

## LACONIA.

### II.—EXCAVATIONS AT SPARTA. 1906.

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#### § 10.—THE THEATRE.

(PLATE VII.)

THE narratives of the travellers, who have visited the theatre at Sparta, are for the most part too short and too vague to prove of much real service to the excavator. Leroy,<sup>1</sup> who visited Sparta in 1770, mentions the seats of greyish-white marble and the retaining-walls of fine rusticated stone, and shows in his illustration the Byzantine fortress-wall, which runs southwards from the theatre, with two columns standing outside it. The plans and drawings of the French<sup>2</sup> Expedition sixty years later show the same wall and columns without any trace of the stage-buildings mentioned by Leake<sup>3</sup> (1805) and Dodwell<sup>4</sup> (1819) among previous visitors, and by Curtius<sup>5</sup> in 1852. Neither Clark,<sup>6</sup> nor Wyse,<sup>7</sup> nor Bursian<sup>8</sup> saw remains of a *proscenium*, so that it appears likely that Curtius at any rate, if not his predecessors, mistook the Byzantine remains in front of the theatre for Roman stage-buildings. It was principally on the evidence of these remains that Leake, Dodwell, and Bory de St. Vincent<sup>9</sup> based their supposition that the theatre was of Roman date.

<sup>1</sup> Leroy, *Les Ruines des plus beaux Monuments de la Grèce*, Paris, 1770, p. 33, Pl. XIII.

<sup>2</sup> *Expédition scientifique de Morée*, Paris, 1831, ii. Pl. 47.

<sup>3</sup> Leake, *Travels in the Morea*, i. pp. 154-6.      <sup>4</sup> Dodwell, *Tour through Greece*, ii. p. 403.

<sup>5</sup> Curtius, *Peloponnesos*, ii. p. 220.

<sup>6</sup> W. G. Clark, *Peloponnesus*, p. 161.

<sup>7</sup> Sir T. Wyse, *Excursion in the Peloponnese*, i. p. 91.

<sup>8</sup> Bursian, *Geographie von Griechenland*, ii. p. 121.

<sup>9</sup> *Expéd. scient. de Morée, Relation de Bory de Saint-Vincent*, Paris, 1836, p. 420.

It is worth while to quote Gell's<sup>1</sup> account, since he gives much fuller details of the appearance of the site. 'If it be very ancient, which I much doubt, it has been restored at a late period, but it must have been intended for the amusement of a very great population, as the radius of the orchestra is 70 feet, and the diameter of the whole 418 feet. The scene seems only to have been 28 feet deep, and the seats were divided into three cinctions, of which the breadths ascending were 20 feet for the lowest, 23 feet for the next, and 40 for the highest. Above this was a space only 13 feet wide, and behind that, the last, which might have been a portico, was 32 feet deep.'

As the orchestra was completely covered in Gell's time, he had no means of measuring it, and so his estimate of a radius of 70 feet is quite erroneous. His total diameter must be measured between two points on the retaining-walls, and not from the semicircle of large *poros* blocks on the summit of the hill, which was probably the limit of the ancient auditorium. This line probably corresponds with the front of his portico, and gives the true diameter of the auditorium as 104 metres or 342 feet.

The principal references to the Spartan theatre in ancient authorities are in Pausanias III. xiv. 1, Athenaeus iv. 139 e, Herod. vi. 67, and Lucian *Anach.* 38. Pausanias says that it was built of white marble, and the other three mention various festivals held in it:—the *gymnopaïdiai*, the boys' ball-game, and a procession which formed part of the Hyacinthia.

From these passages it would appear that dramatic representations were not among the most important spectacles shewn in the theatre, and that in consequence we might expect to find no permanent stage-buildings. It is difficult to see how either the ball-game, or the procession described in Athenaeus could possibly have taken place in a circumscribed Greek orchestra.

