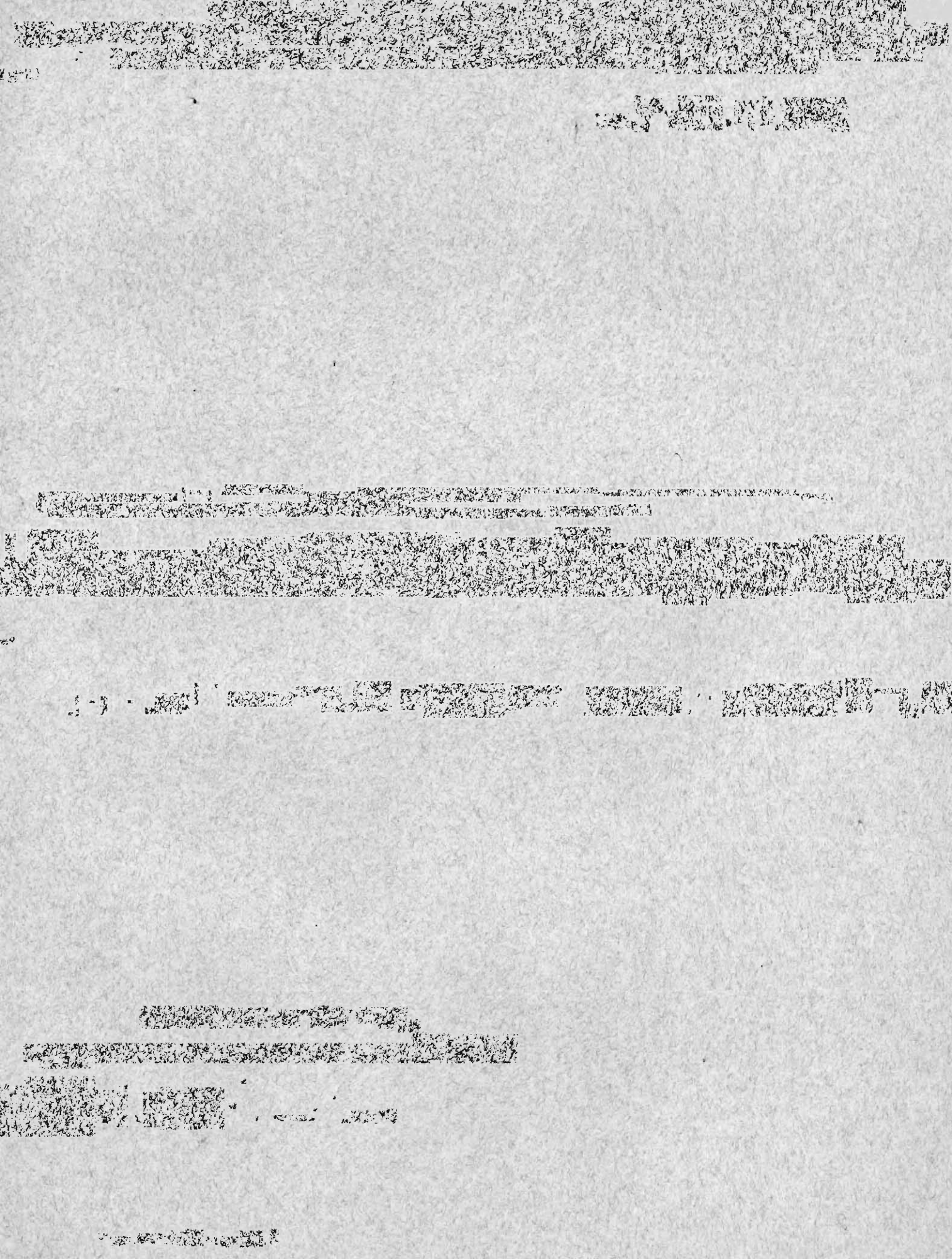
The ground plan (fig. 2) shows the reconstructed shrine in its relation to the neighbouring part of the building. The religious connexions of the environment are here seen clearly marked. In the elongated area behind the north wing of the little sanctuary were found the seal impressions already referred to showing a Goddess, the prototype of the later Rhea, on a lion-guarded height and a pillar shrine beside her. In the adjoining space were the repositories containing the figures of the snake Goddess and her votaries and the fittings of an earlier shrine belonging to the close of the Middle Minoan Age. Adjoining these again are the Pillar Rooms, which in view of numerous discoveries must be regarded as crypts serving a distinct sacral function; and by these, again, the chamber that contained the lioness-headed rhyton and a whole store of vases of ritual use.

\* *Report of the Excavations of the Palace of Knossos (1903)*, p. 95 sqq.



RITUAL VESSELS FROM STONE VASE ROOM ADJOINING SANCTUARY.





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