

A SANCTUARY OF ZEUS MESSAPEUS: EXCAVATIONS AT APHYSSOU, TSAKONA, 1989

(PLATES 3–6)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to the Greek Ministry of Culture for granting permission for the excavation to take place at *Tsakona*. Dr Th. Spiropoulos, Ephor of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities, Arkadia and Lakonia, gave full support and encouragement, with the help of his assistant, Mrs Rosaki. The Managing Committee of the School approved my proposal to excavate and, together with the British Academy, provided funds for the work.

The site was identified by the School's Lakonia Survey; I am grateful to the directors Dr W.G. Cavanagh and Professor J.H. Crouwel for agreeing to my suggestion that I should seek approval for an excavation. Thanks are due to Philip Baker, Tristan Carter, Charles Catling, Richard Catling, Jenny Doole, Eric Ivison and James Whitley, Students of the School, for their work as site supervisors or site assistants. The survey was undertaken and the finished plans and sections which illustrate this report were drawn by David Smyth, the School's Honorary Surveyor. Elizabeth Catling kept house for the excavation party, organised the workshop, and drew the objects illustrated here. Lieve Hibler worked as conservator. The small work-force came chiefly from Aphyssou, under the School's Knossos Foreman, Mr Nikos Daskalakis, with the skilled assistance of Mr Andreas Klonis, of Knossos.

The excavation party greatly enjoyed a visit from the School's Chairman, Professor J.N. Coldstream, during the fourth week of work.

I have benefitted from the advice and ideas of Sir John Boardman, Richard Catling and David Hibler. I am responsible for the errors and solecisms in this report.

FOREWORD

This is a very brief interim account of what was in effect the rescue excavation of one of several hundred sites identified by the Lakonia Survey between 1983 and 1988.¹ That survey, under my general supervision, has been a collaboration between the British School at Athens and the University of Amsterdam, led by Dr W.G. Cavanagh and Professor J.H. Crouwel respectively. The survey itself was the sequel to several years excavation by the School at the Bronze Age settlement and Archaic and later shrine at the Menelaion,² in the village lands of Aphyssou, two and a quarter kilometres ESE of Sparta, as the crow flies. That work, in turn, was the long-deferred continuation of the British School

¹ For the Lakonia Survey, see *AR* 1983–84, 27–8; *AR* 1984–85, 24–5; *AR* 1985–86, 30; *AR* 1987–88, 26; *AR* 1988–89, 37; *Lakonikai Spoudai* 9 (1988), 77–88.

² For references to preliminary accounts of the Menelaion work, *BSA* 76 (1981) 71, n.2, to which add *AR* 1985–86, 29–30 and *AR* 1988–89, 36.

excavations at the Menelaion in 1909 and 1910,³ part of the first major round of British activity in Lakonia in the early years of the present century, of which the excavation of the sanctuary of Artemis Orthia was the centrepiece.⁴

It was apparent to the survey team which identified the *Tsakona* sanctuary in 1984 that this hilltop site had suffered greatly from erosion; this potentially poor state of preservation was greatly aggravated a year later when the farmer with grazing rights to the land⁵ cultivated part of it with a heavy tractor-drawn plough, scraping off much of the surface soil in the process. The final blow came in July 1988 when, during July and August, the site was badly burned at the S limit of disastrous fires that destroyed thousands of olive trees from N of Sellasia, through the village lands of Voutianoï, Ayios Ioannis Theologos, Kalyvia Theologou, Klada, Kokkinorachi and the N outskirts of Aphyssou (see FIG. 1). This left the *Tsakona* hill completely bare and exposed to what was feared would be a greatly accelerated rate of erosion. Surface finds made by the survey, including architectural terracottas, potsherds and many complete and fragmentary handmade terracottas, suggested the site was of interest, and that an effort to salvage what information might still survive would be justified, even though it was recognized that very little would have escaped unscathed the vicissitudes described above. Inspection of the site in late summer 1988 showed no time was to be lost; thanks to the most helpful response from all the authorities concerned, it proved possible to undertake an excavation from 8 May–9 June and 14–18 August, 1989, during which the surviving structures on the site were completely excavated, and tests were made on the hill-slopes to N and S.

LOCATION (FIG. 1)

Modern Sparta, like its Dark Age, Archaic, Classical, Hellenistic and Roman predecessors, lies on a group of low hills close W of the river Eurotas, with, behind it and further to the W, the great N–S spine of the Taygetos range, whose easternmost outliers are only a few kilometres away. E of the river its valley is defined by the deeply scarred marl and conglomerate escarpment that marks the W limit of the Parion range. NNE of Sparta, behind Klada and Kokkinorachi, the river Oinous has its confluence with the Eurotas, having flowed through its own deep valley E of, and behind Ayios Ioannis Theologos, Voutianoï and Kalyvia Theologou. The view E and NE from Sparta dwells on the eroded escarpment, conspicuous for the strongly coloured reddish-brown marl of which it is very largely composed. The way into the Parion massif from the Eurotas valley is provided by several E–W valleys – great erosion scars – which give access to the broad, upland plateau on which stands the village of Chrysapha, surrounded by a complex of ancient sites dating from Early Helladic times to the Late Byzantine period. One of these valleys now carries the modern Sparta–Chrysapha road, that branches off the Sparta–Geraki road. Soon after passing a large group of active lime-kilns, this road enters the valley and begins the climb towards the Chrysapha plateau. At the start of the climb, a conspicuous landmark, on the tip of a sharp spur pointing at Sparta, is the small ruined church of Ayios Yeoryios, high up above the road ('Church' on the area plan, FIG. 1). To the E of this ruin the spur broadens out and rises in a series of very shallow steps to a local

³ *BSA* 15 (1908–09), 108–157; *BSA* 16 (1909–10), 4–11.

⁴ R.M. Dawkins, Ed., *The Sanctuary of Artemis Orthia at Sparta*, London, 1929.

⁵ I acknowledge with thanks the agreement of Mr G. Plakakis, of Aphyssou, to my proposal to excavate at *Tsakona*.

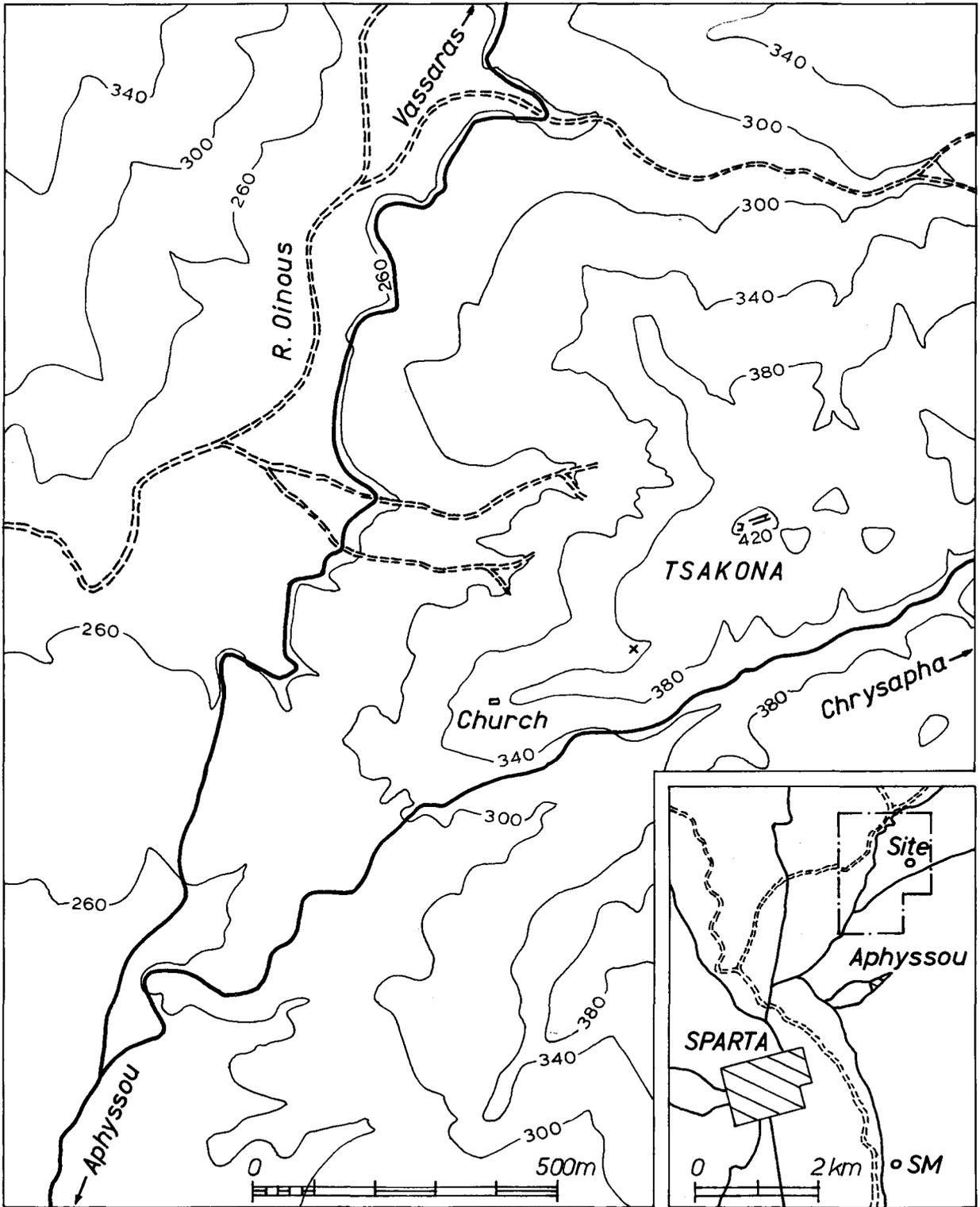


FIG. 1. *Tsakona*: Area Plan

summit of 423 metres above sea level. The whole of this spur east of the ruined church is *Tsakona*, once part of the lands of the Monastery of the Ayii Tessarakonta, which stands two kilometres further ENE on what is, in effect, the E extension of the *Tsakona* ridge.