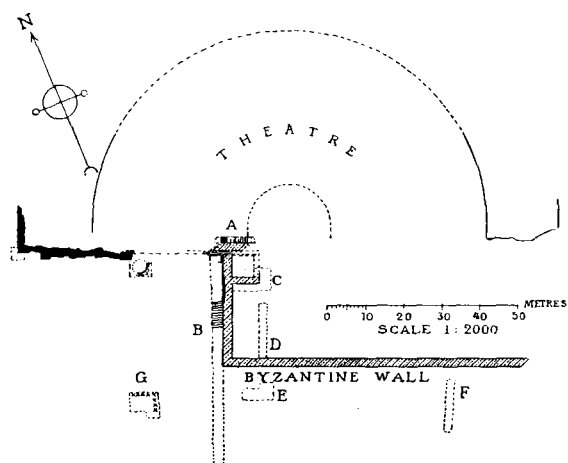
We started work therefore without much expectation of discovering a *proscenium*, or indeed, many remains of the auditorium seats, since all recent travellers from Leake's time onwards, have deplored the rapid disappearance of stone blocks from the theatre-area at the hands of the masons of Mistra.

The greater part of the work in the theatre-region was carried out between March 27 and April 20, but only for the first ten days was any

<sup>1</sup> Sir W. Gell, *Narrative*, p. 328.

large number of men employed on the site. The objects of our trial-trenches were to trace the course of the Byzantine fortification wall, and to ascertain the depth of the orchestra and the dimensions of the theatre, with a view to reporting on the value of future excavation. A plan of the trial-trenches is shewn in Fig. 1.

The longest trench, B, was dug along the base of the Byzantine fortification wall (hatched in the plan) in order to discover its relation with the theatre-buildings, and to extract any inscriptions or marble fragments that might be built into it. In this last respect we were fortunate, as we began at once to discover a great quantity of architectural, sculptured, and



TRIAL-PITS(A-G) NEAR THEATRE

FIG. 1.

inscribed marbles. Of the inscriptions found, many were copied by the Abbé Fourmont during his tour in the Peloponnese in 1729–30.

After digging through three metres of miscellaneous fragments we came upon the foundations of the Byzantine wall. In the northern part of the trench, these consist for a length of 9 metres, of two stepped courses of a rough *poros* stone. Each step is 30 m. high; no mortar was found between the blocks. They seem to be the remains of a classical building previous to the Byzantine wall, since no other part of it to our knowledge has a similar stepped foundation, and it is difficult otherwise to explain a careful uniform piece of construction extending for so short a

distance. In several other parts of the circuit we find use made of pre-existing buildings, and the direction of the wall adapted to suit them. Moreover it is 20 m. higher than the adjoining piece on the south. Had it been of the same date we should not have this abrupt transition. It is clumsily mended in one place with a block of different material, which was presumably added to fill a gap at the time of the Byzantine fortification.

At present there stand upon this foundation, built into the Byzantine wall, seven<sup>1</sup> blocks of white marble of different length but uniform width.

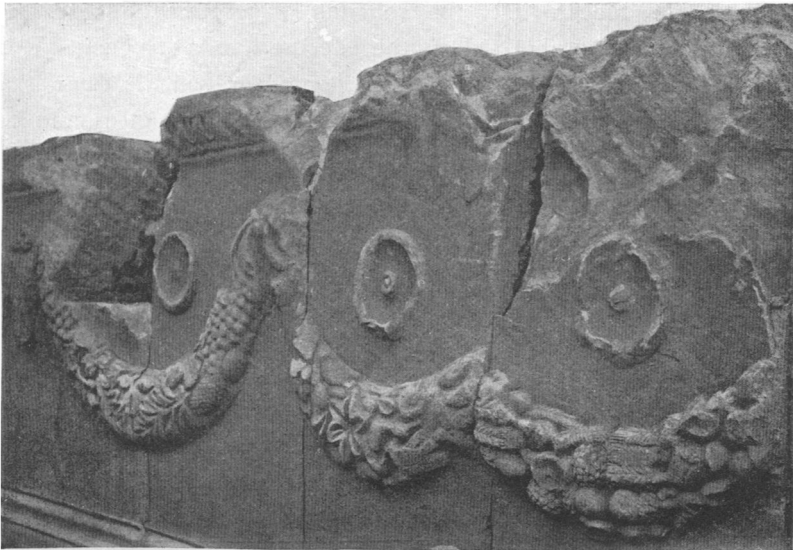


FIG. 2.—MARBLE BLOCK ADORNED WITH BUCRANIA AND FESTOONS.

