

The Basilica, Bouleuterion, and Civic Center of Ashkelon

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Five seasons of excavation (2008–2012) undertaken by the Leon Levy Expedition to Ashkelon in the area of the forum of Roman Ashkelon (ancient Askalōn), a major seaport on the southern Levantine coast, have revealed a continuous sequence of occupation and building activity from the Hellenistic to the Crusader periods. Of primary interest are two monumental Roman phases: a first-century C.E. basilical structure that housed the city's bouleuterion and a Severan enlargement and renovation of this building. Most of the Severan phase has been revealed, as well as substantial portions of the earlier basilica/bouleuterion phase and a monumental Hellenistic complex. This article provides an overview of these architectural phases, the evidence for their date, suggestions for reconstruction, and a conspectus of the pre- and post-Roman use of this area of the city. As some of the few systematically excavated examples of these building types in the southern Levant, these structures shed light on the principal monuments and the urban development of an important seaport at the height of its prosperity, and the evidence for the dismantling of the bouleuterion in late antiquity provides a glimpse into the end of Roman civic organization in an important city of the east.¹

INTRODUCTION

The renewed investigation of the Roman forum of Ashkelon began in the summer of 2008 with the goal of understanding the monuments partially revealed by British excavations conducted in the 1920s. This article outlines the results and preliminary interpretation of five seasons of excavation in this portion of the city. One objective of these excavations has been to record a complete stratigraphic sequence of activity in this area from its beginnings as the civic center of the Hellenistic and Roman city to the point where the public monuments underwent conversion, destruction, and dismantling in the Late Byzantine and Islamic periods. In addition to substantial traces of a monumental complex in the Hellenistic period, the excavations have identified two major phases of Roman building: an Early Roman basilical structure that also housed the bouleuterion of Ashkelon and a Severan monumentalization of this building that converted the apsidal end of the basilica into the architectural form of an odeum. In addition to providing important new

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data for the plan and appearance of these phases, the current excavations have yielded conclusive evidence for adjusting their dates. These excavations add considerable detail to our knowledge of building types of central importance to urban life in the Hellenistic and Roman world, and the evidence sheds new light on the transformation of this public complex over the course of the Imperial period, as well as its use and afterlife in late antiquity and beyond. On a broader level, the renewed investigation of this part of the city has provided valuable new information for the transformation and development of the city plan of Ashkelon from the time of its refoundation in the Persian period to its expansion and monumentalization in the Hellenistic and Roman eras.

The excavation area lies in the central portion of the site, just east of the *cardo* and southeast of the putative intersection of the *cardo* and the southern branch of the *decumanus*.² This area (grid 47, according to the grid system of the current excavations) is a relatively flat and low-lying portion of the site, east of the southern tell (figs. 1, 2) and in close proximity to the Jerusalem gate to the east.³ In 1815, Lady Hester Stanhope excavated a monumental building somewhere in this area, which she described as a temple.⁴ This building was likely of Severan date, based on a drawing of a cuirassed statue found in the excavation.⁵ The large structure



FIG. 1. Map of Ashkelon and the main sites mentioned in the text.

illustrated by Roberts in his 1839 painting of the ruins of Ashkelon⁶ should be located to the north of grid 47 on the other side of the *decumanus*.⁷ The construction of another large public building, probably in this area

and date of the sculpture, see Vermeule 1964.

⁶ Roberts 1842–1844, 2:pl. 57; reproduced in Stager et al. 2008b, 147, fig. 8.3. It is not clear that this is the same structure uncovered by Stanhope in 1815. Roberts attributed the exposure of this building to the clearing operations of Ibrahim Pasha in 1832–1840 rather than to Stanhope’s excavations. Roberts’ building is clearly oriented east–west, whereas Meryon’s description of the building uncovered in 1815 suggests it was oriented north–south. Muhammed Aga, who oversaw these excavations, shipped much of the valuable stone to Jaffa. What remained may have been covered over again. A monumental structure was still partially visible when Guérin visited the site in 1854 (Guérin 1869, 145–47), which he considered Stanhope’s building, but was no longer exposed by the time of Conder and Kitchener’s survey of this part of Palestine in 1875 (Conder and Kitchener 1883, 237–41).

