

THE ROMAN BOULEUTERION AND ODEON AT ASHKELON

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ABSTRACT

Robyn L. Le Blanc: The Roman Bouleuterion and Odeon at Ashkelon
(Under the direction of Jodi Magness)

Between 1921-1922 two monumental buildings were uncovered during excavations by John Garstang at Ashkelon, a city on the southern coast of modern-day Israel. Located in the area of the ancient Roman forum, these buildings were interpreted as a Herodian senate house overlaid by a Byzantine theater. Also found associated with these buildings were architectural fragments and a series of richly carved sculpted pilasters. Renewed excavations by the Leon Levy Expedition to Ashkelon began in 2008, and have focused on re-examining the building plans and dates of the Roman structures. Based on findings from the new excavations, I argue that the earlier building is an early Roman bouleuterion, and that the later theatral structure is a Severan period building, perhaps identifiable as an odeon.

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DEDICATION

To my father, Marc Leon Le Blanc, in loving fulfillment of a childhood promise.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

This chapter sets the tone of the thesis. Following a brief introduction to the site, I present an overview of excavations at Ashkelon and discuss the aims of the current work. Then, in order to situate the apsidal building and odeon in their socio-cultural and political contexts, I end with a section on the history of Ashkelon in the Roman period.

Introduction

Tel Ashkelon lies on the southern coast of the ancient Roman province of Palestine, some 110 km south of modern-day Tel Aviv (Figures 1 and 2). The only city in the southern Levantine coastal plain located directly on the coast in antiquity, Ashkelon was placed astride both the *Via Maris* and ancient trade routes funneling traffic and goods from the coast and to the north and south.¹ Though its Bronze and Iron Age remains are responsible for the site's fame, Ashkelon continued as a prominent center in the Persian

¹ Stager and Schloen 2008: 3. Raz Kletter has criticized Stager's application of the "port power" model pioneered by Bronson in 1977, arguing that the landscape around Ashkelon is incompatible with many facets of Bronson's theory. However, Stager acknowledges the limits of the port power model and calls his argument "suggestive, and, at its best, predictive, but never sacrosanct." Stager's use of the port power model focuses on the Middle Bronze Age, and similar studies have focused on the Iron Age. There has been no study of Ashkelon's involvement in trade or its economic standing in the Roman empire, so I cannot comment on the possible applicability of the port power model in later periods here. My understanding of Ashkelon as a fairly wealthy city is based on literary sources mentioning the port, and also the large amount of imported marble brought in from Asia Minor. See Kletter 2010, Stager 2002: 625.

and Roman periods before peaking in population and size in the Byzantine period.² While excavations have been ongoing at the site since the early nineteenth century CE, very little of the Roman city has been studied. Despite this research bias, a theater, two bathhouses, a road, a series of houses, and an enigmatic “monumental apsidal building” have been uncovered in Roman Ashkelon to date, with a handful of other buildings known to have existed from literary sources or inscriptions.³ The so-called “monumental apsidal building” has been the most intensely studied of these structures, due to its size, enigmatic form and function, and because it is the only currently known example of public and monumental Roman architecture from the city center.⁴ This is precisely why continued excavations and study of this building are so essential—at present it represents the best opportunity to study the civic center, and the urban plan and its building types in the Roman period.

Overview of Excavation and Problems

John Garstang conducted the first excavation of the apsidal building between 1921 and 1922 under the auspices of the Palestine Exploration Fund.⁵ Though his methods produced problems for later excavators, his results were extraordinary.⁶

² Allen 2008: 37-50.

³ See Stager *et al.* 2008: *passim*.

⁴ Also famous is the Late Roman bathhouse known primarily because of a number of infants found disposed in the drain beneath it. This bathhouse has been interpreted as a private bathhouse or a brothel. An excellent parallel are the infant skeletons associated with a third-fourth century CE villa/brothel in Buckinghamshire, England. See Faerman *et al* 2008: 537-540, Stager *et al* 2008: 293-297, Farley 1983: *passim*.

⁵ Garstang 1922: 112.

⁶ These included trenching walls without any vertical controls, disposing ceramic material, and neglecting to note the specific find locations of non-monumental sculpture and of nearly all later architectural material.

Garstang's two-year long excavation exposed a series of superimposed monumental buildings covering an area of roughly 110 x 35 meters square (Figure 3).⁷ The most substantial of these buildings was an apsidal building with an attached peristyle of the early Roman period overlaid by a Byzantine period odeon.⁸ Garstang connected the monumental apsidal building with Josephus' reference to Herod the Great funding a series of public works in the city, including a peristyle or colonnade.⁹ Garstang was brief in his description of the Byzantine odeon, noting only the introduction of a new east-west cross wall and the reuse of a number of columns from the Herodian peristyle.¹⁰

Beginning in 2008, the current expedition, operating under the auspices of Harvard University and the Leon Levy Foundation undertook further excavation of this monument. The project's goals include the full exposure of the apsidal building for the National Park Services and the reevaluation of Garstang's earlier findings. Excavation in this area, "Grid 47", has continued for three seasons (2008-2010), during which time a 30 x 40 m square area was exposed down to the level of the early Roman apsidal building (Figure 5).¹¹ These excavations have thus far succeeded in their overall goals, and have, more importantly, exposed areas of the building not dug by Garstang. Though the general outlines of Garstang's plan have been proved correct, new excavation and the

⁷ Garstang 1921: 25.

⁸ Ibid., 25, 32.

⁹ Jos.*BJ*.1.21.422.

¹⁰ Ibid., 32-33.

¹¹ The name "Grid 47" is used throughout this work and is based on the master grid plan laid down by the Harvard excavation. This grid plan subdivides the tel into numbered 100 x 100 meters grids running west to east. The master grid is currently composed of 100 such grids, with ten rows of ten. Furthermore, each individual grid is subdivided into ten 10 x 10 meter "squares," which are the excavation's primary excavation units. For more information about Ashkelon's grid and recording systems, see Figure 4 and Master 2008: 185-193.

collection of ceramic material have suggested an alternative chronology of the building's phases.

Yet many problems remain unaddressed. Garstang's excavation methods allowed for very little stratigraphic control of his trenches, which follow large walls. His state plan indicated wide vertical exposure of the building, but is contradicted by his photographs, which show a field riddled with deep trenches and pits (Figure 6). Garstang collected little or no ceramic material, and his dating appears to be based on his attribution of the peristyle to Herod, two inscriptions found out of context, and an incorrect stylistic analysis of the sculptures found in the building.¹² The backfilling of Garstang's trenches, Islamic and modern robbing, and construction by the park authorities produced a complicated mix of fills which obscures the stratigraphy of the grid, and secure contexts. Also hampering easy interpretation is the length of habitation on the tel and the reuse of the same area in later periods. The Roman apsidal building and later theatral structure also overlay earlier, perhaps Hellenistic remains. These early walls are obscured by numerous Islamic robber trenches, sumps, and wells. It is often difficult to understand the exact relationship between walls and other features. It is even more difficult to understand the original plan of the theatral building, which has suffered the most from robbing and reuse. All of the seats and the majority of the marble and architectural decorations have been robbed from the odeon, and as well as many of the kurkar blocks from the walls. What remains are largely fragments of the substructure of the theatral building.

The ground plans of both structures present major problems, all relating to the

¹² See Hogarth 1922: 22-23 for these two (Greek) inscriptions.

form and function of the buildings. The earlier Roman apsidal building has been called alternatively an early Roman curia/ bouleuterion with attached peristyle (Garstang, Diplock, Balty and Roller), and a second-third century CE basilica (Watzinger, and Stager, after Fischer).¹³ Though both “Senate House and peristyle” and “curia and basilica” are terms designating public civic buildings with overlapping functions, they also infer specific constructional realities. A basilica would have been roofed, a peristyle not. Some of the details of Garstang’s plan also appear to be inaccurate. For example, there is no extant seating along the apsidal wall (my wall “A”) of the earlier Roman building, and the east-west cross-wall from this same phase has not been found (and certainly was not robbed out).¹⁴ Additional walls—Roman and later—exist where no walls appear on Garstang’s plan, and there is no indication at all of the so-called “Mosque of Omar.” The current excavation of Grid 47 has concentrated primarily on the apsidal end of the structure. Only a portion of the peristyle was uncovered late in the 2010 season, making uncertain its decoration, date, roof type and relationship to the later theater. Neither Garstang nor the Leon Levy Expedition investigated the extreme north end of the building. Finally, very little work has been done on the ground plan, construction technique, and decoration of the so-called “Byzantine odeon.” What type of “theater” was this, and when was it built? What types of fill were used to construct the substructure for the seating, and how many *ambulacra* and *vomitoria* existed? How was this new structure integrated into the city plan? When did this odeon go out of use, and

¹³ Garstang 1921: 25; Watzinger 1935: 97-998; Diplock 1971: 13-16, Balty 1991: 396, 509-510, Fischer 1991: 49; Fischer 1995: 141; Stager 1991: 43-45, Roller 1998: 216-219.

¹⁴ It may be that this cross-wall exists but is not preserved to the same height as the walls that define the flanking vestibules and the apse. A test-trench dug in 2009 sought to uncover this wall but was unsuccessful. This same trench did, however, reveal Garstang’s so-called “Well of Peace.” See below.

why? What was the earliest period of reuse, and how was the building reused?

Finally—and most importantly—are the problems related to the chronology and interpretation of these buildings. As discussed above, dating is clearly an issue, and even though several secure contexts related to the theatral structure were dug during the 2010 season, the earlier Roman apsidal building remains undateable through ceramic material. Even more elusive is the date of the earlier series of “Hellenistic” walls, though a possible foundation trench uncovered in 2010 may provide dating material in future seasons. A related problem concerns the Nike statues, inscriptions and architectural fragments, which were found scattered throughout the area and not in-situ by the current excavations. While Garstang dated these pieces to the first centuries BCE/CE and assigned them to the earlier apsidal building, more recent studies place both groups in the third century CE.¹⁵ This redating necessitates a reappraisal of the apsidal building’s date or the attribution of these pieces to a different building altogether.¹⁶ Either way, the inscriptions found by Garstang pre-date the third century CE and thus cannot be contemporary with the statues and capitals.¹⁷ Without any information about the building’s function and dates obtained from numismatic or ceramic evidence, there is no secure way to date the apsidal building or theatral structure. To date, none of these questions has been adequately addressed, especially not using material gleaned from recent excavations.

¹⁵ See Chapter 3.

¹⁶ Avi-Yonah 1975: 128. Balty makes the appropriate observation that after this study “on ne peut en effet retenir du fouilleur qui la datait de l’époque d’Hérode...” Balty 1991: 396.

¹⁷ Hogarth 1922: 22-23.

Aims of the current work

This thesis seeks to fill the lacunae described above by examining the findings of the Leon Levy Expedition to Ashkelon, arguing that while Garstang's plans are generally correct, his understanding of the buildings' dates and phases is not. Based on new, closed contexts containing dateable numismatic and ceramic material, I argue that the so-called "Byzantine theater" is, in fact, a Severan period odeon, which lies directly atop an earlier apsidal structure. This earlier building is likely a bouleuterion with an attached peristyle from the early Imperial period (the first century CE). In chapters 1 and 2, I examine the archaeological findings of both Garstang and the current excavations in order to outline the architectural type, phasing and dates of these two main buildings. In Chapter 3, I examine the architectural fragments and sculptures associated with the two Roman buildings, arguing that they must belong to the theatral structure. In Chapter 4 I make some concluding remarks about the usefulness of this study, the problems that remain and areas for future research.

Finally, it should be noted that this study fills a gap in scholarship about the Ashkelon odeon, which has not been studied in its own right since Garstang's 1924 article.¹⁸

Historical Context: Ashkelon in the Roman Period

Before continuing with an examination and analysis of the architectural remains of these structures, it is important to understand the political and socio-cultural milieu of these buildings in the Roman period. Despite a wealth of information which suggests

¹⁸ Garstang 1924: 32-35.

that Ashkelon was a prominent Levantine port city there is no accessible synthetic study of Roman Ashkelon.¹⁹ What follows is only a sketch of the cultural and political history of the city with the hope that a longer, more in-depth study will one day follow.

Ashkelon emerged in the Roman period as a bustling port city which had skillfully navigated its way through the complex and often fractious politics of the Hellenistic world. A Tyrian-controlled port city conquered by Alexander the Great during his great sweep south in 332 BCE, Ashkelon became part of the Ptolemaic and Seleucid empires in quick succession.²⁰ Within two centuries, however, Ashkelon had won its independence, though locally minted coins with Ptolemaic ruler portraits highlight the city's continued ties with Egypt (Figure 7).²¹ This relationship was perhaps forged in the aftermath of Alexander Jannaeus' attempt to take control of the region in the second century BC, a move that was quickly checked by a Ptolemaic force and which allowed Ashkelon to maintain its autonomy and independence from Jewish rule.²² This event underlines Ashkleon's contentious relationship with the region's Jewish population, which had roots in the Bronze and Iron Ages when Ashkelon was home to the

¹⁹ See Fuks 2001 (Hebrew) for a historical study of Ashkelon in the Hellenistic and Roman periods. Stager and Schloen also provide a brief summary of Ashkelon in the Roman period in the introduction to Ashkelon 1, and an edited volume in Hebrew provides short studies on various aspects of Ashkelon's history. See Stager and Schloen 2008: 3-15, Arbel 1990: *passim*.

²⁰ Pseduo-Scylax.*Peri.*1.78, Stager 1991: 40. There is no archaeological evidence for a natural or man-made port at Ashkelon. Stager suggests that ships anchored off-shore and rowed in goods by proxy. Stager, personal communication; Wachsmann 2008: 89, 97. For evidence related to Ashkelon's port, see n. 29 below.

²¹ Brett 1937: 456-457. Ashkelon was not always a passive vassal or ally, however; Josephus recounts a purge of the city's leading men when the city refused to pay their Ptolemaic overlords taxes in the second century BCE. *Jos.Ant.* 12.180-182.

²² Brett 1937: 456-457.

Philistines.²³ However, there is literary evidence for a small Jewish community at Ashkelon in the Hellenistic and early Roman periods, despite the fact that it was located outside the halakhic borders of the Land of Israel.²⁴

Ancient authors before the Roman period focus on the culturally cosmopolitan—or “pagan”—nature of the city. For example, Diodorus Siculus tells the tale of the goddess Derketo and her famous lake in the city and Herodotus claims that the city's temple to the Heavenly Aphrodite was the most ancient of the goddess' abodes.²⁵ The city bore the stamp of Greek, Phoenician and Egyptian influences in religion and material culture.²⁶ Ashkelonites actively participated in the consumption of Hellenistic culture, with shrines to Isis existing alongside the ancient temples to the Semitic goddess Derketo.²⁷ Ashkelonian merchants are prominent in the epigraphic record at Delos, and Ashkelonian philosophers and historians were famous in the Mediterranean for various tracts.²⁸ Locally produced imitations of Attic ware and imported red figured pottery also highlight Ashkelon's tendency to interact with cultural influences outside the Levant. This multi-culturalism likely stemmed from Ashkelon's vibrant and ever-changing

²³ For examples: Judges 14:19, 1 Sam 6:17, 2 Sam 1:20, Zechariah 9:5. The longstanding enmity between Ashkelon and the Jews was alive and well in the first century CE, when an Ashkelonite encouraged the Emperor Caligula to move against the Jews. See Philo.*Legatio ad Gaium*.199-205. The presence of a Jewish population in this period can be inferred by Josephus' report that the city executed its entire population of Jews in the first century CE. See below for a longer discussion of this event.

²⁴ There appears to have been a religious prohibition against living in Ashkelon. See Gittlin 2001:1-2. See also Fuks 2000: 546-47, 56-59 for evidence for and against the presence of Jews in Ashkelon before the second century CE.

²⁵ Herodotus even claims that the temple at Ashkelon provided the model for Aphrodite's famous temple on Cyprus; Her. 1.105.; Paus.1.14.7; Dio.Sic.2.4.2-6.

²⁶ Kokkinos 1990: 42; Fuks 2000b: *passim* and Stager 1991: *passim*.

²⁷ Fuks 2000b: *passim*.

²⁸ Leiwo 1989: 575-584; Geiger 1990: 146-147; Kokkinos 1998: 79-84.

population and overlords, as well as its continuing role as a port city.²⁹

The emergence of Rome as a major Near Eastern political power in the first century BCE proved to be a boon to Ashkelon's status. The city's inhabitants, probably sensing a shift in power away from local Levantine despots, threw their weight behind Julius Caesar and Cleopatra VII. During a series of internecine clashes between Cleopatra and her siblings, the queen may have sought refuge in Ashkelon since it was in close proximity to routes into the Levant and Egypt itself.³⁰ Ashkelon's Iron Age fortifications and its strategic location were, likely, further inducements to using the city as a base of operations.³¹ Certainly these considerations were at work when the city proved its loyalty to Rome by serving as a base of operations for Julius Caesar's allies during the Alexandrian War in the 40s BCE.³²

Though Ashkelon was known for producing businessmen and philosophical thinkers, it claimed as its most famous son Herod the Great.³³ According to a late tradition, Herod's family hailed from Ashkelon, where his grandfather reportedly had worked as an attendant in the temple of Apollo.³⁴ Though the veracity of this story is

²⁹ Though Ashkelon's port remains undiscovered (see n. 14 above) many ancient sources attest to the city's role in trade and shipping. The Letter to Aristeeas numbers it among the most important of the region's harbors, and many inscriptions mentioning Ashkelonites abroad indicate that they were heavily involved in maritime trade. William of Tyre notes that the city never had a true port. See Roussel and Launey 1935: no.1719-1721, no.2305; William of Tyre 1943: 17, 22.

³⁰ Chauveau 2004: 19.

³¹ Cleopatra: Even if she did not maintain physical residence in Ashkelon, the city attempted to highlight some sort of affinity between itself and the Egyptian queen, for it minted several different coins in her honor throughout her reign. Chauveau 2004: 19; Brett 1847, *passim*. City walls: There is evidence that Ashkelon's Iron Age walls were reused in the Roman period, with modifications occurring in the Late Roman period. See Kedar and Mook 1978: 175.

³² Jos.*Ant.* 14.28, 17.11.321.

³³ See Stager 1991: 40-4; Stager and Schloen 2008: 9.

³⁴ Eus.*Hist.eccl.* 1.6.2, 1.7.11; Kokkinos 1990: 104-111.

debated by scholars, the king apparently attempted to cultivate *some* sort of relationship with Ashkelon, which was one of the few cities outside his kingdom that benefitted from his generous patronage.³⁵ Indeed, according to Josephus, at Ashkelon Herod constructed “baths and costly fountains, as also passages round a court (*peristula*) that were admired for both their workmanship and size”, as well as a “royal habitation” that was presented by Augustus to Herod's sister Salome after the king's death.³⁶ If the building program was not motivated by a familial connection, it was perhaps inspired by the city's role in international trade, its proximity to Jerusalem, or its status as one of the only cities with *oppidum liberum* status in the area.³⁷ Its status as a free city is reported by Pliny in the first century CE and likely was connected to the settlement of Augustus after 31 BC. As part of an agreement after Actium, the *princeps* enlarged Herod's control of the region, putting Gaza, Jaffa and Anthedon under his auspices—but not Ashkelon (Figure 8).³⁸ Herod, instead, built a port of his own (Caesarea), which eclipsed Ashkelon, highlighting the importance that Herod attached to controlling such a city.³⁹

Very little is known about Ashkelon between Herod's building program and the First Jewish Revolt of 66 CE. We might imagine that the city was especially important, though Strabo reports that Ashkelon was “small and unimportant” at this time.⁴⁰ The

³⁵ For arguments for and against this tradition, see especially Kokkinos 1998 (for) and Fuks 2000 (against). For Herod's building program, see Roller 1998; Japp 2000; Lee 2003; Netzer 2006.

³⁶ Jos.*BJ*.1.21.422; Jos.*Ant*.17.11.321. Whiston trans.

³⁷ These first two suggestions are articulated well by Roller 1998: 94, 134, and the last my own speculation. For Ashkelon's status as a “free city” see Pliny.*NH*.5.14.