and height, moulded at top and bottom, and adorned with *bucrania*, festoons, and bosses. These slabs are shewn on the plan in Fig. 1 by a thickened outline, and an illustration is given of them in Fig. 2: of the seven, the three on the left belong together, but the other four cannot be

<sup>1</sup> Total length 6.26 m., the single blocks from the left measuring .68 m., 1.53 m., .68 m., .60 m., .59 m., 1.09 m., 1.09 m. Height 1.27 m. The design of the left three blocks taken together is a scheme of three bull's heads, with festoons between, and bosses above the semicircles of the festoons. Only half the outside *bucranium* is preserved, as the rest has been chiselled away. Nos. 6 and 7 may belong together, in which case they come from a different scheme of design, as the swing of the festoons is much shorter. Nos. 4 and 5 may be similar blocks cut down. Traces of a bull's head are also visible on the outside corner of No. 7, which is also, therefore, a corner block.

in their original relation to each other, since the festoons and mouldings do not fit. Nor can the first three be *in situ* on the *poros* foundation, as they form in themselves the complete side of a monument or building under three metres in length. This is shewn by the *bucrania* at the outside corners, which originally were continued round on to the short side of the slabs, but were chiselled off when the line of marble slabs was put together. Their erection on the *poros* foundations, therefore, must be due to the Byzantine builders, who, as we shall see, were fond of decorating the lower courses of their wall with fine marble blocks.<sup>1</sup> Both blocks and foundations belong to buildings earlier than the wall.

The marble blocks may be remains of a Roman stage. Their height, 1·27m., is suitable, and the decoration a frequent Roman scheme. Whatever was the case in Hellenic times, it is clear that a permanent stage was needed for Roman dramatic performances, and it was natural for the Byzantine builders to make use of any remains that survived until their day. All the blocks of one of the short sides, presumably the western, were made use of, and a few of the front slabs, whose pattern differed slightly in detail.

The date of the *poros* foundations is probably much later, for, 0·20 m. below them, extending for 6·80 m. in a southerly direction, are remains of what seems to be a road, consisting of rounded stones set in a rough plaster, and supported by a foundation of large blocks set at haphazard.<sup>2</sup>

This road is shewn in the plan in Fig. 1. Under it, at a depth of 1·50m., we come to virgin soil. It is clearly older than the Byzantine wall, under the foundations of which it passes, and it must also be earlier than the *poros* foundations, since there are twenty centimetres of rubble material between the two levels. No traces of this road-surface were found to the north of the southern edge of the marble blocks, and a supporting wall running east and west terminates it on the south. It would seem, therefore, to have run east and west, and water-pipes running in the same direction were found on each side of it. These pipes pass through the rubble under the *poros* foundation. Above the road, and so belonging to a later date, were a great number of water-pipes. They were probably connected with some Roman baths, remains of which exist just south-west of the theatre.

<sup>1</sup> P. 434.

<sup>2</sup> The road found outside the Stoa on the east of the Byzantine wall shows a similar construction; cf. p. 432. Also the road near the so-called tomb of Leonidas; cf. p. 435.

At the northern end of trench B, the arm of the Byzantine wall running south to north joins another wall of the same period running east

