

THE AKROTERIA OF THE NIKE TEMPLE¹

(PLATES 35-37)

THE small Ionic Temple of Athena Nike on the Acropolis was designed by Kallikrates, an architect of the Parthenon, as a monument to the Greek victory over the Persians. A decree of about 449 B.C. authorized plans to be drawn up, but the temple was not actually begun until after the Propylaea, and probably dates between 427 and 424 B.C.² When the temple was completed, the bastion on which it stood was enclosed by a parapet of marble decorated with Nikai. Professor Carpenter's interest in these reliefs and his admirable study of them are well known.

The sculptural decoration of the temple itself consisted of a frieze depicting an assembly of the gods (east), battle scenes between Greeks and Persians (south), and Greeks against Greeks (north and west).³ The pedimental figures, which were fastened to the floor of the pediment by means of round pins, have unfortunately disappeared without a trace. The akroteria too are lost, but they are mentioned in a number of fourth century treasury records.⁴ The most nearly complete of these inscriptions, *I.G.*, II², 1425, dated 368/7 B.C., lists gold from the akroteria under the heading *τάδε σταθμῶι παρελάβομεν χρυσᾶ καὶ ἐπίτηκτα καὶ ὑπόχαλκα* (lines 85-86). Clearly the akroteria were made of bronze overlaid either partly or wholly with gold. The reference is as follows (lines 101-106):

¹ I wish to express my warm thanks to Professor Evelyn B. Harrison for her sustained and friendly interest in this study; it was she also who took the photographs of the akroterion base (Pls. 35, a, 36, b, 37, b). My thanks are due as well to Miss Donna Kurtz for the photograph of the epinetron (Pl. 36, a), and to Dr. G. Beckel for the photograph of the vase fragment in Würzburg (Pl. 37, a). I am much indebted to Mr. G. Dontas, ephor of the Acropolis, and to Mrs. M. Tombropoulou-Brouscari, for making the akroterion base available for study and photographing. Mr. William B. Dinsmoor, Jr., kindly provided the measurements and drawings of the central akroterion base (Fig. 1). Professor Homer A. Thompson contributed timely and valuable advice.

² *I.G.*, I², 24. For the argument as to date, cf. W. B. Dinsmoor, *The Architecture of Ancient Greece*,³ London, 1950, p. 185. Blümel, however, dates a portion of the frieze to 420 B.C. (*Der Fries des Tempels der Athena Nike*, Berlin, 1923, pp. 41-42; *Jahrb.*, LXV-LXVI, 1950-1951, pp. 135-165), and it is possible certainly that the sculptural adornment was not completed until the Peace of Nikias. Cf. also I. M. Shear, *Hesperia*, XXXII, 1963, p. 388. The text of *I.G.*, I², 24, is the subject of a recent article by Alan Boegehold in *Classical Studies Presented to Ben Edwin Perry*, Urbana, 1969, pp. 175-180. He does not discuss the date, except to suggest an archon whose name had 5 or 6 letters. This creates a difficulty, and it may be that the preamble should be reconstructed with no archon named at all. Much depends on restoration.

³ The battle scenes represent the Persian Wars, but probably not specifically the battle of Plataea. Cf. Blümel, *Jahrb.*, LXV-LXVI, 1950-1951, pp. 154-155.

⁴ *I.G.*, II², 1415, line 8; 1421, lines 59 ff.; 1423, lines 1 ff.; 1424a, lines 106 ff.; 1425, lines 101 ff.; 1428, lines 114 ff.; 1428 add., lines 125 ff.; 1435, line 7; 1436, lines 66 ff.; A. M. Woodward, *J.H.S.*, XXIX, 1909, p. 186.

χρυσίον ἐπίτηκτον ἀπὸ τῶν ἀκρωτηρίων
 τὸ νεῶ τῆς Νίκης, σταθμὸν ∴ ∴ ΓΓΙΙΙ·
 χρυσίον ἐπίτηκτον ἀπὸ τῆς ἀσπίδος
 τῆς πρὸς τῷ νεῶι, σταθμὸν ΙΙΓΙΙΙΙ·
 ἕτερον χρυσίον ἐπίτηκτον ἀπὸ τῶν
 ἀκρωτηρίων, σταθμὸν ∴ ∴ ΔΓΓ