³⁸ Pliny.*NH*.5.14.; Jos.*BJ*.1.396; Jos.*Ant*.15.217; Lee 2003: *passim*. Kasher argues that the city was given the status of *oppidum liberum* in connection with its previous status as a Phoenician-controlled city (with Tyre and Sidon). See Kasher 1990: 182-183; Pseudo-Scylax.*Periplus*.1.78.

³⁹ Roller 1998: 133-138.

⁴⁰ Ashkelon probably absorbed some of the inhabitants of Gaza, which was destroyed by Alexander

longstanding enmity between Ashkelon and its Jewish neighbors came to violent fruition once again during the First Jewish Revolt, when the city executed nearly all of its Jewish population.⁴¹ In response, the Jewish zealots who had defeated the Twelfth Legion at the Beth-Horon Pass in 66 CE turned their attention to Ashkelon, destroying part of the city.⁴² This encounter, the city's proximity to Jerusalem and its harbor perhaps were the reason for its use as a temporary base for a contingent of Roman *auxilia*. Josephus reports the presence of two units here, and a decree of the *boule* in the late first century CE refers to an officer in the Tenth Legion.⁴³

Like many other cities in the Near East, in the second and third centuries CE Ashkelon grew substantially. For the first time there are traces of public architecture of the type normally associated with Roman cities--colonnaded streets, a decumanus and cardo, a basilica, an apsidal monumental building, a theater, and numerous temples, all of which are attested to by literary accounts and archaeology.⁴⁴ Fuks discusses the cleansing of the city from “defilement of the gentiles” by a group of rabbis in this period,

Janneus in 96 BC and not rebuilt until the first century CE; see Glucker 1987: 38-39.

⁴¹ Jos. *BJ*.2.18.5, 3.2.1-2.

⁴² Ibid. See also Fuks 2000a: *passim* for a discussion of the relationship between the Ashkelonites and the Jews. He concludes that this relationship, though strained, was perhaps not as volatile as Josephus or other writers (including Philo Judaeus) might have it. It should also be noted that this “destruction” is not discernable archaeologically.

⁴³ Jos.*BJ*.3.12; Hogarth 1922:22-23; Stager 1991: 45. There has been a lengthy debate over this report from Josephus; Smallwood and Cotton, Applebaum and Geiger have suggested that these units were already stationed in the city before the outbreak of the revolt, while Shatzman believes that the attack occasioned the move of these *auxilia* there. As Fuks points out, there is little evidence (outside of Josephus) to be sure either way. In light of the strategic importance of the city, it seems likely to me that these units were already stationed in Ashkelon, perhaps as early as the first century BC. See Applebaum 1989: 162 and Fuks 2000: 52-53 for discussion and bibliography.

⁴⁴ Stager 1992: 42-51; Stager *et. al.* 2008: *passim*; Schloen 2008: 143-145, 147-148, 153-155.

allowing the city's Jewish population to grow as well.⁴⁵ Recent work has connected the city's growth directly to the Severan emperors, who traveled through the area and perhaps “reorganized” the city.⁴⁶

In the second and third centuries CE a distinctly Roman imperial cultural style found its full flowering at Ashkelon. The majority of the Roman-period sculpture and art from the city dates to this period and bears a strong resemblance to styles and types from the imperial capital. A bust from Ashkelon (now at the Rockefeller Museum in Jerusalem) depicts a severe-looking woman wearing her hair in Severan style, the heavy, wig-like hair akin to busts of Julia Domna from the same period (Figure 9).⁴⁷ A host of other marble statues and carved decoration—including a medallion depicting the Greek god Pan, a miniature draped woman, a cuirassed statue of an emperor, statues of Asclepius, Hermes and the sculpted decoration found during Garstang's excavations—date to this period (Figure 10 and 11). These sculptures, combined with imported luxury goods in the form of pottery and jewelry, as well as the adoption of lavishly carved sarcophagi and richly painted tombs testify to the degree to which the local elite embraced Roman expressions of wealth and power (Figure 12).⁴⁸ Lest local practices and styles be downplayed, however, it should be noted that old traditions prevailed even

⁴⁵ Fuks 2000a: 56-59.

⁴⁶ Stager and Schloen claim that “the Severan dynasty of the early third century A.D. took an active interest in the city, reorganizing it according to the Roman plan.” It is unclear what they mean by “reorganization,” but presumably they have in mind the creation of a decumanus and cardo, and, likely, the building of the monumental apsidal building, on which see below. Stager and Schloen 2008: 9; Stager 1992: 43-45.

⁴⁷ Iliffe 1933: 11-14.

⁴⁸ Iliffe 1933a: 11-14; Iliffe 1933b: 110-112; Iliffe 1934: 165; Ory 1938: 38-44; Michaeli 1999: 211-223; Gitler and Kahanov 2008: 385-395.

in this new imperial cultural milieu—coins minted at the city in the second and third centuries CE pay tribute to local deities, including Astarte/Derketo and Tyche.⁴⁹

This explosion of wealth, population and prestige continued during the Late Roman period (the fourth and early fifth centuries CE), when Ashkelon's famous wine industry reached its height.⁵⁰ The city had exported the wine which would make it famous in the Byzantine period since the second century CE, but the number of Late Roman and Byzantine vessels and wine presses indicate that production intensified in this period.⁵¹ Packaged in the locally produced “Gaza” or “Ashkelonian” amphorae, evidence for the consumption of this wine is found throughout the Roman Empire, which was lauded for its taste and medicinal qualities (Figures 13 and 14).⁵² Ashkelon was now the largest city in the southern Levant, and Ammianus Marcellinus numbered it among the five most important centers in Palestine.⁵³ The strategic importance of the city, its port, and the production of wine served Ashkelon well, as they allowed the city to weather the problems that beset other parts of the empire in the fourth century CE. Emerging nearly unscathed in the fifth century, Ashkelon transitioned into even greater prominence as a port-of-call for pilgrims to the Holy Land and merchants eager to trade.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ See Rappaport 1970, Rappaport 1981, Yashin 2009, all *passim*; Stager 1991: 46.

⁵⁰ See Allen 2008: 21-46; according to a survey conducted in the region between 1986 and 1990, the number of sites in the 100 km² around the city tripled between the Roman and Byzantine periods. The number of industrial sites likewise increased dramatically.

⁵¹ Allen 2008: 41-42; Johnson and Stager 2008: 481-482. For archaeological evidence of kilns and production, see Stager *et al.* 2008: 240.

⁵² Majcherek 1995: *passim*; Mayerson 2008: 471-475; Johnson and Stager 2008: 482-486.

⁵³ Amm.Marc.14.8.11.

⁵⁴ Stager 1992: 52-53.

CHAPTER II

THE ARCHITECTURE

This chapter comprises the bulk of the study. It presents a detailed description and analysis of the architecture of the three Hellenistic-Roman building phases in Grid 47, beginning with the scanty remains of what Garstang called “Hellenistic” remains and ending with the theatral building. Each of the first three sections is structured in a similar manner. I begin with previous excavation of the building, continue with a positivist analysis of the archaeological remains and then discuss previous scholarship and interpretations of the building. I end with my own analysis and remarks about the form, function and dating of each building phase. The fourth section discusses the Byzantine and Islamic reuse of the excavated area of Grid 47.

The analysis and identification of architectural features presented here are based on Garstang's excavation reports in 1921, 1922 and 1924, daily notes and final reports from the 2008 season, and my own excavation work at Ashkelon in 2009 and 2010. Notes, photographs, plans, daily reports and measurements recorded in the Ashkelon online database “OCHRE” (Online Cultural Heritage Research Environment, based at the University of Chicago) provide the raw data for this analysis (Figure 15).⁵⁵ I have noted in text where I disagree with the interpretation of colleagues (either in general interpretations or those found in notes from OCHRE). In the absence of final stone plans

⁵⁵ For information concerning OCHRE, see Master 2008: 192-193 and <http://ochre.lib.uchicago.edu/>

for publication I have supplemented the interim top plans produced by the Harvard excavation with my own schematic plans (Figures 23, 25, 32 & 34). I have labeled the walls according to my own alphanumeric system. These designations appear in **bold** in the text. I have provided a concordance between my labeling system and the Ashkelon system in Appendix I.

The current excavations in Grid 47 have not completely uncovered the length of the building exposed by Garstang (Figure 16). To date, the area between and including the “outer apse” on Garstang's plan to the area where he indicated the intersection of the *scaenae frons* and earlier peristyle have been excavated. The plan and date of the peristyle and especially its extent to the north remain in question.

The “Hellenistic” Building

This phase is comprised of a series of walls with no coherent ground plan running from the southwest to the northeast of the later apsidal structure.⁵⁶ This building phase was discovered during Garstang's excavations and dated by him to the Hellenistic period.⁵⁷ He uncovered five wall fragments (“T1-T5” on his plan) organized according to a different plan than the large apsidal building which overlays it (Figure 3).⁵⁸ He included the walls on his state plan of the building and a single photograph of poor quality (Figure 17).⁵⁹ Three of these walls—T3, T4 and T5—are fragments of unknown height and width located beneath the inner foundation wall of the peristyle of the

⁵⁶ These walls do not appear on either the Harvard expedition phase plans, nor my own schematic plans.

⁵⁷ Garstang 1924: 31.

⁵⁸ Garstang 1924: 31-32.

⁵⁹ Ibid., Plate I, Fig. 4.

monumental apsidal building. This area is currently unexposed. T1 and T2 are exposed in the park's "Open Air Museum" (Figure 18). These two parallel wall fragments contain features defined by Garstang as "connected pedestals".⁶⁰ As Garstang indicated on his 1924 plan, T1 terminates in a square platform/pier in the south, and extends under the west flanking room (my room "I") of the large apsidal building. T2 lies directly to the east of T1, and is also cut by the walls of the later Roman apsidal building. A square pier of similar size and shape as T1 is located halfway down the length of T2. Both T1 and T2 are constructed of squared ashlar blocks, and Garstang noted the "peculiar style of masonry composed of flat Ashlar stones placed on edge."⁶¹

As mentioned above, the limited excavation area uncovered in the 2008-2010 seasons prevented the further examination of Garstang's three additional Hellenistic walls (T3, T4 and T5) lying to the north of the later *scaenae frons* (my wall "D"). The large northern expansion of the 2010 season allowed us to investigate the area directly behind the stage building, roughly a meter south of the location of T3, T4 and T5. Several wall fragments were identified here and thought to belong to an earlier period (likely the Roman apsidal building), but no traces of walls were found that could be understood as T3, T4 and T5. In this expansion we uncovered a portion of a wall running parallel to T1 and T2. This wall cannot be T3, T4 or T5, as Garstang's plan shows that this area was left untouched by him. This new wall (34.30 according to the Ashkelon recording system) was only partly articulated by the end of the season, but like T1 and T2 it is constructed with large limestone blocks joined by white mortar rather than the local kurkar. Measuring some 69 x 23 x 38 cm, the blocks of the first course were also set

⁶⁰ Garstang 1924: 31.

⁶¹ Ibid.

upright in the same manner as the walls exposed by Garstang to the north (Figure 19). No square pier was found attached to this wall, but very little of it has been uncovered (only two courses high and less than a meter on one side), as the continuation either extends out of the open excavation area or is cut by wall **D**.

Date and functional interpretations based on such scanty remains are necessarily tentative. Garstang dated these walls to c.300 BCE based on the style of the masonry. Unfortunately, the current excavations have been unable to check his dating with ceramic material. At the very end of the 2010 season we did, however, identify what appears to be the foundation trench of wall 34.30 which may provide our best chance to date the architecture of the earliest building phase in this area.

Garstang also hypothesized that the Hellenistic walls might be indicative “of a double row of columns of considerable length, which must have influenced strongly the town plan of the Hellenistic city.”⁶² While the parallel walls and square piers suggest the form of a colonnaded avenue, this type of structure was still in its formative stages in 300 BCE. In fact, colonnaded streets do not become common before the 1st century BCE/CE and the majority date to the 2nd and 3rd centuries CE.⁶³ There is also the problem of the size and orientation of T3, T4 and T5. According to Garstang’s plan, these walls appear to form the corner of a building and seem to be wider (perhaps by as much as half a meter) than T1 and T2. Are we perhaps dealing with two different buildings? If so, the size and solid construction of these walls indicate two large monumental buildings. If we agree that the “connected pedestals” best fit a colonnaded building, we might posit the existence of a stoa here. The problematic issue of continuity between Greek, Hellenistic

⁶² Ibid., 31.

⁶³ Segal 1997: 5, 48-49.

and Roman city centers aside, it may be that these buildings served civic functions akin to the stoas found in classical agorae. Further excavation is necessary to understand the plan, date, and function of the “Hellenistic” building, as well as its impact on the urban plan.

The Monumental Apsidal Building

This building is the best-known Roman structure at Ashkelon. Though Garstang is credited with the discovery and excavation of this building, the famous Nike sculptures found with it were discovered some forty years before the PEF's interest in the site.⁶⁴ Thus, it is likely that while Garstang conducted the first scientific excavation of this building, it may have been known from at least the late 19th century, if not earlier. The form and function of the building were unknown by Reinach in 1888, but based on the style of the Nikai he hypothesized that the group belonged to some sort of public building from the Herodian period.⁶⁵ The building was almost fully uncovered by Garstang over the course of two years. Afterwards, a small section of the apse (approximately 20 meters square) was left open and used as an “Open Air Museum” for the display of the sculpture and a portion of the architecture related to the Roman building found during the excavations (Figure 20). The rest was backfilled.

Garstang's report of the area detailed a monumental building decorated with richly carved Corinthian capitals, Greek and Italian marble, and several statues.⁶⁶ His

⁶⁴ Schick 1887: 22-23; Reinach 1888: 25-27.

⁶⁵ Reinach 1888: 26.

⁶⁶ Garstang 1921: 14-15.

reconstruction of the building shows it as a narrow peristyle 85 meters in length, leading up to an apsidal end in the south (Figure 21). The extreme north was left unexcavated, though the reason for this is unclear. The whole complex measured approximately 110 x 35 meters.⁶⁷ The inner foundation wall of the peristyle measured approximately one meter across, allowing for an ambulatory of some 2.5 meters between the inner peristyle and the building's one meter wide exterior wall. This created an “open court” about 10 meters across. The peristyle was paved in marble and mosaic, though the design and decoration of the “open court” are unattested.⁶⁸ Based on several column capitals and bases which Garstang claims to have found in-situ, he argued that the main order of the peristyle was Corinthian, with Attic bases and several “heart-shaped columns” (Figure 22).⁶⁹ His reconstruction of the peristyle has 22 columns on each of the long sides and 6 on the ends. The heart-shaped columns were reconstructed as the four corner columns of the peristyle.⁷⁰ According to Garstang, access to the peristyle was through one of the three entrances (hypothetical) on the north end or either of four entrances along the flanks (two on each side). Three doorways opened into the apsidal end on the same axis as those on the north; one main entrance and two into the subsidiary rooms flanking the apse. Garstang noted the remains of niches and shrines in alabaster and marble along the long sides of the peristyle.⁷¹ One such “shrine” appears on his plan located approximately

⁶⁷ Garstang 1924: 25.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 25. Garstang presumably indicates the area where he discovered paving on his reconstruction of the building (Figure 21), where he includes hatched square boxes in the north-west corner of the peristyle.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 25-28.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 25.

⁷¹ Ibid., 29.

30 meters north of wall **A**. The shrine consisted of a single room, opening to the south. Found within was a statue of a god, presumably Apollo, apparently the deity to whom the shrine was dedicated.⁷²

Because the current excavations have focused on the apse, very little of this colonnade has been uncovered, making it difficult to assess Garstang's claims. Though the 2010 season saw our first opportunity to study it, portions of the colonnade were not uncovered until very late in the season and have not yet been adequately studied. Three wall fragments (including my wall “**C**”) were uncovered running north-south behind the later *scaenae frons* (wall **D**), which appear to be the correct size for the foundation walls of the peristyle (about one meter wide). They are also constructed with concrete in the local Roman style. No column bases were found in-situ, and no undisturbed contexts were found in order to date this architecture. The walls clearly post-date the “Hellenistic” wall fragment 34.30 in the northeast corner of the trench, as their orientation is significantly different. Based purely on stratigraphy, it seems likely that these walls should be identified as portions of the peristyle wall uncovered by Garstang and associated with this monumental apsidal building. Whether the peristyle remained in use after the apsidal building was renovated or destroyed is unclear. Wall **D** appears to cut or abut wall **C** and the later theatral apsidal wall **F** uses wall **C** for its foundations. Wall **C** is certainly part of the peristyle, as it was traced up to flanking room **I**. The western wall of **I**, my “**b₂**”, is actually an extension of wall **C**, forming a single north-south running wall that joins the flanking rooms to the peristyle. This relationship was indicated by Garstang on his plan.

According to Garstang, the apsidal wall **A** consisted of a one meter wide semi-

⁷² Roller 1998: 218-219.

circular wall opening to the north, anchored on either end by a square flanking room, **I** and **II**, approximately three meters across each. The apse and subsidiary rooms were closed off from the peristyle by a one meter wide closing wall (my wall “**B**”). Garstang argued that flanking rooms had entrances into the peristyle but not the apse.⁷³ The diameter of the apsidal “room” measured approximately 13 meters across, including the space occupied by several tiers of seats that Garstang noted along the interior of wall **A**.⁷⁴ Our excavations proved that many of Garstang’s observations are correct (Figure 23, 24 & 25). Room **I** and its walls, **b₁-b₄**, and wall **A** had already been exposed for some time in the “Outdoor Museum,” and we were able to trace the continuation of wall **A** nearly to the point where Garstang indicated the existence of room **II**. Later activities robbed out the full extent of the apsidal wall and the walls of the eastern flanking room so that no trace remains of this subsidiary room. Also absent—perhaps robbed, or, simply reconstructed in the original publication—were the tiers of seats that Garstang reported inside the apse. Wall **B** was also not found. Cleaning at the end of the season uncovered a small feature in a north-south test trench from 2008 that may be this closing wall, albeit preserved at a much lower level than the rest of the building.

The form of the apse and the seats in the interior suggested that the structure was a bouleuterion/curia, and the discovery of an inscription nearby detailing a decision of the local *boule* confirmed this identification.⁷⁵ Two sculpted pilasters of the goddess Nike found on top of the later *scaenae frons* in the area of the main entrance to the apse were

⁷³ This is how Garstang reconstructed the building. In truth, there is no evidence for the entrance in the existing western subsidiary room, and so the issue of access is unresolved.

⁷⁴ Garstang 1922: 115; Balty 1991: 396.

⁷⁵ Garstang 1922: 115; Hogarth 1922: 22-23.

restored flanking the main entrance into the senate house on the inside of the peristyle (Figures 26 and 27). Garstang placed the Isis relief against the wall immediately outside the Apollo shrine in the peristyle. The inscriptional evidence and dates of the architectural fragments and statuary were also thought to be 1st century BCE/CE in date.⁷⁶ It is unclear whether Garstang associated the bouleuterion with Herod's program, as his numerous references to Herod concern only the peristyle and sculpted decoration.⁷⁷ He appears to assign the peristyle a later date when he says that "to this [bouleuterion] Herod the Great added sumptuous marble colonnades and cloisters as a sort of forecourt and main entrance."⁷⁸ Contrary to this interpretation it is clear that the bouleuterion and peristyle were constructed at the same time as there is no evidence that the walls shared between them are later additions. Garstang's dating was adopted by Roller and Diplock, though Roller attributed the sculpture and architectural fragments to a later renovation.⁷⁹

The Herodian date was first challenged by Watzinger in 1935, who argued that the Corinthian capitals instead date to the 2nd-3rd centuries CE.⁸⁰ He also emphasized the similarity between the male figure on the Isis relief and portrait features of the Severan emperor Caracalla (Figure 28). This later date placed the patronage of the building firmly outside any local dynast's grasp, and argued for it as part and parcel of the larger trend of urbanization and "Romanization" of the 2nd-3rd centuries CE in the Near East. Watzinger argued that the whole of the peristyle was roofed, and that the complex should be

⁷⁶ Reinach 1888: 25; Garstang 1922: 116; Hogarth 1922: 22-23.

