

THE THEATER AT PHLIUS: EXCAVATIONS 1973

(PLATES 12–16)

IN 1973 the University of Missouri-Columbia in cooperation with the American School of Classical Studies returned to the area of the Palati at Phlius to continue the supplementary investigations begun in 1970.¹ Work was confined to the area of the theater and the scene building, or North Building, north of the Palati proper. Just to the north of the interior colonnade of the Palati, however, a thorough cleaning confirmed what was suspected in 1972, namely that the mysterious mudbrick construction first identified on the east side of the building did exist at the northwest,² extending northward from *ca.* 0.40 m. from the north Palati colonnade and cut by the robbing trench for the north wall of the building (Fig. 1). The shape of the preserved mudbrick is defined on its other three sides by the excavation trenches of 1924. Its original extent is thus unknown and it is at present preserved to only two to three courses. It would appear, then, that this mudbrick “construction”, whatever its purpose, also existed at the north end of the building and perhaps also on the east and south sides as well. The position of these remains would appear to make a northern entrance unlikely, at least on axis. Perhaps the late entranceway preserved at the south end of the building does indeed indicate the position of the original entrance.³

THE THEATER

Work was concentrated north of the Palati in the theater, its attendant scene building (North Building) and the open courtyard which separated it from the Palati (Fig. 1). Investigations continued in the cavea west of the portion cleared in 1972⁴ and the whole lower part has now been cleaned (Pl. 12, a). More cuttings in the bedrock were found west of the 1925 trench where work stopped in 1972. Below these cuttings

¹ For the 1970 season, see *Hesperia*, XL, 1971, pp. 424–447, henceforth *Report* '70. For the 1972 season, see *Hesperia*, XLII, 1973, pp. 102–120, henceforth *Report* '72.

The 1973 campaign began on June 18 and terminated on July 30. The undersigned again acted as Director, assisted by three graduate students from the University of Missouri-Columbia who served as Ford Foundation Archaeological Trainees; Pamela Berich, Stephanie Jernigan, and Karl Kilinski. Thomas Boyd of Indiana University was this season's architect. Aristomenes Arbaroris of Old Corinth once again served capably as foreman. The project was funded by grants from the Research Council and the Alumni Development Fund of the University and by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. It is again a pleasure to express our thanks to a number of people who have helped our work, especially to Charles K. Williams, II and the Corinth staff who once again put up with us and to Mr. Charalambos Kritsas of the Greek Archaeological Service for his interest and understanding. The mayor of New Nemea, Parmenio Demetriou, again aided us in more ways than can be enumerated.

² *Report* '72, pp. 102–111.

³ *Report* '70, p. 432; *Report* '72, p. 110, note 22.

⁴ *Report* '72, pp. 114–119.

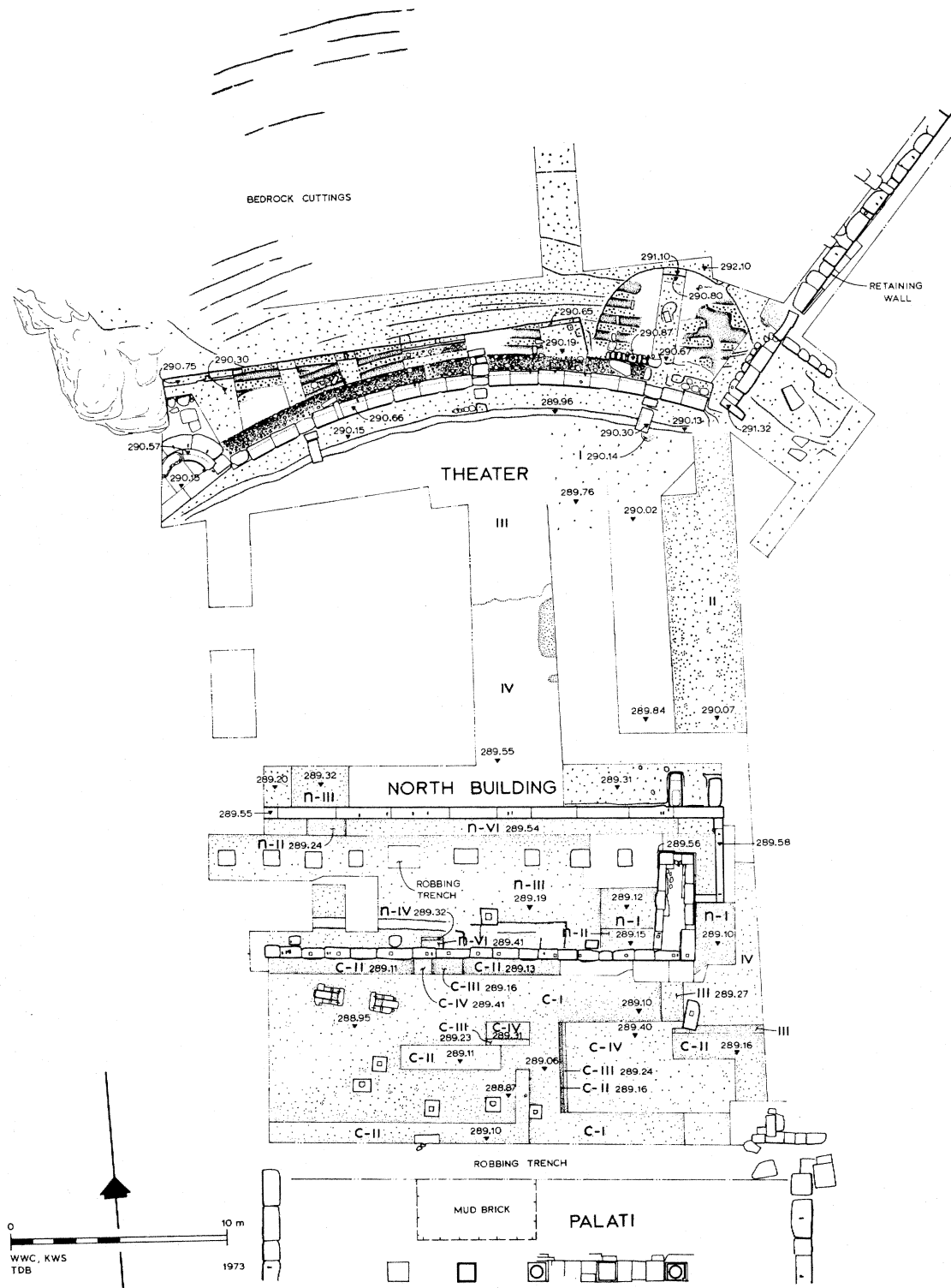


FIG. 1. Theater and North Building, Actual state plan

and behind the row of benches which mark the front row of the cavea, the bedrock had been cut away on a straight line in a similar manner to the circular cutting found to the east in the previous season. The western cutting extends the line of the "dexamene" to the west and returns to the south against the bedrock at the west. A rough plaster was found both against this west wall and against the east wall of the "dexamene". It is clear now that what we had suggested as a later "dexamene" was in fact simply the east corner of the rectangular cutting. The 1925 trench had passed through this area exposing the corner. The whole cutting was filled in at a later date with packing similar to that found in the semicircular cutting to the east. The packing extended to the west, where at least on the surface a line of roughly cut blocks ran north-south next to the bedrock cutting. This was interrupted by a small, late Roman, tile grave which cut through the line of the blocks at the north against the wall of the cutting (Pl. 12, b, foreground). Tests down through this packing revealed that a narrow step or ledge had been left against the rear face of the cutting with a width of 0.21 m. to 0.27 m. The ledge was covered with a thick, coarse plaster and in several of our tests had a narrow (*ca.* 0.08–0.10 m. wide) bedrock shelf preserved immediately in front of it, *ca.* 0.12 m. below the top of the ledge. This was also covered with a coarse plaster on top of which tile fragments had been placed (Pl. 12, b, background; 12, c).