The two amounts of gold from the akroteria have a combined weight of only 19½ drachmas, so we must assume that they are pieces which had been broken off and for some reason had not been replaced. The method of gilding may suggest the reason. It would have been quite impractical to cover the akroteria with a comparatively thick layer of gold such as seems to have been used on a bronze head found in the Agora Excavations.⁵ The word ἐπίτηκτον, moreover, indicates that the gold was fused upon the surface of the bronze through the use of heat.⁶ When the word appears elsewhere in the treasury inventories, it is in connection with bronze or silver vessels such as kraters, thymiateria, etc. We know from actual examples that these were usually covered with a thin layer of gold no thicker than a sheet of paper.⁷ Such gilding could not be removed without injury. We might conclude, therefore, that the pieces of gold from the akroteria mentioned in the inventories were too much damaged to be replaced. Although the inscriptions make it clear that the akroteria were of gilded bronze, they give us no indication of the subject matter. It has been suggested, however, that they were golden Nikai.⁸

Another inscription found on the Acropolis (*I.G.*, I², 380), unfortunately only a small fragment of a stele, gives us a very tantalizing bit of information. It reads as follows:

---- ια -----
 ΔΓΓΓΙΙΙ σ [---- Βελλεροφόντες, Πέ]
 γασος, Χίμαιρα [---- (summa) ----- ἀ]
 [κ]ροτέριον Νίκε [---- (summa) ---- κεφ]
 5 [ἀ]λαιον τούτον Γ [----- σύμπαν]
 [κ]εφάλαιον ΓΓΓΓ ----
 vacat

It seems to be part of a building account mentioning the akroteria of a temple.⁹ The

⁵ T. L. Shear, *Hesperia*, II, 1933, pp. 519-527, pl. XV; H. A. Thompson, *H.S.C.P.*, Suppl. I, 1940, pp. 183-194, fig. 1; D. B. Thompson, *Hesperia*, XIII, 1944, pp. 180-181.

⁶ H. Blümner, *Technologie und Terminologie der Gewerbe und Künste bei Griechen und Römern*, IV, Leipzig, 1884, p. 291 note 3.

⁷ H. A. Thompson, *op. cit.*, pp. 191-193; D. E. Strong, *Greek and Roman Silver Plate*, London, 1966, pp. 78-80, pl. 15.

⁸ W. B. Dinsmoor, *op. cit.*, p. 187; H. A. Thompson, *op. cit.*, p. 199.

⁹ Professor Donald W. Bradeen kindly provided me with a squeeze of the inscription, and I have benefited greatly from discussions with him. The text of *I.G.*, I², 380 has one drachma too few in line 2.

group Bellerophon, Pegasos, and Chimaira was probably followed by a sum stating its cost (and possibly also some further identifying phrase),¹⁰ then another akroterion, a Nike, followed by its cost. The total listed in line 5 refers presumably to all the akroteria of the temple, and comes to a talent or more. The amount is large even for the akroteria of both ends of a temple. For example, the marble akroteria for each end of the Temple of Asklepios at Epidauros cost 2240 drachmas, and the figures of the Erechtheion frieze, which were about 0.58 m. high and carved almost fully in the round, cost only 60 drachmas each.¹¹ The sum of more than one talent for akroteria could be accounted for if the work was in bronze (or gilded bronze) rather than marble. Then the total of more than four talents, which is probably the *σύμπαν κεφάλαιον* (line 6), might include the cost of material as well as of labor, and possibly also other sculptural adornment listed on the missing portion of the stone.

The inscription has been assigned to the Erechtheion, although it is very unlike the numerous pieces of the Erechtheion accounts that are preserved.¹² It differs from the latter's more detailed listing of the individual sculptors and descriptions of their work, yet it is not so brief as the Parthenon accounts, which list only the sum paid to the sculptors.¹³ The letters are rather large to date as late as 405/4 B.C., the time when the Erechtheion was being completed.¹⁴ The size and shapes of the letters find their closest counterparts in inscriptions of the 420s; they are in fact very close to the upper part of a decree of 424/3 B.C. concerning the priestess of the Nike Temple.¹⁵ Such a date for our fragment, along with its reference to a Nike akroterion, strongly suggests an association with the Nike Temple rather than the Erechtheion.

Bellerophon astride the winged Pegasos, slaying the Chimaira, must have made a superlative akroterion group, and no other reason for its use would have been needed. Yet it would have been especially appropriate to a temple of Athena Nike, for it was only with the help of the goddess Athena that Bellerophon acquired the winged horse and slew the Chimaira.¹⁶ And in the portrayal of the Greek hero subduing the eastern *ἄλκη*¹⁷ there may be a subtle analogy with the theme depicted on the frieze, the

¹⁰ Perhaps the akroteria were designated *τὸ πρὸς βορρᾶ* (probably also a Nike), *τὸ μέσον* (Bellerophon, Pegasos, Chimaira), *τὸ πρὸς νότον* (Nike). Cf. note on *I.G.*, I², 380.

¹¹ *I.G.*, IV, 1484, lines 90 ff.; A. Burford, *B.S.A.*, LXI, 1966, p. 259; Stevens, Caskey, Fowler, and Paton, *The Erechtheum*, pp. 388-389, 414.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 277-422, esp. 387-389, pl. XLIX.

