

AN EARLY STADIUM AT NEMEA

(PLATE 17)

A RECENT discovery at Nemea may shed new light on the possible existence of an early stadium in the area of the Sanctuary of Zeus. A roughly rectangular block of hard gray limestone, found in re-use as a threshold in one of the southern doorways of the "xenon"¹ in the southeast corner of Section N 18 (Pl. 17 :a),² is now identified as a block originally from a starting line.³

The stone measures 1.590 m. long, 0.515 m. wide and 0.240 m. deep (Fig. 1; Pl. 17:b). It is characterized by a single groove 0.045 m. wide and 0.023 m. deep which extends the entire length of the block, 0.060-0.105 m. inside the north face. The front (north) edge of the groove is beveled and the rear (south) edge is nearly vertical. The exposed top surface of the starting-line block measures 0.430 m. wide, since the southernmost 0.085 m. of the block is worked down 0.02 m. A post hole, measuring 0.080 x 0.075 m., passes through the entire depth of the block. The center of the post hole is 0.220 m. from the north face and 0.395 m. from the east face of the block. There is no evidence of lead on the interior of the post hole.

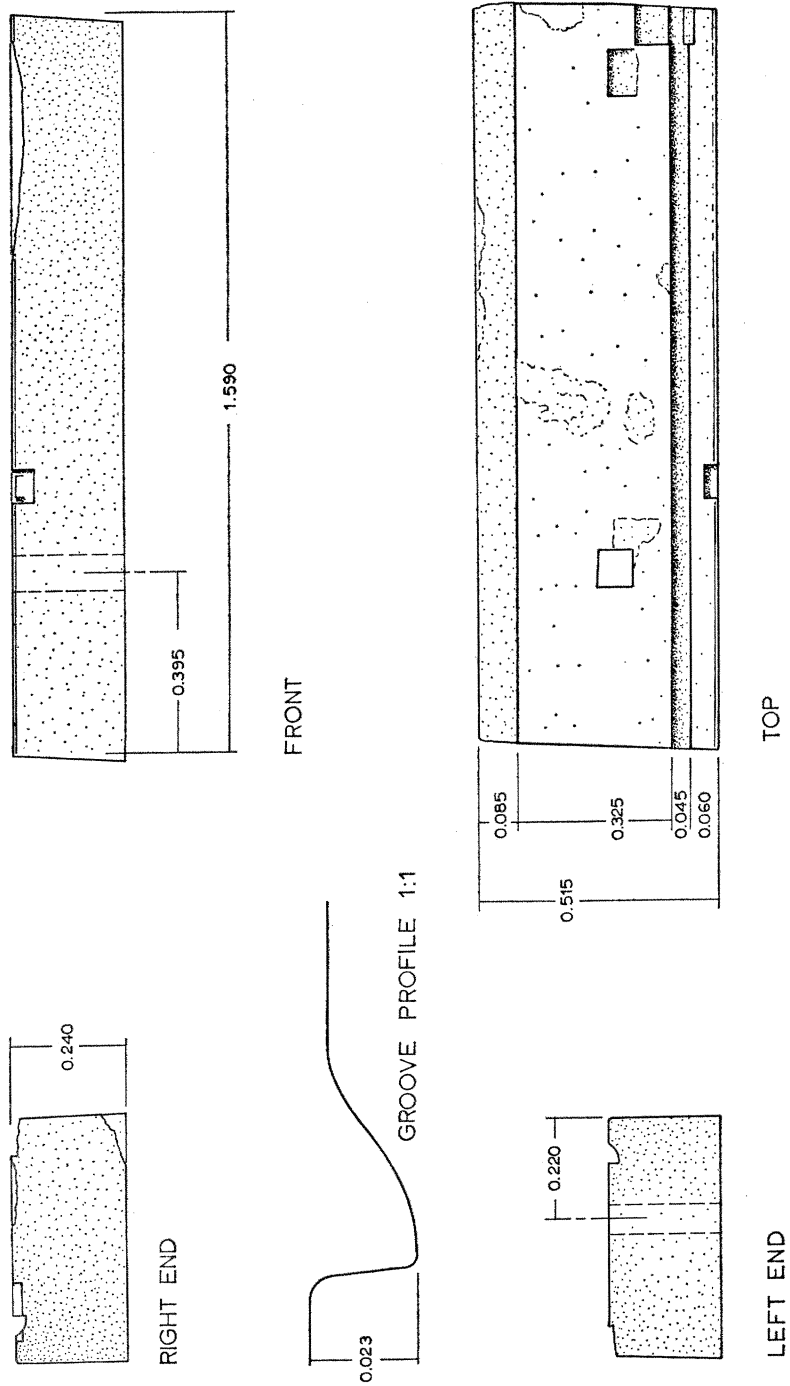
The starting-line block is in a good state of preservation, showing moderate wear generally with heavy damage in a few areas of the top surface. Several cuttings in the top of the block may be explained by its later use as a threshold. A rectangular cutting, 0.08 x 0.07 m., at the northwest corner received the base of the western door jamb. A small rectangular cutting, 0.07 x 0.09 m., immediately northwest of the post hole anchored the central pin of the doorway. Another block directly to the east of the starting-line block, and now missing, once provided the cutting for the base of the eastern door jamb. The heaviest footwear on the top surface of the block is to the east of the post hole. On the north face of the block, 0.54 m. from the east face, a rectangular cutting exists, 0.03 x 0.07 m., the function of which is unknown.

