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Further Investigations at Phlius

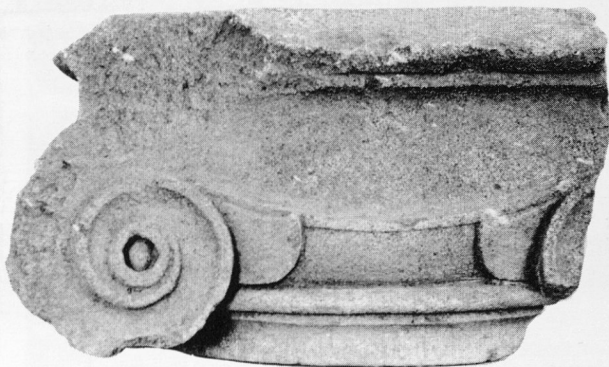
IN 1972 A TEAM FROM the University of Missouri returned to Greece to continue work begun in 1970 at Phlius, a small city site in the Peloponnese.¹ Our goal was to continue the cleaning and study of the large rectangular building known as the "Palati" and the theater complex to the north. We were able to complete the study of the Palati's later periods, revealing evidence of a long life extending through more than sixteen hundred years. We can distinguish, if dimly, the different periods of use, but destructions and later disturbances have made it impossible to be certain of the use or even of the complete plans represented by the parts of walls which have been cleared.

Built originally in the second half of the fifth century B.C., the Palati was destroyed possibly toward the end of the first century B.C. At this time the upper portions of the building, at least, were damaged, for in several places we found roof

tiles and other debris from the destruction (Fig. 1). Apparently this debris was intentionally dumped along the east side of the building, where we could distinguish definite layers of fill. The cleaning up of the debris may have been done in preparation for the re-use of the building, possibly in the second century of our era. At this time a rough wall was laid on the axis of the building just east of the interior colonnade. This wall was apparently destroyed some time in the fourth century, perhaps by the Visigoths under Alaric. We found ample evidence of this destruction in a mound of debris from the wall, which sloped over the tops of the column bases along the east side of the building. The debris was made up of tiles, re-used architectural fragments from the original superstructure, triangular Roman bricks and disintegrated Roman mortar. Here was the Trajanic inscription (A.D. 116-117) found in 1970;

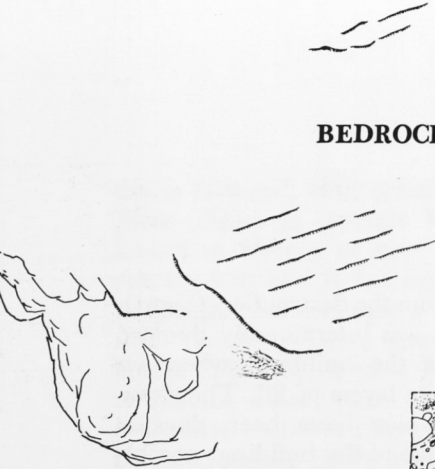


1. Fragment of decorated eaves tile from the original roof of the Palati.

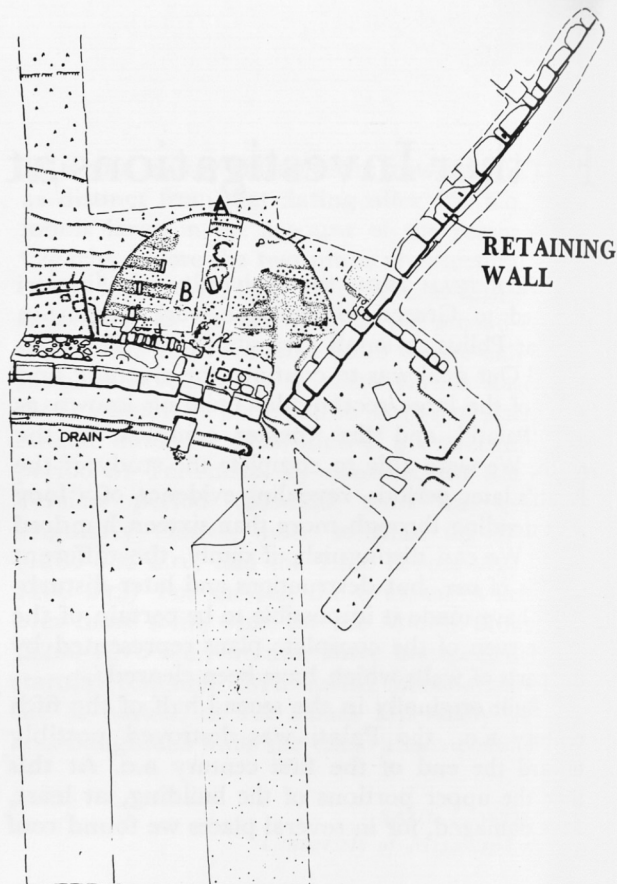
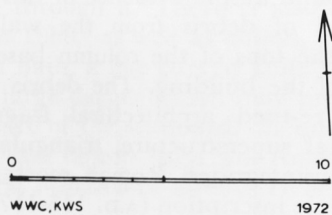