¹³ W. B. Dinsmoor, *A.J.A.*, XVII, 1913, p. 75, lines 35 ff.

¹⁴ For a palmette akroterion attributed to the Erechtheion, cf. C. Praschmiker, *Zur Geschichte des Akroters*, Brünn, 1929, pp. 15-19.

¹⁵ *I.G.*, I², 25; *Ἐφ. Ἀρχ.*, 1897, pl. 11; W. B. Dinsmoor, *op. cit.*, p. 185, note 4; M. N. Tod, *Greek Historical Inscriptions*, Oxford, 1946, pp. 178-179; *S.E.G.*, X, 85.

¹⁶ N. Yalouris, *Mus. Helv.*, VII, 1950, pp. 47-48. Athena often appears as the hero's divine protector on both Attic and South Italian red-figured vases. Cf. K. Schauenburg, *Jahrb.*, LXXI, 1956, p. 64.

¹⁷ The chorus in Euripides' *Ion* refer to the Chimaira as the *τρισώματον ἄλκάν* (line 204), using the abstract poetic noun to convey the idea of both courage and force. The women are observ-

Greeks' heroic struggle against the Persians. Both Bellerophon and Pegasus must have been regarded as protectors in battle, for they appear on shields and helmets from Attica and elsewhere.¹⁸ Bellerophon fighting the Chimaira is not a common subject on Attic vases, so that its appearance on an epinetron from Athens dating from the last quarter of the fifth century B.C. would seem to be more than mere coincidence (Pl. 36, a).¹⁹ The arrangement of the figures on the epinetron is entirely appropriate to an akroterion and suggests direct inspiration from such a sculptural group.

From the representation of the Bellerophon group on the epinetron we can easily imagine the general form of the work in bronze, but a fragment of a red-figured vase in Würzburg (Pl. 37, a)²⁰ gives us an idea of how such an akroterion would have looked on a building. The drawing seems to show Pegasus standing in three-quarter view, rather than a direct front or a direct side view, with the wings extended on either side to balance the central mass of horse and rider. The golden color must surely indicate a work in bronze or gilded bronze. In the akroterion on the Würzburg fragment, only Bellerophon and Pegasus are represented. The arrangement on the epinetron, with the addition of the Chimaira, its head turned back toward Bellerophon, concentrates the movement on the center and is a superior composition for a central akroterion.

As to the appearance of the Nikai which flanked the Bellerophon group as angle akroteria, we can only conjecture. Nikai occur on a number of South Italian vases in scenes of Bellerophon slaying the Chimaira.²¹ The Nike is usually floating toward the hero, holding a wreath in her outstretched hand.²² On this basis, one should probably think of the angle Nikai as striding or stepping toward the central group with a wreath or garland to crown the victor.²³ Two female figures (5 and 22)²⁴ on

ing the "sights" at Delphi, but it is possible that Euripides has inserted some familiar Athenian sights as well, for it is difficult to reconcile the whole passage with what is actually known of Delphi. For a discussion of the problems, cf. A. S. Owen, *Euripides' Ion*, Oxford, 1939, pp. 82-86.

¹⁸ 'Αρχ. 'Εφ., 1920, pls. 1 and 2; Pegasus on the shield of Athena on Panathenaic amphorae of the Kleophrades Painter, J. D. Beazley, *The Development of Attic Black-Figure*, Berkeley, 1951, p. 94; on a helmet, *Hesperia*, XXIII, 1954, pp. 61-62, pl. 44, a.

¹⁹ National Museum no. 2179. 'Εφ. 'Αρχ., 1892, pl. 13, 3. Representations of Bellerophon are collected by F. Brommer, *Marburger Winckelmann-Programm*, 1952-1954. For a general study, cf. T. J. Dunbabin, *Studies Robinson*, II, pp. 1164-1184. The subject appears on only six other Attic red-figured vases (Brommer, p. 12, II, 1-6; p. 13, IV, 8). A mosaic from Olynthos has the same arrangement of the figures as the epinetron (D. M. Robinson, *Olynthus*, V, pp. 4-6, pl. I, 12-13). Amandry notes that the inspiration for the mosaic is surely Attic, not Corinthian as Robinson thought (*R.A.*, XLVIII, 1956, pp. 155-157).

²⁰ F. Brommer, *op. cit.*, p. 14, IV, 4; H. Bulle, *Berliner Winckelmanns-Programm*, XCIV, 1934, pp. 3-10; for a color reproduction, cf. M. Robertson, *Greek Painting*, New York, 1959, p. 162.

²¹ K. Schauenburg, *op. cit.*, pp. 4-5.

²² For example, an oinochoe in Taranto, *ibid.*, figs. 1-3.