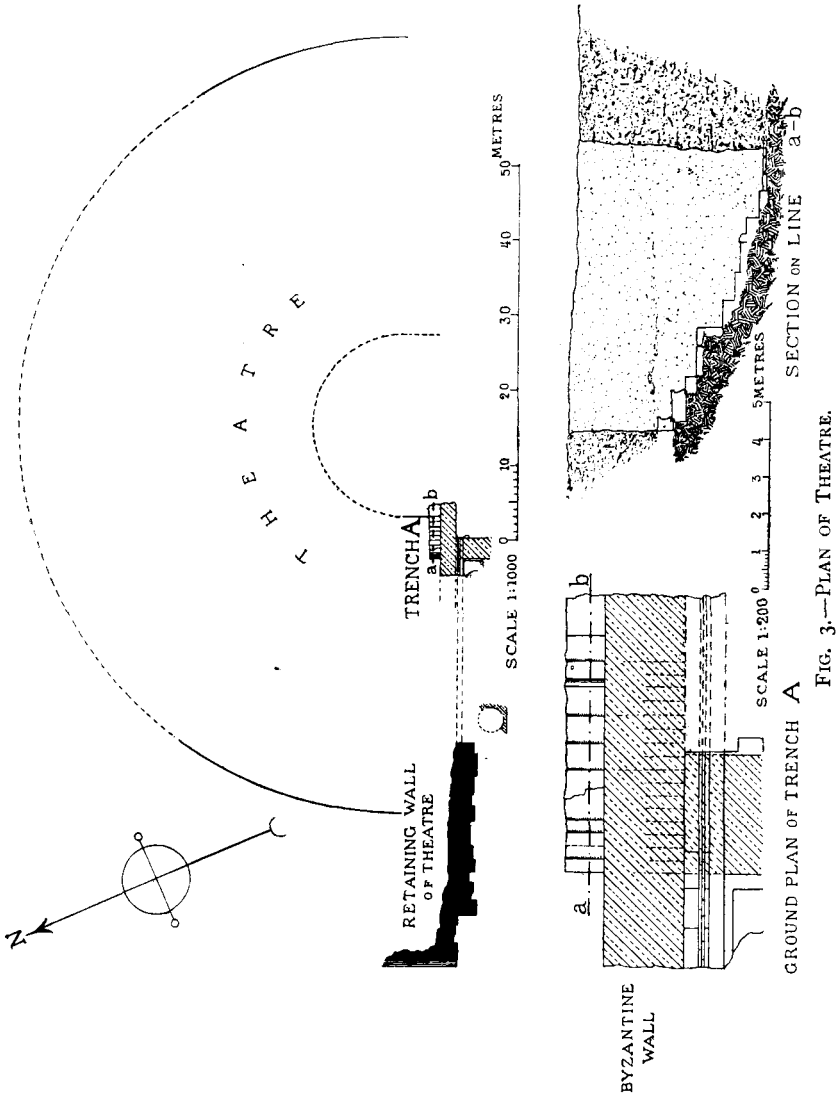


FIG. 3.—PLAN OF THEATRE.

to west, which is built above the retaining-wall of the west wing of the theatre. The substructure of the retaining-wall, consisting of five steps of

irregular size, has remained intact. The upper four are built of carefully dressed, rusticated limestone blocks, and were clearly intended to be visible. The lowest step was probably below the ground-level, and opposite it lie *poros* blocks which may have been the foundation of the western *parodos* or theatre entrance. The upper and lower steps are 40 m. wide, the intervening three, 10 m. wide. The summit of the upper step is 40 m. higher than the road-surface further to the south, and the summit of the lower step, presumably the original ground-level, is 50 m. lower.

A comparison of these levels suggests four periods of construction in this area :—

1. Building of the theatre, represented by the level of the lower step of the retaining-wall.
2. A later Roman period, represented by the road-surface 50 m. higher.
3. A still later Roman level, represented by the *poros* foundations 20 m. higher.
4. Building of the Byzantine fortification-wall.

It is with the second of these periods that it seems most suitable to connect the remains of architraves, columns, and Corinthian capitals that we found in trench B. One of the architrave blocks bears a dedicatory inscription of Vespasian.<sup>1</sup> The building to which the fragments belong must have been a colonnade, since the architrave is decorated on both sides and below, and probably formed part of the Roman stage-buildings. The position in which the fragments were found shews that they must have been arranged symmetrically in the Byzantine wall. Two of the columns were observed still standing in front of the Byzantine wall by Leroy and the French Expedition.<sup>2</sup> The colonnade may have formed a western entrance to the theatre. It must have belonged to the second and not the third period, since the latter was subsequent to, or contemporary with, Christian<sup>3</sup> graves. For the second period, therefore, we may suggest the end of the 1st century A.D.

The building which stood on the *poros* foundations may have belonged

<sup>1</sup> P. 457.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Expéd. scient.* ii. Pl. 47; Leroy, *op. cit.* Pl. 13.