2. Ionic capital found built into Byzantine grave.

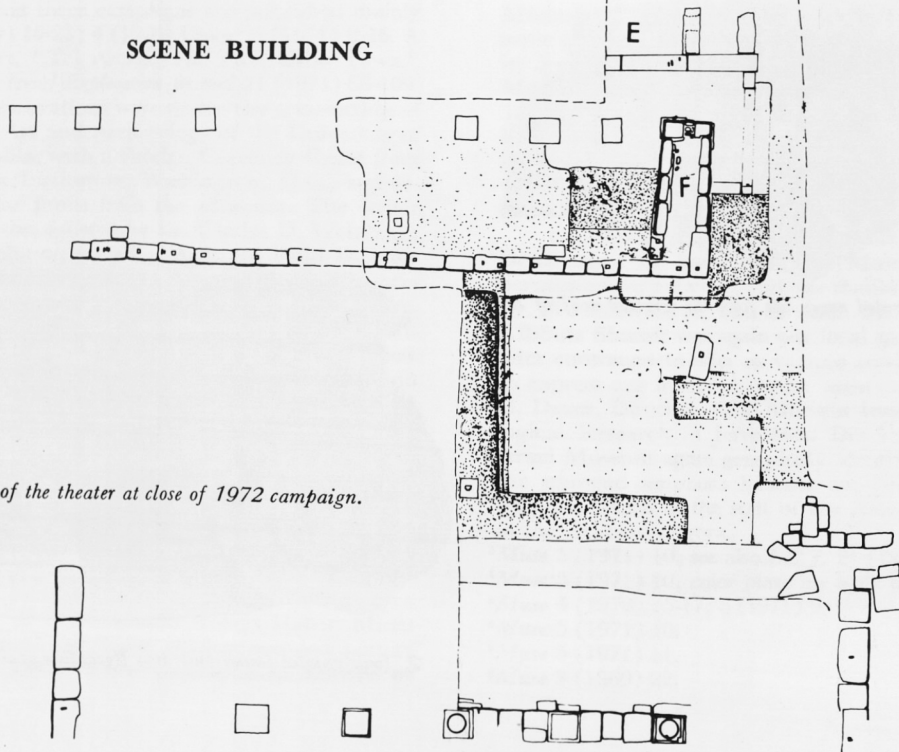
BEDROCK CUTTINGS



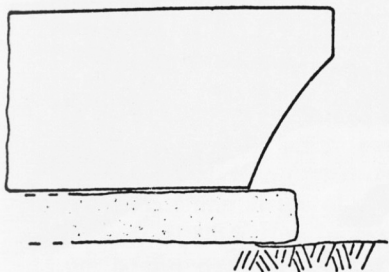
D
THEATER



SCENE BUILDING



Plan of excavations of the theater at close of 1972 campaign.



3. Drawing showing section of a theater seat of first row, as seen in Figure 4.

it had evidently been built into the wall.

The Late Roman period (fifth-sixth century) saw a construction of some sort erected in the courtyard of the building, but we know little about it.

Finally, the building probably went out of use, and by the tenth century part of a cemetery extended over its east side. Some Byzantine graves were uncovered, several containing a number of disjointed skeletons. A handsome Ionic capital (Fig. 2) of the second half of the fifth century B.C. was found built into the wall of one of these graves.² The walls of the building were also robbed out, even down to the foundations, to provide building material for a late Byzantine settlement farther to the south on the plain.