⁷ Roberts’ building was supposedly a temple, although no architectural drawings were made and the descriptions are vague. Roberts (1842–1844, 2:pl. 57) mentions that the columns were “each a single piece of granite” and that the capitals were marble and in the Corinthian order. Numerous monolithic gray granite columns are scattered around the site, particularly clustered around the intersection of the *cardo* and *decumanus*, which may belong rather to the colonnade of the *cardo* or *decumanus*. Mackenzie (1913) produced a useful plan of the site in 1911 and plotted the location of granite columns, Corinthian capitals, and fragments of sculpture. Compare also Garstang 1922, 113: “Local accounts indicate that they [the granite columns] belonged to the ‘Temple of Jupiter’ which was revealed last century.”

² No part of the *cardo* has been located through excavation, but it almost certainly ran from the Gaza gate in the south to the Jaffa gate in the north. Likewise, the most likely course of the *decumanus* is from the Jerusalem gate in the east to the south tell in the west. A portion of the *decumanus* and the Jerusalem gate are depicted on the Madaba mosaic map (Avi-Yonah 1954, 94). The *decumanus* is illustrated as diverging from the gate in two branches, one running directly to the sea and the other toward cardinal west. The southern branch of the *decumanus* represents a different grid system established in the forum area in the Early Roman period. It appears that the Ottoman and Mandate-period roads and the modern paved road in the Ashkelon National Park follow the same general course as the ancient *cardo* and this branch of the *decumanus*.

³ For a complete overview of the geography, natural environment, settlement history, and excavations of the site, see Stager et al. 2008a.

⁴ For a description of these explorations, see Meryon 1846, 3:152–70. See also the description by Forbin (1819, 48–9, pls. 41, 42), who visited the site in 1818 and mentions a “temple of Venus” with rose-granite columns.

⁵ Stanhope had the sculpture smashed and thrown into the sea upon her departure from Ashkelon. For a drawing of the statue, see Meryon 1846, 3:162. This illustration is also reproduced in Stager et al. 2008b, 145, fig. 8.1. For the identification