<sup>3</sup> Skeletons facing east under tiles were found (1) between the levels of the *poros* foundations and the road-surface, (2) opposite the third step of the retaining-wall.

to the period of the Antonine Caesars, at which time Sparta underwent much adornment.

In the Byzantine wall built on the retaining-wall of the west wing of the theatre the ends of the steps of the outermost stairway of the auditorium are to be seen. Trench A was accordingly dug to discover the seat-rows of the auditorium, and the depth of the orchestra. A plan and section of this trench is given in Fig. 3. The level of the orchestra was discovered at a depth of 5 m. below the present surface. It is paved with thin slabs of a greenish marble. Immediately adjoining it is a bench of white marble fitted with a back, and a hollowed seat, and with a platform for the feet raised a few centimetres above the orchestra. Behind this bench are three steps averaging 70 m. in width, the lowest 40 m. above the foot-platform of the bench, and the upper two rising respectively 15 m. and 30 m. Raised 70 m. above the upper step is another 1.25 m. wide, which is cracked across the middle. This was clearly a passage-way or *diazoma*. Above it rise the regular rows, with a foot-space for the lowest row 30 m. above the *diazoma*. The blocks composing these rows have the seat in front hollowed to accommodate the body, while a space is provided behind for the feet of the spectators in the row above.

Two parts of benches found in the theatre are not *in situ*, and have had the backs chiselled away, but the north wall of the Acropolis contains some complete examples.

The seats that stood on the rows between the backed bench in front, and the *diazoma*, must have been different. The two upper steps probably contained benches consisting only of the seat fixed against the back of the step, leaving space for the feet in front, and the lower step, just behind the front bench, was probably another smaller *diazoma*, giving easier access to the best seats of all.

The steps, which are visible under the Byzantine wall in the ground-plan of trench A in Fig. 3, are of white marble like the seats. They are each 35 m. wide, and 15 m. high.

At the lower end of trench B was found a single theatre-seat with legs in the shape of lion's paws in relief. It was inscribed

ΔΑΜΟΞΘΕΝΕΙΑΞΑΝΔΡΙΑΝΔΡΙΑΝΤΟΣΤΟΠΟΣ.

This shows that there were single seats in front (as at Athens) as well as benches (as at Megalopolis).

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When the trench was cleared, it became evident that marble-plundering had been carried on even down to the orchestra level. Large portions of the seats were missing, and others were mutilated, and removed from their original places. The back of the front bench was broken, and all seats removed from the three rows behind it.

With regard to the shape and dimensions of the theatre, our excavations have not been sufficient to give more than approximate measurements.

Prolonging the semicircular line of blocks which appears on the summit of the hill, and which probably indicates the boundary of the auditorium, we get a half circle with a diameter of 104 metres, as compared with 117 m. at Epidaurus, and 128 m. at Megalopolis. On the summit of the hill are remains of walls, which seem to break the arc of the semicircle. These do not belong to the original building, but date from some later reconstruction. The great retaining walls are built of large blocks of a reddish soft stone, and rest on a three-stepped foundation. They must once have been faced with better material. Measurements between the outer sides of these retaining-walls give a total diameter to the whole building of 143 m. or about 470 feet.

The southern extremities of these retaining walls would meet, if produced, in a straight line. The seat-rows are set at a right-angle to this line, and shew no curve in the small piece which we have already excavated. We may infer from this that the boundary-line of the orchestra was produced by a tangent<sup>1</sup> beyond the semicircle, and not by a curve, *i.e.* it resembles the shape of the orchestra at Athens rather than that at Epidaurus. We can estimate the diameter of the orchestra to be 24.5 m. as compared with 25 m. at Epidaurus, and 30.5 m. at Megalopolis, but, until some portion of the arc of its semicircle is discovered, we cannot be sure of the exact position of its central point.