²³ So also the early fourth century B.C. Nike akroterion from the Athenian Agora (*Hesperia*, IV, 1935, pp. 374-379, pl. IV).

²⁴ C. Blümel, *Der Fries des Tempels der Athena Nike*, pls. I-III.

the east frieze of the Nike Temple, who also move from opposite sides toward the center, may echo the pose of the akroteria which originally stood above them.

The height of sculptured akroteria in the classical period is about the same as or a little less than the height of the tympanon. On the Athenian Treasury at Delphi

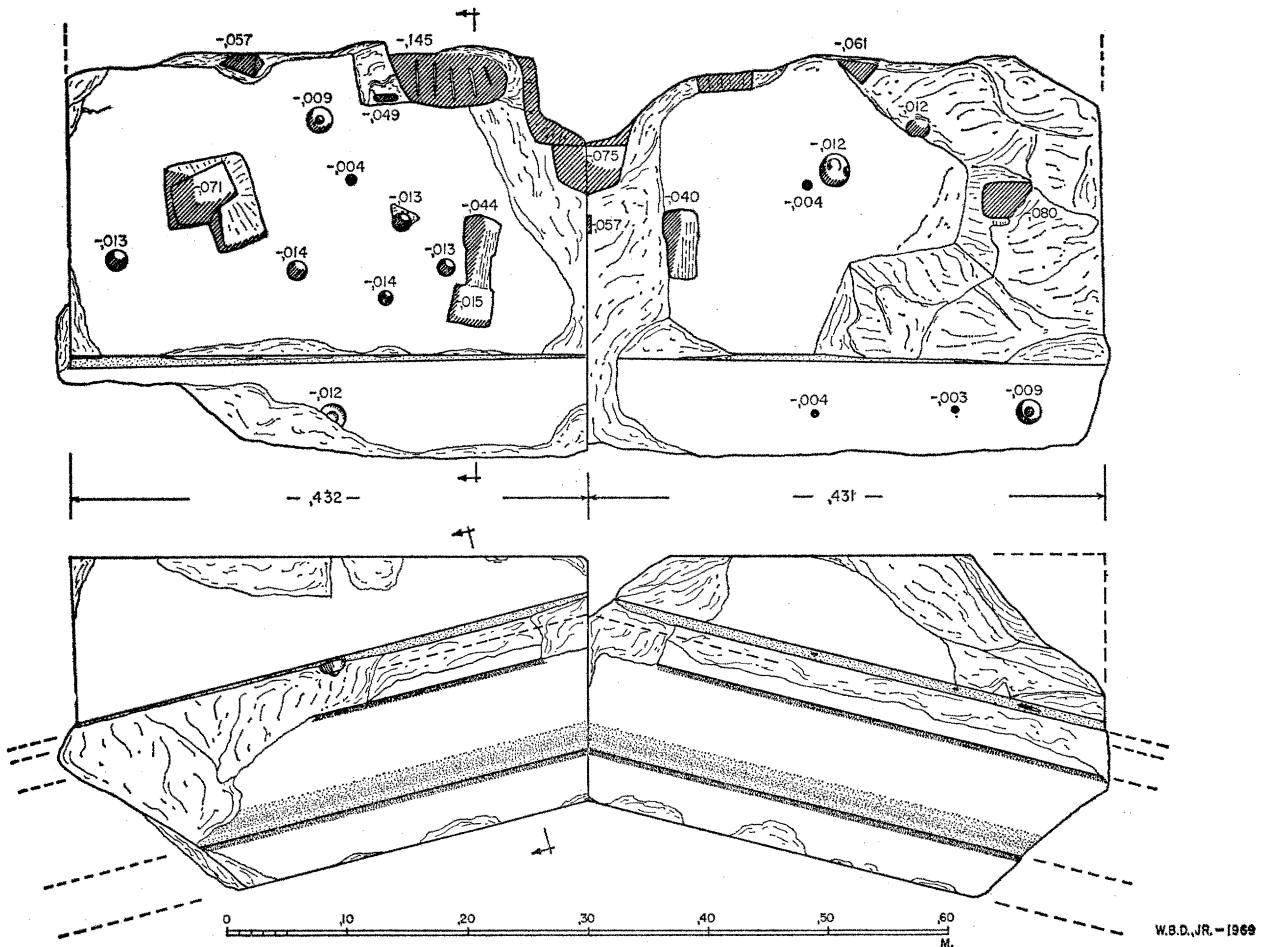


FIG. 1. Central Akroterion Base of Nike Temple, top and front.

and the Athenian Temple at Delos, however, the akroteria were somewhat higher than the tympanon, an adjustment that may have been required by their relatively small scale.²⁵ On this basis, the akroteria of the Nike Temple would have been between 0.52 m., the height of the tympanon, and about 0.75 m. The angle akroteria were

²⁵ Athenian Treasury: tympanon height, 0.735 m., angle akroteria, ca. 1.00 m. (*Fouilles de Delphes*, IV, 4, pp. 175, 182-187). Athenian Temple: tympanon, 1.20 m., central akroterion, ca. 1.67 m. without plinth (Courby's estimate of 1.80 is too large, *Exploration archéologique de Délos*, XII, pp. 138, 238).

usually perceptibly smaller than the central figure or group. Even though small in scale, the gleaming bronze or gilded bronze akroteria of the Nike Temple on its high bastion would have been visible from a great distance.