The starting-line block was removed and the earth fill beneath was found to rest on top of an earlier threshold, original to the "xenon" and dated to the 4th century B.C. The earlier threshold consists of four blocks and shows similar cuttings when compared with the later threshold block (Pl. 17:c). The ceramic content of the fill between the two thresholds, although meager, indicates that the starting-line

¹ The block was first found in 1964 during excavation under the direction of Charles K. Williams, II. The author appreciates the permission of Mr. Williams to study the block and to submit this report.

² Cf. Stephen G. Miller, "Excavations at Nemea, 1976," fig. 2, p. 4 above.

³ The author wishes to thank Stephen G. Miller, Field Director of the Nemea Excavations, Stella G. Miller, Assistant Director, and the University of California at Berkeley for generous assistance in the preparation of this material. Thanks are also due to Stephen K. Elbert for architectural and photographic assistance.



NEMEA A 100

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FIG. 1. Drawing of starting-line block A 100.

block was installed as a later threshold in the "xenon" in the late 4th or early 3rd century B.C.⁴ Since the "xenon" seems to have been built in the late 4th or early 3rd century B.C., the ceramic evidence may be misleading: the re-use of the starting-line block as a threshold should be placed somewhat later in the Hellenistic period.

An examination of the bottom surface of the starting-line block revealed a single letter, *epsilon*, 0.170 x 0.100 m. (Pl. 17:c, d). The epsilon is not archaic in form and there is no way of knowing whether or not the letter belongs to the block in its original use. Although the significance of the epsilon is not known, a block with a similar epsilon was found during the 1976 season on the western slope of the Nemea Stadium, opposite the starting line.⁵

Two parallels exist for a starting line with a single groove, one from the Sanctuary of Poseidon at Isthmia and another from the Delphi Gymnasium. The Earlier Stadium at Isthmia,⁶ partially within the Temenos of Poseidon, has a single-groove starting line which occurs at the northwest end, 10.93 m. southeast of the earliest starting line.⁷ Nine poros blocks of unequal length compose the remains of the single-groove starting line, 0.485-0.53 m. wide and 0.26 m. thick. The top surface of the stones has been worked down leaving an exposed width of 0.33 m. for the blocks.⁸ The single groove is triangular in section, 0.068 m. wide at the top and 0.041 m. deep. It is not continuous but is interrupted by unworked areas 0.26-0.38 m. in length at each post hole. Seven post holes from the single-groove starting line exist and each measures *ca.* 0.077 x 0.07 m. They extend through the entire depth of the stones and were originally lined with lead. The average width of the lanes of the single-groove starting line is 1.595 m. There is evidence that the single-groove line at Isthmia was in a re-used position, and it is likely that the same single-groove starting line was originally located only 0.905 m. southeast of the base of the triangular poros pavement, approximately 10 m. northwest of the present position. Professor Broneer believes that the single-groove starting line was originally installed in the Earlier Stadium perhaps as early as 390 B.C.