⁷⁷ Garstang 1922: 114-117; Garstang 1924: 25-26.

⁷⁸ Garstang 1922: 114.

⁷⁹ Diplock 1971: 14; Roller 1998: 218.

⁸⁰ Watzinger 1935: 97-98. Forty years later, Avi-Yonah came to similar conclusions. See Avi-Yonah 1975: 121-130.

understood as an imperial Roman basilica, with the apsidal space acting as a shrine for the imperial cult.⁸¹ Lawrence Stager, the longtime excavator of Ashkelon, pushed this association even further, arguing for a “Severan rebuilding” of the city and pointing to the Severan emperors as possible patrons. He also notes the similarities in plan between the Ashkelon building and the Severan basilica from the forum at Leptis Magna.⁸² The current consensus in literature still views this building as a Roman basilica of the Severan period (though Watzinger's remarks vis-à-vis the apse as a shrine remain largely outside the discussion).

Recently, Moshe Fischer has argued for additional changes to the reconstruction of the building. Fischer noted that Garstang's reconstruction was based on conjecture, especially in the case of the colonnade, where none of the bases was found in-situ.⁸³ Fischer's new reconstruction was accompanied by the first catalog of architectural and sculptural pieces from the site, all of which he dated to the 3rd century CE. The dates of the architectural fragments, which he, following Garstang, assigned to the monumental apsidal building, were used to date the entire structure to the Severan period. Fischer envisions the building as a fully roofed, two story basilica with attic (Figures 29 and 30). Fischer identifies wall **B** as an attached peristyle and places two heart-shaped columns in the corners at the north end of the peristyle.⁸⁴ He also places engaged columns along the walls of the colonnade and the figured pilasters in the attic above the entrance to the

⁸¹ Watzinger 1935: 97-98. Garstang had called the building a basilica as early as 1921, and he used “basilica” and “peristyle” interchangeably in 1922. By 1924 he had deferred to Josephus and used “peristyle” as the preferred term for the complex. See Garstang 1921: 15-16; Garstang 1922: 114-116.

⁸² Stager and Schloen 2008: 9.

⁸³ Fischer 1995: 141.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 141-143.

apse.⁸⁵ Although Fischer's reconstruction is interesting, there are several problems with it. First, he reconstructs the apse with an attached peristyle purely based on the existence of two heart-shaped columns and one fragment of an engaged column. There is now evidence for additional heart-shaped columns, necessitating a change in their employment in the peristyle. Furthermore, the presence of absence of a roof over the peristyle is unknown and Fischer's reconstruction is only appropriate to a roofed basilical structure.⁸⁶ Finally, though Garstang dated the later theatral structure to the 4th-5th centuries CE, ceramic material associated with the construction of this building places it in the 3rd century CE. The statues and architectural fragments also date to this period, and based on their findspots, it seems likely that both groups belong to the stage building (wall **D**) from this later phase. The reconstruction proposed by Fischer cannot accommodate this enlarged—and perhaps open-air—theatral structure.

Based purely on the form of the monumental apsidal building, it does not seem that a bouleuterion complex or basilica is out of the question.⁸⁷ Indeed, both building types shared the same basic plan in the Roman period, and were used interchangeably in many ways.⁸⁸ There seems to be reason to see the apse in this way in light of the presence of seating around it. Whether bouleuterion with peristyle or “basilica,” apsidal seating, and the discovery of inscriptions related to the *boule* support the interpretation of this area as a senate house. The flanking rooms seem particularly useful for this building,

⁸⁵ Ibid., 146.

⁸⁶ The lack of a drainage system and evidence for roof tiles will be key pieces of evidence toward determining whether this assumption holds.

⁸⁷ Watzinger's argument that the apsidal end was dedicated to housing the imperial cult is without evidence.

⁸⁸ Gros 2003: 192-193; Welch 2004: 8-15.

as they may have been used as archives or storage areas for public records.⁸⁹ The inscriptions mentioning the *boule* and the crouching Aphrodite statue found in the peristyle date to the 1st century CE.⁹⁰ Bouleuteria were common buildings in the Roman period, and the Ashkelon complex shares many common characteristics with other 1st and 2nd century CE structures in the empire.⁹¹ Combined with the date of the inscriptional evidence and the 1st century CE statue found in the peristyle, the most plausible date for the construction of the building is the early Roman period.

What happened to this bouleuterion? Garstang hypothesized that it was demolished “on or about the fourth or fifth century” to make way for a Byzantine theater.”⁹² According to this chronology, the colonnaded building depicted at Ashkelon on the 6th century CE Madaba Map cannot be the bouleuterion complex, as some have argued (Figure 31).⁹³ Furthermore, judging from the date of the building atop it the bouleuterion must have gone out of use before the 3rd century CE, and so the apsidal structure on the Madaba Map must depict some other building at Ashkelon. Stager argues that the bouleuterion fell into ruins or was damaged by a fire or earthquake.⁹⁴ The building may also have been dismantled or remodeled. By the 3rd century CE Ashkelon was fully incorporated into the Roman empire—an *oppidum liberum* no more—and it may be that the city's local *boule* was no longer as powerful or important as it once was

⁸⁹ MacDonald 1943: 276-276.

⁹⁰ Iliffe 1933b: 110-112; Stager 1991: 45.

⁹¹ See Balty 1991: *passim*.

⁹² Garstang 1922: 115.

⁹³ Daniel Master, personal communication

⁹⁴ See below for the date of the theatral structure.

and the building was torn down to make way for a small theater.⁹⁵ Because we cannot definitely pinpoint the function of the later theatral structure, however, it may be that it continued to serve as a bouleuterion, while also functioning as an entertainment venue. Relatively little work was required to enlarge the building, entailing only the building of a new cross-wall (wall **D**) and the addition of several new apsidal walls (**E**, **F** and **G**) for the enlargement of the seating area (Figure 32). Thus, the best estimate for the dismantling of the bouleuterion is that it occurred sometime in the late 2nd century CE.

The Theatral Structure

The theatral structure in Grid 47 was first identified during Garstang's excavations. He identified it as a Byzantine period odeon and connected it with the circular feature in the center of orchestra, which he originally understood to be the "Peace Pool" described by Antoninus Martyr in the 6th century CE.⁹⁶ To date, there has been no study on the theatral structure itself aside from Garstang's excavation report.

Excavations over three seasons (2008-2010) have exposed nearly all of the theatral structure, including the possible *scaenae frons* (wall **D**), *postscaenium*, orchestra, substructure of the cavea and large portions of the first (wall **E**), second (wall **F**), and third (wall **G**) apsidal cavea walls (Figures 33 & 34). Because of later rebuilding and robbing in the area only the skeleton of the theatral structure remains. Walls **E** and **F** had been heavily modified in the Islamic period. Garstang's excavations must have removed much of the construction material, architectural pieces and flooring in an effort to expose more of the Roman bouleuterion below. However, Garstang noted mosaic floors and

⁹⁵ Fischer 1995: 121.

⁹⁶ See Stager 1991, n.11.

“exedrae” belonging to the upper cavea and multi-colored paving in the orchestra, though none of these survives.⁹⁷

The cavea is approximately 40 meters in diameter, though only the three apsidal walls providing support for the cavea remain. In contrast to Garstang's report, no seats were found at all in the excavation.⁹⁸ Wall **D**, which has been interpreted as the *scaenae frons* is thin and shallow, with no vaulted substructures and consists of a wall of about one meter wide and 35 meters long.⁹⁹ Wall **D** is not a solid construction, but, rather, an earthen core faced in stone and cement, a characteristic of later theaters such as those at Sepphoris and Caesarea.¹⁰⁰ The width of wall **D** poses problems for reconstructing the typical aedicular stage facade, and it may be that the stage building was of an abbreviated form. A break in the middle of the wall may indicate an entrance or is a later cut, possibly made by Garstang himself. During excavations inside this “break”, a large piece of plaster painted bright yellow was found (Figure 35). Painted plaster often decorated the *proscenium* of theaters and odea.¹⁰¹ A painted plaster front might explain why the proposed *scaenae frons* lacks the typical niched front. It might also have been faced in marble or covered entirely over by wood or a platform.¹⁰² If wall **D** was supplemented by a wooden platform in antiquity it may be that there was an elaborate stage building as at other Roman theaters. However, the thin and narrow character of wall **D** may likewise

⁹⁷ Garstang 1921: 15.

⁹⁸ Garstang restored seats along the first apse, but never attributed them to the odeon or bouleuterion, though he was inclined to place them earlier. It now seems more likely that they belonged to the odeon. See Garstang 1924: 29.

⁹⁹ Segal 1995: 38.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 41-43.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 33.

¹⁰² Segal 1995: 23, Sears 2006: 83.

point to the interpretation of this building as a monumentalized multi-purpose theatral structure that still primarily served as the local senate house.

Wall **D** terminates in a large square “pier” at each end (**d₁** and **d₂**) which jog out in front and back beyond the line of the stage (Figure 37). These piers probably functioned as *versurae*, or vestibules with staircases located off the stage. The piers are filled with several layers of construction fill or sub-floor bedding. A white mosaic floor covers **d₂**; whether this belongs to the later Byzantine building or represents a renovation of the theatral structure is unclear (Figure 36).¹⁰³ Though heavily disturbed in some areas by Garstang, **d₁** contained the same construction fill as **d₂**, including a strip of closed, sealed, dateable material. Pottery from this area dates the building to the Roman period. The construction sequence of the fill in the pier can be described as follows: a gray-white plaster layer with many shell and pebble inclusions lies atop a compact red-brown clay, which directly overlies another layer of grey-white plaster chunks and then a loose red-brown fill. Though the previous layers were relatively sterile (containing some Roman sherds and many fragments of roof tiles) this layer yielded a clean assemblage of Roman pottery dating no later than the third century CE and five coins (Figure 38).¹⁰⁴ The construction fill is original to **d₁** and, while it is possible that the material used to fill the pier was dug up nearby, there are no other closed contexts which might be used for dating at this time.¹⁰⁵ The large amount of Byzantine pottery found in every other post-Roman context in Grid 47—especially late forms of Gaza amphorae—makes it unlikely that

¹⁰³ See below for further discussion. Similar mosaics were associated with the Byzantine renovations of theaters at Caesarea, Shumi and Neapolis. See Retzelff 2003: 124, 126, 128; Shenhav 1993: 1383.

¹⁰⁴ These coins are still in the process of being cleaned and restored.

¹⁰⁵ This would explain the large amount of Iron Age sherds found in the two fill layers immediately below the loose red-brown fill.

there would not be at least one or two intrusive sherds, had this constructional fill been of Byzantine date.

Piers **d**₁ and **d**₂ were joined to the second apsidal wall **F**, probably originally through a vaulted *parados*. This entryway would have led into the orchestra in front of the stage. Like most theatral buildings from the Roman period, the orchestra is a half-circle, and, in fact, more horseshoe-shaped because of the use of the earlier bouleuterion wall **A**, **b**₃ and **b**₆ as guides for the new theatral walls **E**, **F**, and **G**.¹⁰⁶ Indeed, the orchestra is demarcated by wall **E**, which abuts **b**₃ and **b**₆ though only the relationship between wall **E** and **b**₃ remains extant. And, because wall **D** was built directly in front of the bouleuterion's wall **B**, the curve of wall **E** was much sharper than that of the bouleuterion's apsidal wall **A**, resulting in the elongated semi-circular orchestra. The orchestra proper measures some 12.5 meters across, and boasted an *opus sectile* floor, a portion of which survives intact (Figure 39).¹⁰⁷ This small fragment is less than half a meter square and is located next to wall **E** in the southeast of the orchestra. The surface would have run up to the seats, represented now by wall **E**. This wall was perhaps originally the beginning of the seats or a low podium encircling the orchestra. Wall **E** has an “opening” located directly at the center of the orchestra, which may have indicated the beginning of a staircase on the face of the *ima cavea*. Though obscured by a later Islamic addition to wall **E**, the break is stepped, with the bottom “step” at the approximate level of the *opus sectile* flooring (Figure 40).

¹⁰⁶ I make this distinction because horseshoe-shaped orchestras were generally associated with ritual theaters. Here the orchestra shape was created by the use of the bouleuterion's walls as guides. See Segal 1995: 22, Sear 2006: 25.

¹⁰⁷ This is perhaps a fragment of the tiled floor discussed by Garstang 1921: 15.

The cavea proper is more fragmentary and was heavily disturbed by later activities in the area. As a result, only the three apsidal walls of the cavea are preserved. There are no seats and very little fill that might be considered original to the construction of the theatral building.¹⁰⁸ The lack of constructional fill indicates that the cavea and orchestra were built entirely of fill deposited on an artificially created slope. The majority of theaters in both the Roman and Greek periods used naturally sloped terrain as much as possible when building theatral structures and only a handful of theaters in the Levant are built on an artificial slope.¹⁰⁹ The type of subcavea fill used in the Ashkelon theatral structure is unclear, but was perhaps a mix of rubble and soil in the spaces between the large apsidal walls. The presence of an *ambulacrum* would have weakened the structure, but these passageways would have utilized arches and vaults to minimize pressure from the solid fill above them.

Like wall **E**, the second apsidal wall **F** is constructed of large cut kurkar blocks with thick grey cement. This wall does not appear on Garstang's plan, though it is preserved to a height of 3.57 m, and is 1.64m across. Wall **F** curves around from piers **d**₁ to **d**₂, and is built using walls **b**₃, **b**₆ and **C** for its foundations. The center point of this apsidal wall passes within ten centimeters of the earlier bouleuterion apsidal wall **A**, which seems to have been purposefully left partially intact (Figure 41). Wall **A** may have been used as the surface for an *ambulacrum*, or provided additional structural support for the cavea. Much of the northeast portion of wall **F** is bonded with a later Islamic addition, which changed the arc of the wall and caused it to continue north with less

¹⁰⁸ Thus far, two fills, excavated in 2009 and 2010, may be original to the theatral structure, but several intrusive sherds and a relatively small number of buckets excavated from each make this tentative.

¹⁰⁹ Among these are Bosra, Elousa, the small theater at Philadelphia and the theater at Samaria. Also of interest is the use of pre-existing walls as part of the artificial fill at Samaria. Segar 1995: 30,77,86, 89; Zayadine 1966: 576-580; Negev 1982: 122-128.

curvature.

Two “features” between walls **E** and **F** are anomalous, but deserve a brief note. The first is a large platform of rubbly plaster, concrete and mortared stones located between walls **E** and **F**, and bordered on the east and west by the bouleuterion rooms **I** and **II**. There has been no geological study of the makeup of this mass, but it appears to be either lime or gypsum plaster. A cross-section of the mass showed it to be a constructed feature made of brick and rock. Based on this, I have suggested that this “mass” might be a collapsed kiln associated with the later fills containing ash and burnt pottery against the second apsidal wall.¹¹⁰ It might also have represented an attempt in the Roman period to provide extra support for the cavea by constructing a dense platform to cover the gap between walls **A** and **E**. Indeed, there are other indications that the architects of this building were concerned with support for the cavea in the form of a localized “addition” to wall **F**. This addition is half a meter wide and rests on some 30 cm of fill that served to bridge the gap between walls **A** and **F**. The addition appears bonded to the center curve of wall **F**, and there is no indication that it was robbed out from other portions along the same wall. It was clearly built against the center of wall **F**, perhaps for extra support and to relieve pressure on the center point of the curve of this wall. The addition may have been intended to provide extra support in an area that was weakened by an *ambulacrum* and *vomitoria*. This may also be indicative of a renovation after an earthquake, on which see below.

The third apsidal wall **G** is preserved to a height of two meters, and is some 2.5

¹¹⁰ Adams 1994: 65-77. Several fragments of body sherds removed from the mass appear to be Byzantine in date, supporting a suggestion that this is a later feature installed after the theatral structure went out of use.

meters wide (Figure 42). This wall is currently understood as the closing wall of the cavea, though excavation has not exposed its entirety, or the area behind it. A small opening—about half a meter wide—in the southeast of the wall may be a *vomitorium*.¹¹¹ In this case, the space between walls **F** and **G** would have served as an *ambulacrum*, though there is no longer any physical evidence for barrel vaulting of any sort. Photographs from Garstang's excavations may show a fragment of a broken vault which no longer exists and might be part of our dismantled *ambulacrum*. Garstang noted the presence of two “ambulatories” between the curved walls of the theatral building, “the outer one higher than the inner.”¹¹² The meaning of this is unclear, and it may be that these “ambulatories” were simply the spaces between the apsidal walls. However, the presence of an *ambulacrum* between walls **F** and **G** may explain the predominance of Byzantine and Islamic period construction here; there was little in the way of fill or architecture to remove in order to reuse the space. It is possible that there was no barrel-vaulted passageway at all, and that the theater-goers accessed their seats via exterior staircases.

I have not yet addressed the circular feature located in the center of the orchestra,

¹¹¹ This possible *vomitorium* does not appear on any top-plan, as it lies outside the bounds of the current excavation area (in the southeast corner). This “break” has been interpreted as intentional, and there appears to be some sort of stepped feature indicating an entrance or surface. It seems likely to me that this is simply a product of robbing or later rebuilding. If a *vomitorium*, it would be at a very high level, and it is unclear how the difference in height between the surrounding area and the entryway to the theatral structure would be bridged. Because nothing outside of the building has been excavated thus far, we simply cannot know whether additional walls exist (making the theatral structure even larger than currently thought) or whether streets, colonnades or additional buildings were placed directly next to it. Because the theatral building does not appear to take advantage of any sort of natural slope, we should posit the ground level to be roughly equal to the level of the orchestra, which is nearly two meters below the *vomitorium*. A ramp or incline may have existed, but again, there is no evidence for any of this. The 2011 excavations intend to focus on an expansion to the south to answer many of these questions, but the state of preservation of the rest of the theatral building makes it unlikely that there will be definitive answers in this regard.

¹¹² Garstang 1921: 15.

Garstang's so-called "Well of Peace." This "well" was uncovered during his excavations, and subsequently robbed of its upper courses so that the top course is currently found at a level significantly lower than the orchestra floor (about one meter below it). The diameter of this "well" is 3.5 meters across, and it is constructed of nicely squared stones with an unplastered interior (Figure 43). Garstang originally associated this feature with Ashkelon's "Well of Peace" described by Antoninius Martyr in the 6th century CE as "a well of peace made after the fashion of a theatre, in which one descends by steps into the water."¹¹³ This is likely one of the reasons Garstang dated the structure to the Byzantine period, though he later disavowed this claim after discovering that the feature "indeed had no independent water supply."¹¹⁴ It is unlikely that this "well" belongs to the bouleuterion or the odeon, as it is offset too far to the west to be in the center of either apse.

The ceramic material suggests that the theatral structure is a 3rd century CE building. The Nike pilasters, which have been redated to the Severan period, also seem to be associated with the theater, as one was found lying on top of wall **D**, understood as the *scaenae frons*. Diplock placed the pilasters in the earlier building, claiming that the statues were found at a "deep level" and juxtaposed "to the foundation walls of the great building."¹¹⁵ But, according to Garstang's plan and his field photographs, the Nike and Atlas were found on top of the *scaenae frons* and not beneath it (Figure 44). The Nike with palm branch was found in the orchestra, and was photographed near a tiled surface which may be the original surface of the theatral structure (Figure 45). Also, the

¹¹³ Translation given by Garstang 1921: 15.

¹¹⁴ Garstang 1924: 32.

¹¹⁵ Diplock 1971: 14.

monumental character of the pilasters makes them good candidates for the decoration of a stage building. Thus, based on the ceramic material and date of the sculpted pieces associated with the building, the Ashkelon theatral structure was likely built under the Severans, in the 3rd century CE.

Discursus: Bouleuterion, Odeon and Theater

I have called the Ashkelon theatral building by this vague appellation throughout this discussion, but, in fact, it is popularly referred to as an odeon. This is due in part to its small size, and also to a desire to identify the building with the odeon mentioned by Theophanes in the 4th century CE.¹¹⁶ However, an odeon is often indistinguishable from a bouleuterion or small theater.¹¹⁷ In terms of cavea diameter, odea and small theaters are also often interchangeable, with diameters approaching 45 m according to Segal's typology.¹¹⁸ A bouleuterion is often distinguished by its capacity, which might be expected to equal the number of men in the assembly.¹¹⁹ An odeon generally had a roof and a small *scaenae frons*, but there are so many exceptions to this rule that it is not a helpful guide.¹²⁰ And, of course, small theaters had *scaenae* too.¹²¹ Even so, political and entertainment functions were not unique to bouleuteria and odea. Odea, too, were often

¹¹⁶ Roberts and Turner 1952, papyrus 627.