Our sanctuary occupied the highest point on *Tsakona*, on the largest of a group of closely adjacent flat hill-tops. The position commands extensive views to all points of the compass. Immediately N and NNE it overlooks the lower valley of the Oinous with, behind it to the N, the rounded outline of the hill identified by many as the site of ancient Sellasia, but more generally known locally as the hill of Ayios Konstantinos. From NE to SE the view embraces the rising succession of peaks that between them make up the western part of Parnon. To the S and SSW is the escarpment above the Eurotas, on one promontory of which the Menelaion can be identified, five kilometres away, S by W. In line behind it, another three kilometres away, is the shrine of Apollo Hyakinthos at Amyklai, site of an important Bronze Age settlement and, it seems, Mycenaean sanctuary.⁶ Further W much of the upper valley of the Eurotas is to be seen, backed by Taygetos, in one of whose side-valleys running back to the W is Kalyvia tis Sochas, site of the Eleusinion.⁷ Closer at hand (four and a half kilometres SSW) is Sparta itself. The sites of the sanctuaries of Artemis Orthia and Athena Chalkioikos are easily identified. Further away are Mystras (eight and a half kilometres SW) and the mouth of the Langada Pass at Trypi (nine kilometres WSW).

THE SITE (PLATE 3a, FIGS. 1 and 2)

Until 1988 there was, a kilometre to the E, a very large area used by the municipal authorities of Sparta as a dump for the town's domestic rubbish. The presence of this dump (which has been a major fire-hazard for the surrounding countryside, and the source of great anxiety on the part of those whose land abuts it) effectively closed off the most natural means of access to the site, from the direction of the Monastery of the Ayii Tessarakonta. *Tsakona* is now approached from the S, up the steep hillside from the Sparta–Chrysapha road, following a track bulldozed along the hill flank by those farming the *Tsakona* spur. Other, similar tracks exist on the N side, descending to the Oinous and, ultimately, Kokkinorachi and Klada. This pattern of modern communications is of little help in identifying the ancient means of access. It is possible that those coming from Sparta followed the line of the modern road to Chrysapha, continuing up the valley to a point well to the E of the shrine, from which they would have doubled back to the W once they had reached something like the same contour.

The hilltop selected for the sanctuary is a prominent feature of the *Tsakona* ridge, or spur. The land slopes away steeply on all sides except the SE (where a narrow saddle connects it with an adjacent hilltop) and the W, where it descends in relatively shallow narrow terraces to the top of the spur and the ruined church of Ayios Yeoryios. Near the spur, the survey reported the existence of a Middle Bronze Age occupation site; traces of a spring have been noted on the slopes below this site to the N. The focus of the sanctuary occupied a space 45 metres E–W, ten metres N–S, but the scatter of votives down the N and S slopes extended on a line of at least 75 metres long.

⁶ See K. Demakopoulou, *To Mykenaiko Iero sto Amyklaio kai i YE IIIC Periodos sti Lakonia*, Athens (dissertation).

⁷ See J.M. Cook and R.V. Nicholls, *BSA* 45 (1950), 261–98.

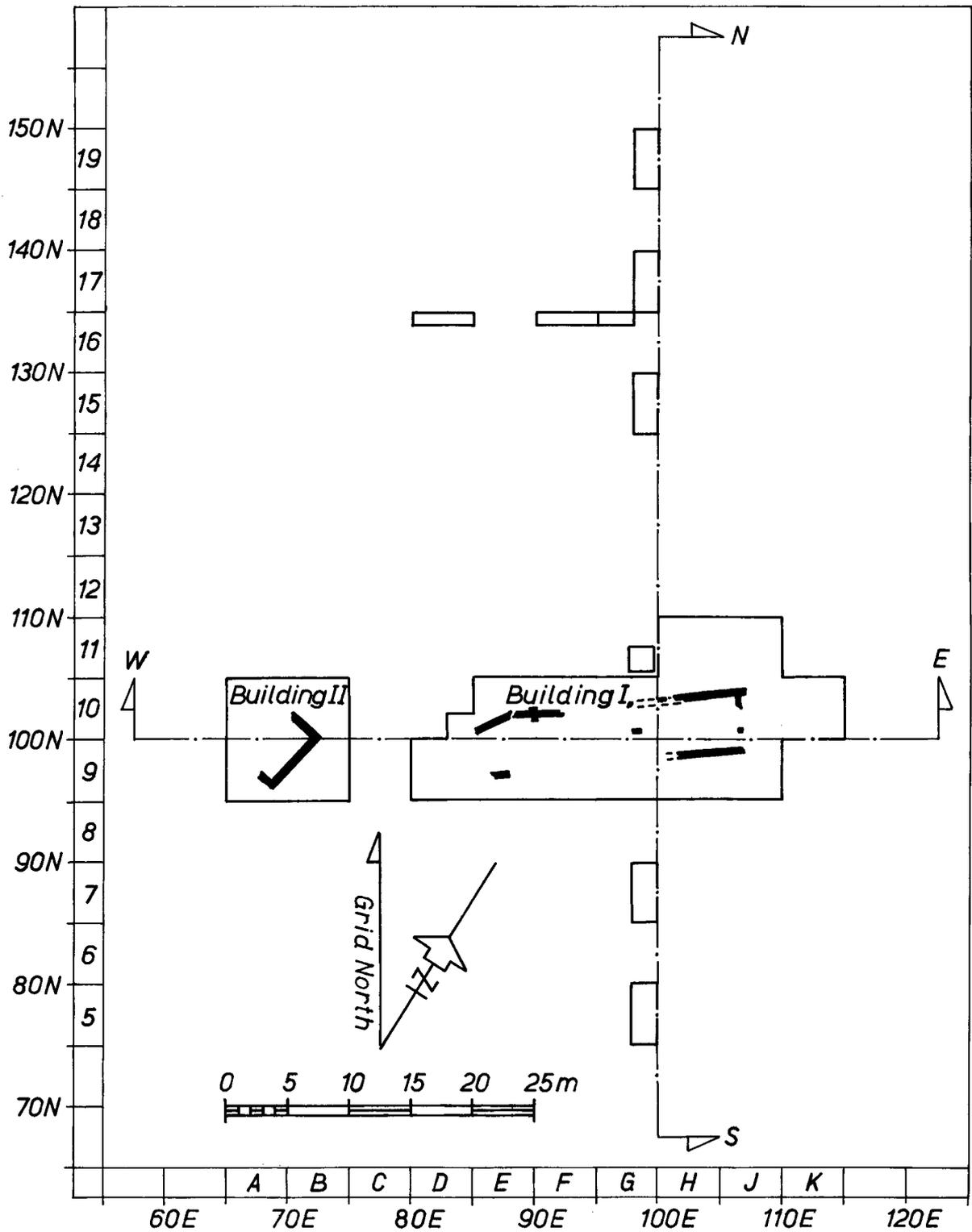


FIG. 2. *Tsakona*: Site Plan and Grid

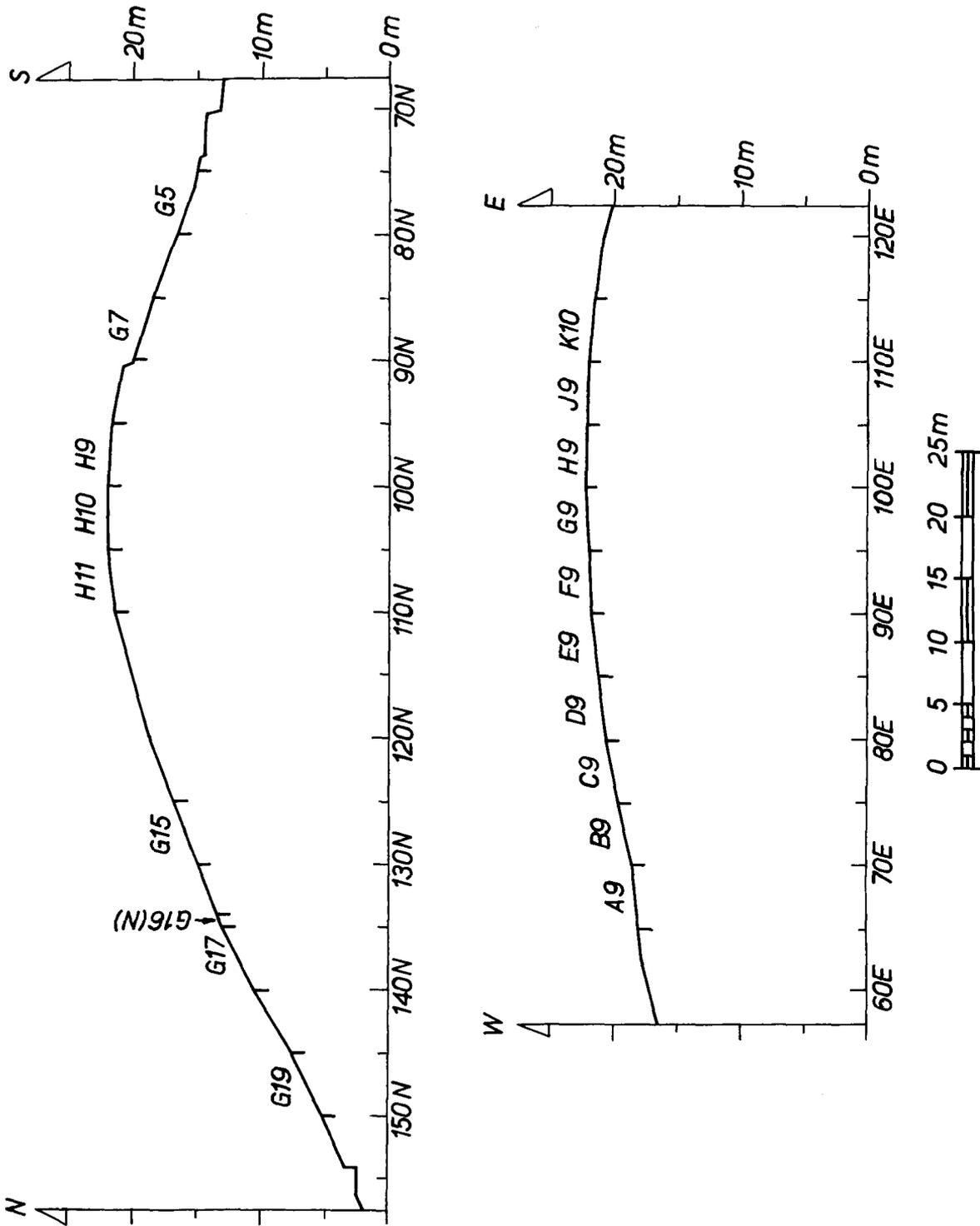


FIG. 2. *Tsakona*: N-S and E-W hill profiles

Two buildings were identified: Building I, the main shrine, and Building II, an ancillary building of unknown function. Building I stood on the hilltop, its long axis orientated NE–SW, following the long axis of the hill. Building II began fourteen metres SW of the W extremity of Building I, orientated N by E and S by W. It had been set into a natural scour at the W edge of the hill, evidently taking advantage of, and perhaps improving upon a natural feature, and accepting its constraints, rather than imposing itself as part of a preconceived formalised plan. No sign was found of a *temenos* wall. Both the location of surface finds, and subsequent excavation showed that the major erosion route for material from the site lay down the long, steep N slope of the hill. Much material had also slipped down the S slope, but very much less was recovered to E and W, where the hill profile was very different (see hill sections, FIG. 3).