A number of cuttings exist in the upper surface of the main ledge, both U-shaped and rectangular. In the test trench at the west end of the cutting a narrow channel in the plaster on top of the bench (*ca.* 0.03 m. wide, 0.04 m. from wall) was found running east-west. At *ca.* 0.12 m. from the west wall of the cutting the channel turns towards the south and ends with an opening at the south edge of the ledge. The channel may once have existed throughout the whole area, for the upper plaster surface was only found well preserved in the west. Plaster of the same type was found on both the east and west walls of the cutting and stops *ca.* 0.04 m. above the top of its floor, which is bedrock in the east but stereo in the west.

The original use of the cutting before it was filled with packing is an enigma. Possibly some construction or constructions were built into the side of the hill. Analysis of the plaster indicates that it may have been waterproof⁵ and some of the cuttings could be interpreted as sockets for wooden supports for some sort of roof construction, perhaps of the lean-to variety. The semicircular cutting to the east, investigated in 1972, also had a narrow ledge against its back wall.⁶

The packing in the rectangular cutting exhibited similar alternating clay and pebble layers as were found in the semicircular cutting to the east. They were not easily traceable throughout the whole area, having been washed away in several places,

⁵ The analysis revealed a lime-and-clay, or argillaceous limestone, composition which indicates that it may have acted as a hydraulic plaster. The analysis was carried out by Prof. E. E. Pickett of the Department of Agricultural Chemistry at the University of Missouri-Columbia.

⁶ *Report '72*, p. 117.

but what could be identified tended to confirm the theory that these alternating strips represented the foundation levels for seating, stone blocks for bench supports being placed in the clay strips while the sitter's feet rested on pebbled strips. Three foundation blocks were found in the packing. Two, including one recognized in a test trench in 1972 oriented northeast-southwest, were found in pebble strips and would appear not to be *in situ*. The third was found in a clay strip. Pottery from the packing was early Roman in date, with one sherd possibly as late as the second century after Christ.⁷

The bedrock lump wall discovered in 1972⁸ was found to run the whole length of the cavea immediately behind and, in a few places, overlapping the row of poros bench seats. This rough wall maintains a maximum preserved height of *ca.* 0.35 m. above the surface of the seats and is probably to be considered as a retaining wall for the packing to the north. Two sections of this wall were removed in our test probes through the packing. In these areas it was found to be constructed of large lumps of bedrock and some fragments of worked stones, bonded with earth and placed on top of a packing of soil and pebbles. This in turn rested on a bedrock foundation block in the 1925 trench but not elsewhere. The bedrock lump wall cuts through the east wall of the rectangular cutting, thus ensuring its later date.

The poros seats as found are all of the same general type as described in the 1970 report.⁹ Seventeen make up the front row of the cavea, which is pierced by three entrances, one at the approximate center and two about six seat-lengths to east and west. The seats vary in size from *ca.* 0.56 m. to 0.74 m. in width and from 0.92 m. to 1.36 m. in length. Their surface elevation varies only 0.01 m. from east to west, being higher in the east. The bedrock dips appreciably to the west here, and to maintain the approximately level elevation foundation blocks were introduced, beginning under the third seat from the east and running under the rest of the row, continually increasing in height to a maximum of *ca.* 0.27 m. at the west end. All the seats bear a roughly worked strip about a third the width of the seat along the back portion of the surface which would seem to indicate the existence once of a second row. Pry cuttings exist within the roughened areas in seats 5, 6, 7, 11 and 13 from the east, while seat 16 bears a double pry cutting.¹⁰ Seats 9 and 11 have two sets of ten small circular depressions in two rows of five on their upper surfaces. The easternmost seat (no. 1) is distinguished from the rest by having its roughly worked surface strip along its rear edge slightly lower than the surface proper of the seat.

Between seats 13 and 14 what appears to be a rough patch has been inserted. The block, *ca.* 0.25 m. wide, extends into the line of the bedrock lump wall beyond the

⁷ Lot 167.

⁸ *Report '72*, pp. 114-119.

⁹ *Report '70*, pp. 439-440.

¹⁰ The cuttings on seats 5, 6, 7 extend 0.025 m. in from the rear face of the block and give the impression of being perhaps clamp cuttings for another block behind. They are, however, extremely shallow and are more likely to be pry holes.

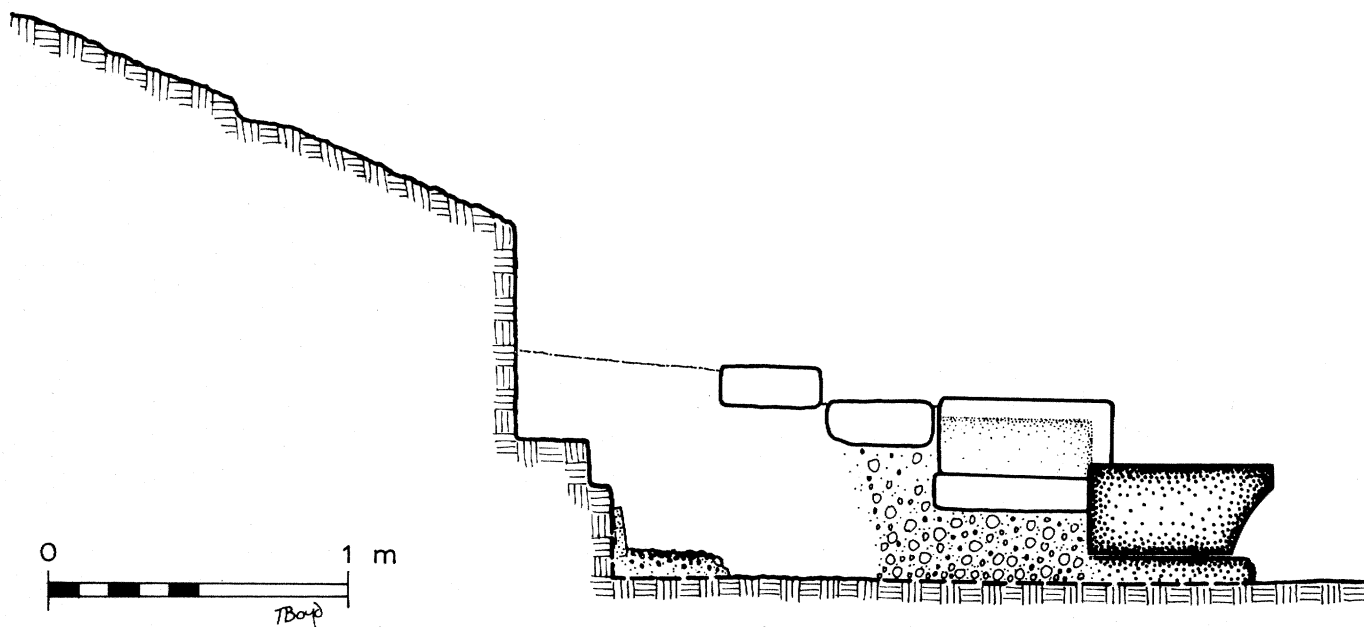


FIG. 2. Cavea looking east. Section through central entrance

north edges of the rest of the row, while its southern face extends very slightly beyond its neighbors and its upper surface lies approximately 0.01 m. below the adjoining seats. The patch is not as well worked as the other seats and is of a coarser limestone. The last seat block on the west is unusual in shape and size but rests on a continuation of the foundation course which the rest of the seats sit on. The block measures 0.52 m. by 0.98 m. and, although level, its upper surface slopes substantially to the south and east perhaps from an earlier use.