Fragments of three of the akroterion bases of the Nike Temple have been found; they are carved in one piece with the sima. One of the angle bases, drawn by G. P. Stevens, was badly damaged, and none of the cuttings on its surface are preserved (Fig. 3).²⁶ Pieces of a second angle base, from the northeast corner, are now in place on the Temple (Pl. 35, b).²⁷ On either side of its broken central part are traces of a major cutting for the fastening of an akroterion. This fact would be entirely consistent with a single Nike.

Two blocks of a central base, one previously drawn by Stevens and the other by Orlandos, have been found on re-examination to join (Figs. 1, 2; Pl. 36, b).²⁸ The cuttings at the back of the two blocks very clearly fit together to form one socket (Fig. 1, top; Pl. 37, b), and the lines of the sima moulding at the front are also perfectly contiguous (Fig. 1, bottom; Pl. 36, b). The top surfaces of the two blocks

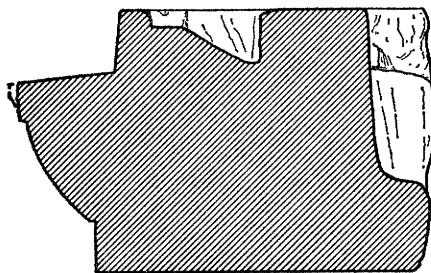


FIG. 2. Central Akroterion Base of Nike Temple, Section.

where preserved are level except for a slight slope to the sides to provide for drainage. Each block is about 0.432 m. long, giving an overall length for the base of about 0.864 m. The complete depth of the blocks is not preserved, for both are broken away at a point where three large sockets (from left to right 0.145 m., 0.18 m., and 0.125 m. deep) are cut in (Pl. 37, b). These three look as if they are part of one heavy fastening. The right and left sockets are 0.21 m. from the front edge of the base, which is just a little to the front of the center of the block.²⁹ To the left of this three-part socket is the corner of a diagonal cut, 0.057 m. deep, and to its right a similar diagonal cut, 0.061 m. deep (Fig. 1; Pl. 37, b).

²⁶ *A.J.A.*, XII, 1908, pp. 402-404, fig. 6. This fragment can no longer be located.

²⁷ A. K. Orlandos, *Ath. Mitt.*, XL, 1915, p. 44; *B.C.H.*, LXXI-LXXII, 1947-1948, figs. 20, 24. I wish to thank Professor James R. McCredie for photographing this base.

²⁸ *A.J.A.*, XII, 1908, fig. 7; *B.C.H.*, LXXI-LXXII, 1947-1948, figs. 20, 25. Orlandos thought that the two blocks of the base were from opposite ends of the temple, p. 32.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, fig. 20. Orlandos has shown the original depth of the base as 0.60 m.

On the extant upper surface of the base, four cuttings are to be seen:³⁰ a rectangular one, 0.063 m. by 0.05 m., and 0.071 m. deep, at the left of the left hand block, and a smaller square one, 0.03 m. wide and 0.044 m. deep, at its right (Fig. 1; Pl. 36, b); a similar cut, 0.04 m. deep, which may originally have been circular, at the left of the right hand block, and a corner of another square or rectangular cutting, 0.08 m. deep, in the broken section at the right of the right hand block (Fig. 1; Pl. 35, a). A shallow round hole in the upper part of the right hand block, 0.012 m. deep, has the trace of a corner outlined, 0.035 m. to the left of it, as if a square tenon fitting over the hole had left a stain on the marble surface (Pl. 35, a). These points of fastening clearly indicate a much more complex akroterion than that at the angle, undoubtedly a group. It should be noted that the cuttings on these bases are quite different from those clearly intended for marble akroteria. A marble figure stood on a plinth, which was usually set into the base and therefore required a large shallow continuous socket in the top of the base with a smaller deeper cutting within it to anchor the akroterion in place.³¹ The cuttings on the Nike bases were plainly meant for metal akroteria which did not require a plinth. The shallow square cuttings at the front of the central base were designed to receive the sort of square tenon seen on the foot of the charioteer from Delphi, used to fasten the figure to the chariot.³²

In addition to these major cuttings on the base, there are a number of round drill holes, varying from 0.004 m. to 0.014 m. deep and from 0.015 m. to 0.02 m. in diameter, scattered over the surface in no apparent pattern.³³ These are clearly too

³⁰ The holes were enlarged when the akroteria and their lead fastenings were pried out. The measurements given are therefore approximate and represent the original cutting only.