SURFACE INDICATIONS

The first evidence by which the site was identified by the Lakonia Survey in 1984 consisted of several handmade terracotta statuettes picked up on the modern track at the foot of the site's N slope. At this date, both the slopes and the hilltop were covered in dense scrub, which made exploration difficult, though not impossible. It was clear, however, that the terracottas and associated pottery had washed down slope from the hilltop where, despite the scrub, traces of building remains, including fragments of glazed roof-tile, were to be seen. On the E side of the hill, part of a disk akroterion was found. The combined evidence of the surface material pointed to a sanctuary, including a building roofed with terracotta tiles and enhanced by architectural embellishments. This analysis was reinforced after the subsequent ploughing and fire damage; more terracottas were found on the N slope, while the plough had ripped out stone from buried walls whose lines were suggested by the manner in which the despoiled stone lay on the surface. Towards the E end of the area defined by the lines of surface stone was a patch of very dark soil, hinting, perhaps, at the presence of a hearth. At the W extremity of the site, below the edge of the hilltop, three or four stones were observed *in situ*, evidently part of a structure of some kind. It was thought possible they might belong to a *temenos* wall, though there was no other sign of such a wall on the same contour – or elsewhere.

Preliminary study of the surface finds by the Lakonia Survey suggested occupation of the site from the 8th century B.C. (based on a fragment of Late Geometric pottery from the foot of the N slope) until Roman times (based on fragments of mould-made lamps). Indications provided by the numerous terracotta statuettes of ithyphallic men, and a much smaller number of figures of pregnant women suggested a cult preoccupied with human reproduction. It was thought likely that the deity had been male.

A POSSIBLE IDENTITY FOR THE CULT

As reported in *BSA* 84 (1989), 187–97,⁸ supplementary work in 1987 by the Lakonia Survey led to the discovery of the fragment of a Lakonian cup on the surface, 250–300 metres SW of the sanctuary, at the point marked by a 'X' on FIG. 1. The cup fragment has been dated

⁸ See also *AR* 1987–88, 26 and fig. 26.

to the first half of the 6th century B.C.; it is made notable by its fragmentary graffito inscription:

---] ΕΜΕΣΑΠΕΥ

This text has been recognized as a dedication to Messapian Zeus, a title of Zeus only attested in Pausanias and Theopompos.⁹ Note is taken that Pausanias refers to a *temenos* of Zeus Messapeus seemingly on the W side of the Sparta plain, somewhere N of the modern village of Xerokambos. Attention is also drawn to the recent publication by I.G. Taiphakos¹⁰ of a fragmentary tile-stamp found in Christou's excavations at Anthochori, two kilometres S of Xerokambos. The tile-stamp has been restored:

δαμό]σιοι Διός
Μεσσα]πέος φαρ[

This has suggested to the authors that a shrine of Messapian Zeus was located at the settlement of Anthochori. They recognized the possibility of more than one shrine with this dedication in the Sparta valley, but were commendably cautious about identifying the *Tsakona* site as a second Zeus Messapeus shrine, on the strength of a single find, one which had anyway strayed a considerable distance from the *Tsakona* shrine, if that was indeed where it originated. The 1989 excavation, however, has shown that there almost certainly *was* a shrine of Zeus Messapeus at *Tsakona*.

THE EXCAVATION (FIGS. 2, 3, 4 and 5)

The site was in an unattractive state when the excavation began. (PLATE 3b) The hilltop was deeply scarred by plough-furrows and disfigured by the blackened skeletons of the scrub bushes burned in the 1988 fire. Higgledy-piggledy lines of stone hinted at the position of erstwhile walls. That, in places at least, bed-rock was close to the surface was shown by the top scatter of variously sized water-worn pebbles ploughed off the surface of the underlying conglomerate.

A grid divisible into five metre squares (FIG. 2) was established, orientated to take account of the apparent axes of the building whose existence was inferred from the position of stone brought up by the plough. The grid encompasses the N and S slopes of the hill, as well as the hilltop (FIG. 3). FIGS. 2 and 3 show which grid squares were dug, in part or whole. The psychological effect of the grid was to lead us to think of its axes as N-S and E-W, when in fact they were NE-SW and NW and SE. FIGS. 2-5 show clearly the difference between magnetic North and grid North.

The first phase of excavation was directed to stripping off as much topsoil as possible as quickly as possible to allow the underlying building to be seen as a whole with the least delay, establishing subsequent excavation priorities in good time. The open-area technique was followed, no baulks being left, sections being drawn as the work progressed. This proved a correct strategy. The scanty and badly damaged remains were difficult

⁹ Pausanias 3. 20. 3. Stephanos of Byzantium citing Theopompos on Μεσσαπέαι.

¹⁰ *Peloponnesiaka* 12 (1976-77), 219-22.

enough to interpret as they were revealed by this open system; they would have been unintelligible half-observed by a network of metre, or half-metre baulks. With very few exceptions, deposits were shallow (less than 0.50 m anywhere on the site), overlying the weathered cobbly conglomerate of which much of the hilltop *stereo* is composed.

Serious damage had been done by the 1986 deep ploughing. This damage was of two kinds. First, much of the *original* topsoil had been graded off the hilltop and dumped in heaps just below the N edge, together with a proportion of the accompanying scrub. These heaps had burned particularly fiercely in the 1988 fire, and were heavily blackened in consequence. Second, the remaining hilltop soil had been heavily disturbed by the plough, which in places had left narrow but easily recognizable furrow bottoms gouged into the *stereo*. Where they occurred, of course, it was clear no archaeological soil remained undisturbed. As the result, (see FIG. 4) remains of Building I were badly damaged; in places, particularly on the SW side, the wall had been obliterated, and any trace of foundation trench had gone with it. Elsewhere, the wall-line was recognizable, but badly damaged. At other points again, it was found quite well preserved. Fortunately, it seemed that the ploughman's technique was erratic. It was also fortunate that he had avoided one or two very large scrub bushes which had protected features which would otherwise certainly have been destroyed. Building II, on the other hand, had been out of reach of the plough, and was found in comparatively good condition; not only was it set into a cut in the W tip of the hill, but its E side had had additional protection from a sturdy wild olive tree that had succumbed to the fire.

The N and S slopes had not been damaged by ploughing; on the N side, an undisturbed wash layer was everywhere found, immediately beneath surface, varying in depth from .10 to .70 m.

With the exception of potsherds and roof-tile fragments, all objects were recorded three dimensionally, vertical measurements being recorded in relation to a site datum, using an engineer's level and Sopwith staff. A very few levels were measured by water-level. Publication of the site plan on which the locations of all objects recovered are recorded is reserved for the final report.

A high proportion of excavated earth was removed by rubber bucket to a shaker sieve to ensure as high a recovery rate as possible. Samples of archaeological soils were taken for laboratory examination, the results of which will be described in the final report. No froth flotation was attempted.

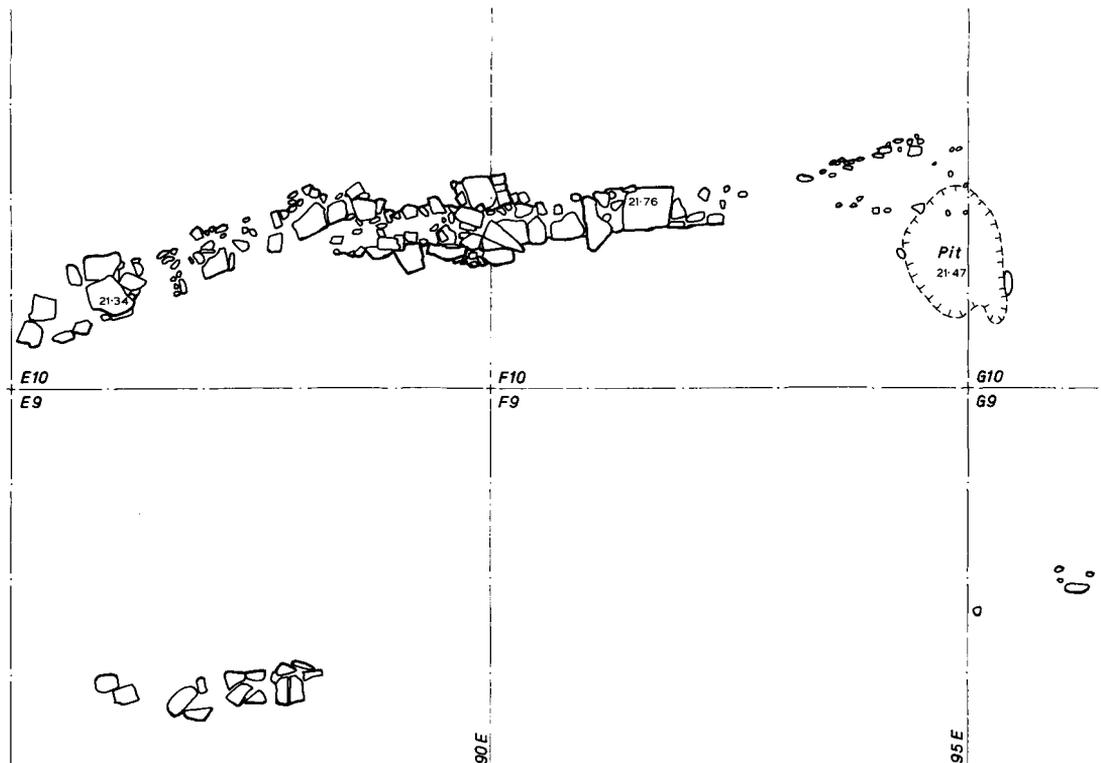
THE SANCTUARY

The combined evidence of the Lakonia Survey's study of the site and the 1989 excavation shows the *Tsakona* hilltop was the site of a small sanctuary comprising two buildings, Building I on the hilltop, Building II to its W. Terracotta statuettes, pottery and roof-tile from the area of Building I were found scattered broadcast up to 50 metres away down the N slope, and at least 25 metres down the S slope.

