

# THE DATE OF THE WALLS AT TANAGRA

(PLATE 51)

THE unexcavated ruins of ancient Tanagra, which lie on the northern slope of Mt. Kerykios in eastern Boiotia, are mostly marked by a city wall of dark hard limestone.<sup>1</sup> This wall, some three kilometers in circumference, outlines an irregular shape on the slope of the mountain and is distinctly visible from some distance away: from the National Highway near the Schimatari toll booth, or from the O.S.E. rail line near Inoi Junction (Pl. 51, a).

Four types of building material can be distinguished. The most common is a dark, hard, local limestone which was used frequently throughout Tanagra, and occurs on Mt. Parnes and at nearby Plataia. Less common are sandstone blocks at various places throughout the circuit. There are large concentrations of loose rubble fill along the wall at the summit of the ridge, and at one place a conglomerate stone is visible.

The remains of periods other than that of the dark, hard limestone are scanty and inconsequential, and it is nearly impossible to make any statements concerning date.<sup>2</sup> But the dark, hard limestone is common enough to allow it to be dated with some precision.

The wall is generally 2.5 meters thick,<sup>3</sup> and eight courses of the dark, hard stone are visible. There are exterior and interior faces, each one course thick, with a rubble fill. There are 56 towers, at intervals of roughly 30 meters, and four possible gateways, probably for roads to Thebes, Delion (Tanagra's seaport), Athens, and Plataia or interior Attika. Although the walls and towers are frequently marked only by mounds, or by an unplowed strip, construction of the Athenian aqueduct in the early 1950's revealed the face of a tower near the summit of Mt. Kerykios (Pl. 51, b). The masonry at this point, which does not fall precisely into any of the categories defined by Robert

<sup>1</sup> The personal observation necessary for these conclusions came through repeated visits to Tanagra over the period from the summer of 1970 to the spring of 1971.

The earliest modern visitor to Tanagra who recorded noting the walls was William Martin Leake, who visited the city on January 31, 1806 (*Travels in Northern Greece*, II, London, 1835, p. 456). Others were H. N. Ulrichs in 1837 (*Reisen und Forschungen in Griechenland*, Berlin, 1863, pp. 68-71), Carl Robert in 1875 ("Die Ausgrabungen in Tanagra," *Archaeologische Zeitung*, XXXIII, 1876, pp. 148-160), and J. G. Frazer on November 13, 1895 (*Pausanias's Description of Greece*, V, London, 1913, pp. 76-81). Leake and Robert drew rough maps; Frazer's account is by far the most complete.

<sup>2</sup> Frazer (*Pausanias*, V, pp. 77-78) felt that the sandstone may have reflected a late Roman rebuilding, possibly in reaction to the barbarian invasions of the third century after Christ. The rubble near the summit may be a hilltop fort of indeterminable post-antiquity date.

<sup>3</sup> Frazer (*Pausanias*, V, p. 78) measured a well-preserved portion, since destroyed by aqueduct construction, and found it to be 6 feet 8 inches across.

L. Scranton,<sup>4</sup> is of isodomic coursing, but some of the blocks are quadrilaterals with no parallel sides, a type of construction rare in Greek walls, yet recognized as a variant of isodomic ashlar masonry by Scranton.<sup>5</sup> Elsewhere in the city walls the blocks of the dark, hard stone seem to be isodomic ashlar construction.

Scranton established the period for this type of wall masonry as between 425 and 375 B.C.<sup>6</sup> The south wall of Akte in the Peiraieus, which is similar in style to the walls of Tanagra, has been dated to the period of Konon (395 B.C.).<sup>7</sup> The walls of Messene, also much like the Tanagra walls, have been dated to the founding of the city by Epaminondas in 369 B.C.<sup>8</sup> The walls of Plataia, similar in style and building material to the walls of Tanagra, have been assumed to have been constructed at the time of the restoration of the city after the Peace of Antalkidas of 386 B.C.<sup>9</sup> There are other isodomic ashlar walls similar to those at Tanagra, including ones in Boiotia at Hyriai and Orchomenos. All that have been dated have been placed between 450 and 363 B.C., and most fall within the narrower limits of 425–375 B.C.<sup>10</sup> In addition, the use of towers at regular intervals in the walls implies (but does not require) a date of late fifth or early fourth century B.C.<sup>11</sup>

Although historical evidence concerning the walls of Tanagra is scanty, it is possible to date them with a fair degree of accuracy. Three ancient sources mention them. After the famous battles of Tanagra and Oinophyta, in 458–457 B.C., the walls of Tanagra were destroyed by the Athenians.<sup>12</sup> Yet in 377 B.C., when Agesilaos of Sparta invaded Boiotia, he marched near Tanagra, keeping the city walls on his left.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Robert L. Scranton, *Greek Walls*, Cambridge (Mass.), 1941. Although admitting the need for "revision in individual details," F. E. Winter, *Greek Fortifications*, Toronto, 1971, p. 81, felt that Scranton's chronology "still [retains] a good deal of [its] validity."

<sup>5</sup> Scranton, *op. cit.*, pp. 17, 101. See also Winter, *op. cit.*, pp. 83–84.

<sup>6</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 112.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 114 f.; Winter, *op. cit.*, p. 160. Walther Wrede, *Attische Mauern*, Athens, 1933, p. 29, pl. 70, preferred a date after the battle of Chaironeia (338 B.C.).

<sup>8</sup> Scranton, *op. cit.*, pp. 112–113; Winter, *op. cit.*, pp. 165–166; Diodorus Siculus, 15, 66; Pausanias, IV, 27, 5–8.