The only evidence for the date of the theatre at present available, is the forms of the letters which serve for masons' marks on many of the blocks of the retaining wall, and general considerations of its shape and character. Mr. Tod, to whom I sent copies, has had the kindness to inform me that

<sup>1</sup> Examples of the tangent extension exist in the theatres of Athens, the Piraeus, Eretria, Assos, Segesta, Priene, and the larger theatre at Pompeii. The curved extension is found at Sikyon, Epidaurus, Megalopolis, Delos, Magnesia, Mantinea, and in most of the Greek theatres of Asia Minor.

the letters, facsimiles of which are given in Fig. 4, can hardly be earlier than 200 B.C., and may be much later. Thus we find E for Ε, Π for Π, and Ξ for Ξ. *S.M.C.* No. 145, which may be dated 225 B.C., still preserves E and Π. The Ι is probably Η turned on its side. The general appearance of the theatre also suggests a late date of construction. That a theatre existed at the time of the Persian wars we know from Herodotus,<sup>1</sup>

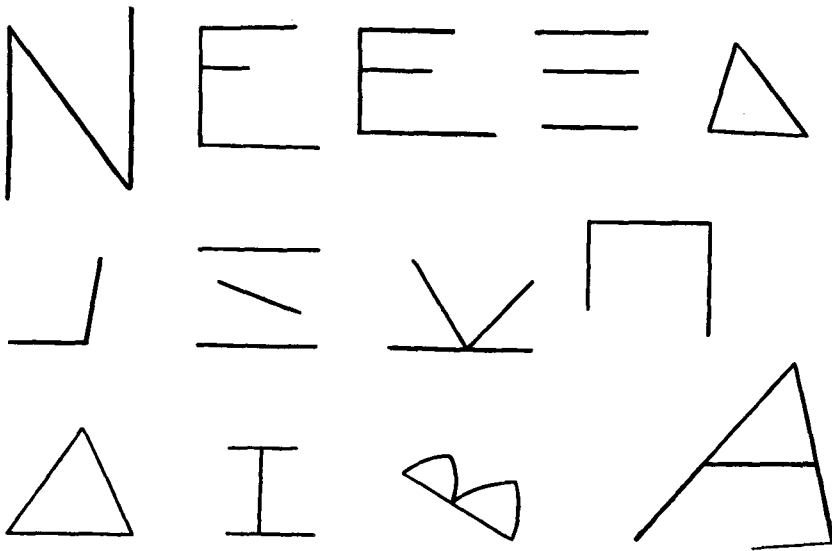


FIG. 4.—MASONS' MARKS ON BLOCKS OF RETAINING-WALL.

but the present building can hardly be earlier than the first or second century B.C. The extremities of the retaining-walls in the earlier <sup>2</sup> Greek theatres that are visible to-day, are usually set at an angle to one another, and pointing towards the centre of the orchestra, but at Sparta, if produced, they would meet in a straight line. The theatres <sup>3</sup> which shew this feature, universal in Roman times, are not earlier than the Hellenistic period. The theatre does not conform to the ordinary Roman

<sup>1</sup> vi. 67.

<sup>2</sup> This feature appears in the theatres of the Piræus, Oropos, Eretria, Sikyon, Epidaurus, Megalopolis, Delos, Assos, Magnesia, Priene, and the larger theatre at Pompeii.

<sup>3</sup> *E.g.* Mantinea, Pergamon, Adria, Gabala, Bostra, Aspendus, the Odeum of Herodes Atticus, Rhiniassa, Dramysson, and all the theatres of Sicily and the West with the exception of Pompeii.

plan, since it has not the typical Roman *parodos*, and since it has an orchestra whose size is greater than a semicircle. The orchestra is paved with marble slabs, instead of being beaten earth. This is the rule in Roman theatres, but is unusual in Greek times.

A large number of bricks<sup>1</sup> stamped  $\Sigma\text{KANOT}\Theta\text{HK}\Lambda\Xi$ , and frequently with a magistrate's name added, *e.g.*  $\text{E}\Pi\text{K}\Lambda\Lambda\Lambda\text{IKPATEO}\Sigma$ , and the name of the manufacturer,  $\text{E}\Pi\Gamma\Omega\text{NA NIK}\Lambda\Xi\text{I}\Omega\text{NO}\Sigma$ , were found in the long trench B. These imply the existence of a Skanotheka or property-room, as at Megalopolis. No trace of such a building was, however, discovered. They may also help in deciding the date of the theatre, as we know of a magistrate Kallikrates<sup>2</sup> in the first century, B.C.