BUILDING I

(In Grid Squares E9,10; F9,10; G9,10; H9,10 and J9,10 – see PLATE 3c, d, FIGS. 2 and 4).

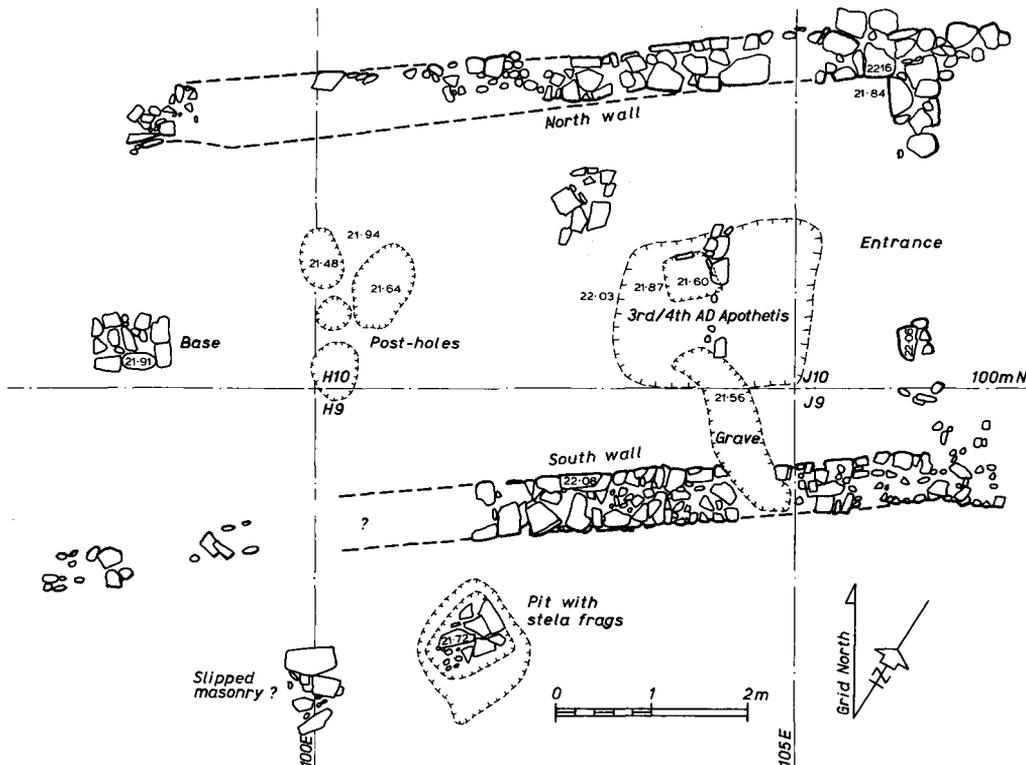
This was a rectangular stone structure built in the centre of the hill, its long axis roughly NE–SW, following the long axis of the hill itself. It was approximately 22 metres long, and

FIG. 4. *Tsakona*: Plan of Building I

five metres wide, overall. The walls, where well preserved, were 0.60 m wide. Though in most places only a single course of masonry survived, part of the SE wall still had five courses. There had been an entrance to the E, the exact width of which was not recoverable; it is likely to have been approximately 1.50 m. It is likely, but not certain, that the N and S walls extended as antas, though no sign was found of post-hole or column-base for the shaft that might have been needed to support the lintel of the resulting porch. Much of the centre of the N wall had been destroyed by the plough. Though the W end of the N wall survived, it was very confused, and interpretation of an apparent succession of building phases detectable at this end of the building can only be very tentative; all that remained were the stones of the lowest course. It will be argued in the final report that possible explanations include (1) a phase when Building I was six metres shorter than its observed size of 22 metres (2) that the evidence would anyway be ambivalent of the sequence of the larger and the smaller phases (3) that the three and a half metres at the W end of the N wall are differently aligned.

For the S wall, its E part was relatively well preserved (though it had been cut by a late grave); the central and W parts had almost completely vanished. The W wall itself could not be traced. It is unknown whether this end was rectilinear or apsidal.

With the exception of the E end of the N wall, where some – ?reused – small poros blocks were mixed with schist slabs, construction throughout was of varying sized



naturally fractured blocks or slabs of bluish schist. Though this material does not occur naturally on the *Tsakona* ridge, or its immediate vicinity, it forms the bedrock of the country further to the N and NE, and could have been brought to the site with comparatively little effort, from a distance of not more than three kilometres. It is unknown whether the walls were built to their full height in schist, or whether the upper courses were of mudbrick. The site was so denuded of deposit that the lack of horizons either of soil that could be interpreted as disintegrated mudbrick or of schist pieces that could have been fallen wall debris is of no significance for determining this point. No evidence was found to show whether the walls had been rendered, internally or externally.

If any part of the floor of Building I had ever been paved, no trace of such paving remained. Thanks to the recent deep ploughing, the floor was very difficult to detect at all; at one or two points, however, it seemed possible that a skim of marl had been spread over the conglomerate bedrock, and that this had served either as a floor surface, or sub-surface.

The building had certainly been covered by a roof of Lakonian glazed tiles, fragments of which were found all over the site, and in a heavy concentration in the SE quadrant of G10 and the NE quadrant of G9 (FIG. 4). This area of fallen roof, obviously, had escaped the 1986 ploughing, raising the suggestion that, until that event, there had been a destroyed roof horizon throughout Building I. Against this, however, is the fact that there was not a

corresponding volume of tile in the disturbed soil. Other roof material recovered included fragments of ridge-tiles, several antefix fragments, and a number of pieces of disk-akroteria. Interestingly, several joining fragments of the latter (PLATE 6a) came from inside, and close outside the building in G₁₀ and G₉, respectively. If these fragments could be shown to have been close to their position in the building where they were found, that fact would have very interesting implications for the final form of the building. Discussion of the possibilities must be reserved for the final report.

Inside Building I a limited number of features was identified. Not all could be explained. On the boundary between F₁₀ and G₁₀ (FIG. 4) a roughly oval pit was found, 1.40 x 1.00 m, some 0.50 m deep into *stereo*. No clue to its function was revealed by the fill, which nevertheless included a bronze spearhead with short socket, well preserved (PLATE 5a). Further E, just N of the G₉–G₁₀ boundary (FIG. 4) was a rectangular stone setting 0.80 x 0.60 m, roughly midway between N and S walls. Over it, but not in position, had been found one of the two joining fragments of the inscribed limestone pillar (*infra*) (PLATE 4c), the other having been recovered from the surface before the excavation began. Over a metre E of this setting was a complex of four small pits, encompassing an area of 1.80 m N–S x 1.00 m E–W. These pits could well have been used as post-settings; it could not be shown whether they had been used simultaneously, or in sequence. A number of iron nails or staples was found in the immediate vicinity, though not in the pits/post-holes themselves.

Just inside the E entrance was an extensive but shallow cutting in the *stereo*, 2.00 x 1.80 m, 0.20–0.30 m deep, found filled with very dark, ashy soil, containing many objects, including terracotta statuettes, miniature aryballoi, fragments of mould-made Roman terracotta lamps, and a few small scraps of glass. Encompassed within this cutting, or *apothetis*, was a small, almost square cutting, 0.50 x 0.46 m, up to 0.15 m deeper than the *apothetis* itself. Its filling was not distinctive.

Only two features were identified outside Building I. These were found close to the S wall, in H₉ (FIG. 4). On the G₉–H₉ boundary an arrangement of stone 0.90 m N–S x 0.50 m E–W seemed systematic but, if so, probably out of place. This might have been a block of masonry until recently *in situ* in Building I's S wall, dislodged and somehow realigned by the action of the plough. Two metres E, one metre from the S wall a pit was found 1.20 x 1.10 m, narrowing to 0.70 x 0.85 m, up to 0.50 m deep. In the pit-filling was a number of flat limestone slabs, deliberately and carefully placed flat in the pit, not thrown in at random. On cleaning and preliminary study these fragments were found to form parts of two slim, undecorated stelai, with surfaces carefully worked smooth and edges chamfered. It seems possible that these stelai had originally been set up somewhere in the sanctuary and that, having been damaged, it was felt proper that they should be buried within the *temenos*. If, as seems quite possible, the top of the pit fill was missed in the early stages of the excavation (where, in fact, it was dug through soil, not *stereo*), then it also contained the fragment of an inscribed limestone *halter* (*infra*).

A grave was found, orientated roughly E–W, cut into the S edge of the *apothetis*, the adjacent *stereo* (?floor), and through the S wall of Building I (FIG. 4; PLATE 4d). It contained the well preserved skeleton of an adult, probably a woman. The body had been placed extended on the back, facing E, the right hand over the pelvis, the left folded over the abdomen. There were no grave goods. The burial must post-date the abandonment of the sanctuary, no earlier than the 3rd–4th centuries AD. It is likely that no trace of the S wall of Building I survived above ground at the time of the burial, since those who dug the

grave would hardly have chosen to do so through the thickness of a wall, had they been aware of its existence.

BUILDING II

stood four metres WSW of the W end of Building I (PLATE 4 FIGS. 2 and 5), in grid squares Ag,10 and Bg,10. Before excavation, three stones of what proved to be its W wall appeared on the surface, where they were not understood; it was supposed they might form part of a *temenos* wall. Excavation quickly showed that they were part of a second building whose axes had been approximately N-S and E-W. Unfortunately, at the time of excavation, Grid North affected the way the building was described, so that what were in fact the East and West sides of the building were termed North and South, and *vice-versa*. The same solecism applied to the naming of the walls, so that what should actually have been described as the 'North' wall was termed the 'East' wall, and appears as such on FIG. 5. The other walls are similarly misnamed. In what follows, the wall descriptions are those that appear on FIG. 5, *not* the correct ones. Only the S part of Building II remained, having been protected by the shallow scarp of the up-slope side of what was probably a natural scour at the W end of the sanctuary hill. The small building platform created by this, admittedly hypothetical, natural scour may well have been enlarged and/or levelled for the construction of Building II. The natural processes of slope degradation were probably responsible for the destruction of the N half.