The line of seats is pierced by three entrances; the easternmost one was cleared in 1972.¹¹ The central entrance (Fig. 2) is presently made up of five steps extending from the level of the orchestra through the seats and into the cavea. A block must originally have spanned the drain in front of the seats but only a cutting which contained its north end is preserved. The step above the drain cutting at +290.60 m. elevation is *ca.* 0.45 m. by 0.59 m. and badly broken at its east and west ends. Above this block is a rough step which is inserted into the line of benches, with tile fragments and small stones packed under and behind it (Pl. 13, a). The surface elevation of this block is slightly (0.08 m.) above the line of the seats. It rests on a lower block *ca.* 0.17 m. high, which in turn lies on the foundation course. The eastern seat (no. 8) bears an 0.11 m. preserved extension which protrudes from the west end of the seat. This does not follow the curved face of the seat but simply projects westwards into the entranceway,

¹¹ *Report '72*, p. 115.

reducing the entrance to approximately 0.62 m. at this level. That this extension, which may have served once as a door jamb which perhaps held sheathing, belongs to an earlier period is shown by the fact that the step block is placed on top of the broken portion of the seat's westward extension. The step above the line of seats lies *ca.* 0.12 m. above the surface of the block just described and is of a finer poros. It is evidently re-used, showing signs of anathyrosis. It also rests on a lower block *ca.* 0.15 m. high, which in turn rests on the packing for the bedrock lump wall. The next step beyond the poros step is actually made up of two blocks placed side by side with their surfaces now approximately level with the previous step. These blocks rest in part on the packing for the bedrock lump wall and in part on the packing of the rectangular cutting. The last, most northerly step lies *ca.* 0.09 m. above the previous step and rests entirely on the packing in the rectangular cutting. The block is roughly worked and is set slightly to the west, out of line with the other blocks in the central entrance-way.

The western entrance is similar to that on the east¹² and also utilizes re-used material. Here the block covering the drain was found *in situ*, measuring 0.50 m. by 1.30 m. To the north, and with its upper surface approximately 0.09 m. higher, lies the second step, while the third is placed within the line of the seats *ca.* 0.05 m. below their upper surfaces. The seats on either side of the 0.82 m. entrance have their flanking surfaces finished, indicating that, as with the other entrances, there was originally a passage through the seats here (Pl. 13, b).

The line of seats is terminated on the west by a well-made exedra (Pl. 13, c) set at a slight angle to the line of seats. Behind the exedra the rubble wall, which has been conjectured to be the western end of the packing, extends up to the back of the rectangular cutting. The exedra extends beyond the west wall of the rectangular cutting, which it appears to break, and beyond the excavated area. As cleared it consists of a pavement of large blocks which support a curving bench and back wall, only the lower blocks of which are preserved (Pl. 14, a). The platform appears to be constructed of rectangular blocks ($2.35 \times 0.63 \times 0.28$ m. thick) on the south, backed by three square blocks (*ca.* 1.12 m. east-west by 1.12 m. to seat). Upon this pavement rest two portions of the curved bench. That on the west has been very badly damaged so that the whole upper surface and both ends have been chipped away and the whole block apparently yanked out of its original position. Its neighbor on the east, however, is in almost perfect condition and is *in situ*. The preserved seat shows a profile (Fig. 3) similar to theater seats with a fillet at the front and a simple curve below that. It is finished at the end by a molded leg ending in a stylized animal's paw which is lightly chipped. A small round hole (0.02 m. wide) is preserved on the inside surface of the leg 0.10 m. from the top of the bench and 0.05 m. out from the under surface. A

¹² *Ibid*, p. 115, pl. 23, a.

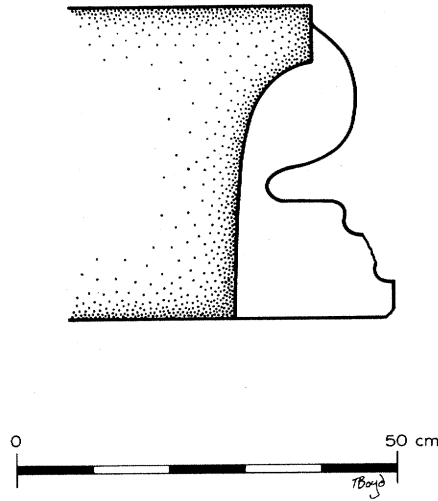


FIG. 3. Exedra. Profile of bench

partially preserved flat projecting molding runs along the end of the bench and terminates approximately 0.06 m. from its rear surface, which is broken away. An incised vertical line marks this termination. Two complete blocks (1.35 m. long by 0.65 m. wide) and a portion of a third make up the cleared portion of the rear wall of the exedra. The first two bear pry holes on their upper surfaces and it is obvious that the back wall of the exedra must originally have extended higher.

The exedra is terminated on the east by a low, elaborately worked block which rests on the pavement ($0.79 \times 0.575 \times 0.20$ m. high). This block has been cut to fit around the northeast corner of the exedra's bench and was placed against the east end of the back wall. On the east it rests loosely in a notch in the foundation block for the westernmost seat. A small portion of the upper southeast corner of the decorated block is not worked, apparently not to be seen. The block bears raised panels on both preserved surfaces. Below each panel the surfaces are worked back in two narrow bands with the upper band forming a vertical leg at the corner. This type of decoration probably derives from protective skins left on unfinished buildings and is often seen in the fourth century and Hellenistic periods.¹³

Over the whole area there was a heavy layer of silt and wash containing badly preserved sherds datable at the latest to the fourth century after Christ. Once again this debris produced evidence for other Classical buildings at the site in a fragment of

¹³ A. Orlandos, *Tὰ ὑλικά δομῆς τῶν ἀρχαίων Ἑλλήνων*, Athens, 1959–1960, pp. 254–255. The profile of our bench finds its closest parallels in seats connected to two bases in front of the Athenian Stoa at Delphi. A *terminus ante quem* is given for the larger of the two by inscriptions of the third century B.C. carved on the ends of the base (B. Haussoulier, "Inscriptions de Delphes," *B.C.H.*, VI, 1882, pp. 217–219, nos. 50, 51). The profile of the bench leg of the smaller, uninscribed monument is in fact closer to our example (Base C in fig. 6 of *Fouilles de Delphes*, III, 3,1).

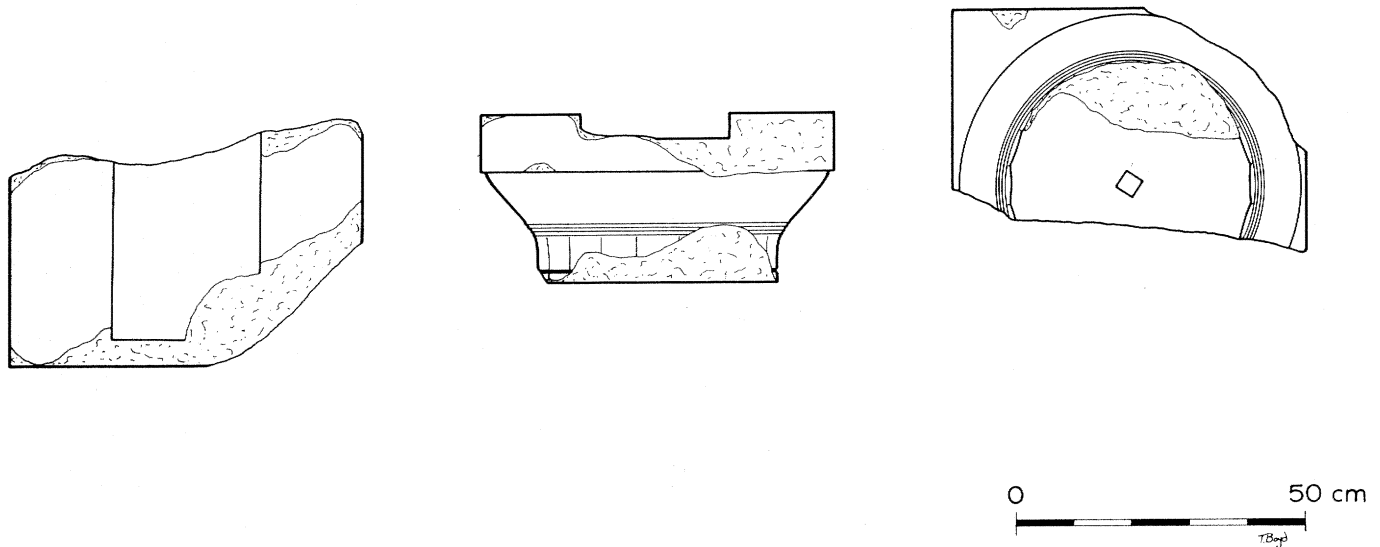


FIG. 4. Doric column capital

a Doric capital which was found over the cavea, having evidently rolled down from above (Fig. 4).¹⁴

In front of the theater benches the drain was cleared for its entire length before disappearing into the western scarp. The crumbly nature of the bedrock and the fact that to the west the drain was at least partially cut out of clay make it difficult to determine its original position. It slopes from elev. +290.09 m. in the east to *ca.* +289.70 m. in the west.