It is necessary to summarise the results of the other trials made in the theatre-region. Trench C was dug to follow the course of a wall abutting on to the Byzantine fortification wall, and was then carried northward in the hope of hitting on part of the stage buildings. No trace of them was found. The walls discovered belong to a Byzantine house, apparently of two stories, adjoining the fortification wall. Ancient marbles were built into it, and fragments of glazed pottery were found around it. The threshold is 3 m. above the level of the orchestra, and admits to the upper story; 1.50 m. lower, a square drain extends southward from the direction of the theatre, but this is at too high a level to be connected with the orchestra. The upper part of the trench was full of marble débris, but no traces of ancient foundations were discovered.

Trench D was sunk in the plateau inside the Byzantine wall to find the continuation of the road discovered in Trench B. In this, however, it was unsuccessful. We found the continuation of the square drain from C, and of the water-pipes which run parallel with the road in B, but no evidence for the road itself, except a low wall which might be part of its foundations. It is possible that all stones found here were used in the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *S.M.C.* (Tod and Wace) p. 26 and nos. 76, 535, 535<sup>A</sup>, and 712. The presence of a *Skanotheka* in Sparta goes a long way to show that the original stage-buildings, at any rate, were only temporary. The parallel instance is Megalopolis, where the *Skanotheka* was undoubtedly intended as a receptacle for the temporary wooden constructions used as stage (or background). We may infer that the Spartan building was used in the same way. When the theatre was required for the Gymnopaedia or other festivals, the space in front of it would be left free; when there were dramatic representations, the temporary building would be brought out and erected. At Megalopolis, had the *Skene* been permanent, the entry to the Thersileion would have been blocked. When the later *Skene* was erected, the Thersileion had ceased to be important.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *S.M.C.* No. 205.

construction of the Byzantine wall. With the exception of three stamped bricks from the Skanotheka, all the remains found were Byzantine.

The field to the south of the Byzantine wall lies 1.50 m. lower than the plateau inside it, and slopes gradually to the south. Various trials here revealed plentiful traces of Roman occupation, but none of Greek, except in trench E, where at a depth of 2 metres, four large square blocks were discovered built into a wall of miscellaneous materials bonded with mortar, which acted as a supporting-wall for a Roman house. These blocks are mortised for the reception of *stelae*. The *stelae* were carefully run in with lead, and the lower part of one of them is still in position. The size of the holes varies, the width and depth being about .25 m. and .09 m., the length from .35 m. to .91 m. In the same line further east were found two large marble blocks containing a long inscription<sup>1</sup> on the subject of the games performed at the tomb of Leonidas.

Pausanias (III. xiv. 1) remarks that 'opposite the theatre is the tomb of Pausanias who commanded at Plataea: the other tomb is that of Leonidas. Every year speeches are spoken over the graves, and games are held in which none but Spartans may compete... there is also a tablet with the names of the men who looked the Persians in the face at Thermopylae.' It would be too much to assume that we have in one of these stones the remains of the actual *stèle* of the Spartan warriors, but doubtless *stelae* were erected in connexion with the games, and in these stones and the inscribed blocks we are justified in seeing remains of the cenotaphs of the two Spartan heroes. Pausanias' phrase 'opposite the theatre' must mean, on the other side of the road which ran westwards from the market-place. Thus the remains in trench B suit admirably with what we might expect to be the position of that road.

One further find of great interest was made in this region. About 100 m. west of trench E was found the trunk of a great stone lion of archaic workmanship. We learn from Herodotus (vii. 225) that a lion was erected at Thermopylae in memory of Leonidas. Nothing would be more natural than to erect another on his cenotaph in Sparta.