¹¹⁷ Kockel 1995: *passim*; Sear 2006: 28-40.

¹¹⁸ Segal 1995: 25. Sear notes that odea tend to be larger, but that this is not a hard and fast rule. Sear 2006: 38.

¹¹⁹ Sear 2006: 38-39.

¹²⁰ Hansen and Hansen 1994: 42.

¹²¹ Bieber 1961: 220; Sear 2006: 38-39.

used for meetings of the local *boule*, as indicated by numerous recorded instances.¹²²

Cicero himself noted the tendency of the Greeks to hold political meetings in theatral structures.¹²³ The overlapping uses of theatral buildings make it hard to pinpoint a specific “type” of building with a plan distinctive to an odeon/bouleuterion/small theater, and, in fact, the Romans themselves likely did not make this distinction.¹²⁴

Unfortunately, there is no evidence for the presence or absence of a roof in the theater at Ashkelon, and so the distinction between odeon and small theater is unresolved in this way.

The most compelling argument for the Ashkelon theatral structure as an odeon is based on comparisons with other small theaters and odea. First, the diameter of the cavea places the odeon at Ashkelon firmly within the category of small theaters/odea as outlined by Segal. Even more compellingly is the way the Ashkelon theatral structure fits into Meinel's typology of odea. Meinel's work traced the development of odea from the late Classical to the Roman period, arguing for three main phases of evolution.¹²⁵ Using case studies from the Greek and Near Eastern worlds, Meinel subdivided odea and the *theatrum tectum* into several sub-groups.¹²⁶ The Ashkelon odeon, like many small

¹²² MacDonald 1943: 61-62; Kolb 1981: *passim*; Hansen and Hansen 1994: 49-51; Sear 2006: 40; Bier 2008: 144-168. Examples of “multi-purpose” bouleuteria/odea include buildings at Aphrodisias, Nysa, Ptolemais and the North Theater at Gerasa. Even the local assembly at Athens met in the odeon from time to time.

¹²³ Cic.*RP*.3.35.

¹²⁴ See Bieber 1961: 167-222; Meinel 1980: 24-30, 36-43; Segal 1995: 24-29; Sear 2006: 37-43.

¹²⁵ Meinel 1980: 134-159 (early phase), 159-189 (transitional phase), 190-332 (main phase).

¹²⁶ Meinel 1980: 134-332. Meinel's “early” phase centers on late Classical odea, with the Odeon at Athens as the main example. An intermediate phase considers bouleuteria and the *theatrum tectum* from the Classical to the early Roman periods. Meinel's main phase begins in the late Hellenistic/early Roman period (roughly, first century BCE/CE), and traces the development of Roman odea through the third century CE. Odea are further subdivided into fully Roman versions, and then into western and eastern

theaters and odea in the Near East, fits well into Meinel's *theatergleiches Odeion im hellenisierten Osten*, which uses the Philippopolis theater, and the odea at Kanawat and Cyrene as exemplars.¹²⁷ This type of odeon is distinguished by its abbreviated form of *scaenae frons* and elongated semi-circular orchestra.¹²⁸ These characteristics fit nicely with the remains at Ashkelon.

The fact that the theatral structure overlays an earlier senate house may indicate that this building is actually a large bouleuterion of the type known from many sites in Asia Minor.¹²⁹ Large, theatral bouleuteria with the same general architectural features—lots of seating and a small stage—are, for example, found at Aphrodisias, Troy and Iasos.¹³⁰ If the theatral structure continued in use as a bouleuterion, this second phase of building should be interpreted as a renovation intended to monumentalize and update the early Roman structure. Unfortunately there is no evidence pointing to the specific function of the building in this period, and so designating it as a bouleuterion is impossible.

Since we lack any specific way to pinpoint the nature of the activities that took place in the theatral structure at Ashkelon, we cannot designate the building as either an odeon or bouleuterion with any certainty. Two main differences separate odea and bouleuteria and theaters: roofing systems, the elaboration of the stage building and the primary function of the structure. Bouleuteria were always roofed, odea sometimes and

examples.

¹²⁷ Meinel 1980: 291-298.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 291.

¹²⁹ See Gneisz 1990, Balty 1991, Hansen and Hansen 1994, Kockel 1995, Sear 2006. See more below.

¹³⁰ MacDonald 1943: 248-249; Gneisz 1990: 323-324; Hansen and Hansen 1994: 39-41; Bier 2008: *passim*.

theaters almost never. We do not know if the theatral structure at Ashkelon was roofed, and so this criterion is of little help. Bouleuteria and odea often had an abbreviated or non-existent stage building, while theatral *scaenae frons* were often elaborately decorated with niches and multi-storied aedicular structures. The proposed *scaenae frons* at Ashkelon is smaller, and an elaborate stage-building would be unstable resting on the one-meter wide foundation wall (wall **D**). Again, the theatral structure strongly resembles both a bouleuterion and odeon. Functionally speaking, theaters and odea are often understood as primarily entertainment venues, though Kolb has argued that cities built monumental and dramatic political meeting places which could also serve as the backdrop for dramatic performances.¹³¹ Hansen and Hansen, meanwhile, take the opposite and traditional approach, arguing that cities “built theatres for theatrical purposes” which “could conveniently and frequently be used as meeting places” for the local assembly.¹³² The primary function of the Ashkelon theatral structure is nowhere evident. Without inscriptions pointing to the function of the odeon or evidence for the type of roof that belonged to the structure the interpretation of the building’s function remains uncertain. However, in order to distinguish this building from the bouleuterion beneath it, and the larger theater to the south, calling the theatral structure in Grid 47 at Ashkelon an “odeon” seems convenient for the time being. The structure reflects the typical characteristics of an odeon, as discussed above, and literary evidence suggests that an odeon did exist at Ashkelon in the 4th century CE.¹³³

¹³¹ Kolb 1981: 90-91.

¹³² Hansen and Hansen 1994: 52-53.

¹³³ Roberts and Turner 1952: papyrus 627.

The end of the theatral structure

When and why did the theatral building go out of use? There is no clear answer. Stories connect Ashkelon to water spectacles and similar performances in this period, but the theatral structure does not appear to have been renovated and reused in this way.¹³⁴ The so-called “Well of Peace” in the center of the orchestra and the numerous cisterns/silos are later constructions which are unrelated to drainage or water management.¹³⁵ The building definitely was out of use by the middle of the Byzantine period, when a building was constructed in the cavea and deposits related to industry and production are found between the cavea walls. If this is the case, then the theatral structure was in use for about 300 years. Procopius mentions the closing of entertainment venues in the Near East because of financial problems in late antiquity, but Ashkelon's prosperity in this period makes such a situation unlikely.¹³⁶

The most likely explanations are the simplest—there was simply no longer a need for a theater or the building was damaged by some natural disaster. Perhaps the larger southern theater was deemed sufficient for meetings, performances and other spectacles. Or, perhaps the theatral building was not large enough to accommodate the numbers of people attending a given function, especially in light of the fact that the population of the city swelled to twice its size.¹³⁷ Perhaps the theater went out of use, fell into disrepair and was subsequently dismantled. It may also be that some sort of earthquake or fire

¹³⁴ Segal 1995: 13; Trevarsari 1960: *passim*; Retzleff 2003: *passim*.

¹³⁵ For a brief outline of the types of renovations required to turn a theater into a water theater see Retzleff 2003: 124.

¹³⁶ Procop.*Aed.*2.10.22.

¹³⁷ Allen 2008: 41-49.

damaged the building, and that the city's inhabitants saw no need to repair it, shifting material and Earthquakes in 363, 419, 672 and 748 CE are known from literary sources to have damaged cities in the region, and all post-date Theophanes' trip.¹³⁸ There is no evidence for earthquake damage to the theatral structure, though I have suggested that the addition to wall F and the cement platform in the same area, might be connected to renovations.

Byzantine and Islamic Reuse

Before turning to the architectural fragments and sculpted decoration associated with the two Roman buildings in Grid 47, I wish to comment on the use of Grid 47 in the Byzantine and Islamic periods. This bears directly on the Severan theatral structure, since it concerns the date that the building went out of use. As previously mentioned, the area was utilized in both of these periods, when the reuse and extensive robbing of the Roman walls and other remains occurred. Garstang identified the remains of an Islamic period building in this area, which he called the “Mosque of Omar,” and referred to the reuse of the Roman period columns and column capitals in this building.¹³⁹ It may be that the granite columns erected in the modern Ashkelon National Park in the area of the basilica belong to this “mosque,” as they were standing in the field when Schumacher visited the site in the 19th century.¹⁴⁰ The current excavations have found no traces of any architecture which might be interpreted as a mosque, so Garstang's “Mosque of Omar”

¹³⁸ See Russell 1985: *passim*, but especially 42, 47. For a description of the 363 CE earthquake, see Amm.Marc.26.10.

¹³⁹ Garstang 1924: 33.

¹⁴⁰ Schumacher 1886: 172.

was either incorrectly identified by the excavator, or robbed out so thoroughly in the early twentieth century that little remains in the current excavation area.

Though the Islamic mosque cannot be identified with any certainty, the Leon Levy Expedition to Ashkelon has isolated three periods of post-Roman reuse of Grid 47, beginning in the Byzantine period. Here, I briefly outline the major architectural features of these phases and relate them to changes to the architecture of the Roman buildings.

Byzantine

This is perhaps the most elusive period in terms of architecture and our understanding of the building's function. This phase is dated to the Byzantine period, that is, the 6th and early 7th centuries CE. This date is based on pottery collected in fills above two surfaces in the area of the sub-cavea (indicating that this was no longer used for seating), and includes a large number of Gaza amphoras and imported Late Roman Wares. Though later robbing removed much of the material associated with this phase, a concrete surface, a mosaic floor, several walls, and a compact fill indicate that a sizable building occupied this space in the Byzantine period.

As discussed above, many odeia and theaters in the Roman Near East were converted into “water-theaters” in late antiquity, a renovation usually indicated by the closing off of the orchestra by large walls to retain water.¹⁴¹ This is an attractive idea for the reuse of this space, especially as Ashkelon is mentioned in Byzantine literature in relation to such spectacles, but, unfortunately, it does not hold up archaeologically. Features such as a concrete surface and at least one compacted fill in the space of the

¹⁴¹ See especially Traversari 1960. For a criticism of Traversari, see Retzleff 2001: 214-215.

cavea indicate that the theater was not functioning as such in this period. The seats and sub-cavea fill must have been removed to accommodate whatever building was erected in their place. The seats likely were removed first, at the same time or immediately after the odeon was stripped of its marble facing. Many pieces of multi-colored marble were found in robber trenches and pits all over the theatral structure, though there is no trace of any lime pits. Perhaps some pieces were carted off for decorating private homes or public buildings. Many marble fragments uncovered by Garstang and the current excavation show clear signs of reuse and recarving. The sub-cavea fill either washed into the orchestra (perhaps explaining why this area seems completely devoid of architecture or ceramic material), or was scraped away in preparation for the Byzantine building.

No new walls appear to be associated with this building, though a bedded concrete floor with some pieces of marble was laid against the eastern portion of wall **F**, and on top of what would have been the cavea fill. This “floor” was cut by a later trench to the west, and was covered by a solid mass of gypsum plaster mixed with roof tiles (Figure 46). This mass does not appear to be a roof or wall collapse of any sort. The fact that the plaster is gypsum suggests that it came from an interior construction, as gypsum was more expensive and more susceptible to wear than lime. The gypsum plaster covered the floor entirely, but on the south it abuts a non-existent feature. The plaster sits vertically, as if it was deposited against a wall before solidifying. Because of this, it appears likely that there was once an east-west wall at this spot.¹⁴² If so, this wall matches the line of the robbed wall **b₄** of room **II** of the Roman bouleuterion. It may be that the walls of the flanking rooms of the bouleuterion were left standing during the construction of the Roman theatral building, to support the cavea. After the removal of

¹⁴² I am grateful to Adam Aja for this observation and suggestion.

the cavea fill and the decision to construct a Byzantine period building against wall **F**, wall **b₄** may have been reused as the south wall of the Byzantine building or used as a foundation course for a wall (now robbed out). Wall **B** was perhaps also used this way, although excavation in this area of the grid has not reached a level at which this hypothesis might be tested.

A second surface found to the north is the white mosaic (Figure 36) already discussed in relation to **d₂**. The mosaic is bedded and placed directly on top wall **D**, and hints of mosaic in the north section of the grid indicate that it may have stretched several meters to the north, though it was cut (perhaps by Garstang) along the line of the edge of wall **D**. Although ceramic material collected from collapse on top of the floor yielded a Byzantine date, the mosaic and its bedding were not excavated and thus the mosaic's date is unknown. Adding to this difficulty is the fact that the bedding of the mosaic is similar to the bedding used in **d₁**, which has been dated based on pottery to the Roman period. There is disagreement over the dating of this surface, but a later date is preferable because of the hint of similar mosaic in the north section some five meters behind wall **D**.

The resulting picture is that of a long and narrow building, at least fifteen meters in length and of unknown width. But, because neither of the two floors associated with this phase can be dated conclusively to this period, it is impossible to understand fully the sequence of events here. It may be that the surfaces relate to some renovation of the theater which necessitated the removal of the seats, with the Byzantine-fills on top of them related to a time when the theatral structure had gone out of use. Additionally, the walls on the southern and western edges of the building/room are hypothetical, and while there appear to be robber trenches, it is unclear whether these affected the earlier apsidal

building walls or are associated with later walls.

The final issue with the Byzantine reuse of this area is the possibility of the theater's reuse in the Byzantine period. The white mosaic from the eastern pier may be related to the renovation of the odeon after an earthquake. Likewise, the cement and mosaic floor directly to the south may indicate not a Byzantine building, but, rather, modifications to the size and layout of the theatral structure. Perhaps the theater continued in use through part of the Byzantine period, and was then reused before the Islamic period, questions which only further excavation can answer.

Islamic Rebuilding and Reuse

There are two later phases of Islamic reuse in the area, both of which are marked by the reuse of the Roman walls and the alteration of the space east of the orchestra. Very little Islamic material was collected west of wall **F**, and no architecture at all was noted north of wall **D**. An addition to wall **F** was built in the early Islamic period, slightly altering the line of the wall by softening the curve as the wall continued north to wall **D** (Figure 47). Drafted blocks were used, which are much smaller (approximately 27 x 22 x 11 cm) than those recycled from the existing Roman wall (53 x 28 x 22 cm). A fine white mortar joins the blocks, and there is some evidence of a white plaster facing on the eastern face of this addition. A series of abutting radial walls was added in both phases and associated with a plaster floor and then a cistern. In addition, two sumps, a silo, a well, and a cistern were installed near wall **F**.

Wall **E** was also reused in the early Islamic period. The Roman wall was used as a foundation for a larger wall, which was associated with a surface dated by its subfloor fill

to the Abbasid period. The subfloor fill was rich in pottery, consisting almost entirely of very late Gaza amphora fragments with occasional pieces of Islamic cream and coarse wares. This leveling fill covered the area between wall **E** and **F**, and was excavated immediately behind wall **F** south of the orchestra. The building in this area appears to have been quite large, but its exact relationship to the building to the east of wall **F** is unclear, largely because of Garstang's removal of the material between these two spaces.

The function of the structures in Grid 47 in this period is unclear, though the presence of a sump sunk into the ground to the west of the Roman/Islamic wall suggests that this portion of the area was outside the walls of the Islamic period building. Both buildings appear to be monumental and there is a lack of occupational debris, so it may be that they were part of the Islamic city center. As for the Mosque of Omar and the so-called “Well of Peace,” there is no evidence for the former, and it is unclear to which building the latter belongs. Garstang's chronology implied the existence of two phases of Islamic reuse. When writing about the reuse of Roman columns in the Mosque of Omar, Garstang noted that some “had fallen on to the earlier Arab floor, and some had crashed through the very stout floor of the mosque itself.”¹⁴³ The “earlier Arab floor” presumably is related to the early Islamic period remains between walls **E** and **F**. Fallen column fragments were found only behind the *scaenae frons*, and at a much lower level than any of the other Islamic period remains. These fragments might be debris from Garstang's excavations. The “very stout floor of the mosque” does not appear to exist any longer, if at all. It may be that Garstang understood one of the surfaces currently dated to the Byzantine period as this floor, or he might have removed it in search of the Roman

¹⁴³ Garstang 1924: 33.

foundations below. He does not describe in detail and does not include any of the Islamic period architecture on his state plan of the building. The “Well of Peace” has only been reexamined partially, uncovered in a test trench in the 2009 season and not fully exposed. It appears to have been robbed out since Garstang's excavations, but by whom or why are unclear (Figures 48).¹⁴⁴ Garstang noted that the “well” appeared to have no independent water supply and did not conform to the ancient description of this monument, which included a descent down a flight of stairs and springs of water.¹⁴⁵ In any case, it is unlikely that the stone feature located in the orchestra can be identified with the “Well of Peace” as described by Antoninus Martyr, and it may be related instead to the handful of other silos/sumps/cisterns installed in Grid 47 in the Islamic period.

¹⁴⁴ It was probably for building material, but further excavation in the orchestra might reveal that the structure collapsed or that the stones were removed and deposited nearby.

¹⁴⁵ Garstang 1924: 33.

CHAPTER III

THE ARCHITECTURAL AND SCULPTURAL FRAGMENTS

Today visitors to the national park at Ashkelon are impressed by the number of architectural fragments and sculpture on display, especially in the outdoor yards containing material from the Garstang and Leon Levy Expeditions. Unfortunately, none of this material comes from securely dated contexts. There is no way to date the architectural fragments and sculptures stratigraphically or by ceramic deposits associated with their find spots as they come from secondary or disturbed contexts or robber trenches. The sheer number of architectural fragments in a variety of materials, sizes and orders defies assignment to two Roman buildings. The bouleuterion and odeon were located in Ashkelon's city center, and therefore many of these pieces might have come from other still undiscovered buildings in this area. Also, many fragments on display belong to buildings of different periods.¹⁴⁶

Robbing activity in the Byzantine, Islamic and modern periods remains the biggest obstacle in placing these sculptures and architectural fragments in their proper context. The removal of much of the marble from the buildings in the city center presumably took place as soon as they went out of use. Robbing for marble, sculpture, and ashlar masonry continued into modern times. For example, the Nike pilasters were

¹⁴⁶ For instance, the Byzantine church capital that is now located directly outside the open excavation area in Grid 47.

originally uncovered by digging (probably robbers) in the 19th century and reburied until the Palestine Exploration Fund's team recovered them in the early 20th century.¹⁴⁷ The pervasiveness of robber trenches has been noted above, and indicated by George Schumacher's comments upon his visit to the site in 1886: "We entered the old site from the north, where the fallen remains of the city wall show large granite columns built into it, and along a road... natives excavating marble slabs and other antiquities... On approaching we found several natives at work cutting a slab of beautiful white marble into pieces... it had an unfinished cornice on its upper part."¹⁴⁸ Some 70 years earlier, the intrepid Lady Hester Stanhope's physician witnessed a similar phenomenon: "Ascalon was stripped of all that was useful in it to rebuild Jaffa and Acre...hence rose the mosque and the public baths; where granite, porphyry and marble, are huddled together in rich but bungling confusion. When that which lay on the surface had been carried off, they proceeded to dig."¹⁴⁹ The recutting and reuse of ancient material in later walls and buildings is an unfortunate consequence of the excellent preservation of many of the Roman buildings at the site (Figure 49). Because of this, much of the sculpted material that belonged to both Roman buildings in Grid 47 is lost, so that, in Garstang's own words "what remains is only a fractional indication of one of the really great monuments of antiquity."¹⁵⁰

Despite this phenomenon, several conclusions can be drawn from the assemblage of sculpted and architectural material found by Garstang and the current excavations.