Two test trenches were undertaken south of the exedra in an attempt to determine whether any construction might be found in the orchestra floor in this area. Results were negative.

Although various patches of hard surfaces were found including an apparent clay surface just south of the drain (labeled as III on the plan, Fig. 1), no obvious orchestra floor was detected.¹⁵

CHRONOLOGY

The cavea, as recovered, presents a number of peculiarities which make dating, even on a relative basis, precarious at best. It would appear that the rectangular cutting

¹⁴ Ph73 A1. Single fragment preserving one half of the capital. Poros stone, well carved; a portion of the abacus on the capital's left side is broken away and there are other broken areas. H. 0.30, L. 0.60, W. 0.35, D. of shaft 0.42 m. A slot 0.25 m. wide cut into the top of the abacus perhaps indicates the position of a plinth for a statue. A square (0.04 m.) centering hole is preserved in the center of the shaft.

¹⁵ Levels I and II are those mentioned as T-I and T-II in the 1972 excavation report, *Report '72*, p. 119.

and by analogy the semicircular cuttings to the east belong to the earliest period represented in the cavea. Its use is uncertain; it may not have had anything whatever to do with a theater.

The remains in their present state date from the latest period of use, but it is more difficult to determine the date of the original establishment of the seating. The clay and pebble packing is certainly to be dated to the Roman period, as was the anta base on the east retaining wall, which itself contains a number of re-used blocks.¹⁶ Stylistically, the seat blocks are difficult to date with any certainty, although the projecting fillet is cited as indicating a Greek rather than a Roman type.¹⁷ However, examples of this profile are common in late Hellenistic times, especially in the East, and are known from Roman times.¹⁸ Evidence would seem then to point to at least major activity in the cavea in Roman times, involving seating and probably the retaining wall, but the possibility exists that this was the period of the establishment of the seats in their present position. A glance at the plan indicates several unusual features of the preserved row of seats including the patch, the final seat at the west which is clearly not an original seat, and the absence of any traces of the second row. These anomalies might be explained by the fitting of a line of seats into a space which is slightly too wide. It might also be mentioned that no place has been found to accommodate the four thrones, all four of which were found not in the theater but in fields to the east.¹⁹

A possible reconstruction would have the foundation blocks for the seats laid as far as the pre-existing exedra. Next, the seats were placed upon the foundations, with a patch and an odd seat at the west to close the gap to the exedra. The earlier cuttings against the hill were filled in and the wooden-bench seating established, bordered on the east by the retaining wall which may also have been built at this time, and on the west by a line of roughly cut stones placed behind the exedra whose walls would have obscured the view if the seating had extended all the way to the west. On the south the seating would have been bordered by the rubble retaining wall, possibly plastered as a second row, and on the north by the ascending slope of the hill which was doubtless also used for viewing space. The date of this change is difficult to extract but probably hangs together with the history of the North Building.

¹⁶ *Report '70*, p. 441 and note 26. This particular type of base is not found in Corinth after the middle of the first century after Christ.

¹⁷ O. A. W. Dilke, "The Greek Theatre Cavea," *B.S.A.*, XLIII, 1948, p. 153.

¹⁸ A number of parallels for our seat profiles can be found in the excellent plans and photos of D. De Bernardi Ferrero's *Teatri Classici in Asia Minore (Studi di Architettura Antica, I-III*, Rome, 1966, 1969, 1970). Closer to Phlius, a seat block with projecting fillet datable to the first century after Christ is recorded from Isthmia: E. Gebhard, *The Theater at Isthmia*, Chicago, 1973, p. 68 and figs. 35, 36.

¹⁹ Local accounts have it that the two whitewashed examples were found placed on a pavement of squared blocks in a field to the east of the Palati. The other two were found on the surface being used as field markers in this same general area.

COURTYARD AND NORTH BUILDING

Further investigations were carried out in the area of the North Building and the courtyard to the south of it to check the stratigraphy determined in 1972 in the east half of the courtyard and to try and relate these levels to the stratigraphy in the North Building. It was also planned to investigate further the line of blocks parallel to the building on the north.²⁰ This "proskenion" wall was found to run uninterrupted across the front of the building and to disappear into the western scarp (Pl. 14, b). The present exposed length is some 21.13 m., composed of ten rectangular blocks of uniform width (1.45–2.70 m. in length; 0.50 m. in width). Pry holes exist in the second, fifth, seventh, and eighth blocks from the east. In each case there are two, with the exception of the seventh block which has only one. Several tests were dug down to bedrock on both the north and south sides of the wall. It was found that the blocks which extend to the north from the east end of the wall²¹ were resting in shallow cuttings in the bedrock, which were made to receive them (Pl. 15, a).

Further, the blocks of the wall were found to be unevenly worked, some actually broken on their bottom surfaces and resting on a rubble layer within their footing trenches. On the north side, with the exception of block no. 3, a sunken band ran along the top surface of the vertical face to a depth of 0.03 m. from the top of the block. This band is sunk 0.03–0.04 m. and is more carefully worked than the rough, almost quarry face it abuts. One of the two blocks investigated on the south side of the wall exhibited this working.

The two projecting blocks were fitted into the wall, the vertical surfaces of blocks nos. 1 and 2 having been worked back to receive them. These slots were larger than was necessary for the size of the block, having an excess of 0.20 m. to the west of the eastern projecting block, 0.30 m. to the east of the western block, and 0.15 m. to the west of that block.

The test trenches to the north of the wall at its east end also revealed three circular post holes averaging about 0.18 m. in width and 0.08 m. in depth, cut into the bedrock and covered by a pebbled stratum, itself cut by the blocks (Pl. 14, b).

The sequence of floors outlined in the 1972 report²² was further tested by clearing most of the west half of the area of the courtyard and by removing the small remaining patches of undug fill in the North Building. The varying tests give a rather fragmented impression of the area on the plan (Fig. 1) but verified the previously determined sequences. A north–south section through the floors and North Building is given in Figure 5. All the surfaces slope down to the south and west.

The lowest floor, C I, was uncovered in a relatively large area at an average

²⁰ *Report '72*, pp. 111–114.

²¹ *Report '72*, 113–114.

²² *Report '72*, pp. 112–113. The term "floor" here is used to designate recognizable surfaces. Some of these are more likely than others to be actual floors and this will be indicated in the text.