NORTH of the Palati lies the theater, the existence of which was confirmed in 1970. This year's studies raised many more questions. We investigated two areas in the theater—the cavea and the scene building (see Plan). In the cavea the cuttings in the bedrock of the hill, noticed in 1970, were found not to continue to the east but to be interrupted by a semicircular cutting (A on Plan) which extends to the retaining wall of the cavea on the east. Within this cutting (to the south) the bedrock appears to have been removed to a depth of almost 1.30 m. and the space packed with a filling of clay and mud brick; in this were placed at least four square stone blocks which project from its surface. These line up with the rock cuttings



4. First row of the theater seats, seen from the west, also showing the three entrance blocks.



5. View of the excavations from the north at the end of the 1972 season. In the foreground the theater seats; in background the scene building and beyond, the Palati.

mentioned above and probably were supports for wooden seats. Moreover, the surface of the packing is divided into alternating strips (about 0.50 m. wide) of pebbles and clay, the blocks being set in the clay and the pebble strips probably used as foot-rests for the audience (see B on Plan).

These alternating strips of clay and pebbles, while obvious around the blocks on the west, could not be discerned in the center of the area and were only occasionally visible on the east.³ A test trench (C on Plan) dug into this packing in an area where there were no surface indications yielded Early Roman sherds, indicating that the packing must have been laid down at this time.

This Roman building activity in the theater, which apparently also included additions to the retaining wall to the east, must be considered as reconstruction and reworking of a basically older structure. The stone theater benches, still *in situ* and forming the first row of the auditorium, are of Greek workmanship and must belong to an earlier period (Fig. 3).

This year we found that three meters to the west of the retaining wall these benches are interrupted by an entrance into the cavea consisting of three blocks laid at right angles to them. The highest one (at the north) is set in the line of seats slightly below their upper surfaces (Fig. 4). The lowest block spans the theater drain which runs in front of the seats. These blocks are re-used and thus of a later period. The sides of the seats framing the entrance are smoothly worked, indicating that an earlier opening, of the same period as the benches, existed here.

A test trench dug 7.50 m. to the west (D on Plan) indicated that the benches continue in that direction and there is a good possibility that the whole front row of the theater will prove to be preserved.

INVESTIGATIONS around the scene building located to the south of the auditorium (see Plan) yielded interesting results. An extension consisting of a narrow wall of stone blocks was found to run parallel to and 1.56 m. north of the scene building (E on Plan). This looks very much like the foundations for a raised stage, a common addition to Greek theater stage buildings, usually in the Hellenistic period. These foundations (Fig. 5),

then, would have supported a stage which may have been reached by a staircase in the narrow rectangular projection at the east end of the scene building (F on Plan).

At the end of the 1972 season a number of problems remained with regard to the theater, especially its chronology. The enormous space (about seventeen meters) between the scene building and the auditorium is puzzling and unusual (see Fig. 5). Ordinarily only a few meters separate the stage from the retaining wall of the auditorium, thus forming an entrance to the orchestra. Perhaps such a large space was needed at Phlius for theatrical reasons, or perhaps other buildings may have been placed between the scene building and the cavea, as in the early theater at Thorikos in Attica, where a temple and storage buildings partially closed off the orchestra to the east and west.⁴ If such buildings exist, they must be at the west, where excavation has not yet extended. Here, too, the other problems of the theater may be solved.

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¹W. Biers, "Investigations at a Small Greek City," *Muse* 5 (1971) 17-19; *Hesperia* 40 (1971) 424-447. The excavations, sponsored by the American School of Classical Studies at Athens, extended from July 3 to August 11. William Biers was director. Trench masters were graduate students: Harriet Anne Weis of Bryn Mawr College, Nancy Reed Eals and Karl Kilinski II of the University of Missouri. All three were Ford Foundation Archaeological Trainees. The architect this season was Kenneth Schaar from the University of Illinois (Chicago). This excavation was funded by grants from the Research Council of the University of Missouri-Columbia and the American Council of Learned Societies.

²The capital bears a deep cutting in its top surface and an unfluted shaft, indicating that it was not part of a building but served as a base for a statue, perhaps a choregic monument close to the theater.

³Apparently here, as well as farther to the south, wash from the hill may have done considerable damage to a construction made essentially of mud brick. This is perhaps borne out by our difficulty in identifying an orchestra floor immediately to the south. Indications are that we may expect to find better preservation in the area farther to the west, which is not under the steepest part of the hill.

⁴T. Hackens, "Le théâtre," *Thorikos 1965* (Brussels 1967) plan 5.