<sup>9</sup> Scranton, *op. cit.*, pp. 113–114; Pausanias, IX, 1, 4.

<sup>10</sup> Scranton, *op. cit.*, pp. 175–177.

<sup>11</sup> Winter, *op. cit.*, pp. 157–160. Another argument may be made on the grounds of the defensive purposes of the walls. There is no evidence for any round towers anywhere in the circuit wall: all the towers except one seem to be either square or rectangular. The exception is triangular and is caused by an angle in the wall. The tower walls are never more than a single row of blocks, or usually about two meters thick. Moreover, the wall is not solid stone, but has a rubble core. All this suggests that the walls and towers were not designed to withstand artillery. Artillery was first constructed around 399 B.C. at Syracuse, but it did not influence defensive architecture on the Greek mainland until the building of the walls of Messene in 369 B.C. Thus a *terminus ante quem* of 369 B.C. may be assumed for the walls of Tanagra. See E. W. Marsden, *Greek and Roman Artillery: Historical Development*, Oxford, 1969, pp. 48 ff., 116, 126. See also Winter, *op. cit.*, pp. 164–167.

<sup>12</sup> Thucydides, I, 108, 2; Diodorus Siculus, XI, 82, 5.

<sup>13</sup> Xenophon, *Hellenika*, V, 4, 49.

Thus the walls which had been destroyed in the mid-fifth century B.C. had been rebuilt by some 80 years later.

If the stylistic evidence is correct in placing the date of the construction of the visible walls between 425 and 375 B.C., presumably these walls were those built to replace the walls destroyed in 457 B.C. It is reasonable to assume that the walls were not rebuilt immediately after their destruction; the Athenian control of Boiotia which had dictated the destruction would hardly have authorized any rebuilding.<sup>14</sup> Although the battle of Koroneia in 446 B.C. ended Athenian control,<sup>15</sup> Tanagra remained unimportant in the following years.<sup>16</sup> By 395 B.C. the city, which in the early part of the fifth century had been the most important in Boiotia, had been reduced to only one-eleventh of Boiotia's economic and political resources; her lack of ability to defend herself and thus her total dependence on Thebes for protection would have been a major factor in this decline in importance.

Yet even though Tanagra was probably without walls as late as 395, 18 years later they had been rebuilt, for Agesilaos of Sparta saw them in 377 B.C. There are two likely dates during this period when this rebuilding could have occurred. In 395 B.C. the Boiotian Federation, under Theban leadership, broke away from Spartan control and allied itself with Athens.<sup>17</sup> Tanagra was at this time still a member of the Federation,<sup>18</sup> but there are indications of continued Spartan sympathies in the city, despite the change in the Federation's alliance. Xenophon implied that Tanagra was controlled by a pro-Spartan party under the leadership of a certain Hypatodoros when Agesilaos invaded in 377 B.C.;<sup>19</sup> in the same year the city had a Spartan governor named Panthoidas.<sup>20</sup> Thus Tanagra, a pro-Spartan island in the midst of the pro-Athenian Boiotian Federation, might well have felt the need for city walls.

Yet a date of 386 B.C. for the rebuilding is far more probable. At that time the Peace of Antalkidas terminated all federal alignments and granted autonomy to virtually all Greek cities.<sup>21</sup> The Boiotian cities could no longer count on neighboring Thebes for defense, and they enjoyed autonomy for a brief period until Thebes's consolidation of the hegemony later in the century. Tanagra minted coins for the first time since

<sup>14</sup> Diodorus Siculus, XI, 83, 1; Thucydides, I, 108, 2.

<sup>15</sup> Thucydides, II, 2-7.

<sup>16</sup> In 395 B.C. Tanagra had only one *boiotarchos* (compared to four at Thebes), and was only the fourth in importance out of the six districts of Boiotia. See *Hellenica Oxyrhynchia*, 16 (Bartoletti, pp. 22-23). It has reasonably been assumed that this political division of Boiotia was that put into effect after the treaty of Koroneia; see I. A. F. Bruce, *An Historical Commentary on the 'Hellenica Oxyrhynchia'*, Cambridge, 1967, p. 103; also J. A. O. Larsen, *Greek Federal States*, Oxford, 1968, pp. 33-35.

<sup>17</sup> Xenophon, *Hellenika*, III, 5, 7-17; Diodorus Siculus, XIV, 81, 2.

<sup>18</sup> *Hellenica Oxyrhynchia*, 16; Bruce, *Commentary*, p. 102.

<sup>19</sup> Xenophon, *Hellenika*, V, 4, 49.

<sup>20</sup> Plutarch, *Pelopidas*, 15, 4.

<sup>21</sup> Xenophon, *Hellenika*, V, 1, 31; Diodorus Siculus, XIV, 110, 3.

446 B.C., as did numerous other Boiotian cities.<sup>22</sup> Yet with this political autonomy would also have come responsibilities for defense: the demise of the Theban-dominated Federation meant that this was each individual city's problem. Walls would be necessary, and it is likely that Tanagra, like neighboring Plataia, would have built them at this time. By 377 B.C., when Agesilaos marched past the city, Tanagra was once again fortified.

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<sup>22</sup> Barclay V. Head, *On the Chronological Sequence of the Coins of Boeotia*, London, 1881, pp. 43–60; Charles T. Seltman, *Greek Coins*, London, 1955, p. 158.



a. Site of Ancient Tanagra. The wall appears as a horizontal line immediately below the crest of the hill at the right



b. Tower of limestone blocks