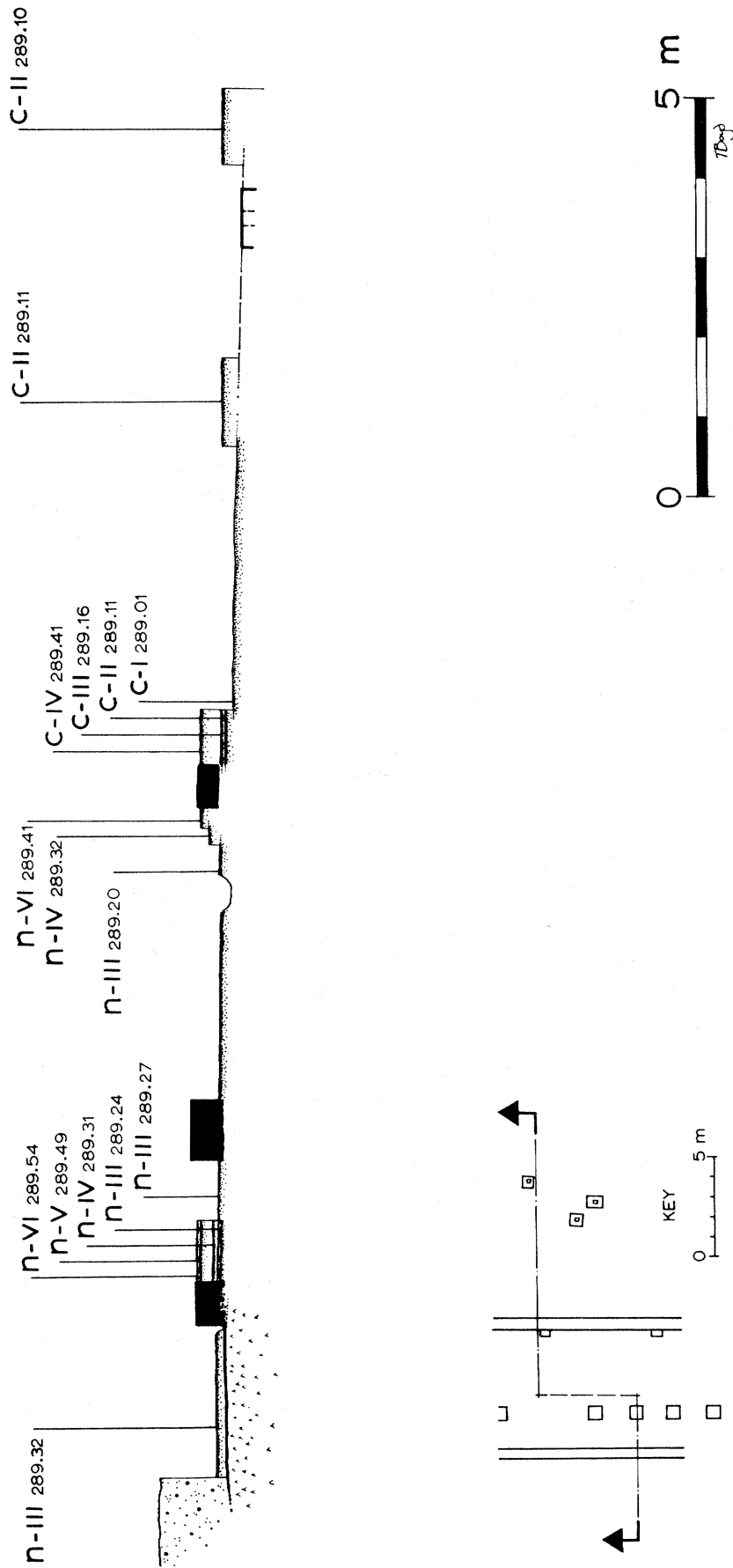


FIG. 5. Courtyard and North Building. Section through floors, looking east

elevation of +289.01 m. and is associated with N I inside and to the east of the North Building. It is made up of small pebbles set in a hard-packed fill, giving a hard surface. A few tests were taken through this lowest floor, the pottery from which, although scrappy and poorly preserved, would not appear later than the fourth century B.C.²³ A number of interesting features are to be associated with this floor and were covered by Floor C II.

In 1972 we recorded a square block with a vertical socket cutting in its upper surface.²⁴ This season revealed four more similar blocks to the west of this arranged in a seemingly random manner (Pl. 5, b). All five are roughly square and of about the same dimensions (approximately 0.68 m. square) with the exception of that found in 1972, which was somewhat smaller (approximately 0.635 m. square). All these blocks have square cuttings in their upper surfaces. The base found in 1972, the next one to the west, and the farthest to the west have vertical channels opening off the main cutting on their south sides as if for a flange or a tenon (*ca.* 0.10 m. wide by 0.05 m. deep). These bases remind one very much of similar sockets for wooden posts known from many theaters where they were sometimes used to support timbers for removable stage buildings, as at Pergamon.²⁵ Their haphazard arrangement here, though, makes any such supposition somewhat difficult.

Further to the north and embedded in the same Floor C I, we came upon the stone foundations for two "machines" (Fig. 6, Pl. 15, c, d). These foundations are rectangular in shape with overall dimensions of approximately 0.80 × 1.30 m. They are each constructed basically of three poros slabs forming a rectangle with one short side open. The two closed ends face each other at a distance of 1.18 m. in a northwest-southeast line behind the North Building. The side walls meet the short walls at right angles and are secured by iron hook clamps set in lead. All four of these clamps have survived *in situ* (Pl. 15, e). Rectangular cuttings exist in the upper surfaces of the side walls. The open ends of each construction are partially blocked by a rectangular slab which provides an angled floor between the two side walls. This ends just slightly beyond the beginnings of the cuttings on the upper surfaces of the walls, leaving open a square area approximately 0.30 × 0.34 m. The constructions' side walls appear to be continued on the western example by unevenly cut blocks, one of which bears a roughly cut shelf on its upper surface, and by two field stones on the eastern example.

Constructions of similar dimensions and general shape but without a sloping floor are known from theaters at Megalopolis, Eretria, and Elis.²⁶ In each case they

²³ Lot 177.

²⁴ *Report '72*, p. 113, pl. 21, a.

²⁵ W. Dörpfeld, "Die Arbeiten zu Pergamon 1904-1905," *Ath. Mitt.*, XXXII, 1907, fig. 14, p. 224.

²⁶ For Megalopolis the best description is in E. Fiechter, *Das Theater in Megalopolis (Antike Griechische Theaterbauten, IV)*, Stuttgart, 1931, pp. 24, 26. Fiechter is again the best source for Eretria: *Das Theater in Eretria (Antike Griechische Theaterbauten, VIII)*, Stuttgart, 1937, p. 15. Drawings of the examples from