³¹ An akroterion base from the southeast corner of the Temple of Asklepios at Epidauros, for example, contains a roughly circular cutting for a marble plinth about 0.32-0.36 m. in diameter (Roux, *L'architecture de l'Argolide aux IV^e et III^e siècles avant J.-C.*, Paris, 1961, p. 105, pl. 31, 4). On another base no cutting was made, but the outline of a rectangular plinth 0.55 by 0.45 m. is discernible on the surface (p. 104, pl. 31, 3). An angle base from the Temple of Artemis at Epidauros contains a cutting for a plinth (Kavvadias, *Πρακτικά*, 1906, pp. 99-100, figs. 7-9). On a fragmentary base attributed to the Temple of Ares, a portion of an elliptical cutting, about 0.32 by 0.215 m., remains, which must have been the setting for a marble plinth. It also has a deeper socket within, 0.295 by 0.55 m., for fastening. W. B. Dinsmoor suggested that this base was meant for a metal akroterion because of two drill holes in the surface, which he considered similar to those on the Nike base (*Hesperia*, IX, 1940, pp. 36-37, fig. 14). But see below, note 33.

³² *Fouilles de Delphes*, IV, 5, 1955, p. 59, pl. XX.

³³ The angle bases also have a row of shallow drill holes along the upper edge of the sima (Fig. 3; Pl. 35, b. Cf. *A.J.A.*, XII, 1908, fig. 6; *B.C.H.*, LXXI-LXXII, 1947-1948, fig. 24). The central base has one such hole on the edge of the sima on the right hand block and the trace of another on the left (Fig. 1; Pls. 35, a, 36, b). An akroterion base attributed to the Temple of Ares has two drill holes of comparable diameter, one on the top of the base and one on the top of the sima, but these holes are very much deeper and so quite different from those of the Nike base. This difference as well as the elliptical cutting on the surface indicates a marble akroterion (cf. note 31 above). A fragmentary base from the Temple of Poseidon at Sounion, which had marble floral akroteria, also contains two deep drill holes, probably for fastening them in place (Orlandos, *Δελτ.*, I, 1915, pp. 17, 24, fig. 12).

shallow to have been of any use in fastening the akroteria. Since most of them do not betray the damage usually caused by the removal of lead, it is unlikely that they were ever used for fastening.

It is extremely difficult to interpret satisfactorily the evidence of the cuttings on the central base. I believe it possible, however, that the four shallower cuttings toward the front of the blocks could have supported a chimaira, while the rearing Pegasos could have been anchored by means of a strut beneath his body³⁴ in the three-part socket farther back. It is, of course, also possible that the Bellerophon group stood at the other end of the temple.

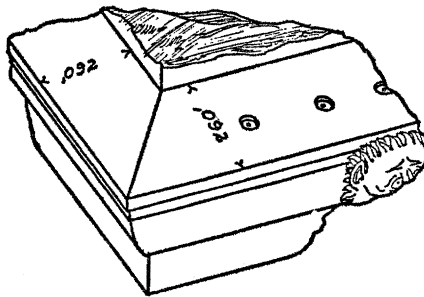


FIG. 3. Fragment of Angle Base
of Nike Temple.

If we restore Bellerophon, Pegasos, and Chimaira as a central akroterion of the Nike Temple, it would represent one of the early uses of a group as a means of increasing the height of the central akroterion. The pair of girls from the Hephaisteion must be about contemporary.³⁵ Boreas carrying off Oreithyia, the central akroterion at the east end of the Athenian Temple at Delos, dating around 417 B.C.,³⁶ is an instructive parallel. There the great wings of Boreas and the head of Oreithyia, who has already been lifted from the ground, form the apex of the composition. A pier of marble rising 0.29 m. from the plinth was needed to support the weight of the female figure. A small running horse, undoubtedly an attribute of the wind god, partially hides the pier and fills the space below Oreithyia's feet. This method of concealing a strut was perhaps suggested by the chimaira of our bronze group, but the solution was not so well suited to marble as to bronze.

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³⁴ The running horses that serve as angle akroteria on the Athenian Treasury at Delphi were supported by a strut under the chest (*Fouilles de Delphes*, IV, 4, 1957, pp. 182-187).

³⁵ H. A. Thompson, *Hesperia*, XVIII, 1949, pp. 235-236, pls. 53-54; *A.J.A.*, LXVI, 1962, p. 345.