As preserved, Building II measured five metres E-W, and just over three metres N-S. The whole of the S wall, 1.40 m of the W wall and 3.10 of the E wall remained, but none of the N wall. Because of Building II's position on the E edge of the low saddle separating the sanctuary hill from the hill next to the SW, the recent tractor cultivation had missed it, with the exception of the W wall, which had suffered some damage. The saddle itself had been sadly mutilated by an abortive attempt to dig out the setting for a large water tank.

There was no trace of an entrance in what remained. The walls were up to 0.45 m thick, and in places stood up to 0.75 m high. Though largely built of schist blocks of varying thicknesses, some large water-worn cobbles derived from the local bedrock conglomerate were also used. The upper courses in the S wall had been pushed inwards out of alignment (FIG. 5), largely by the action of the roots of the small wild olive tree growing immediately outside it.

Building II apparently post-dated Building I. This was suggested by a heavy tumble of schist slabs and blocks at the E end of the scour, over which lay a level of dark soil containing one or two terracotta statuettes. The E wall of Building II was founded on top of this deposit of dark soil (FIG. 5). Further confirmation of the relative building sequence was provided by fragments of black glaze spherical aryballoi and two or three terracottas found in the makeup of the walls of Building II. The tip of schist at the E end of the scour might be explained as a dump of unused building material brought to the site for the construction of Building I. Whatever the explanation, schist, as we have seen, is alien to the site; this pile cannot have been intended for Building II, since it is partly built over it.

Inside the walls, immediately below a thin layer of surface soil, a layer of roof tiles was found (PLATE 4b), the majority of which were lying almost flat and, though broken, with their fragments closely articulated. Some of the tiles were complete, or nearly so. While it is tempting to explain this arrangement as deliberate, and suppose tiles were stripped off the roof and placed over the floor of Building II as part of a demolition procedure, it would

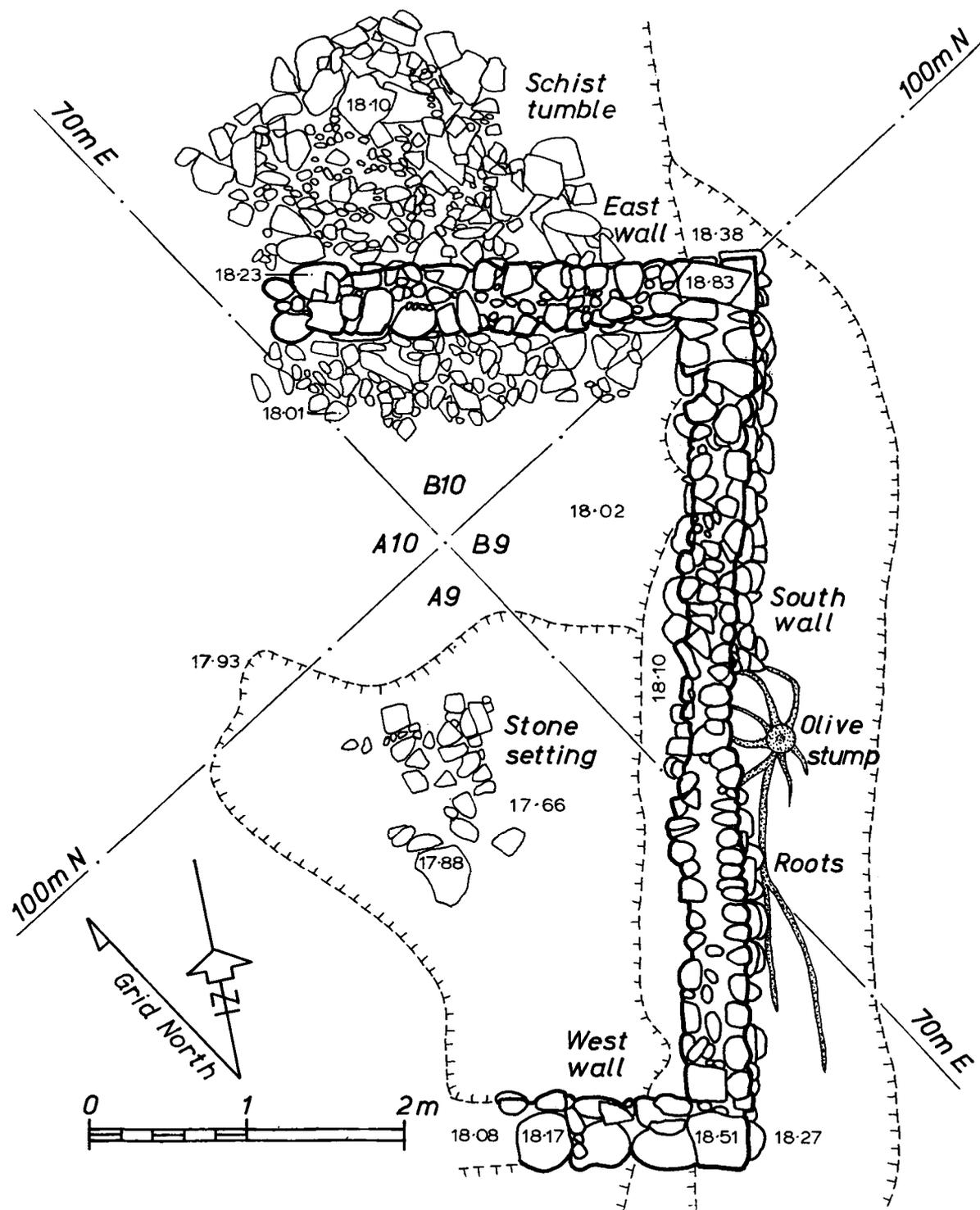


FIG. 5. *Tsakona*: Plan of Building II

be natural to expect this to have been done by stacking the tiles in vertical piles, rather than spreading them all over the floor. It is, nevertheless, striking that the roof should have collapsed inwards in such an orderly fashion. Under the tiles was found a deposit of dark soil which seems to have overlain an ill-defined floor of trodden earth and decayed conglomerate. The level contained numerous handmade terracotta statuettes, a few miniature aryballoi and several black glaze spherical aryballoi and black glaze stemless cups. There were also fragments of the body of a large black glaze hydria (?) with reeded body.

Building II contained no features that pointed to its function. A rather irregular setting of small schist slabs overlying *stereo* (FIG. 5), and a very irregular depression in the *stereo* surrounding the setting are, at present at least, unidentifiable.

THE SLOPES

FIG. 2 shows that a series of exploratory trenches was excavated down the slopes N and S of Building I (parts of G5, G7 on the S slope, G15; D, F and G16, G17 and G19 on the N slope). Up to 0.30 m of hillwash overlay the marl or conglomerate *stereo* on the slopes, with which were found many complete and fragmentary terracotta statuettes, complete miniature aryballoi, complete and fragmentary spherical aryballoi and pieces of roof-tile. Other finds included a bronze arrowhead and a bronze Roman coin. A few pieces of schist which could have been part of Building I were found singly; there were no concentrations of stone, and no traces of structures. Clearly, the N slope in particular must conceal very large numbers of the minor offerings made at the sanctuary; many others must have tumbled further down into the *revma* at the bottom of the slope, whence they will have been swept away and pulverised by the stormwater of successive winters' rains.

ASSOCIATED FINDS

If the material from *Tsakona* is compared with finds from other sanctuaries, not least with other Lakonian sanctuaries, it may appear rather meagre. The account that follows is not exhaustive, but no major category has passed unmentioned.

There were relatively few offerings of *bronze*. Mention has already been made of the spearhead from the pit in Building I (PLATE 5a). Of five arrowheads (PLATE 5b), four were found quite close together, in G10 and H10. One was of socketed, two-edged barbed type¹¹ suggested by Snodgrass as possibly Archaic. He reports the type is rare at Olympia, known at Marathon, fairly common at Perachora and in Sicily, and 'seemingly unknown elsewhere'. The other four were three-edged, with interior socket,¹² a type whose development was complete by the fifth century BC. Snodgrass mentions that the type was very widespread at Thermopylae, the Akropolis N Slope, and Olynthos. Several joining fragments of a shield facing came from G10. The fragments come from the rim, and are heightened by concentric repoussé relief ribs just inside the rim. A single small fragment of facing decorated in relief with guilloche pattern recalls others from Lakonian sanctuaries.¹³ Other small fittings from shields came from H9 and 10, G10. Small 'pins',

¹¹ A.M. Snodgrass, *Early Greek Armour and Weapons*, Edinburgh, 1964, 151 and fig. 10, no. 3A3.

¹² Op.cit. 153, and fig. 10, no. 3B3.

¹³ eg *BSA* 15, 145, fig. 13:18, from the Menelaion.

with flattened head bent over at right angles (PLATE 5e) came from H₉ and G₉. Unexpected, but unmistakable were two relatively large bronze jets, with the start of the runner in each case (waste material from the bronze-casting process) from F₁₀ (PLATE 5d). Since these objects are unlikely to have been dedications themselves, their presence hints at the casting of at least one substantial bronze votive offering within, or very near the sanctuary.

Over 100 *iron* objects were recorded, not all of which have yet been cleaned and identified. They include a socket, perhaps from a spearhead, and 28 nails, or staples. 20 of these were found relatively close together, in G₁₀, H₁₀. As suggested *supra*, they may be connected with whatever use was made of the complex of small pits/post-holes on the G₁₀/H₁₀ border. Only six iron pieces came from Building II; none came from either the N or the S slope.

While many Lakonian sanctuaries are particularly rich in small *lead* votives, often found in many thousands,¹⁴ the *Tsakona* sanctuary yielded only 25 lead objects altogether, of which only 20 were certainly votives, sixteen of them wreaths, two fragments of warriors, one grille and a possible diadem. Three of the lead objects came from the N or S slopes, three from Building II, the rest from F₁₀, G₁₀, H₁₀ and J₁₀, in and around Building I, with no concentration at any one point.