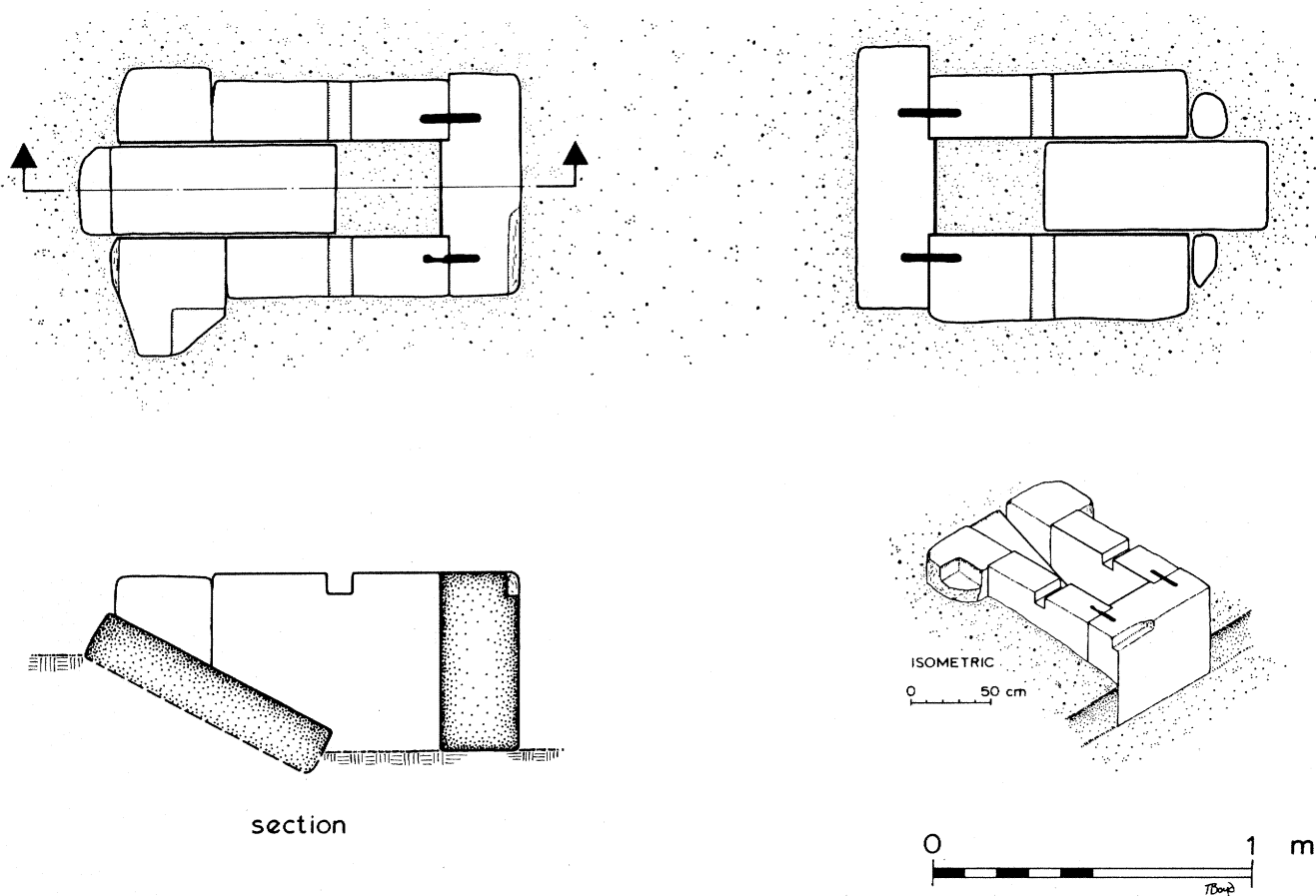


FIG. 6. Courtyard. Stone foundations

appear to come in pairs and to be located some distance apart from one another, often at the sides of the scene building, or actually outside it as at Eretria. Only one example has been discovered at Megalopolis; if the placement is analogous to the other two theaters, the second one must have been destroyed.

The use to which these constructions were put has been variously described as either foundations for some type of windlass or as simply rather elaborate bases for

Megalopolis and Eretria are given by H. Bulle, *Untersuchungen an Griechischen Theatern* (Abhandlungen der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, XXXII), Munich, 1928, taf. 13.

The foundations at Elis are not completely published and the one existing example is in fact quite different from those on the other sites, having been originally simply a deep shaft with large blocks as its sides. As now preserved, with one block fallen, and standing free of the earth terrace in which it was once placed, it presents an impression of a base for a tall mast but without the refinements of the other examples. The Elis foundations are first mentioned in the original excavation report: O. Walter, "Vorläufiger Bericht über die Grabungen in Elis 1914," *Jahresh.*, XVIII, 1915, Beiblatt, p. 74 and fig. 27. For the most recent plan of the theater in general, see V. Leon, "Vorläufiger Bericht über die Grabungen in Alt-Elis," *Jahresh.*, XLVII, 1964-65, Beiblatt, p. 94, fig. 50.

wooden uprights or masts of some sort.²⁷ In favor of the windlass theory is the fact that in two of the three theaters there is evidence for something movable which perhaps may have needed such a machine or pair of machines to put it in motion. At Megalopolis a movable stage of some size was apparently trundled out from its shed when needed and at Eretria tracks leading to the orchestra may have carried a wheeled contrivance of some type, perhaps the ἐκκύκλημα.²⁸ Unfortunately, the one other theater for which a movable scene building is attested, Sparta, apparently does not have such constructions although they presumably could have been destroyed or removed in antiquity.²⁹

All the known examples have one end open, and a square or rectangular opening or socket, either cut in a separate block as at Eretria, or formed by the three walls and the cuttings in the side walls as at Megalopolis and Phlius. This would tend to favor the theory that these constructions are merely foundations for large wooden masts, one end being left open to more easily raise and lower the cumbersome wooden uprights.

The newly discovered examples from Phlius do not appear to fit into the pattern of placement that has been inferred from those in the other three theaters. Our examples are placed closely together and not oriented with the present scene building but more southeast-northwest; they are also at present behind the scene building. Since they do, however, predate this building, any contemporary constructions must either have been destroyed or be directly under the present stage building. Furthermore, none of the other examples are as carefully built as ours, with their well-preserved iron clamps, nor do they have sloping stone blocks as floors. These last could be interpreted as inclined planes designed to help the setting and removal of large wooden masts, but one wonders if they were really necessary for a mast only about 0.30–0.34 m. square.

On the other hand, the clamps might indicate some attempt to overcome pressure

²⁷ Fiechter suggested a windlass of some form possibly for the movable wooden stage at Megalopolis but considered the examples at Eretria as bases for heavy vertical timbers. Bulle also favored masts with the cuttings in the side walls (as on the example from Phlius) used to secure cross pieces to hold the vertical masts in place. He further suggested that perhaps these masts extended up through the stage building and supported a rope from which were suspended "puppen" over the roof of the building (Bulle, *op. cit.*, pp. 90–91). Walter suggested that the examples from Elis served as bases for awnings, but it is difficult to see how this would have worked. A. Frickenhaus (*Das altgriechische Buhne*, Strassburg, 1917, p. 94) followed by M. Bieber (*The History of the Greek and Roman Theater*, Princeton, 1961, p. 75) suggested that they were bases for περίκτοι, although evidence for a socket to support a vertically revolving pole is missing.

²⁸ The controversies as to the shape, use and date of introduction of the ἐκκύκλημα, or ἐξώστρα if they are indeed the same thing, are most conveniently summarized by A. W. Pickard-Cambridge, *The Theatre of Dionysus at Athens*, Oxford, 1946, pp. 100–122. For a further view, see P. Arnott, *Greek Scenic Conventions in the Fifth Century B.C.*, Oxford, 1962, pp. 78–88.

²⁹ H. Bulle, *Das Theater zu Sparta* (Sitzungsberichte der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, V), Munich, 1937.

such as might occur when a windlass drags a heavy object, although how such a contraption could work on these remains is somewhat of a mystery.

In the course of the excavations, a rough intrusion was found cut through Floor N III within the North Building. It appeared in the form of a channel (*ca.* 0.50 m. wide) which ran east to west 0.96 m. north of the south wall. Where found, this channel was cleared to a depth of some 0.21 m. to a harder strosis approximately at the elevation of Floor C I. The channel's course is shown roughly on the plan, Figure 1. It is possible that this intrusion may be a robbing trench and may preserve the position of a line of tracks for some movable object. It is to be noted that as far as one can tell the North Building itself continues to the west beyond the curve of the cavea, which is peculiar but brings to mind the *skenotheke* construction at Sparta.³⁰ At Megalopolis there was a large movable stage because the area in front of the Thersilion had to be left open for access to that great building; we still do not know the use of the Palati at Phlius. The evidence is certainly not present to support the suggestion of some sort of rolling stage for Phlius, but it is an interesting thought nonetheless.

Tests around these constructions indicated that they apparently were not set into a pre-existing level but rather Floor I was built up around them.

Floor C II, now preserved only in a number of baulks, was found at an average elevation of +289.12 m. and is somewhat varied in consistency, some areas having an almost pebbled surface, others being of hard earth and even a number of stroses, perhaps indicating long use and repairs. Floor C II covered the bases and the "machines" and passes under the south wall of the North Building where it is to be identified with N II on the basis of elevation and composition. Where tested on the west, the foundations for the south wall of the North Building actually cut through this floor. The floor must predate the building and by the same reasoning so must the bases and the "machines". Floor II would appear to have gone out of use perhaps as late as the second century after Christ,³¹ but the stratigraphy in the areas tested was greatly disturbed.