¹⁴⁷ Schumacher 1886: 175; Schick 1887: 22-23; Garstang 1921: 12.

¹⁴⁸ Schumacher 1886: 172.

¹⁴⁹ Meryon 1846: 155.

¹⁵⁰ Garstang 1922: 117.

First, that the overwhelming majority of carved pieces found during the excavation of the bouleuterion and odeon are Roman in date, and thus likely decorated one of these buildings. Second, several types of bases and capitals appear with such consistency in size and material that we can attribute them to a single building. Third, both the capitals and Nike sculptures are dateable stylistically, suggesting their identification with one structure over another.

The Architectural Fragments

This section comments on the information contained in Appendix II, which is a brief catalog of materials found in or around Grid 47 by Garstang or the Leon Levy Expedition. During the 2010 season, each piece of architecture and sculpture was photographed, measured and catalogued in preparation for publication. The present catalog includes only representative pieces of the major groups of fragments.

Architectural fragments or sculpture that can not be associated with either the bouleuterion or odeon are omitted. The catalog contains ten “types” of architectural fragments, numbered with Roman numerals, which are referred to as “Type __” in the text. The main catalog entry includes the number of the fragment, either according to the park (usually four numbers) or the Leon Levy Expedition (MC#), the findspot, identification, material, measurements (when available), number of similar examples, proposed date, attribution and related publications.

Though I have isolated several different categories of architectural pieces in Appendix II, it would be a mistake to understand the evidence as anything but highly fragmentary. Half of the architectural fragments found in and around Grid 47 have been

heavily damaged, especially by recutting and reuse in later buildings. Furthermore, it is unclear whether we should include the grey granite or pink granite columns in the reconstruction of the bouleuterion or the theatral building (the latter is the more likely building). I think we can distinguish at least two different sizes of Corinthian capitals, of which the larger (**Type I**) likely belong to the *scaenae frons* and are associated with the large Attic-Ionic pedestals (**Type IV**), while the medium sized capitals (**Type V**) are associated with the peristyle. There are fragments of a third, smaller type of Corinthian capital (not included in the catalog), which may belong, as Fischer argues, to a second storey. Fischer has convincingly proposed a Severan date for the architectural fragments based on a stylistic analysis and comparison with examples from throughout the Near East.¹⁵¹ Apart from the style of these capitals, the use of multi-colored marble and imported granite (**Types VIII and IX**) suggests a second or third century CE date. In the Levant, colored granite was used exclusively for columns, and with marble, was imported frequently only after the second century CE.¹⁵²

Based on the similar dates of the architectural fragments and the theatral structure, it is reasonable to assign the heart-shaped columns, large Corinthian capitals, pink and grey granite columns and pedestals to the *scaenae frons*. This attribution is based on the size of these fragments and the traditional use of multi-colored marbles in this type of structure.¹⁵³ The fragmentary nature of the architrave blocks found in Grid 47 makes it difficult to assign them to the peristyle or *scaenae frons*. While Fischer associated all of

¹⁵¹ Fischer 1995: 123-129; Fischer 1998: 51-52, 68-69, 241; Fischer 2008: 493-502.

¹⁵² Fischer 1998: 31, 33.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 232.

the architectural fragments with the monumental apsidal building, he noted that the architrave blocks are of the type “usual in *scaenae frons*.”¹⁵⁴ Similar examples are found in the entablature from the theater at Scythopolis (Figure 50). Thus, assigning the carved architrave blocks to the *scaenae frons* is not without parallel.

The Sculpted Pilasters

The group of Nike pilasters is perhaps the most famous set of sculptures from Ashkelon, consisting of three (probably originally more) carved pilasters of winged Nikai. These sculptures may be those mentioned by Schumacher in 1886, who noted that “a renowned native antiquarian at Acca told me secretly that at Askalân marble statues were discovered, and that he had the intention of looking after them shortly.”¹⁵⁵ Certainly, two of the three pilasters were known by 1887, when Schick studied and photographed the two most complete examples in situ. The statues were found lying in a deep pit, and Schick reported that “the peasants there knew of [them] for a long time, but considering them as idols kept them buried” (Figure 51).¹⁵⁶ Though Schick implies that the sculptures were to be removed from their find-spot, they apparently were reburied, for Garstang rediscovered them some forty years later. Indeed, the knowledge that the sculptures were buried led Garstang to dig where he did.¹⁵⁷

To date, these two nearly complete Nikai and smaller fragments of at least one other have been found in Grid 47. The Nike and Atlas group are the best preserved,

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 51.

¹⁵⁵ Schumacher 1886: 175.

¹⁵⁶ Schick 1887: 22-23.

¹⁵⁷ Garstang 1921: 12.

though exposure in the Outdoor Museum and vandalism have caused significant damage (Figure 26).¹⁵⁸ The sculpture, made of Marmara/Carrara or Thasian marble, is carved in very high relief, standing 0.26m away from the plinth, which is 3.60m in height, 0.90 m wide and 0.70m deep.¹⁵⁹ The Nike is framed by a projecting cornice at the top, and rough tooling on all sides indicates that the plinth originally was set into a wall or entablature. The face of the Nike is damaged and both arms have been broken. Her left arm grasps the drapery at her thighs, her right arm is raised, and she may have been holding a wreath, as Fischer suggests.¹⁶⁰ Her hair is bound up in the back, with stray strands escaping on both sides of the head. She wears a peplos that is fastened at both shoulders and belted high, below the bust, with a relatively short overfold. The drapery is rendered thinly, with shallow lines over the thighs, legs and abdomen. Deeper folds are found in the fluttering drapery pushed away from the body, seemingly by wind or force of motion, though her wings are rendered stiffly. To indicate movement, her bare right foot is placed forward, as if alighting on the globe supported by an overburdened Atlas, whose exaggerated muscles appear even more tightly packed in his awkward, crouched position peering up at the Nike. The orb of the world is perched on Atlas' shoulders, and he reaches both hands up to steady it. Atlas rests on an undecorated square pier with a molded cornice. The plinth for the pilaster—if there was one—has been removed, as saw marks on the top and bottom of the pilaster indicate.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁸ Garstang 1921: 15; Garstang 1924: 28.

¹⁵⁹ Fischer 1995: 131; Fischer 1998: 255; Fischer 2008: 494.

¹⁶⁰ Fischer 1995: 30 calls the “grasping of the peplos...an archaistic feature not normally found on representations of Nikai.”

¹⁶¹ This happened before its discovery in the 19th century, as the first photograph of this pilaster shows it already damaged and sawn. See Schick 1887: 22-23.

The second well-preserved pilaster depicts a winged Nike with a palm branch (Figure 27). Less of this pilaster is preserved, measuring approximately 2.28m in height, 0.90m in width and 0.60m in depth.¹⁶² She, too, wears her hair parted in the middle and gathered with tendrils escaping and trailing over her shoulders. Her peplos is fastened at both shoulders and belted below the breasts. She wears a *polos*, which extends above the projecting cornice. Her face is damaged and her left arm and feet are broken. In her right hand she carries a large, upright palm branch, which extends to the projecting cornice, and in her left, upraised arm, she perhaps carried a wreath.¹⁶³ Her wings, like those of the other Nike, are stiff, with motion and wind indicated by the motif of wind-blown drapery clinging to breasts, abdomen, and knees. The drapery of this Nike with palm branch is thicker and less sheer, with greater mass and deeper folds over the abdomen than on the other Nike. Because both hands hold implements of victory, her peplos is left free on both sides, and an attempt is made to show it billowing out behind her. Fischer notes that “traces of her right leg... survive, as well as traces of a round feature, probably a globe,” though it is unclear what is meant by this. No such fragment is currently found in the storage area, and he does not include further description of this piece.¹⁶⁴ In contrast to the Nike and Atlas pilaster, this Nike 's left leg is extended, likely a purposeful counterpoint for display purposes.

The remaining two pilasters are preserved as fragments of the legs only. Both display similar treatment of windblown drapery across the thighs of a Nike, with one leading forward with her right leg. This piece is of the same width (0.91m) as the other

¹⁶² Fischer 1995: 133.

¹⁶³ Fischer's suggestion (1995: 133); he notes that “some traces at the upper right corner of the cornice may belong to a wreath.” I was unable to identify visually which markings he identifies as traces.

¹⁶⁴ Fischer 1995: 133; Fischer 1998: 135, item 98.

two pilasters, though it is preserved only to a height of 0.68m (Figure 52). The second fragment is even smaller and heavily damaged. Although I include it because of the similarity to the other Nikai in the style, carving of the drapery, and type of marble, it may belong to a different statue altogether. This fragment is quite small, preserved to some .54m in height and .85m in width (Figure 53). If this does belong to a Nike sculpture, it might be a portion of the lower legs.

In the 19th century, these pilasters were assigned to the first century CE, because, as Reinach argued, because they reflected “une bonne oeuvre de transition entre le style tourmenté et pathétique des écoles hellénistiques et l'art conventionnel et lourd de l'époque impériale.”¹⁶⁵ A first century CE date squared nicely with the date of the inscriptions found in the building and the attribution of the senate house and peristyle to the Herodian building program of the same period. This interpretation was articulated and championed by Garstang in 1921 and 1924, and was suggested first by Reinach in the 19th century.¹⁶⁶ Based on their find spots Garstang assumed the sculptures were displayed in the senate house, flanking the main north entrance from the peristyle.¹⁶⁷ Diplock's later work adopted this dating, arguing for a restoration of the two pilasters inside the door jambs of the main entrance instead.¹⁶⁸

Despite Diplock and Garstang's agreement, Watzinger argued for a later date for the pilasters as early as 1935.¹⁶⁹ Cornelius Vermeule and Kristin Anderson also dated the

¹⁶⁵ Reinach 1888: 25.

¹⁶⁶ Reinach 1888: 26; Garstang 1921: 114-116; Garstang 1924: 25-29.

¹⁶⁷ Garstang 1921: 15; Garstang 1921: 117; Garstang 1924: 28.

¹⁶⁸ Diplock 1971: 14.

¹⁶⁹ Watzinger 1935: 98.

pilasters to the Severan period, calling them “the most splendid Roman imperial architectural sculpture to be found east of Ephesus and Corinth.”¹⁷⁰ A Severan date for the sculpture rules out their inclusion in the bouleuterion, and argues for their attribution to the odeon. Fischer, Stager and Garstang restored the Nikai in the peristyle, but this only possible if we posit a phase of renovations to the peristyle 3rd century CE. The monumental subject matter and findspots of the preserved Nikai atop the *scaenae frons* rather suggest that they were located in the stage building.

After the Nike pilasters, the Isis relief is the best known sculpture from Roman Ashkelon (Figure 28). Found in the 19th century, the sculpture has alternately been identified as Isis, Tyche, Fortuna, an amalgamation of these goddesses, or one in the guise of another.¹⁷¹ Marcel R. Savignac was the first to examine the statue, which had been known for some time, having been discovered during the removal of marble and masonry blocks for modern construction.¹⁷² Like the Nike pilasters, the relief was examined, photographed and published, but reburied until Garstang's excavations.¹⁷³ It does not appear to have been moved from its original find spot; Savignac included a hand-drawn map in his original publication of the piece, and places it in the general vicinity of the Roman monumental building.¹⁷⁴

The sculpture was displayed alongside the Nike pilasters in the Open Air Museum

¹⁷⁰ Vermeule and Anderson 1981: 15.

¹⁷¹ Savignac 1905: 127-128; Garstang 1921: 12; Garstang 1924: 28; Krug 1995: 135-138; Fischer 2008: 496-497.

¹⁷² Savignac 1905: 425.

¹⁷³ Garstang 1921: 12.

¹⁷⁴ Savignac 1905: 427.

at Ashkelon until 2008. Unlike the Nikai, the Isis pilaster is of Greek Pentelic marble, the only example of this marble found at Ashkelon.¹⁷⁵ The relief is preserved to a height of 1.07m and is 1.0 m wide, and, like the Nikai, rough tool marks cover the three unbroken sides and the back. The bottom of the relief appears to have been sawn off, making its exact height is unknown, though it was perhaps comparable to the Nikai.¹⁷⁶ A projecting cornice crowns the relief, and the diademed *polos* extends above it in the same manner as the *polos* of the Nike pilaster. The relief depicts two figures carved in very high relief, and in the same Severan style as the Nikai. The larger of the figures is intended to be Isis, as the sheaths of wheat and crescent moon on her *polos*, and the Isiac knot of her mantle indicate. The goddess' hair is parted in the middle, the length curled and fixed to the back of the head. The face is wide, with deeply-set eyes, slightly parted lips and a solid chin. Her neck is fleshy and shoulders narrow; there is no indication of movement in the rendering of the drapery or the position of the body. She wears a deeply carved mantle over a short-sleeved chiton, and the mantle is secured with an Isiac knot between the breasts. Both arms are placed at her sides with elbows slightly bent, indicating, as Fischer and Krug suggest, that she held cultic attributes—a cornucopia, rudder, situla and sistrum are all possible.¹⁷⁷ The figure that accompanies her is much smaller proportionally and occupies only a quarter of the remaining space of the relief over the goddess' right shoulder. This figure is male and appears to be a child—the large, round face, fleshy cheeks and balled fists are particularly child-like, though the boy wears a

¹⁷⁵ Fischer 1998: 255.

¹⁷⁶ Savignac 1905: 425; Fischer 1995: 133.

¹⁷⁷ Savignac 1905: 427-428; Fischer 1995: 133, 135; Krug 1995: 135.

diadem and a Greek himation.¹⁷⁸ Savignac identified the figure as Horus/Haropocrates, but Watzinger, Wenning and Krug have suggested that the figure has portrait features, possibly, Wennig argues, of Caracalla.¹⁷⁹ Unfortunately, the poor preservation and size of the statue make such an observation unproveable.

According to Garstang's plan, the Isis relief was found by the eastern foundation of the peristyle, very close to the small niche that Garstang took to be a shrine to Apollo, as a statue of the god was discovered there.¹⁸⁰ Fischer, however, notes the similarities in size between the Isis relief and the Nikai pilasters and, instead, argues that the relief belonged to this series and was displayed alongside the Nikai over the entrance to the senate house.¹⁸¹ Fischer's reconstruction calls for three Nikai and the Isis, and, if we include Krug's suggestion, a fifth depiction of Serapis. In light of the new date proposed for the odeon and popularity of Nikai in Eastern theaters, it seems more likely that the Nikai and Isis pilasters were all displayed in the *scaenae frons*. This argument relies on the Nikai and the Isis pilaster as visual counterpoints in the same program, but this cannot be verified archaeologically, since the Nikai were found clustered around the *scaenae frons* and the Isis was several meters away in the peristyle. It may be that the Isis relief belongs on the *scaenae frons* of the odeon along with the Nikai and other pilasters of deities, personifications as well as sculptures of patrons, but it may also be that we can posit a different set of pilasters for the interior or exterior of the peristyle. It is unclear which of these is the more elegant solution, and, while I would argue that the Isis pilaster

¹⁷⁸ Fischer 1995: 133-135.

¹⁷⁹ Watzinger 1935: 98; Wenning 1992: 499-510; Krug 1995: 136.

¹⁸⁰ More on this below.

¹⁸¹ Fischer 1995: 145-146, Fig 25.

may have been displayed alongside the Nikai in the *scaenae frons*, the find spot of the relief suggests that the sculpture was cut where it fell, removed from the entablature of the peristyle.

Miscellaneous Sculptures

Four statues were also found during Garstang's excavation of the Roman monumental building: a monumental statue of a man (lost), a statue of a god (lost), a draped woman (lost), and a copy of the popular Hellenistic “Crouching Aphrodite” type (Figure 54).¹⁸² Garstang identified the monumental statue as a depiction of Herod and the statue of the god as Apollo, though he did not include descriptions of them. He may have based his identification on attributes included with the figure or on a similar type found elsewhere (for example, the Belvedere Apollo). He may have also identified this statue with Apollo because of the so-called “Shrine to Apollo” which Herod reportedly built, and which Garstang identified with a small niche or “shrine” halfway down the peristyle of the Roman apsidal building.¹⁸³ Of these statues, the Crouching Aphrodite is the only one that survives; it is of coarse-grained white marble and is not of as high quality as the later Nikai.¹⁸⁴ It has been dated to the late Hellenistic period, and is thus probably original to the decoration of the peristyle.¹⁸⁵

The current excavations also uncovered several statue fragments which might be

¹⁸² The Crouching Aphrodite can be found today in Jerusalem. See Garstang 1922: 117.

¹⁸³ *Chronikon Paschale* 186, 191; Roller 1998: 218.

¹⁸⁴ Iliffe 1933: 110-112.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

associated with one of the two Roman buildings. The first is a very fragmentary foot, of smaller scale and marble than the Nike statues but which appears to be a foot placed on some surface. The second is a lion's paw, preserved halfway up the leg. It seems likely that this was the foot of a table rather than a full-sized statue of a lion (Figure 55).

Ultraviolet photography indicated that the foot was once painted. Both fragments were found out of context in later robbers' trenches. A portion of a buckle from a cuirassed statue was found during data collection for the architectural catalog (Figure 56). Finally, mechanical removal of later fill behind the *scaenae frons* uncovered a small altar decorated with a thunderbolt or sheath of grain. This altar may have originally been located in the orchestra of the odeon, but it seems too small for such a use.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This chapter is devoted to the conclusions of this study on the monumental buildings of Roman Ashkelon's city center. I begin by summarizing the arguments I have made concerning the dating and interpretation of the architecture and sculpture of the bouleuterion and Roman odeon. I continue with the implications of this study, and propose some general conclusions about the evolution of Grid 47 and what the bouleuterion and odeon can tell us about the city in the Roman period. Finally, I discuss areas that remain problematic in terms of dating and interpretation, and for fruitful future research.

Conclusions

Thus far, I have discussed the architecture, sculpture and building phases of the bouleuterion, peristyle, and odeon in Grid 47 at Ashkelon. I have argued that the monumental apsidal building uncovered by Garstang in the 1920's belongs to the early Roman period, and cannot be associated with the third century CE sculpted Nike pilasters and multi-colored marble decoration found in the area. These sculpted pieces, combined with dates from ceramic material obtained in renewed excavations of the odeon, provide a Severan date for the theatral structure also uncovered by Garstang. These are the best

conclusions that we can reach with the currently available information. These results prompt a re-evaluation of our understanding of Roman Ashkelon's city center.

Though we cannot currently identify the function and date of the earliest building phase in Grid 47, we have tentatively identified these as Hellenistic period remains. The presence of an early Roman bouleuterion and third century CE odeon in the same place argues for continuity in the use of Grid 47 as the city center. It may be that the city center in the Roman period was in the same place as the city center of the Hellenistic period, and so our earliest monumental walls may be public buildings belonging to this earlier period.

The presence of an early Roman bouleuterion is compelling evidence for continued emphasis on Ashkelon's political autonomy in the late Hellenistic and early Roman periods. Very few bouleuteria are found in the Levant, and none dates to this early period. The wealth and cosmopolitan nature of this port city probably provided the funds and inspiration for the bouleuterion complex, which relies on precedents from Asia Minor.¹⁸⁶

The building of an odeon directly on top of the earlier Roman bouleuterion may have signaled the end of Ashkelon's autonomy in the third century CE. It is unclear when the city lost its status as a free city, but the replacement of a political building for an entertainment venue may indicate that this shift took place under the Severan dynasty. Though the odeon may have continued to serve the local assembly, the elaboration of the theatral building in this period may also signify the need for additional entertainment venues to serve a larger or more cosmopolitan population. The new odeon was decorated with symbols of imperial power, embodied in the Nike pilasters which were displayed in

¹⁸⁶ See below.

the building's *scaean frons*, and perhaps also in inscriptions that link the success of Rome to the success of Ashkelon. Though the stage building of the odeon is poorly preserved, the architectural fragments associated with it indicate that it was elaborately decorated in multi-colored imported marble and granite. Heart-shaped columns and intricately carved architrave pieces evoke the lavish decoration of the Caesareum and large theater at Scythopolis. The use of imported marble indicates that Ashkelon continued to have access to such materials, as well as the money or local elite to fund the erection of this building. The Ashkelon odeon combines characteristics of other Roman theatral structures both in the Levant and in the empire, but local concerns dictated the deployment of Roman construction techniques and design. Built on an artificial fill, the odeon perhaps utilized some of the earlier bouleuterion walls, and may have been designed to allow unchanged access to the earlier peristyle. Though the extent of the Roman city center at Ashkelon is virtually unknown, the elaborate use of imported marble and monumental character of bouleuterion and odeon indicates that the city was able to afford large public buildings and was an important and wealthy city in the southern Levant.