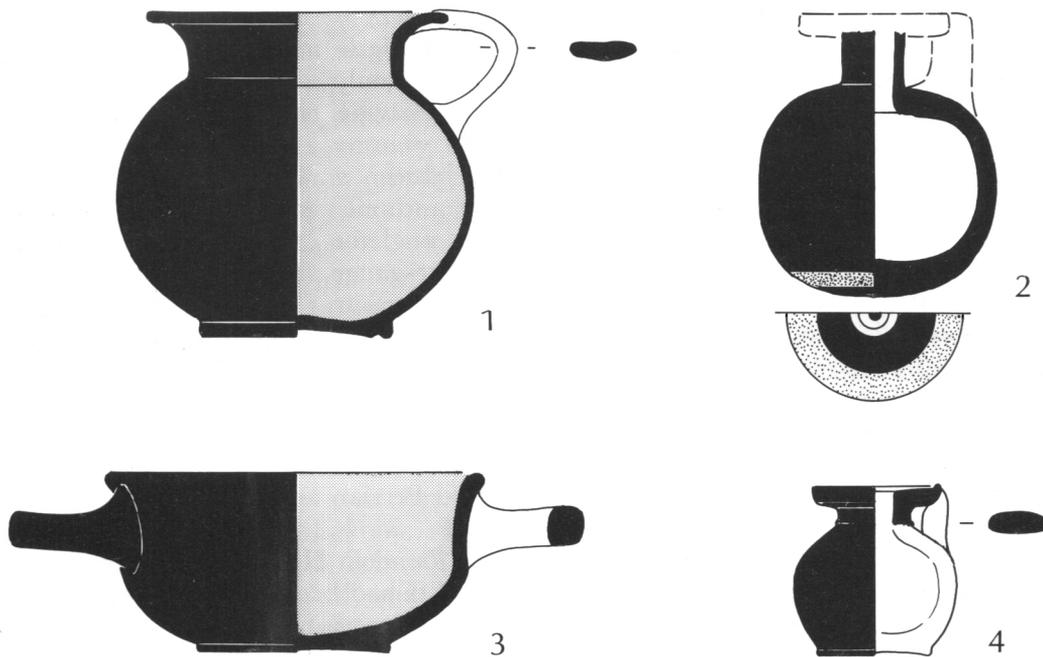
Handmade terracotta statuettes were, as has already been implied, ubiquitous (PLATE 6d). Over 2600 were registered, of which a large number is complete, or nearly so. Other registered items consist of heads, torsos or single limbs. The greatest number represent a crouching, sitting or kneeling male figure, with outsize phallos, sometimes cradled in the crook of the left arm, sometimes supported by both arms, occasionally unsupported, one hand raised to the head. Standing ithyphallic figures are very rare. Other human figure types, all rare, include a standing man leaning forward to clasp a low table with both hands, standing figures of undetermined sex, (apparently draped), standing figures of naked, pregnant women, figures of naked women, squatting, with legs spread apart (?women in parturition), a quadruped (presumably an equid) with panniers, an undifferentiated quadruped. The technique of these handmade terracottas was homogeneous. The figures are rarely over 8 cms high; in a good many cases they are considerably less. They are made of quite fine clay, cream to light brown in colour, with fine particles, but no obvious inclusions. The effect of firing has produced a soft to medium-hard biscuit; though a few show traces of a monochrome reddish-brown coating, the majority are reserved. Some facial features, fingers and, occasionally, toes, are shown by incision. The characteristic big noses were modelled by finger and thumb.

Fragments were also found of a very few *mould-made terracottas*, including a small and rather crude daedalic figure of a woman (quite possibly a vase-affix), a finely modelled late Archaic kouros head, and the head of a mature man, with jutting beard, (?late Archaic), itself possibly a vase-affix. The extreme rarity of undoubted free-standing mould-made figures is noteworthy.

Comparatively little *pottery* seems to have been dedicated at the sanctuary (FIG 6). What there was represents a limited range of shapes, and of sizes within those shapes. We may distinguish between miniatures (FIG. 6:4), dedication of which must largely have been a

¹⁴ A.J.B. Wace in *BSA* 15, 127–41. R.M. Dawkins, *Artemis Orthia*. More recently, W.G. Cavanagh and R.R. Laxton in

BSA 79 (1984), 23–36.

FIG. 6. *Tsakona*: Pottery from Buildings I and II

symbolic act since their capacity was infinitesimal, and normal-use vases, which may have played a role in the dedication of unguents (spherical aryballois FIG. 6:2), or in the pouring of libations (mugs, stemless cups FIG. 6:1, 3). Out of 450 registered 'pots', 347 are miniatures, 46 are normal size aryballois, six are stemless cups, two are mug-oinochoai. The remaining 49 items are of miscellaneous types, not always closely identifiable. The distribution of the registered 'pots' points to marked difference of function between Buildings I and II. In Building II there were eighteen normal-size aryballois, and only eleven miniatures. 302 miniatures were found in and around Building I, 32 normal size aryballois, stemless cups and mug-oinochoai. Of all normal-size vases, 55% were found in F10 and G10, and another 24% in H9 and H10. These relative proportions of miniatures and normal sized vases will doubtless require revision after the numerous unregistered pottery-lots (zembils) have been examined and recorded.

There was virtually no decorated pottery, and certainly none was found with figured ornament. Most of the normal size vases (particularly stemless cups, FIG. 6:3 and mug oinochoai, FIG. 6:1) are coated in black glaze. Some aryballois (FIG. 6:2) have bands of red and white paint on the underside, and are otherwise black glazed. Other aryballois are completely black glazed. Many of the miniatures (FIG. 6:4) are wholly or partly black glazed, but a large number are without any kind of coating.

The final, Roman, phase in the life of the sanctuary was demonstrated by the many *mould-made lamp* fragments found in the E half of Building I, with a major concentration in and around the *apothetis* just inside the entrance. No lamp was preserved even approximately complete (PLATE 6c). 388 lamp fragments were registered which, relying solely on the handles recovered, represents a minimum of 210 lamps. Preliminary examination of

the fragments preserving parts of decorated shoulders or discuses shows the material invites comparison with lamps published by J. Perlzweig from the Athenian Agora, dating to the third and fourth centuries AD.¹⁵ One of the only identifiable discus subjects is erotic – symplegma between woman and animal. Fragments of factory-owner signatures will repay future study.

Also attributable to the Roman period were eighteen small fragments of glass vessels thirteen of which come from H10, three from H11 and one each from H9 and J10.

Other finds worthy of mention occurred as singletons, including a fine cornelian scaraboid seal, pierced longitudinally by a very fine-gauge string-hole. There are several milk-white patches on the back and sides. The seal measures 2.2 x 1.8 cms, and is 0.5 cm thick. The intaglio depicts an archer striding to left, looking back to right (PLATE 5g). He wears a belted tunic, the folds in whose sleeves are clearly defined. He has tight curly hair, and is apparently clean shaven. He holds a strung bow in his right hand, and two arrows in his left. Professor Sir John Boardman, who kindly examined a cast and a photograph of the seal, considers it to be of Greco-Persian type, datable in the fourth century BC. He suggests this may represent a somewhat Hellenised Persian archer. The seal was found in H10, close W of the *apothetis*.

The fragment of a *halter* (jumping weight) was found in H9 (PLATE 5f), perhaps in the upper fill of the pit in which the plain stele fragments had been buried (*supra*). The halter, of rather ‘sugary’ limestone, has part of a two-line inscription, written retrograde. The lower line – more legible – seems to consist of part of a name KYNOΣ[--- The lettering suggests a late Archaic date for the inscription.

Two joining fragments of a much larger but, unfortunately, even more worn inscription were found, one in G10 amid the roof-tile deposit (PLATE 4c), the other brought up to the surface by the plough. The text had been cut longitudinally, on one of the faces of a limestone pillar, almost square in section. The two uppermost lines are clearly visible, though extremely difficult to read. Three more lines almost certainly existed, but have been nearly completely obliterated by the wearing of the stone. So far as the letter forms are legible, they appear to be Archaic.

THE IDENTITY OF THE CULT

Four or five fragmentary tile-stamps were recovered, which seem to identify the cult. They came from the E half of Building I (G9, H9 and H10). The best preserved of them (PLATE 5h) reads:

ΔΑΜΟCΙΟ
ΜΕCС[---

At least one other fragment confirms the MECC[--- of the second line. These finds should mean that, at the date at which the tiles were made, at least, the sanctuary was a state responsibility, and that the honorand’s title began with ‘Mess. . . .’, which it is tempting to restore as ‘Messapeus’. This restoration, obviously, is the more attractive in view of the

¹⁵ Particularly some of her Disk Patterned lamps – *Agora* 1470–1580, pls 28–9.
vii *Lamps of the Roman Period*, Princeton, 1961, 145–7, nos.

1987 surface find (*supra*) of an inscribed cup fragment with a graffito dedication to Zeus Messapeus, collected some distance from the sanctuary. That find, which has been dated to the first half of the sixth century BC, makes it likely that the sanctuary had always been dedicated to the same deity. Discussion of the implications of this identification and the relationship of the *Tsakona* sanctuary with the Zeus Messapeus shrine perhaps located at Anthochori, S of Xerokambos (apparently the shrine of Zeus Messapeus referred to by Pausanias), is reserved for the final report on this excavation.

SUMMARY

This preliminary account of the results of the 1989 *Tsakona* excavation has, quite deliberately, confined itself to a chronicle of the discovery and exploration of the site. Close analysis of the remains, and of the associated material, can only be offered after further study; only after that has been completed will it be possible to offer a considered interpretation of the site.

It must be re-emphasized that this excavation was merely an aspect of a much wider programme of research in Lakonia. The sanctuary was one of several hundred ancient sites recorded by the British School's Lakonia Survey, without which its very existence might have passed unremarked, and the site could well have been completely destroyed by further cultivation. Even so, the account given above shows the excavation was only just in time to recover some evidence for the identity and history of the site.

If the site was in continuous use from its beginnings in the seventh or sixth century BC until the third or fourth century AD, there are long stages within this period of nearly 1000 years for which no shred of evidence has survived. Might the site only have been used for relatively short periods at a time, have been abandoned and only brought back into use after long periods of inactivity? Building I, as we have seen, shows signs in its W half of architectural vicissitudes; unfortunately, these signs are too imprecise for any reliable reconstruction of the site's history to be attached to them. The following relative sequence of events suggests itself:-

- 1 Establishment of the cult on the *Tsakona* hill
- 2 Construction of Building I, first phase (small shrine)
- 3 Construction of Building I, second phase (large shrine)
- 4 Construction of Building II
- 5 Destruction of Building II and W half of Building I
- 6 Construction of Building I, third phase (small shrine)
- 7 ?Repair of W half of Building I, new alignment
- 8 Repair of Building I, third phase: use of *spolia* in N wall
Use of *apothetis*
- 9 Abandonment of sanctuary
- 10 Inhumation burial in E half of the ruins of Building I

Some of these events are certain, others conjectural to varying degrees. The least certain is no 2, which rests on subjective interpretation of the evidence for architectural phases in the masonry remains in E10, F10. No 7 is also conjectural, depending on the same evidence. Even if that evidence has been correctly interpreted, no 7's place in the sequence is uncertain.

