

The Wall Paintings of the West House at Mycenae





Pair of yoked horses facing left (WH F54).

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The Wall Paintings of the West House at Mycenae

by

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Preface

The wall paintings discussed in this volume were originally discovered in 1958 by Nikolaos Verdelis during the excavation of the West House, one of the four buildings, also known as the “Ivory Houses,” south of Grave Circle B, at Mycenae. A small number of specimens were illustrated by the excavator in his preliminary report of the excavation, in 1958 and 1963 (Verdelis 1958, fig. 125;β; 1963, figs. 53, 54).

When I was working on the architectural and archaeological material from all four buildings for my Ph.D. dissertation, between 1983 and 1988, and while I was preparing the final publication of these buildings between 1989 and 1994 (Tournavitou 1995), the wall paintings, stored in the Leonardon Apotheke at Nauplion, were unfortunately not available for study.

The material was incidentally “rediscovered” in 2004 in the storerooms of the new Mycenae museum, where they had been transferred, along with all the other archaeological finds from the site previously stored at Nauplion. This latent re-discovery of the material prompted a systematic study of the wall paintings from the building, which began in 2005 and was completed by 2009. During this period most of the fragments were cleaned, individual pieces were joined where possible, and the material, which had been already divided into distinct stylistic and thematic groups, was systematically recorded.

The wall paintings were photographed in 2010, courtesy of the Institute for Aegean Prehistory (INSTAP), by Chronis Papanikolopoulos, the photographer of the INSTAP Study Center for East Crete (INSTAP-SCEC). At the same time, a select number of samples were submitted by Hariclia Brecoulaki for chemical analysis at the Ormylia Foundation in Chalkidiki (see App. A). The professional drawing of selected material by Douglas Faulmann, the artist of the INSTAP-SCEC,

started the same year (2010) and continued, with interruptions, until the completion of this present volume in 2012.

The final publication of this material completes the cycle, which began with the original monograph on the Ivory Houses as a whole (Tournavitou 1995) and continued with the reassessment of the stratigraphy and architecture of the West House, undertaken almost 10 years after the original publication (Tournavitou 2006a). The decision to undertake the study and publication of the wall paintings signaled a directional U-turn as regards my personal academic and research interests, which were until then focused on technology, architecture, pottery, and other, mostly socioeconomic/sociopolitical aspects of the Bronze Age. This change of direction coincided, interestingly, with the beginning of an extensive project on religion and cult practice as manifested on Minoan peak sanctuaries (Tournavitou 2006b, 2009a, 2011, 2014), and with a minor side-project concerning the symbolic role of animals on the Tanagra larnakes (Tournavitou 2009b). Soon after (2010), the aftereffects of this reallocation of research interests culminated in another major project, the study and publication of the highly unusual, and in some cases unique, Mycenaean pictorial wall paintings from Argos (Tournavitou and Breccoulaki 2015).

Having been introduced to iconography and wall paintings relatively late in life, I retained an impatience for typology and stylistic trivia. What I was fascinated by was the pictorial element, more specifically, the underlying narrative, the elusive, yet retrievable canvas, tentatively emerging through the seemingly stylized and often hopelessly fragmentary wall paintings. I became inevitably intrigued by the anticipation of the unexpected, by the intellectual process leading toward the meaning of individual elements, a conscious indulgence, seeking individuality in a more or less public art, irreversibly tied to compelling sociopolitical strategies. This intellectual leap into the interpretation of pictorial imagery has gradually refined my understanding of the material world, and it eventually redirected my conceptual sensibilities to the multifarious, nonmaterial aspects of human behavior, for which I am immensely grateful.



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It is my pleasure to acknowledge the contributions of the many people and organizations that have made this volume possible. The excavations of the West House, directed by Nikolaos Verdelis between 1958 and 1960, were conducted under the auspices of the Archaeological Society at Athens, which graciously granted me permission for the study and publication of the archaeological material from the building. I would also like to express my sincere gratitude for the cooperation and support of the Ephorate of Antiquities at Nauplion, during the long study period of the rediscovered material at the new Mycenae museum between 2005 and 2009.

The systematic study of the material would not have been possible without funding. Generous awards for the conservation of the wall paintings were provided by INSTAP in the period between 2005 and 2009 and then again in 2010–2012 for the drawings and photographs. A special thanks to the conservators Michalis Skourtis and Maria Dimitrakopoulou, who not only restored the material but also assisted in the reconstruction of the original compositions.

For the excellent drawings and photographs presented in this volume, I am much indebted to Douglas Faulmann and Chronis Papanikolopoulos, two artists working for the INSTAP-SCEC. I would personally like to express my deepest gratitude to Douglas Faulmann, not only for his talent and insight during the detailed processing of the pictorial aspects of the paintings, but also for the tremendous patience he showed with the numerous changes/alterations/corrections and additions to the original drawings. For his invaluable help with the digital processing of the plates and figures, I would like to express my gratitude to Yiorgos

Angelopoulos. Unless otherwise noted, all drawings are by Faulmann and all photographs by Papanikolopoulos.

Special thanks should also be extended to the Psychia Foundation for providing the necessary funds for the chemical analysis conducted on samples of the material and to Hariclia Brecolaki, who provided welcome advice and information on technical issues concerning techniques and painting protocols.



List of Abbreviations

CCD	charge-coupled device	mg	milligrams
cm	centimeters	µg	micrograms
diam.	diameter	MH	Middle Helladic
dims.	dimensions	MM	Middle Minoan
EDS	energy dispersive X-ray	mm	millimeters
EDXRF	energy dispersive X-ray fluorescence	µm	micrometers
ext.	exterior	mW	milliwatt
FTIR	Fourier transform infrared spectroscopy	nm	nanometers
GC-MS	gas chromatography-mass spectrometry	NM	catalog number of the National Archaeological Museum, Athens, Greece.
h.	height		
i.d.	integrated design	pers. comm.	personal communication
IR	infrared	PAR	parabolic aluminized reflector
kV	kilovolts	pres.	preserved
L.	length	PVAc	polyvinyl acetate
LBA	Late Bronze Age	SEM	scanning electron microscopy
LC	Late Cycladic	SIM	selected ion monitoring
LED	light emitting diode	th.	thickness
LH	Late Helladic	TIC	total ion chromatogram
LM	Late Minoan	VIL	visible induced infrared luminescence
LOD	detection limit	w.	width
LOQ	quantitation limit	W	watts
m	meters	XRD	X-ray diffraction
mA	milliamperes	XRF	X-ray fluorescence
max.	maximum	Z	atomic number