The Problems Remaining and Future Research

Despite the wealth of conclusions presented above, many questions about the bouleuterion, odeon and Roman Ashkelon remain. The date of the Hellenistic walls and the early Roman bouleuterion may be addressed through continued excavation, though the plan of the Hellenistic building will probably never be fully investigated. The

Herodian connection to these two earlier phases also warrants continued study, but in the absence of testimonia in the form of inscriptional evidence, it seems unlikely that this problem will ever be resolved. Continued excavation might reveal essential characteristics related to the function of the bouleuterion and peristyle, including the types of roofing of these buildings.

Although the odeon is the best known of the three buildings in Grid 47, the existence and plan of any rectilinear closing walls, *ambulacra* and connections between the theatral building and peristyle warrant investigation. The relationship between the odeon and the “Well of Peace,” and other architectural features which may point to Byzantine renovations should likewise be studied. Most importantly, however, is the investigation of the precise function of the theatral structure and the types of activities that occurred there. Recovery of inscriptions concerning the *boule* in the third century CE might point to continued use of the theatral structure as a political meeting place. This would underline an interpretation of the addition of the three apsidal walls as an intention to monumentalize the local assembly building. Renovations to the orchestra and water storage systems could also point to the use of the theatral structure for water spectacles in late antiquity.

Excavation outside the peristyle, bouleuterion and odeon will also help situate these buildings within the city's urban plan. Further excavation in the area of the city center will shed light on the types of buildings that surrounded the bouleuterion and theatral structure, and also how these buildings were integrated into the city's plan and street network.

There is also much work to be done situating the Ashkelon bouleuterion and

theatral structure in the context of urban and architectural developments in Roman Palestine and in the Roman Near East. The Ashkelon bouleuterion is only one of five bouleuteria in the Levant and Arabia, though it is possible that several of the nine odea in the same region were multi-functional structures.¹⁸⁷ Bouleuteria are more frequently found in Asia Minor and Greece, and Ashkelon's history as a gentile and "Hellenized" city may account for this connection. The Ashkelon bouleuterion complex (with the peristyle) also strongly resembles Roman period basilical structures at Samaria, Scythopolis, Aphrodisias and Ephesus.¹⁸⁸

The consistent—and persistent—connections between Ashkelon and Asia Minor is further emphasized by the use of imported Proconnesian marble at Ashkelon, and the similarities between the Nike pilasters and the Nike statues from the theater at Aphrodisias.¹⁸⁹ Leptis Magna also imported Proconnesian marble, and Corinthian capitals from this North African metropolis are of the same stylistic type as the large Corinthian capitals (Type I) found at Ashkelon.¹⁹⁰ Ashkelon's connection with the marble trade, and the dissemination of architectural and sculptural styles in the Near East is an intriguing area for future study.

Finally, much work concerning the Nike pilasters, their iconography and their role in the iconographic program of the Ashkelon odeon remains. There are several Near

¹⁸⁷ Sear and Balty give different numbers. The list according to Sear: Ashkelon, Scythopolis, Samaria, the small theater at Petra and Dura Europos. Balty lists additional bouleuteria at Philadelphia, Pella, Gerasa and Gadara. These additional bouleuteria are just as likely to be odea, which Balty does not distinguish from theatral structures with political functions. The nine odea are found at: Antipatris, Ashkelon, Abila, Kanawat, El Hammat, Gerasa, Pella, Philadelphia and Philippopolis.

¹⁸⁸ Watzinger 1935: 96-97; Crowfoot *et al.* 1942: 35, 55-57; Stinson 2008: 79-106.

¹⁸⁹ Erism and Smith 2001: 74-78.

¹⁹⁰ Fischer 1995: 129.

Eastern parallels for the iconography of the Nike pilasters, including an inscription from Caesarea, a wall-painting from the Tomb of the Three Brothers in Palmyra and the Nike statues from the theater at Aphrodisias (Figures 57, 58 and 59).¹⁹¹ Situating the Nike pilasters and the Isis pilasters in the context of imperial iconography and vis-à-vis other sculptural programs on public buildings in Roman Palestine and the Near East will help provide a socio-political context for the iconographic program of the *scaenae frons*.

¹⁹¹ Olami and Ringel 1975: 148-150; Kraeling 1961: 13-19; Colledge 1976: 84-87; Erism and Smith 2001: 74-78.

APPENDIX I
CONCORDANCE

Labels used in this work	Harvard Expedition Identification
Wall A	53.31, 54.67, 45.38
Wall B	N/A
Wall C	34.48
Room I	N/A
Room II	N/A
Walls b ₁ -b ₃	N/A
Walls b ₄ -b ₆	N/A
Wall D	34.10
Wall E	44.27=44.5
Wall F	53.9, 54.15, 55.6, 45.7
Wall G	55.4, 45.10

APPENDIX II

ARCHITECTURAL CATALOG

Type I

Number: Unnumbered Fragment #96
Findspot: Garstang Excavations
Material: Proconnesian marble
Measurements: 0.90m (total height), diameter unknown but approx. 0.70m
Identification: Large Corinthian capital
Number of similar examples: 2, possibly 4
Proposed date: Severan
Attribution: Theatral structure, perhaps the *scaenae frons*

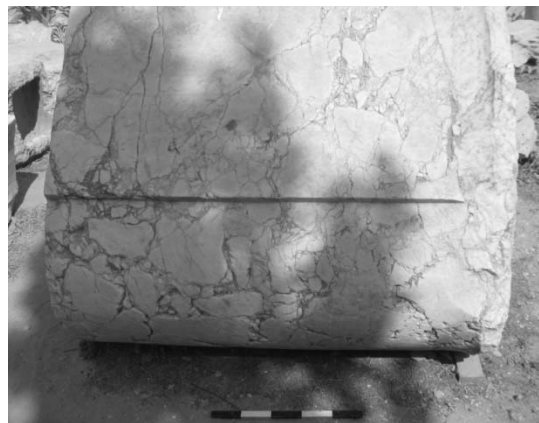
Parallels: Leptis Magna (Fischer 1995: 129)



Type II

Number: 47-7171
Findspot: Garstang Excavations
Material: Limestone with pink/red veins?
Measurements: 0.90m (length), 1.26m (width)
Identification: “Heart-shaped” column
Number of similar examples: 5, none complete
Proposed date: Severan
Attribution: Theatral structure, perhaps the *scaenae frons*

Parallels: North Palace at Masada, triclinium at Jericho; various buildings at Alexandrum and Jeruslame; Caesareum and basilica at Scythopolis (Netzer 2001: 230-236; Mazor and Amos 2007: 132, 138-142, 149-153, 163-165; Mazor 2007: 182-183)



Type III

Number: Unnumbered Fragment #95

Findspot: Garstang Excavations

Material: Marble

Measurements:

Bottom Plinth: 1.61m (width), 0.62m (height)

Base: 1.64m (width), 0.23m (height)

Heart-shaped base: 0.89m (diameter of each lobe), 0.27m (height)

Identification: “Heart-shaped” column base and plinth

Number of similar examples: none

Proposed date: Severan

Attribution: Theatral structure, perhaps the *scaenae frons*



Parallels: Caesareum and basilica at Scythopolis (see Type II above)

Type IV

Number: 47-7191

Findspot: Garstang Excavations

Material: Marble

Measurements: 0.90m (diameter), 1.22m (height)

Identification: Attic-Ionic base and pedestal

Number of similar examples: none in the area of Grid 47, but several similar examples in the area of the Byzantine church

Proposed date: Severan

Attribution: Theatral structure, perhaps the *scaenae frons*



Type V

Number: Unnumbered Fragment #112

Findspot: Garstang Excavations

Material: Marble

Measurements: 0.46m (diameter), 0.58m (height)

Identification: "Small" Corinthian capital

Number of similar examples: 9

Proposed date: Severan

Attribution: Unknown; perhaps renovation of peristyle?

Parallels: "The most popular type of marble capital in Roman Palestine"; Caesarea (Fischer 1992: 219-220; Fischer 1995: 129)



Type VI

Number: 47-7189

Findspot: Garstang Excavations

Material: marble

Measurements: 0.67m (width), 0.32m (height), 0.32m (depth)

Identification: Architrave fragment

Number of similar examples: none

Proposed date: Unknown, but probably Severan

Attribution: Unknown, but probably the *scaenae frons*



Parallels: *Scaenae frons* at Scythopolis (Fischer 1998: 51, 62)

Type VII

Number: 47-7194

Findspot: Garstang Excavations

Material: marble

Measurements: 0.21m (width), 0.21m (height), 0.79m (depth)

Identification: Architrave fragment (from pediment?)

Number of similar examples: none

Proposed date: Unknown, but probably Severan

Attribution: Unknown, but probably the *scaenae frons*



Type VIII

Number: Unnumbered Fragment #56

Findspot: Garstang Excavations?

Material: Grey granite

Measurements: 0.33m (diameter)

Identification: Grey granite column

Number of similar examples: 15 in immediate vicinity, but many more on site; only those standing in the excavation field appear complete

Proposed date: Unknown

Attribution: Unknown



Type IX

Number: Unnumbered Fragment #86

Findspot: Garstang excavations?

Material: Pink granite

Measurements: 0.36m (diameter)

Identification: Pink granite column

Number of similar examples: 5, none complete

Proposed date: Unknown

Attribution: Unknown



Type X

Number: 47-7161

Findspot: Garstang excavations

Material: Marble

Measurements: 0.41m (diameter)

Identification: White marble column

Number of similar examples: 48, none complete

Proposed date: Unknown

Attribution: Unknown, but probably the peristyle



FIGURES

Figure 1. Roman Palestine. From Fischer 2008: 122, Fig. 1.

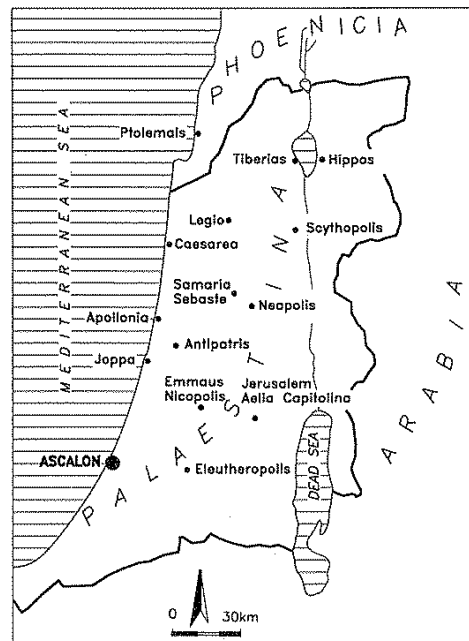


Figure 2. Tel Ashkelon today. From Fischer 1995: 123, Fig.2.

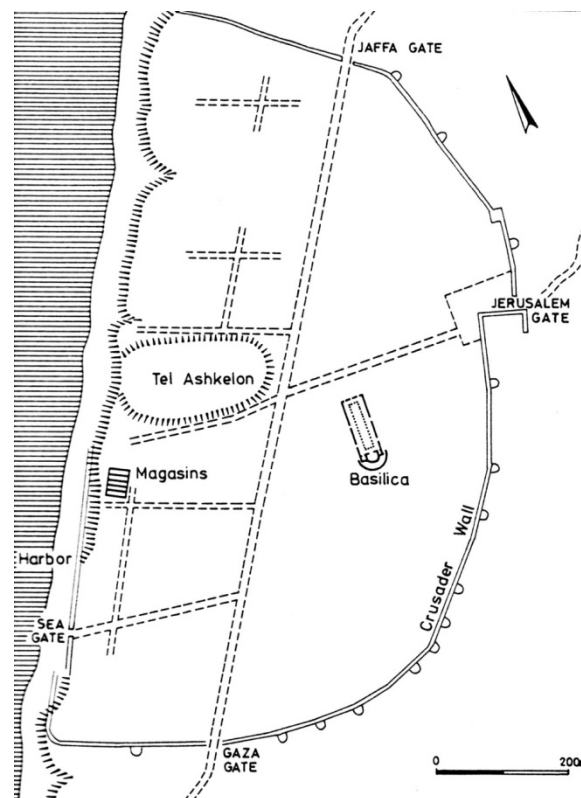


Figure 3. John Garstang's Plan of his excavations of the "Senate House and Herod's Cloisters" in 1924. Garstang 1924: 25, Plate I.

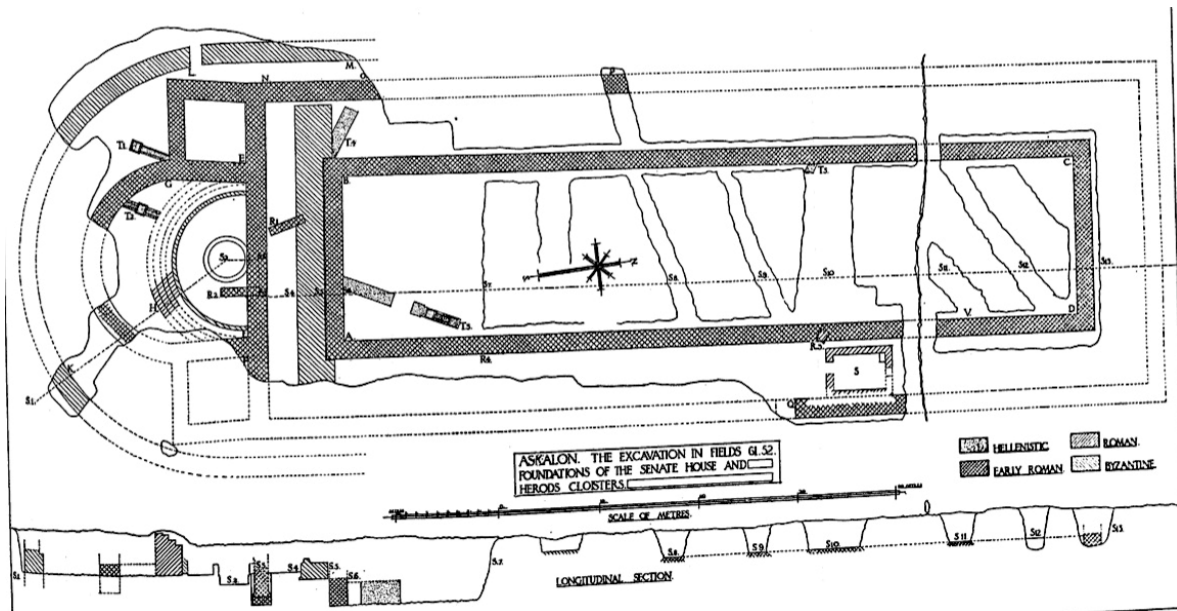


Figure 4. The Leon Levy Expedition's "Grid system" at Ashkelon. From Stager *et al* 2008: 187, Fig. 11.1.

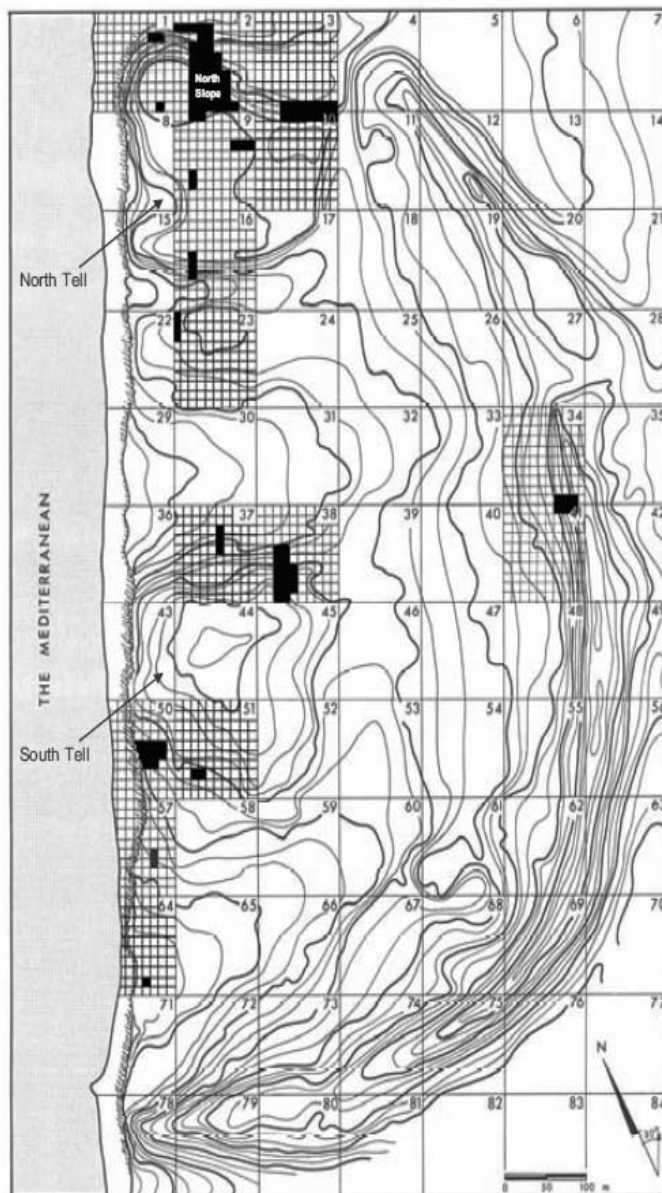


Figure 5. Grid 47 in 2010. North is at the bottom of the photograph. Photograph courtesy of the Leon Levy Expedition to Ashkelon.



Figure 6. Garstang's Excavations. Photograph courtesy of the Palestine Exploration Fund.



Figure 7. Cleopatra coin minted at Ashkelon. From Bret 1937: Fig 5.



Figure 8. Ashkelon and the Herodian kingdom in the early first century BCE. From Lee 2003: Fig 1.



Figure 9. Third century CE bust of an Ashkelonian woman. From Iliffe 1933: Plate III .

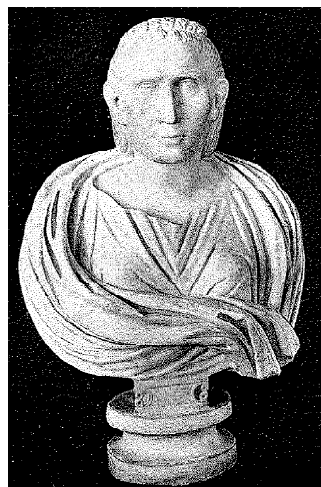


Figure 10. Drawing of a statue, probably of a cuirassed emperor from the second century CE. Discovered and then destroyed by Lady Hester Stanhope in the 19th century. From Meryon 1986, vol. 3: 162.



Figure 11. Marble medallion from Ashkelon depicting the god Pan. From Vermeule and Anderson 1981: Fig. 19.



Figure 12. Third century CE painted tomb from Ashkelon. From Arbel 1990: 148.

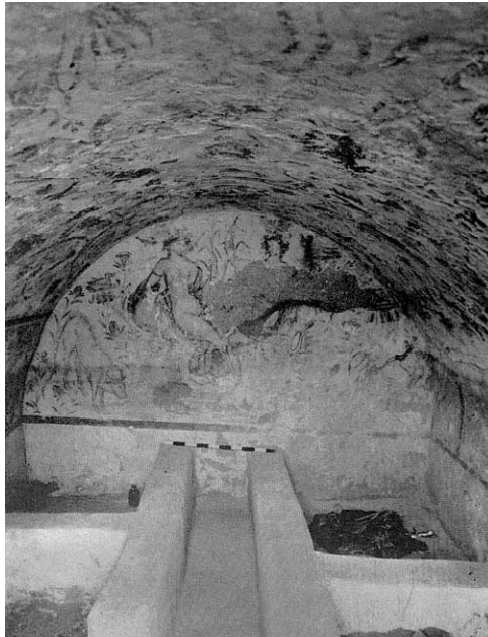
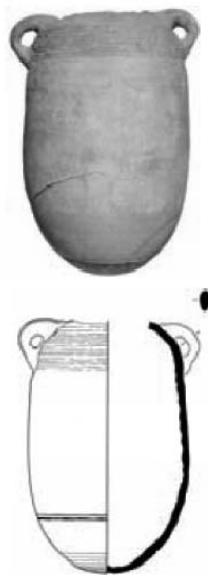


Figure 13. Gaza amphora. From Barako 2008: Fig 23.