Floor C III was enigmatic in consistency and, being located between two relatively hard surfaces, may not represent a "floor" at all. Found at an average elevation of +289.18 m., this floor again appears to have been cut by the south wall of the North Building and is also connected with Floor N III within it. This, however, showed more characteristics of a real floor, with white plaster and patches of pebbles set closely together. The intrusion in this floor has already been mentioned. No date could be recovered for Floor C III.

The fourth floor from the bottom in the courtyard, C IV, was found over the entire area this season at an average elevation of +289.30 m. It is again somewhat uneven in composition and runs up against the blocks of the south wall of the North Building.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pl. III.

³¹ Lot 152.

In 1972 a triglyph metope block was found re-used in this floor to the east and a date of the 5th–6th century after Christ was suggested for its going out of use.³² This floor, C IV, was the uppermost floor distinguished in the courtyard and we turn now to the stratigraphy within the North Building where a number of other layers were identified in the limited areas tested.

Floor N IV has an average elevation of +289.32 m. with a somewhat uneven surface composed of stones set in a fairly well packed earth of a distinctive yellow color, and is about 0.10 m. to 0.12 m. in thickness. It runs up to the south wall of the building and is cut by the footing trench for the north wall. The pottery from the fabric of this floor would appear to belong to the first century after Christ.³³

Floor N V, at an average elevation of +289.45 m., exists only in a narrow area in the test trenches immediately south of the north wall and extends almost to the line of large blocks which lie to the south. It predates the north wall and the large blocks appear to have been set down through it.³⁴ N V does not exist elsewhere in the North Building and one can only assume that it must have been partially removed at the time of the laying of the north wall and the placement of the square blocks.

Floor N VI, at approximately +289.47 m., was found throughout the North Building and was composed of stones of varying sizes set in a somewhat uneven surface which runs up to both walls. It went out of use in the fifth century after Christ.³⁵ It is similar in composition and elevation to Floor C IV and perhaps represents the last use period, when a new floor was laid over the whole area. Pottery from within its fabric dates to the second century after Christ.³⁶

CHRONOLOGY

The chronology of the North Building is difficult to determine due to its having been previously almost entirely dug out. It would appear from the scanty stratigraphical evidence that the south wall was built in Roman times, the line of blocks providing foundations for a rubble or mudbrick superstructure, possibly indicated by the square holes in the top surfaces. These would serve to hold uprights for such a construction.³⁷ A second period saw the construction of the small narrow chamber at the east end of the building, which has been suggested as the foundation for a staircase,³⁸ the east wall and the long north wall. Stratigraphically, it appears that the square blocks may be contemporary with this period, perhaps providing foundations for a primitive wooden

³² *Report '72*, p. 113.

³³ Lot 93.

³⁴ Unfortunately the small amount of pottery recovered from this layer was early in date and thus not chronologically significant.

³⁵ Lot 168.

³⁶ Lot 182.

³⁷ *Report '70*, p. 438.

³⁸ *Report '72*, p. 114.

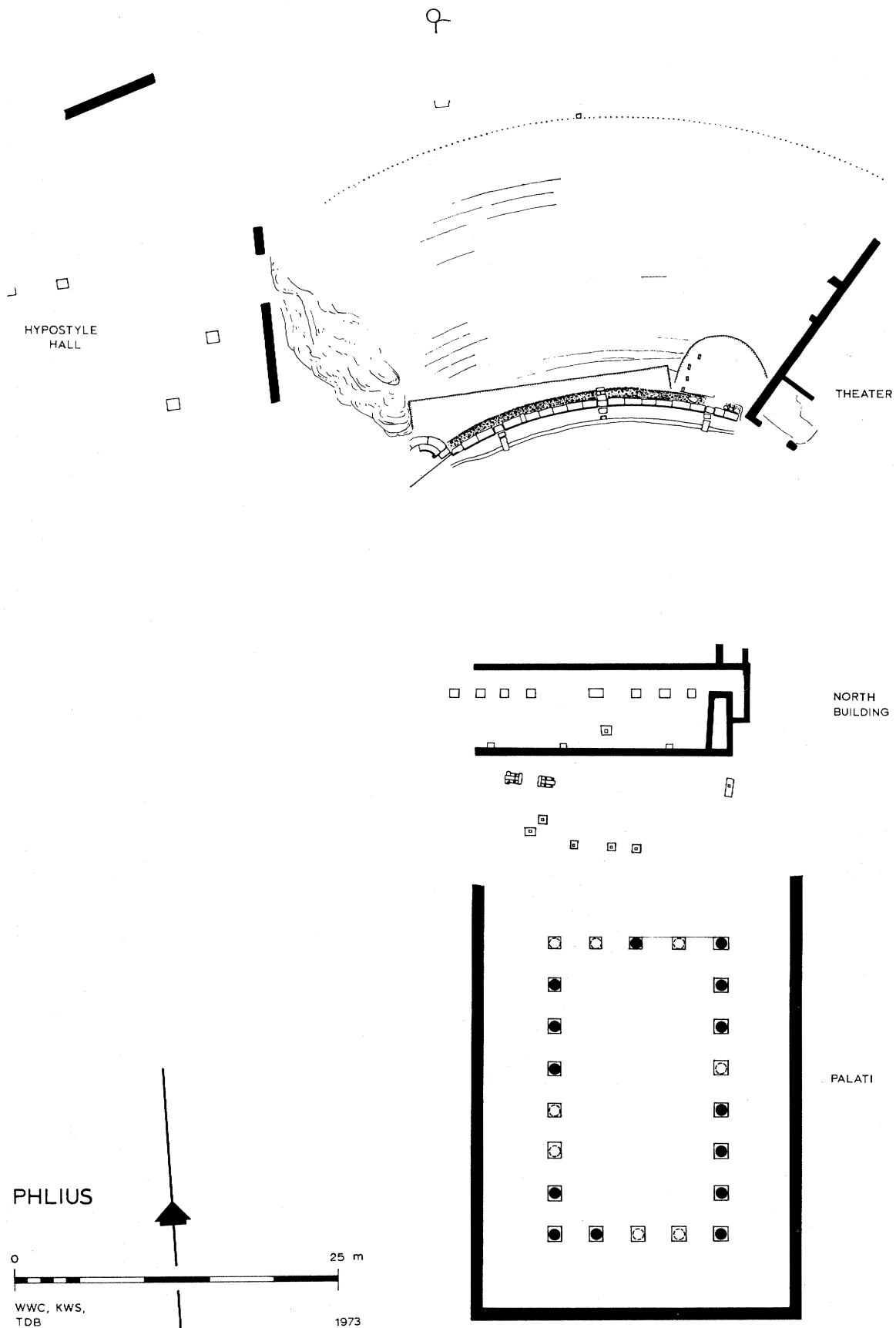


FIG. 7. Area of excavation at end of 1973 season

scaenae frons which would have risen behind the stage. The date of these additions is also hard to determine; a date perhaps in the second century after Christ would be most likely.

CONCLUSION

Taking the cavea and the North Building—scene building together, the most that can be said is that there was considerable building activity in the theater at Phlius in the first two centuries after Christ, perhaps with the establishment of the present seating arrangements as early as the first century and the final completion of the stage building as we now have it in the second century. How much of a theater establishment existed before the Roman period and whether the form of the North Building represents a “petrification” of a wooden prototype is impossible to say. It has been suggested above that perhaps some sort of movable apparatus was employed.