The absolute chronology of *Tsakona* is imprecise and incomplete. Though further study will do much to improve this situation, the extreme meagreness of the stratigraphy will prevent an orderly succession of datable events. While there certainly exists a sequence of datable objects that, between them, can probably be shown to represent each of the ten centuries between the site's beginnings and its end, those objects unfortunately cannot be allocated to as many architectural or stratigraphic contexts.

When the site was identified by the Survey, one or two sherds found on the lower N slope suggested the site was already in use in the eighth century BC. None of the pottery found in and around Building I is as early as this; the only early object from Building I is a fragmentary Geometric bronze dress pin (PLATE 5c) from H10. We can do little more than note that cult may have started at *Tsakona* during the eighth century BC.

Pottery from the W half of Building I and from Building II suggests that these two units were abandoned at much the same time. The pottery (FIG. 6, 1 and 3) points to a date in the later part of the fifth century BC for that event. It is tempting to look for an historical context for this abandonment.¹⁶ Thucydides III.89 refers to the failure of the Peloponnesians in 425 BC to make their annual invasion of Attika, giving as the reason the prevalence of earthquakes at the time. If the region of Sparta itself had been affected by earthquake, perhaps our sanctuary suffered damage to add to the Spartan leadership's anxieties about the wisdom of pursuing their annual invasion plans.

If this analysis is correct, the whole of Building I may have been destroyed, of course, and only partly rebuilt at some later, indeterminable date. Perhaps it was in this reconstruction that our stamped tiles were used for the roof; these should be no later than the first century BC. While the sanctuary was in active use in the third and/or fourth centuries AD (clear from the mould-made lamps), there is no material datable to the first and second centuries AD; it may be that the cult, like the Menelaos and Helen cult, was not one that appealed to Rome. Perhaps it conveyed nationalistic overtones too overtly for even the most benevolent Imperial patron of Sparta to swallow.

There is as yet little to say of the nature of the cult itself. The complete absence of food debris from the site¹⁷ suggests that feasting had no part in the ritual, and makes unlikely an explanation of Building II as a dining room. With even the very limited number of offerings recovered from the site it is clear that quite a wide range of items was brought for dedication, including weapons, armour, athletic gear and a sealstone in addition to countless handmade terracotta statuettes, miniature vases and pottery. The complex of offerings suggests a male god attended by male worshippers. The weapons and armour may have been spoils of battle; it is, naturally, tempting to see in the socketed arrowheads material from the battlefield of Plataea, but of this there could never be proof.

It must be right to separate the obvious *dedications* (of which pitifully few survive) from the statuettes, which must tell us something of the reasons that brought men to *Tsakona*. Was the emphasis on male sexuality inspired by gratitude for potency, or anxiety concerning its efficiency. What was the relationship between the statuettes and the miniature aryballoi? Are we dealing with a Spartan attempt to respond to the problem of *oliganthropia*?

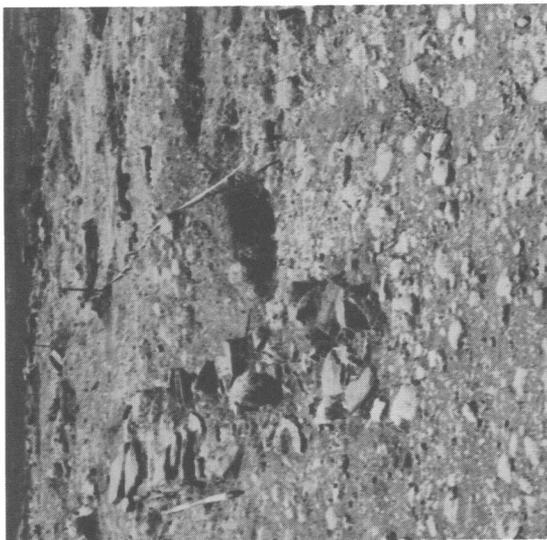
¹⁶ I am grateful to Richard Catling for this suggestion.

¹⁷ Virtually the only animal bones found were five *astragaloi* (three in H9, one in H10, one in K10), which were almost certainly brought to the sanctuary as bones,

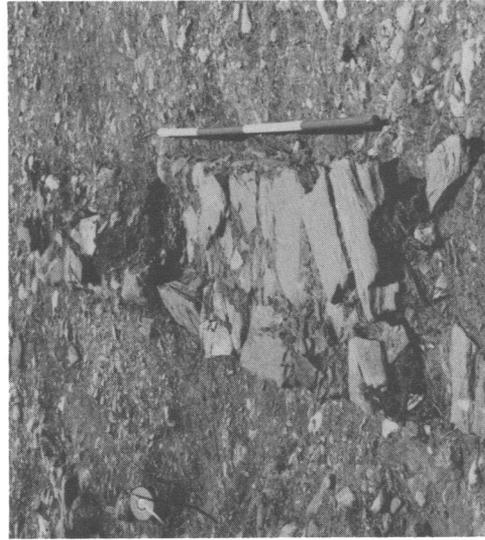
whether dedicated or left behind by accident. That they are more likely to have been dedicated is suggested by two terracotta *astragaloi*.

Evidence for Roman cult rests chiefly on the *apothetis* at the E end of Building I. This included many mould-made lamp fragments, and some glass sherds, but also a large number of handmade terracotta statuettes indistinguishable on summary study from the statuettes found in contexts assumed to be Late Archaic or Classical in date. Were the statuettes made throughout the use of the sanctuary, or did the last visitors to Building I pick up statuettes from the thousands which must still have been within the *temenos* and reuse them, together with a mould-made lamp and, sometimes, a glass vessel? If it is correct to believe the sanctuary was disused during the first and second centuries AD, how should we interpret this final period of use. Were these late visits born of conviction, or was there a self-conscious, almost antiquarian revival of the cult of Zeus Messapeus. Whatever the explanation, this was the final episode in the life of a Spartan sanctuary, whose very existence had remained unknown for more than 1500 years, until its discovery five years ago by the Lakonia Survey.

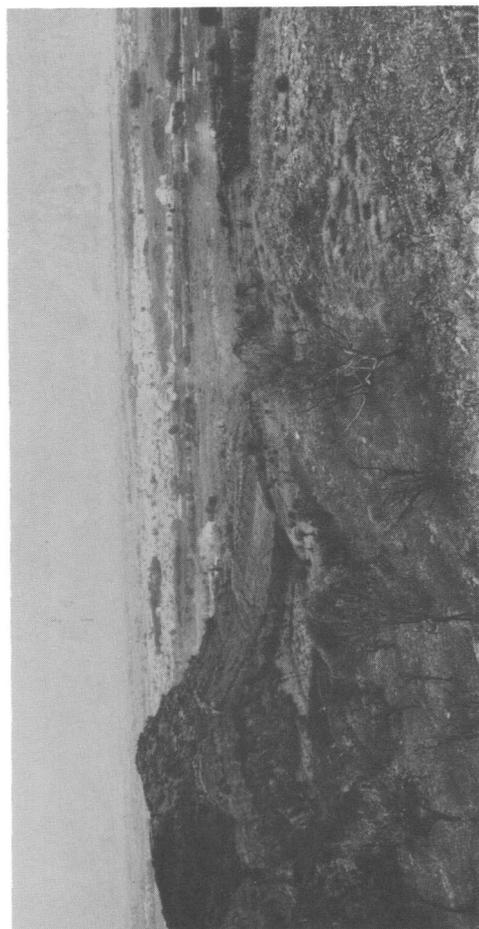
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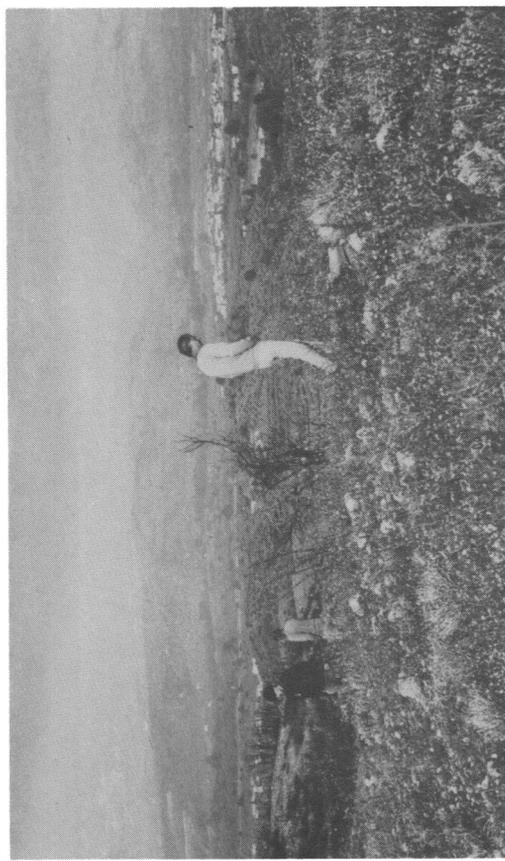
(b)



(d)



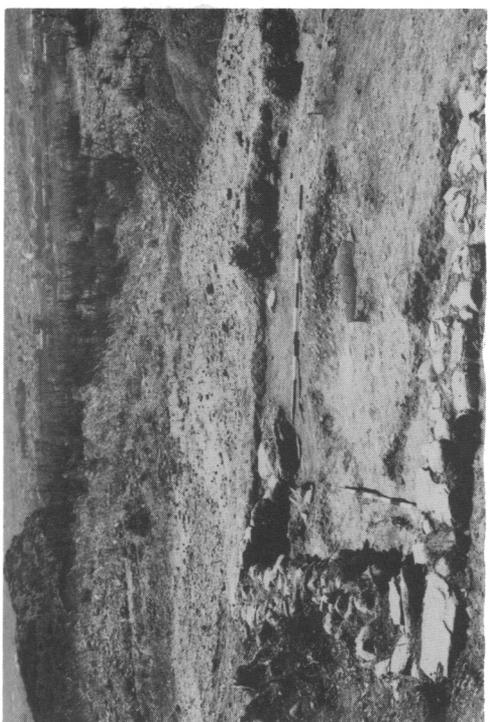
(a)