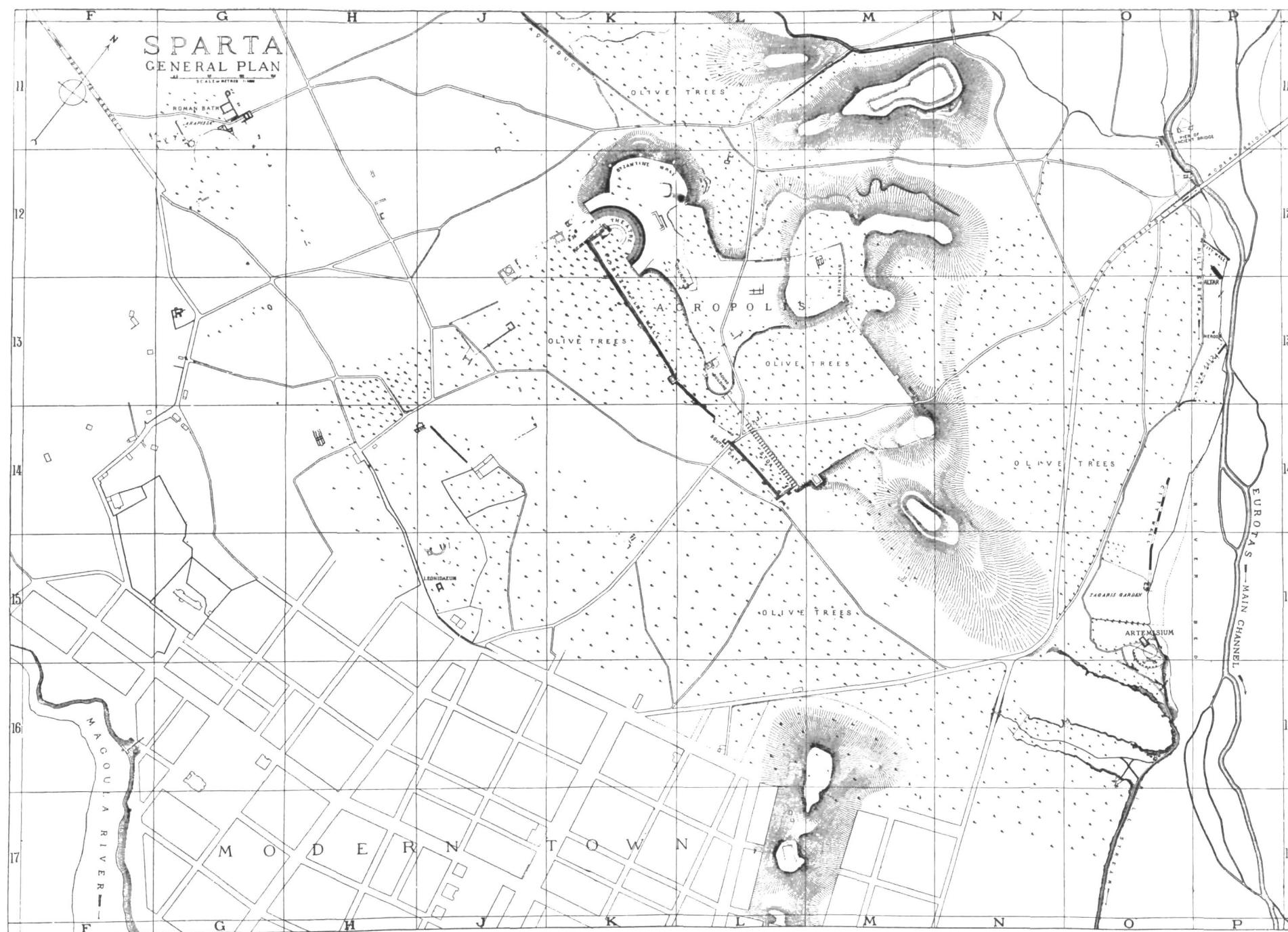
The whole area between trench G and the theatre was excavated in search of traces of roads or ancient buildings; but here, as in all the theatre-area (**K**), we found little that was definitely Hellenic, though there

<sup>1</sup> Pp. 445 ff.

are many traces of the Roman bathing establishment (**K**), of which the French Expedition saw considerable remains. The Roman level lies about one metre below the surface in all the pits we made. Virgin soil occurs about three metres down without any traces of Hellenic occupation. The ground to the south for 100 metres from the Byzantine wall was tested with similar results.

It thus appears unlikely that many Hellenic remains will be found in this area outside the theatre itself, and we have every reason to fear that the theatre itself has suffered considerably from mediaeval and modern quarrying.

GUY DICKINS.



SPARTA.—GENERAL PLAN.