Type A (Gazillon) (solid black arrow)

Type B (Askalondon) (solid black circle)

Undetermined (open circle)

Locations marked on the map include: Trier, Tours, Angoulême, Tarascon, Carthage, Rome, Naples, Athens, and others. A legend in the top right corner defines the symbols: a solid black arrow for Type A, a solid black circle for Type B, and an open circle for Undetermined.

The screenshot shows the OCHRE Online Cultural Heritage Research Environment interface. The left sidebar displays a tree view of the project hierarchy, with 'Unit # 1' selected under 'Grid 47 Square 45'. The main window displays the 'Information' tab for 'Unit # 1', showing fields for Name, Abbreviation, Identifier, and Count (10). Below this is a table of properties for 'Unit # 1', including location, elevation, date, and phase information.

Variable	Value	
Location or object type	Stratigraphic unit	<input type="checkbox"/>
Unit #	1	<input type="checkbox"/>
Top elevation (m)	22.73	<input type="checkbox"/>
Bottom elevation (m)	0.0	<input type="checkbox"/>
Immediately earlier than	Unit # 2	<input type="checkbox"/>
Equals layer-feature	<unassigned>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Corresponds to layer-feature	<unassigned>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Date begun	Jun 8, 2010	<input type="checkbox"/>
Date completed		<input type="checkbox"/>
Phase at Ashkelon	Grid 47, Phase 3	<input type="checkbox"/>
Location or object type	Feature	<input type="checkbox"/>
Feature type	Stone-lined pit (dst)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Feature composition	Stone	<input type="checkbox"/>

Figure 16. The unexcavated extent of the peristyle in Grid 47. From Arbel 1990: 151.



Figure 17. The “Hellenistic Gateway and colonnade” (T3) uncovered by Garstang in the 1920’s. View to the north. From Garstang 1924: Fig 4.

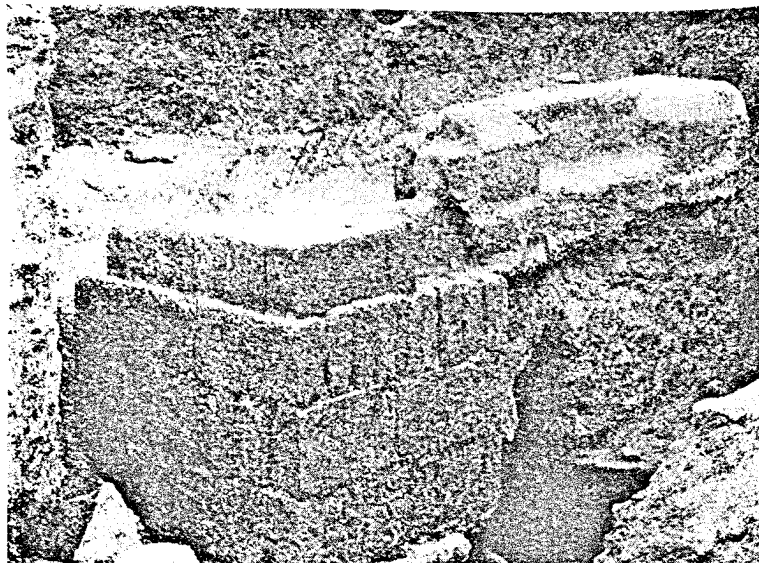


Figure 18. The Hellenistic walls (T1="U41" and T2="U26") in the "Open Air Museum" in Ashkelon. Plan courtesy of the Leon Levy Expedition to Ashkelon.

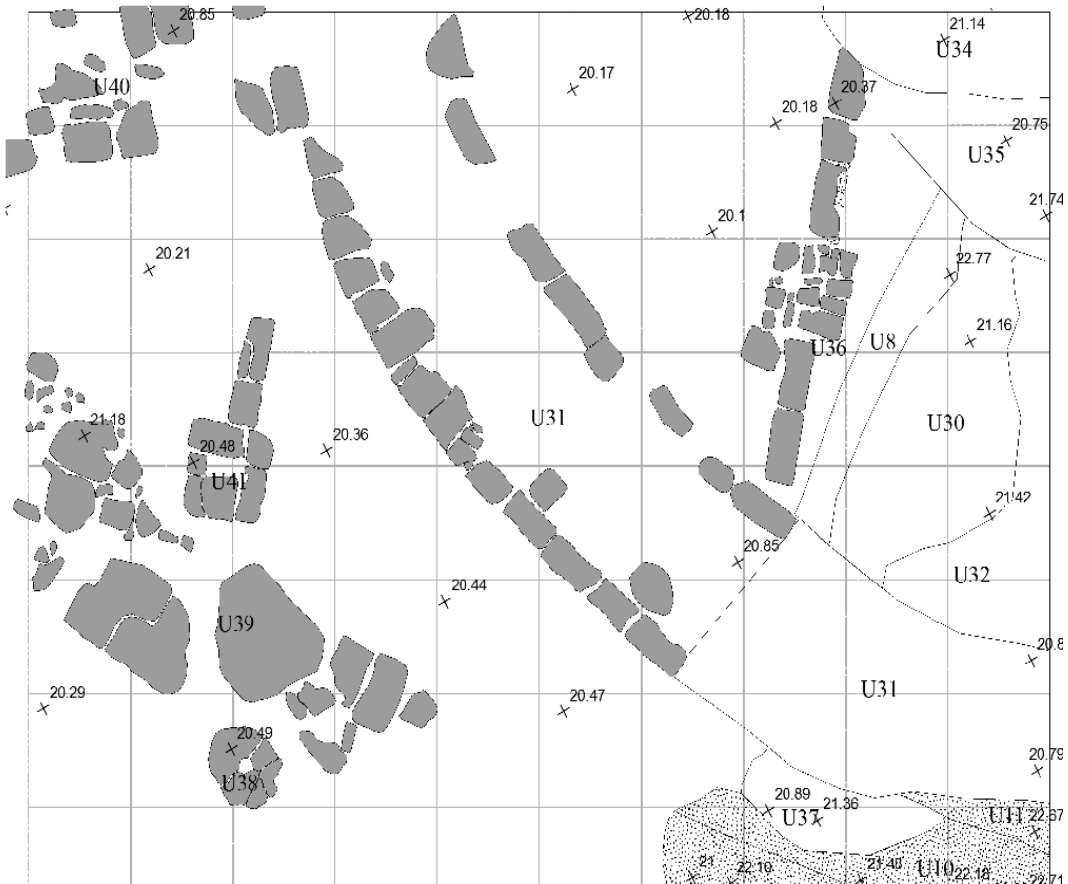


Figure 19. The "Hellenistic wall" (34.30) uncovered during the 2010 season. View to the east. Photo courtesy of the Leon Levy Expedition to Ashkelon.



Figure 20. The Open Air Museum at Ashkelon before renewed excavation. View to the south-west. Photograph courtesy of Tracey Hoffman.



Figure 21. Garstang's reconstruction of the early Roman apsidal building. From Garstang 1924: Plate II.

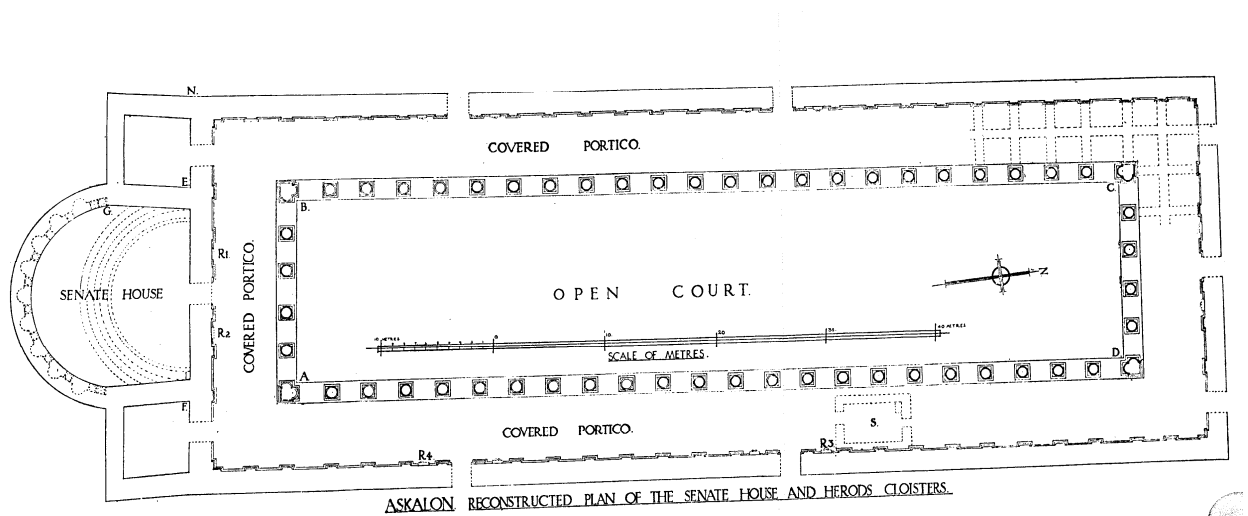


Figure 22. The “Main Order” of the Senate House and Herod’s Cloisters. From Garstang 1924: Plate III.

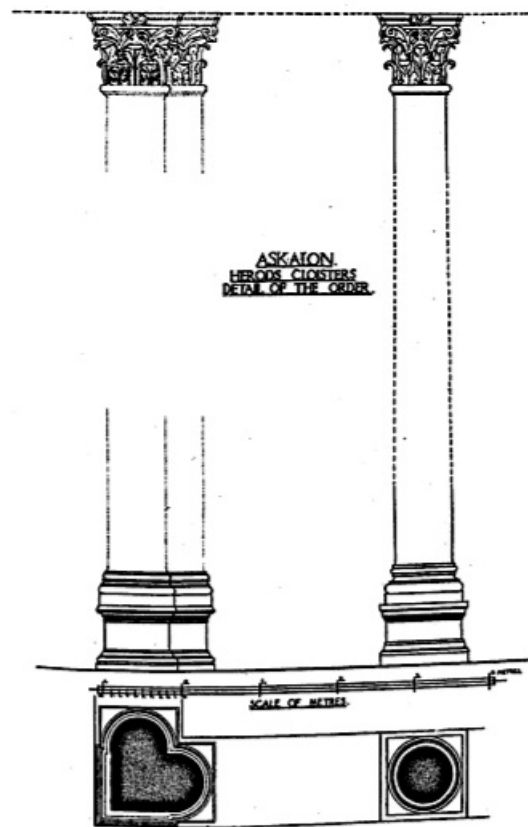


Figure 23. Schematic plan of the excavated portion of the bouleuterion, with walls labeled. Plan is not to scale.

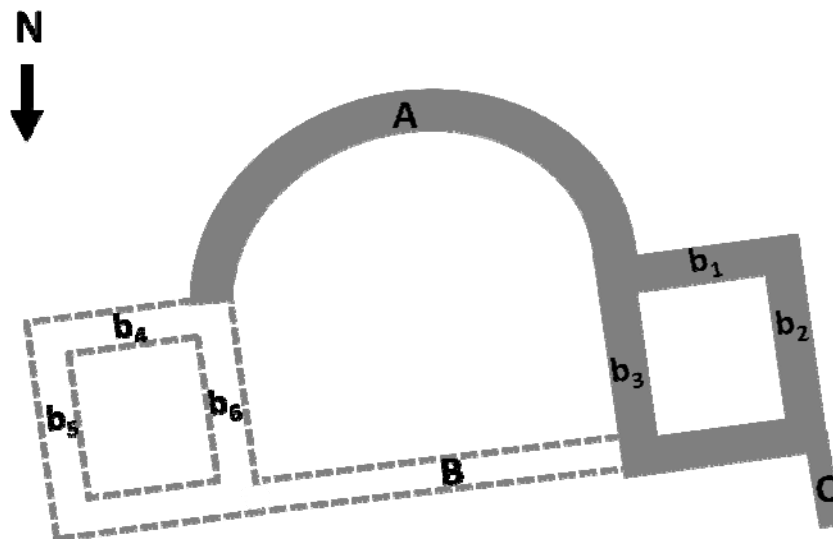


Figure 24. Plan of bouleuterion apse (wall **A**) and western flanking room (**I**) after renewed excavations in 2009. Plan courtesy of the Leon Levy Expedition to Ashkelon.

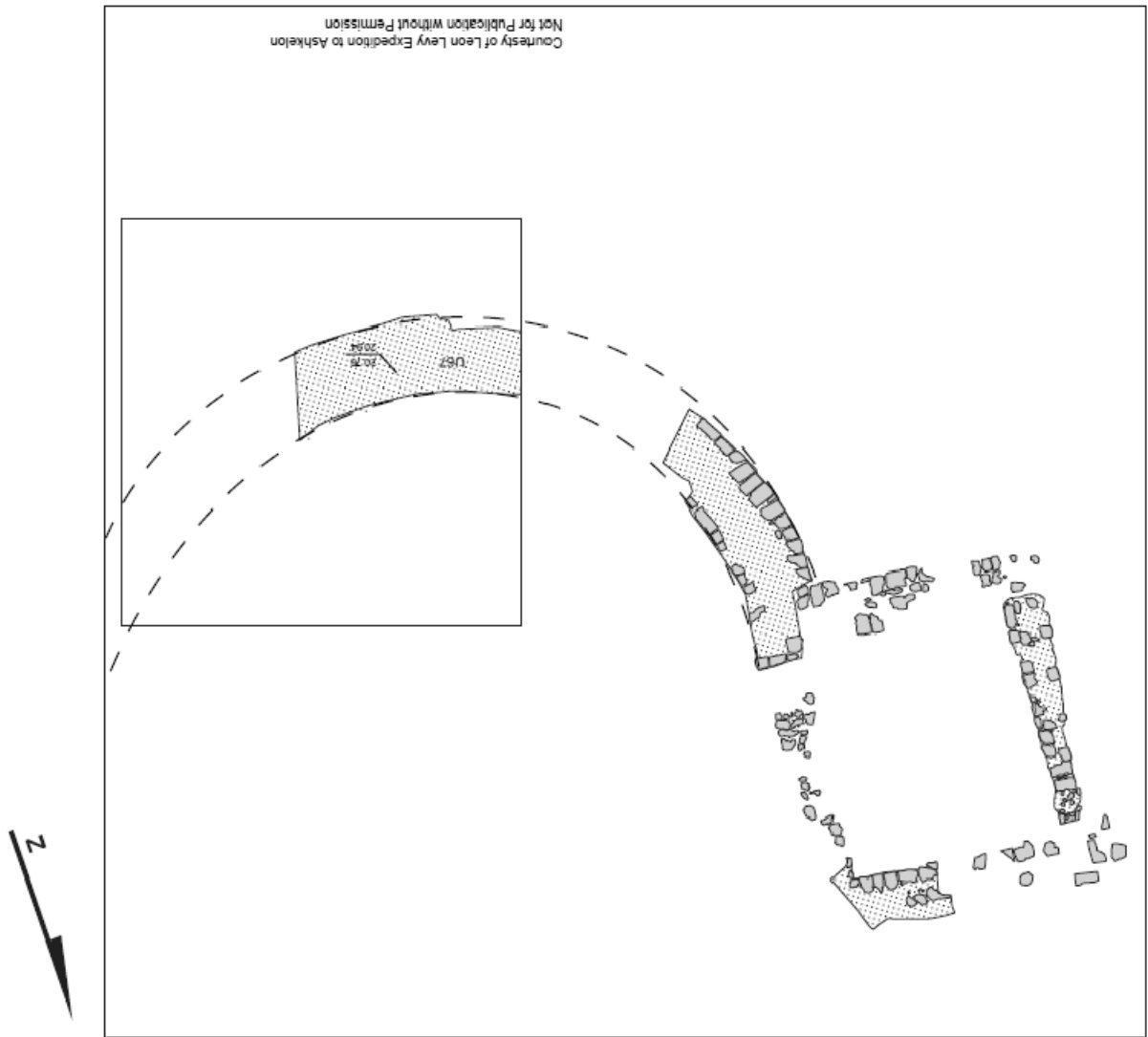


Figure 25. 2010 aerial photograph of open excavation area overlaid by the schematic plan of the bouleuterion.



Figure 26. The Nike and Atlas pilaster from Ashkelon. Photograph courtesy of David Grushko.



Figure 27. Nike with palm branch pilaster from Ashkelon.



Figure 28. Isis pilaster from Ashkelon. Photograph courtesy of David Grushko.



Figure 29. Mosche Fischer's reconstruction of the Roman apsidal building/basilica. From Fischer 1995: 142, Figure 23.

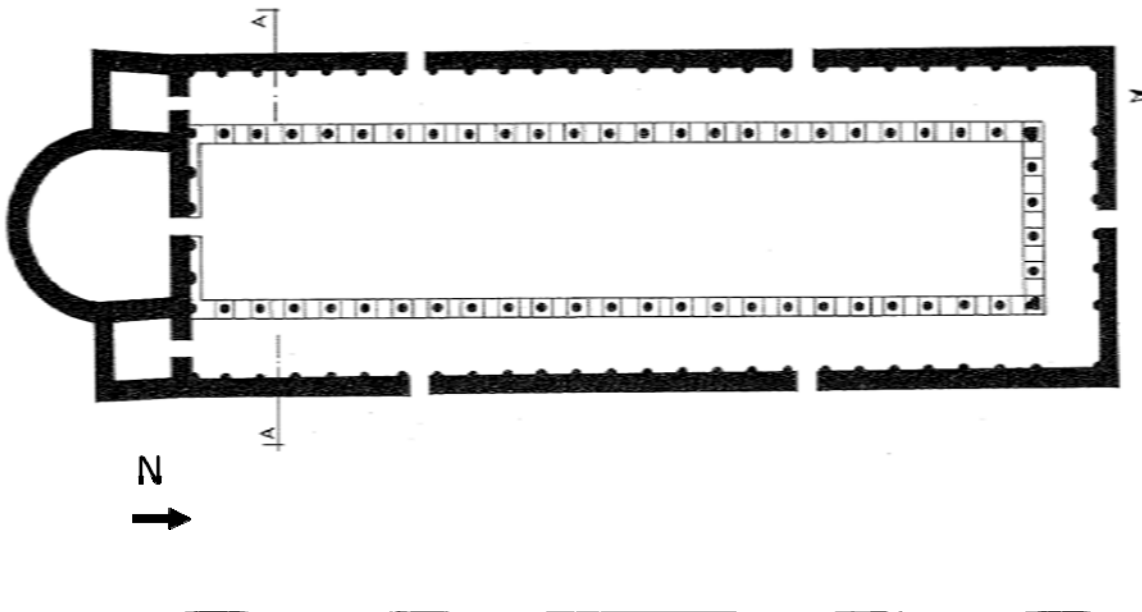


Figure 30. Mosche Fischer's elevation of the Roman apsidal building/basilica. From Fischer 2008: 144, Figure 25.