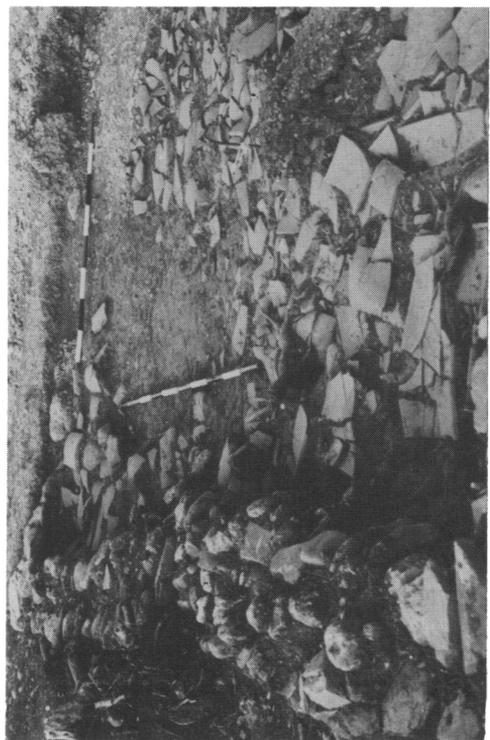
(c)

A SANCTUARY OF ZEUS MESSAPEUS
(a) View from the site SSW to Sparta; (b) Site before excavation, May 1989; (c) S wall of Building I from W Building I from W
(d) S wall of Building I from E;

PLATE 4



(a)



(b)

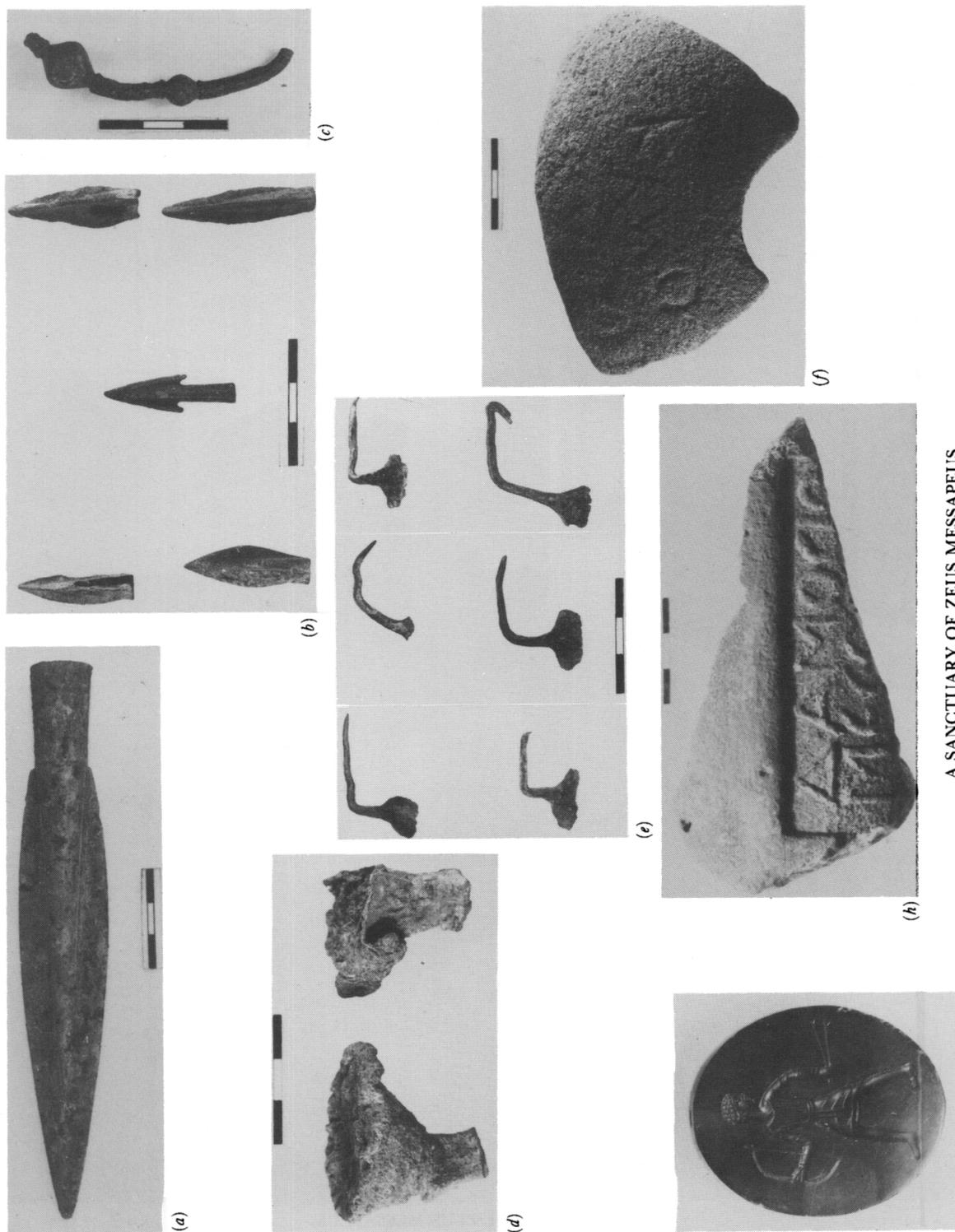


(c)



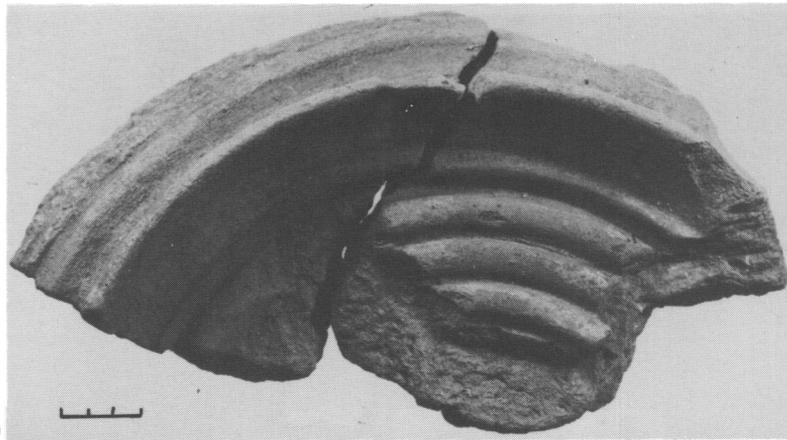
(d)

A SANCTUARY OF ZEUS MESSAPEUS
(a) General view of Building II from NE; (b) Roof destruction in Building II; (c) Tile collapse in Building I; inscription fragment *in situ*; (d) Building I – intrusive burial

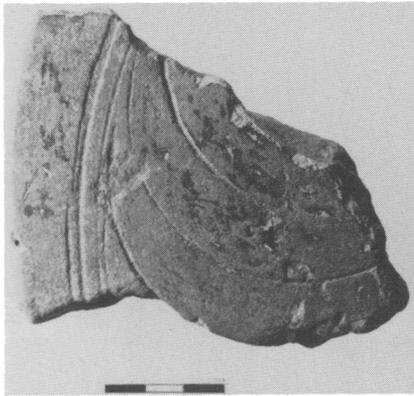


A SANCTUARY OF ZEUS MESSAPEUS
 (a) Bronze spearhead; (b) Bronze arrowheads; (c) Geometric bronze pin fragment; (d) Bronze jets; (e) Bronze 'pins'; (f) Inscribed halter fragment; (g) Greco-Persian gem: archer; (h) Tile stamp

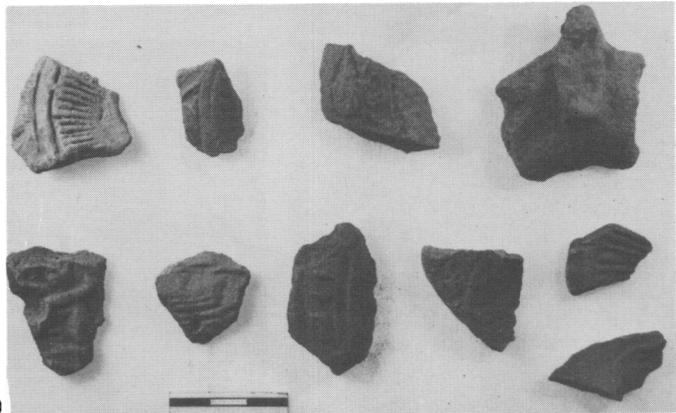
PLATE 6



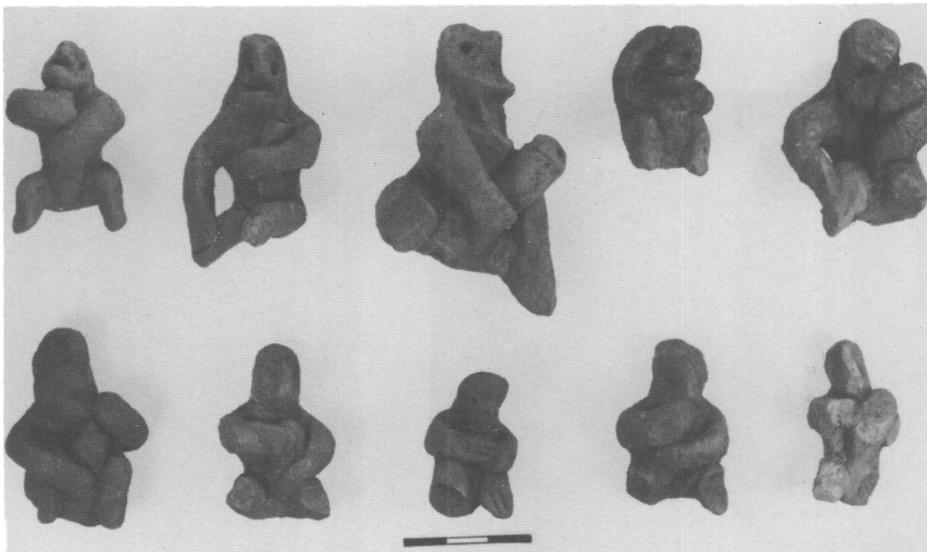
(a)



(b)



(c)



(d)

A SANCTUARY OF ZEUS MESSAPEUS

(a) Terracotta disk akroterion fragment; (b) Terracotta antefix fragment; (c) Mouldmade Roman lamp fragments; (d) Handmade terracotta statuettes