³⁶ Picard, *Manuel d'archéologie grecque*, II, pp. 788-789, 794-796, fig. 318.



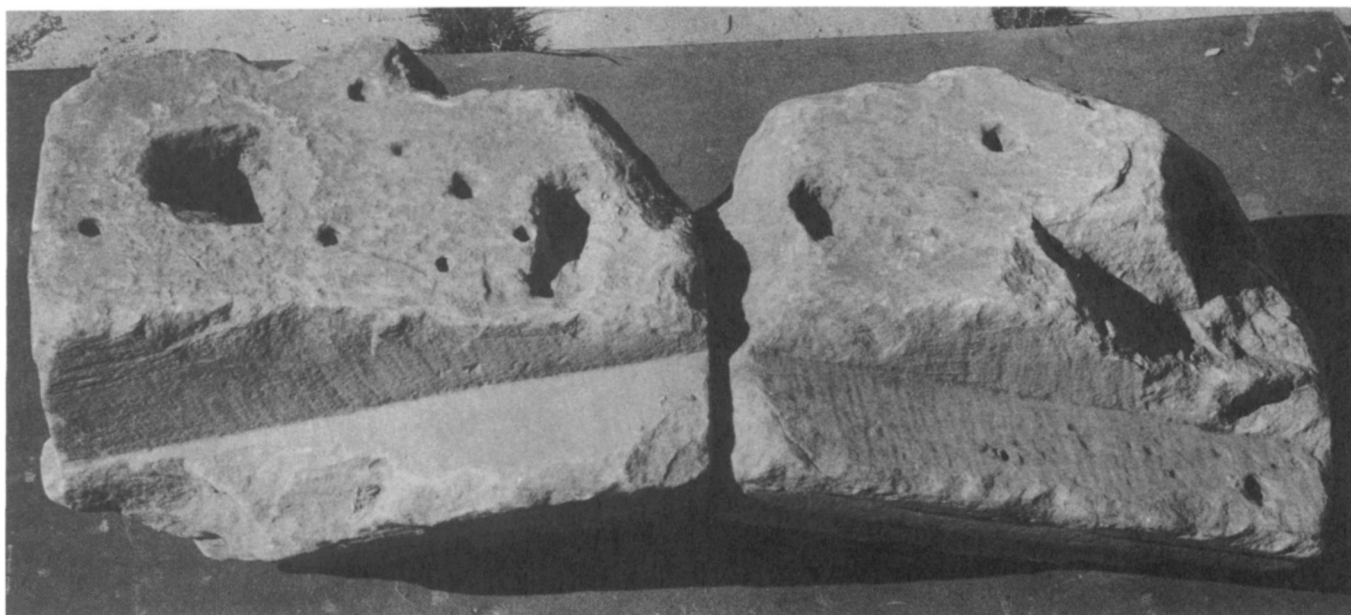
a. Nike Temple, Central Akroterion Base, Right Block