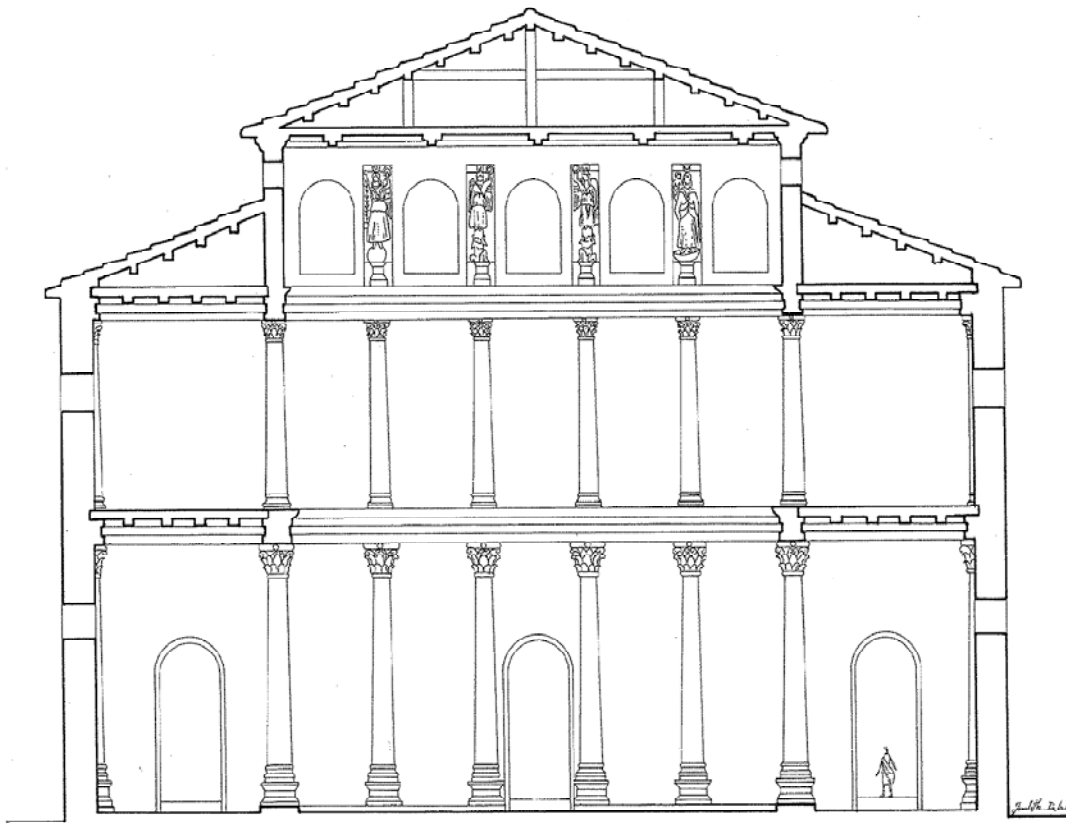


Figure 31. Ashkelon on the Madaba Map. Adapted from Donner 1992.



Figure 32. Schematic phase plan of the bouleuterion and odeon. Plan is not to scale.

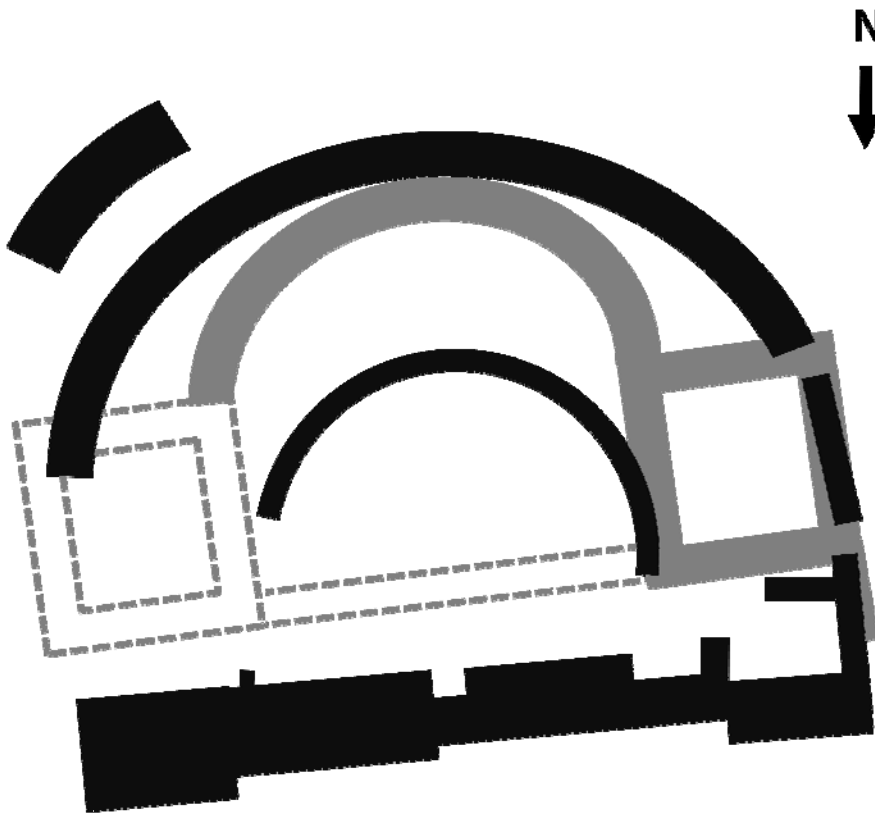


Figure 34a. Schematic phase plan of the odeon with walls labeled. Plan is not to scale.

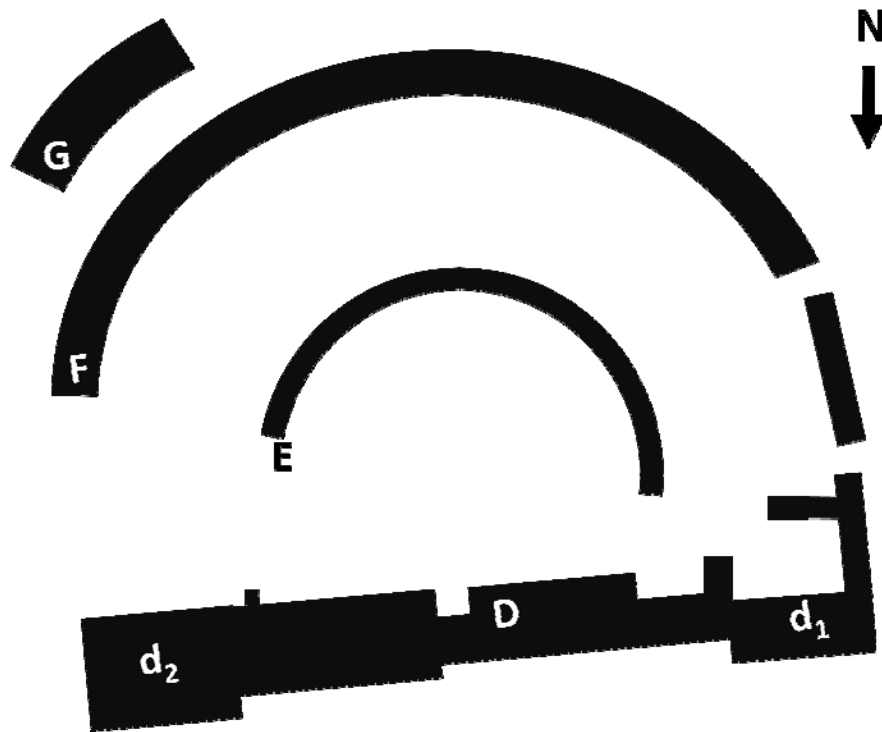


Figure 34b. 2010 aerial photograph of open excavation area overlaid by the schematic plan of the odeon.

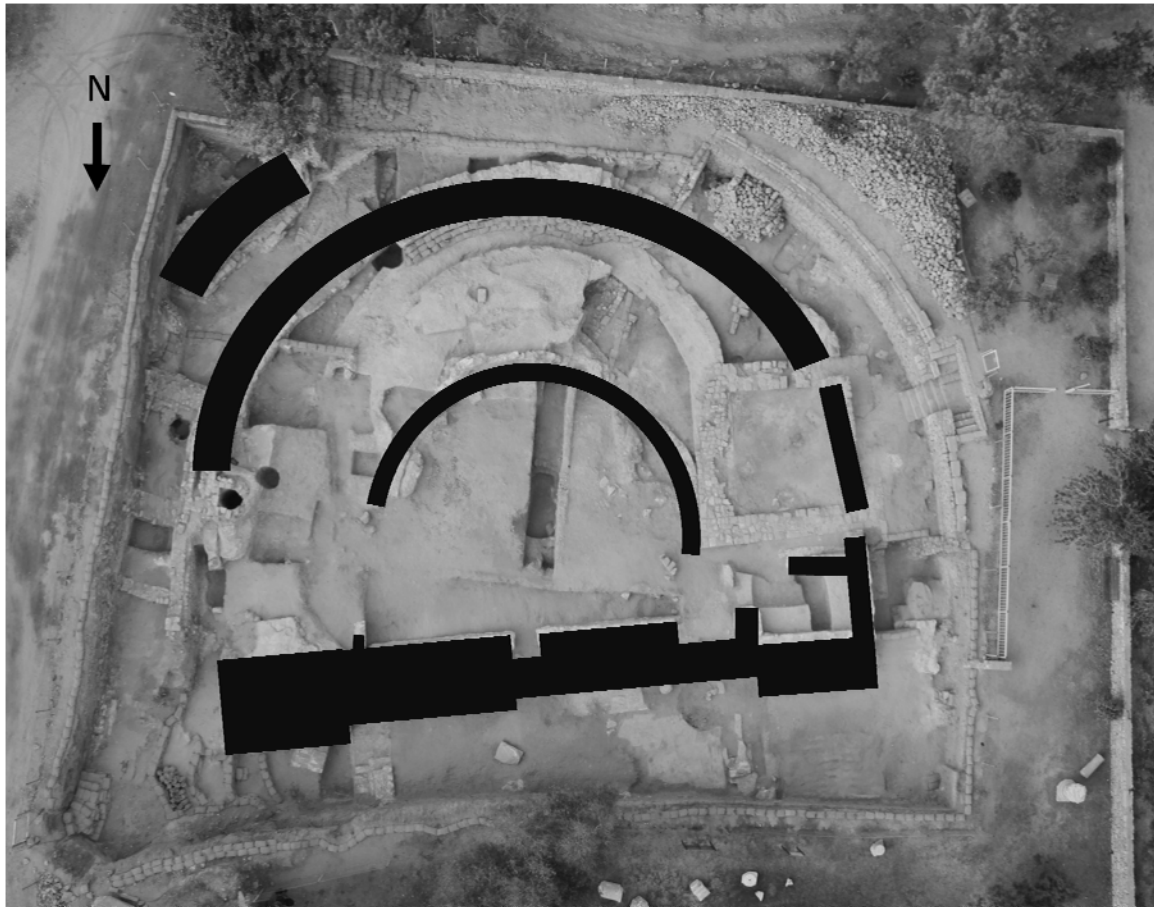


Figure 35. Fragment of painted plaster. View to the west. Photograph courtesy of the Leon Levy Expedition to Ashkelon.



Figure 36. White mosaic surface from pier **d**₂. View to the northeast. Photograph courtesy of the Leon Levy Expedition to Ashkelon.

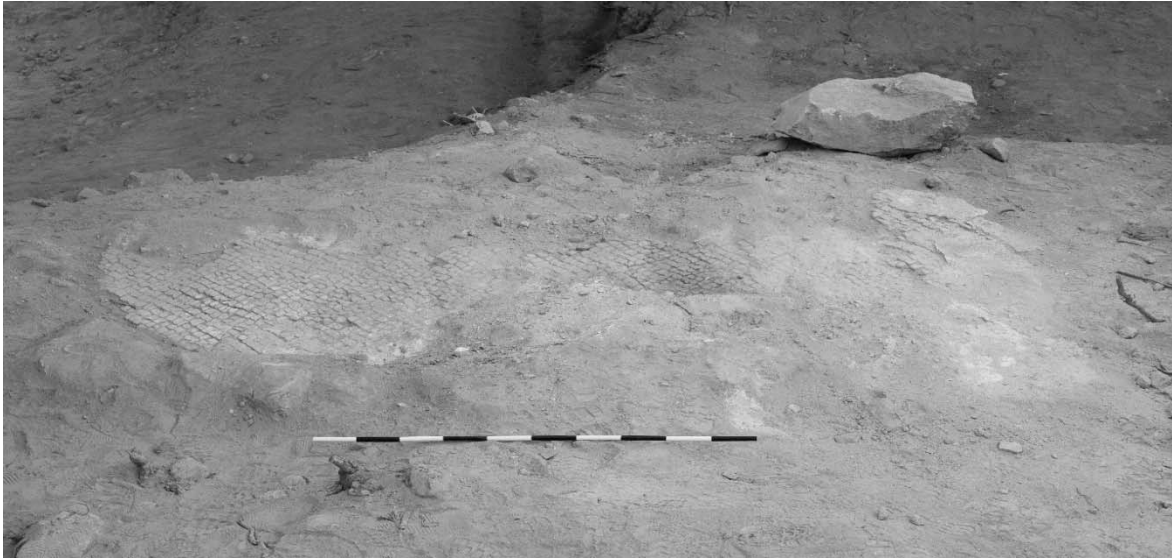


Figure 37. Roman pottery found in pier **d**₁ of the odeon. Photograph courtesy of the Leon Levy Expedition to Ashkelon.



Figure 38. Pier d₁. Also, connection of bouleuterion flanking room **I** with peristyle wall **C** (foreground). View to the east. Photograph courtesy of the Leon Levy Expedition to Ashkelon.



Figure 39. Fragment of *opus sectile* from the odeon's orchestra floor; portion of wall **E**. View to the northeast. Photograph courtesy of the Leon Levy Expedition to Ashkelon.



Figure 40. Break in wall **E**; perhaps representing an access point to seats in the cavea. View to the south. Photograph courtesy of the Leon Levy Expedition to Ashkelon.

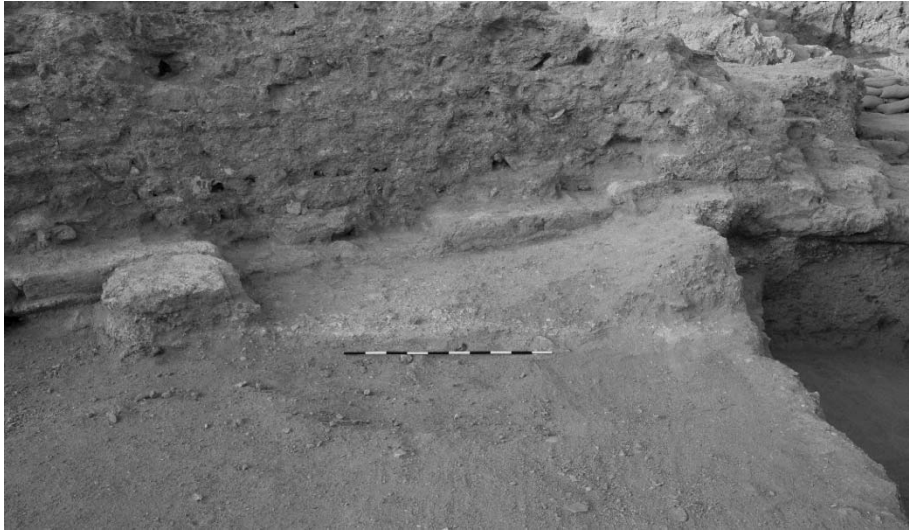


Figure 41. Area between walls **E** and **F**, with the later “addition.” View to the west, with the Roman bouleuterion apsidal wall **A** in the center of the photo, and the addition to the left. Photograph courtesy of the Leon Levy Expedition to Ashkelon.



Figure 42. Apsidal wall **G**. The possible *vomitorium* is represented by the break in the wall to the right. View to the southeast. Photograph courtesy of the Leon Levy Expedition to Ashkelon.



Figure 43. Current photograph of the “Well of Peace.” Aerial view. Photograph courtesy of the Leon Levy Expedition to Ashkelon.



Figure 44. Nike and Atlas pilaster when found by Garstang. The Nike is located at the top of wall **D**, immediately above the Corinthian capital and column fragment. Photograph courtesy of the Palestine Exploration Fund.



Figure 45. The Nike with palm branch pilaster found “in-situ” during the Garstang expedition. Note the nearby tiled floor, which possibly represents the original surface of

the orchestra. Photograph courtesy of the Palestine Exploration Fund.



Figure 46. The “concrete and marble floor” from the Byzantine building. Photograph courtesy of the Leon Levy Expedition to Ashkelon.



Figure 47. Islamic-period addition to wall F. View to the south. The Islamic addition is the higher, straighter wall to the east, and the earlier Roman odeon wall is the shorter,

curving wall to the west. Photograph courtesy of the Leon Levy Expedition to Ashkelon.



Figure 48. The “Well of Peace” during the Garstang Excavations. The well is located in the foreground, immediately before wall **D**. View to the north. Photograph courtesy of the Palestine Exploration Fund.



Figure 49. Architectural Fragments located behind wall **D**, including heart-shaped columns that were re-cut and abandoned. View to the south. Photograph courtesy of the

Palestine Exploration Fund.



Figure 50. Architrave block from the *scaenae frons* at Scythopolis. From Fischer 1998: Fig. 63.



Figure 51. The Nike and Atlas pilaster when first uncovered in the 19th century. From Schick 1888: Plate I.



Figure 52. Fragment of an additional Nike pilaster.



Figure 53. Possible fragment of an additional Nike pilaster?



Figure 54. The “Crouching Aphrodite” found in the peristyle of the apsidal building by John Garstang. From Iliffe 1933: Plate A.

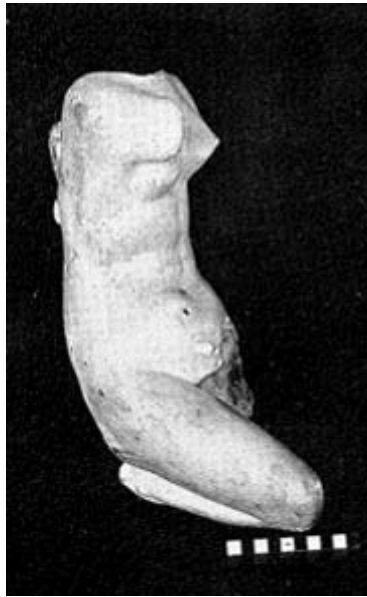


Figure 55. Fragment of a lion's paw (probably from a table) found during the 2010 season. Photograph courtesy of the Leon Levy Expedition to Ashkelon.



Figure 56. A buckle from a cuirassed statue of the Roman period?



Figure 57. The Nike from the aqueduct at Caesarea. From Olami and Ringel 1975: Fig.B



Figure 58. Nikai from the wall paintings of the Tomb of the Three Brothers from Palmyra. From Kraeling 1961: Figure 6.

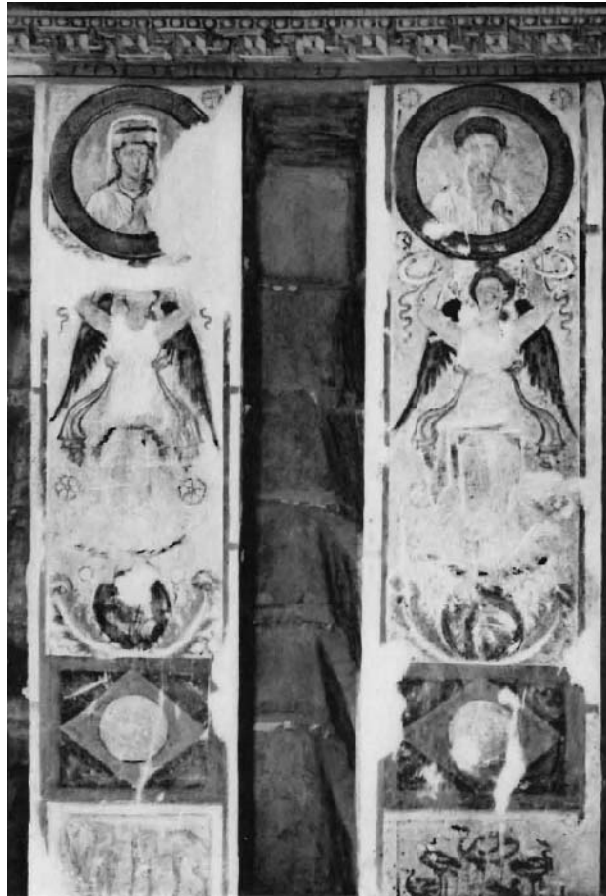


Figure 59. Augustan period Nikai statues from the theater at Aphrodisias. From Erim and Smith 2001: Figs. 13-14.



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