The second example of a single-groove starting line is from the *paradromis* located immediately in front of and parallel to the *xystos* on the upper terrace of the Gymnasium at Delphi.⁹ A starting line exists at both the northwest and southeast ends of the *paradromis*, 172.996 m. apart. The length of the northwest starting

⁴ Pottery lots N 18: 1-3.

⁵ Cf. Stephen G. Miller, "Excavations at Nemea, 1976," p. 26 above.

⁶ The following discussion is based on O. Broneer, *Isthmia*, II, *Topography and Architecture*, Princeton 1973, pp. 49-52, 65-66; pls. 22, 24, 95; plans VII, IX.

⁷ I refer to the triangular poros pavement with starter's pit. Cf. Broneer, *op. cit.*, pl. 23.

⁸ This worked-down surface faces the track whereas starting blocks at Nemea and elsewhere have similarly worked-down surfaces facing away from the track. Were these blocks at Isthmia turned around when moved to their present position? The unique V-shaped cross section of the groove in these blocks might thus be explained as a result of recutting the groove.

⁹ The following discussion is based on Jean Jannoray, *Fouilles de Delphes*, II, *Topographie et Architecture: Le Gymnase*, Paris 1953, pp. 46-51, 81-88; pls. I, III, VII, XXII.

line is 4.095 m.; that of the southeast line is 5.173 m. Each line is composed of three limestone blocks of varying lengths, 0.38 m. deep and 0.44 m. wide, plus a fourth irregularly shaped stone bordering the eastern extremity of the line. The top surface of the limestone blocks is characterized by a single groove, in lengths varying from 0.485-0.73 m., interrupted by post holes and large unworked areas. The single grooves are 0.053 m. wide, 0.042 m. deep. The front edge of each groove is beveled and is 0.155 m. from the front of the starting-line blocks. The post holes vary in size between 0.075-0.105 m. square and 0.09-0.10 m. deep. At the eastern boundary of the northwestern starting line is an irregularly shaped block, 0.39 x 0.46 m., with a square hole in the center. The limestone blocks of the southeastern starting line are bordered to the east by a fragment of an incomplete block, 0.60 m. long, characterized by a quadrangular hole and a continuous single groove 0.05 m. from its north face. This block, although different from the others of the starting line, appears to be a fragment of another single-groove starting-line block. The date of the construction of the Delphi Gymnasium is 334/3-327/6 B.C. based on inscriptional evidence.

Although the games at Nemea are documented as early as the 6th century B.C., the evidence to date suggests that the Nemea Stadium now being excavated was constructed in the late 4th century B.C. It seems only reasonable to expect an earlier stadium to have existed at Nemea. The recently identified single-groove starting-line block at Nemea may contribute to our knowledge of such an earlier stadium. All indications are that the Nemea Stadium and the Later Isthmia Stadium were constructed roughly contemporaneously. Both stadia were built at a considerable distance from their sacred *temenoi* and are characterized by starting lines with two parallel grooves on their top surfaces. The latest starting line for the Earlier Stadium at Isthmia, described above, is a single-groove starting line which Professor Broneer believes remained in use until the abandonment of the Earlier Stadium and the construction of the Later Stadium at Isthmia in the time of Alexander.¹⁰ The single-groove starting line of the Earlier Stadium at Isthmia, therefore, was the direct predecessor of the double-groove starting line of the Later Stadium. In addition, the Earlier Stadium at Isthmia was partially within the Temenos of Poseidon, adjacent to and southeast of the Temple of Poseidon, a feature not unknown in other sanctuaries. The earliest stadium at Olympia and the stadium at Halieis are both located close to their respective temples and partially within the sanctuaries. Since much of the area surrounding the Temple of Zeus at Nemea is as yet unexcavated, it would be possible and not surprising to find the site of an early stadium there, partially within the limits of the sanctuary.