In any event it is perhaps not surprising that a small city, although with theatrical traditions, would have such a seemingly primitive theater until Roman times. Sparta, with whom Phlius was particularly associated, itself did not have a permanent stone stage building until the Roman period, and that apparently did not reach its final form until the end of the second century after Christ.³⁹

Figure 7 and Plate 16 show the area of the excavations after the end of the 1973 season. Perhaps the general outlines of the history of the theater at Phlius can now be dimly seen but neither the west side nor the upper portion of the cavea has been cleared. The west end of the North Building has not been located and must lie beyond the termination of the cavea. This problem, together with the very large orchestral space, still needs elucidation and solutions. As for the orchestra, one begins to wonder if the area was actually used for the production of plays in the true sense or served more as a place of assembly. Whether satyr plays needed special accommodations in their own birthplace, or whether other gatherings perhaps used this area, are questions to which we will probably never know the answers. It is interesting to find, however, that the memory of Pratinas and his satyrs was still kept alive in Alexandrian epigrams.⁴⁰ No doubt his tradition must still have had some strength even in later times in this corner of the Peloponnesos which was his home.

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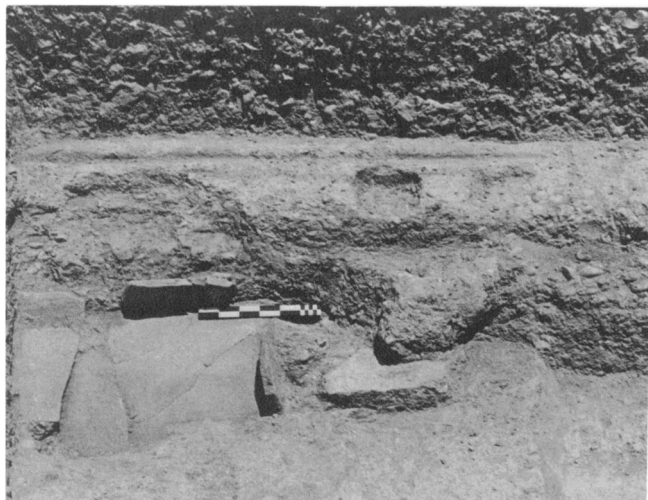
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³⁹ W. Dinsmoor, *The Architecture of Ancient Greece*, London, 1950, p. 310; H. Bulle, *op. cit.* (note 29), pp. 49–50.

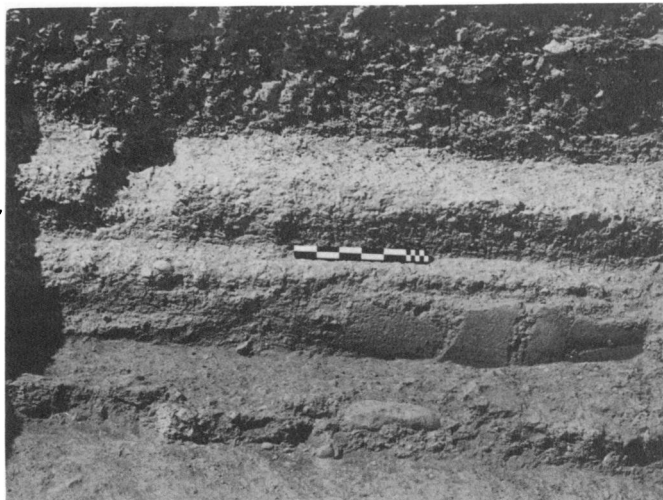
⁴⁰ T. B. L. Webster, “Alexandrian Epigrams and the Theatre,” *Miscellanea di Studi Alessandriani*, Torino, 1963, pp. 531–543.



a. Cavea from east



b. Rock-cut ledge from south



c. Ledge from south

Cavea

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a. Central entrance from south



b. Western entrance from south



c. Cavea from west, exedra in foreground

Cavea

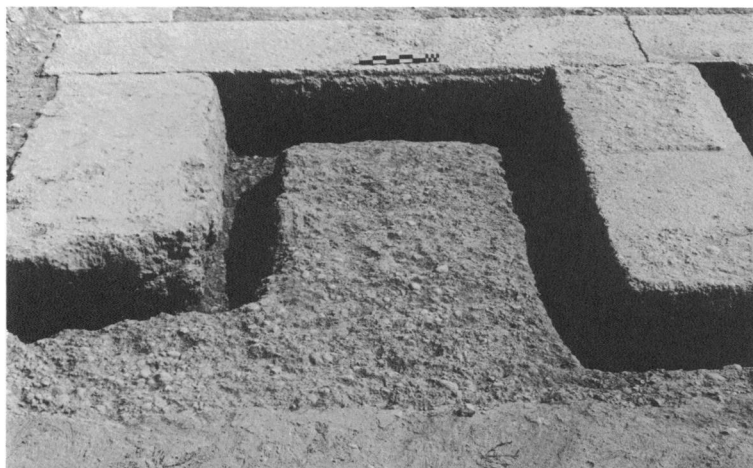
WILLIAM R. BIRS: THE THEATER AT PHLIUS: EXCAVATIONS, 1973



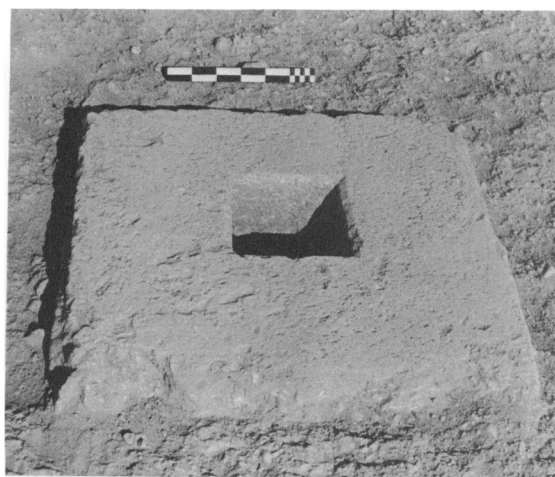
a. Exedra from south



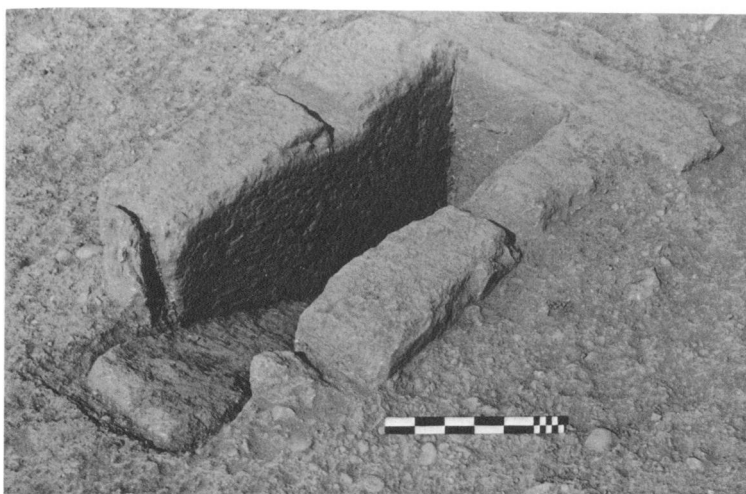
b. North Building from northeast. Postholes in lower right corner



a. North Building, east end of north wall from north



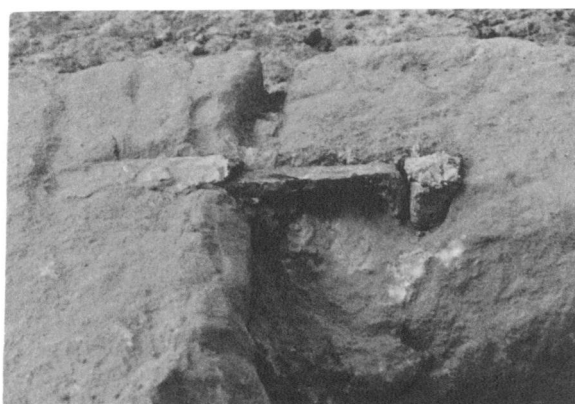
b. Courtyard. Base from east



c. East foundation in Floor C I from northeast



d. East foundation in Floor C I from east



e. East foundation. Iron clamp *in situ*

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Area of excavations at end of season, from northwest

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