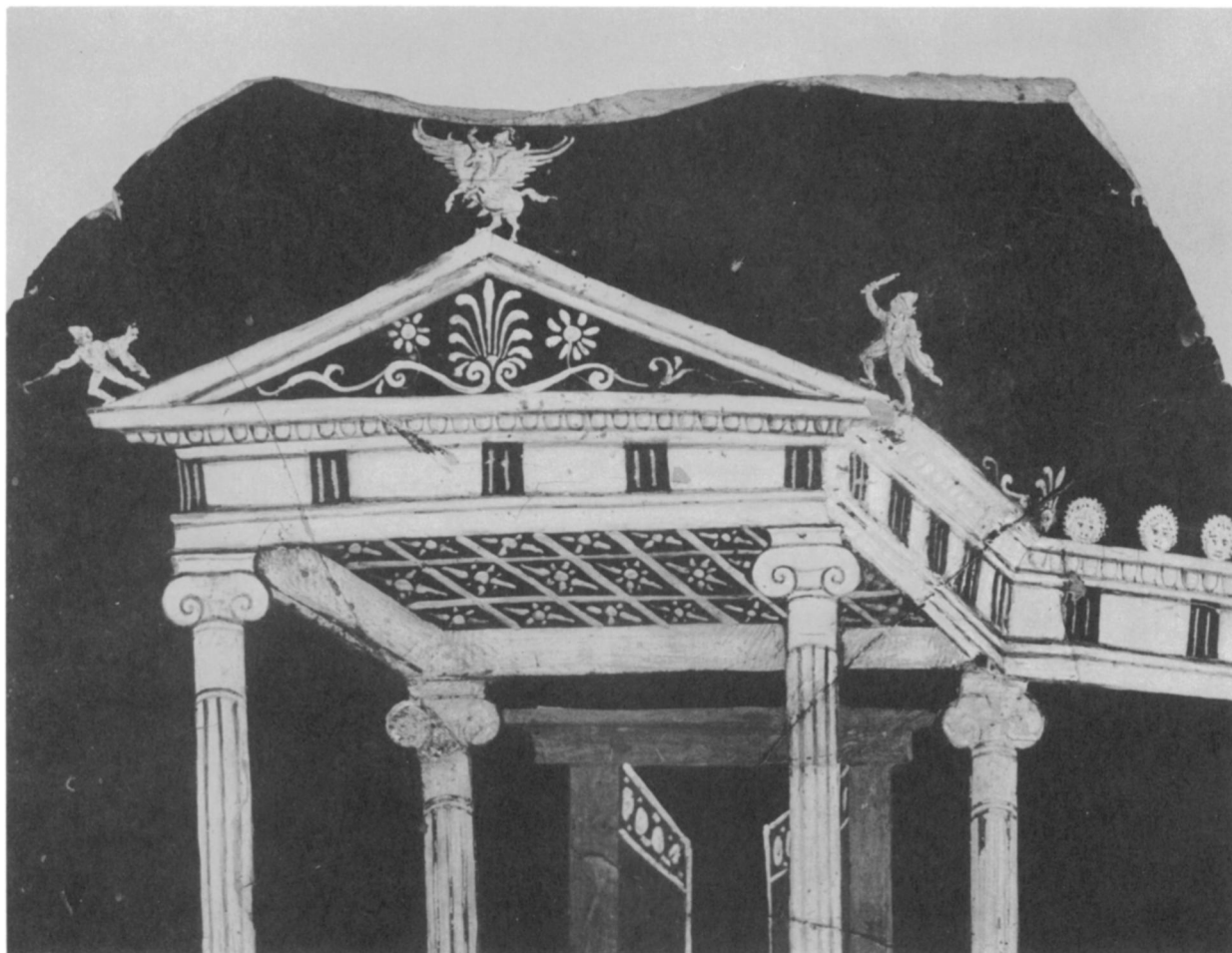
b. Nike Temple, Northeast Angle Akroterion Base



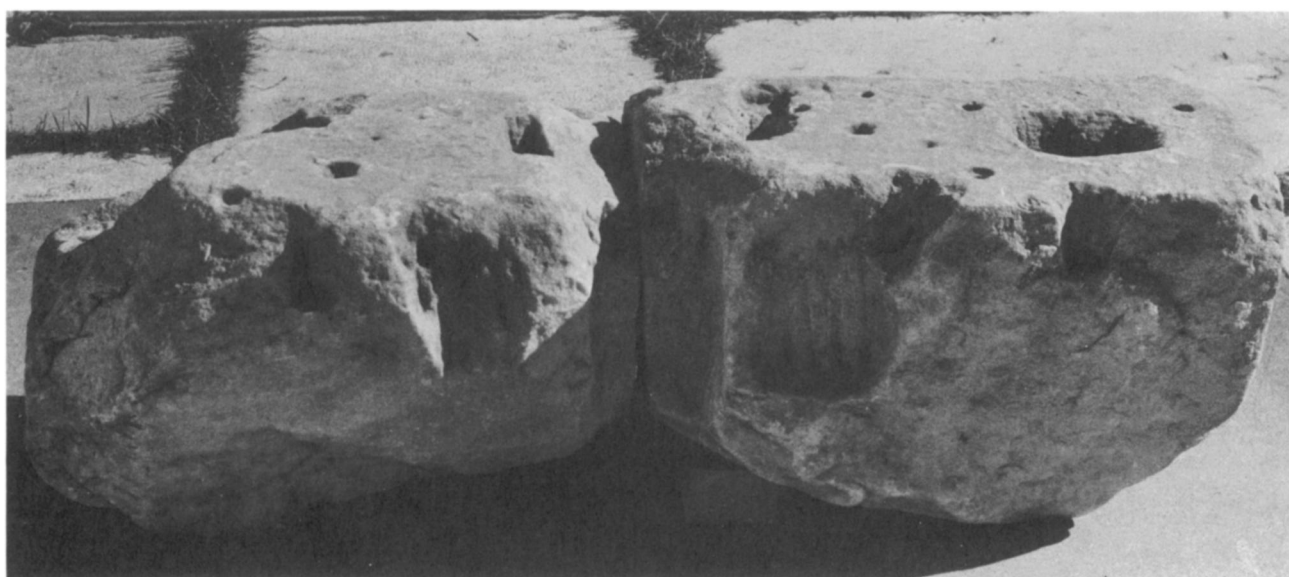
a. Epinetron. Athens National Museum 2179



b. Nike Temple, Central Akroterion Base, Front View



a. Bellerophon Akroterion on a Vase Fragment in Würzburg



b. Nike Temple, Central Akroterion Base, Back View

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