The other possibility, based on the parallel with Delphi, is that the single-groove starting-line block from Nemea is from a gymnasium. This seems less likely since the earliest ancient gymnasium which has been excavated and positively identified,

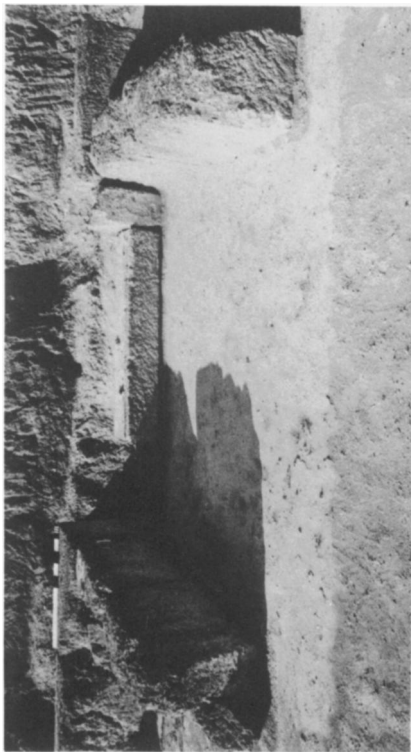
¹⁰ Cf. Broneer, *op. cit.*, pp. 65-66.

to date, is that at Delphi, from the third quarter of the 4th century B.C. A gymnasium at Nemea would have to have been built and either abandoned or remodeled within a century or so in order for the starting-line block to be removed and re-used as a threshold in the “xenon”.

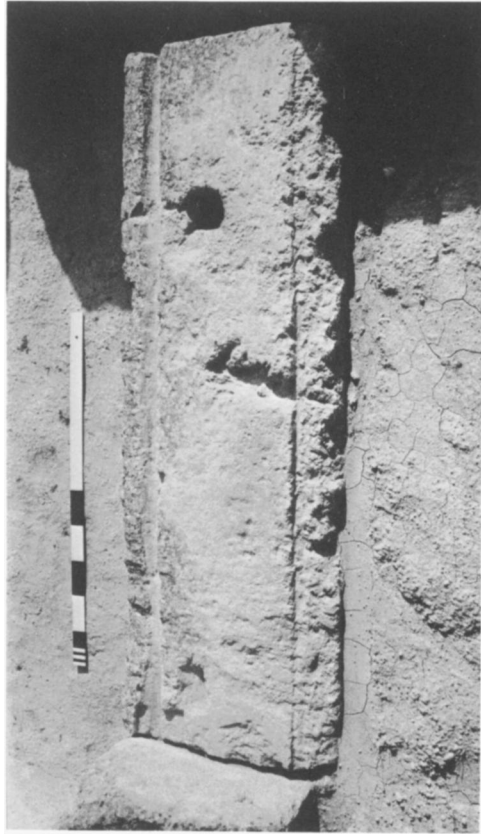
It seems more likely that the single-groove starting-line block is originally from the starting line of an early stadium in the area of the Sanctuary of Zeus. In the early Hellenistic period, after the now extant stadium at Nemea was constructed at some distance from the sanctuary, the block from the early stadium will have been re-used locally as a threshold in the “xenon”. Further excavation will hopefully reveal the location and details of this early stadium.

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a. Starting-line block *in situ* as threshold block in southern doorway of "xenos", from north



b. Starting-line block *in situ* as threshold block, from south



c. Starting-line block resting on its north face after excavation, exposing earlier threshold of the "xenos", from south



d. Underside of starting-line block showing *epsilon* in lower left central area

DAVID GILMAN ROMANO: AN EARLY STADIUM AT NEMEA