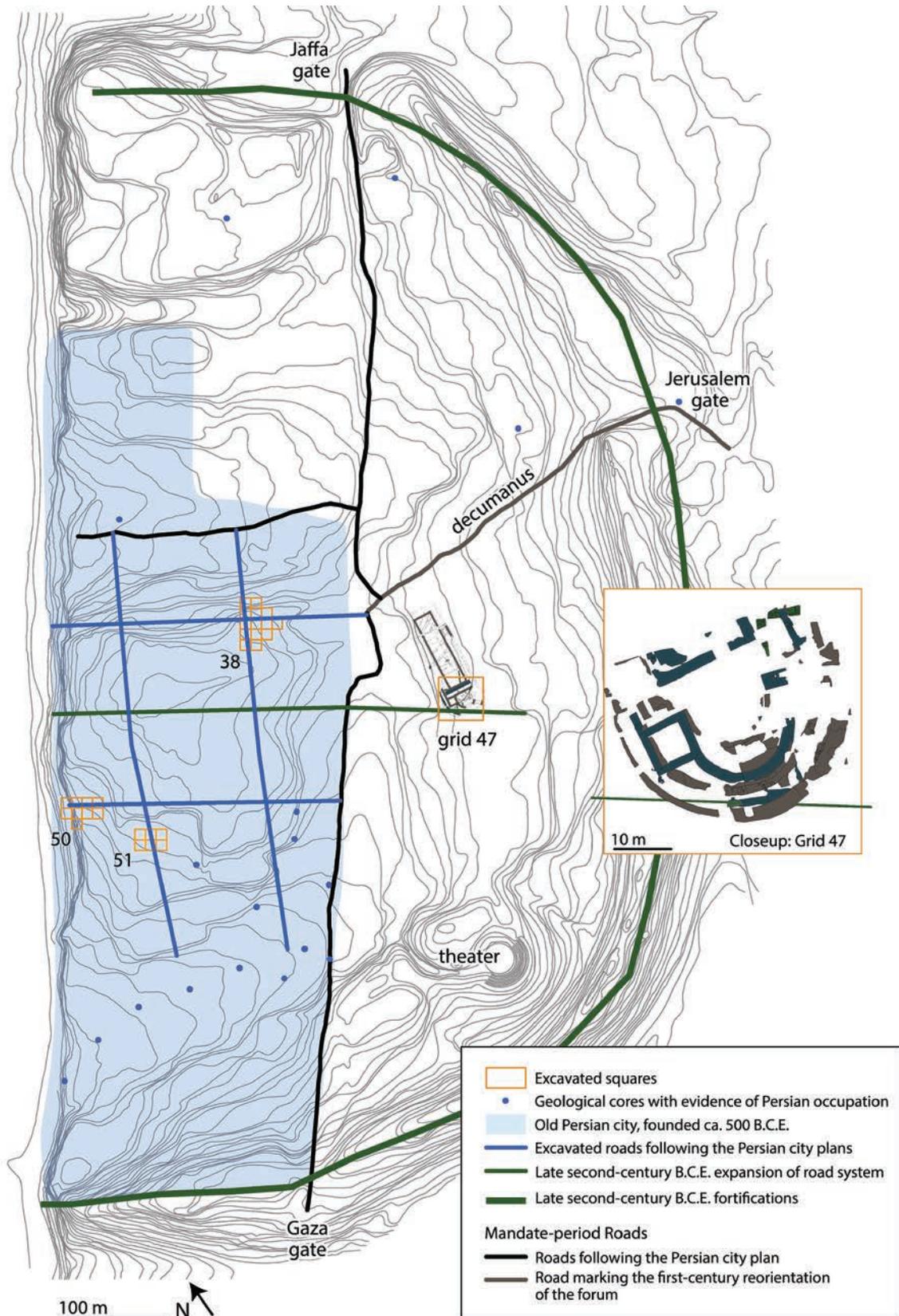


FIG. 2. Plan of Ashkelon, showing the location of the excavation area in grid 47 and the expansion of the Hellenistic and Roman city.

of the city, is also attested by two building inscriptions from the reign of Commodus.⁸ To the south is the main theater of Ashkelon, rising on an earthen slope abutting the southeast rampart (grid 61).⁹ From this assemblage of public monuments, it is clear that the area between grid 47 and the theater served as the forum in the Roman period, and the current excavations have demonstrated that this area was the monumental center of the Late Hellenistic city as well.

EARLY EXPLORATION AND THE EXCAVATIONS OF THE PALESTINE EXPLORATION FUND IN GRID 47

Prior to excavation, sculpture and architectural fragments belonging to a monumental Roman building had been located and recorded by early travelers to the site. Two Nike pilasters belonging to the Severan bouleuterion/odeum were initially uncovered by the local governor Raouf Pasha in the late 19th century. Photographs of one of these was first published by Schick in 1888,¹⁰ shortly after its discovery, and in the same year a second Nike pilaster was discovered close by and published by Reinach.¹¹ In 1905, an Isis pilaster was uncovered some distance to the north and described by Savignac.¹² The site of Ashkelon had been extensively used as a quarry to supply stone for building projects since at least the early 19th century, and probably earlier, exposing much of the architecture of the later periods.¹³ Ibrahim Pasha, the commander of rebel Egyptian forces that occupied Palestine from 1832 to 1840, cleared and heavily looted the site of its stone to build the military outpost of “New Ashkelon”

(‘Asqalān al-Jadīda) near the Palestinian village of Majdal. After his retreat in 1840, the looting continued, albeit at a slower pace, but many marble blocks were cut and exported for building materials and decorations for building projects in Jaffa, Gaza, and Akko. Descriptions of architectural fragments probably belonging to buildings in the forum survive in the accounts of early visitors to the site, along with details of the extensive dismantling of large blocks of marble and stone.¹⁴ In fact, most of the architectural fragments uncovered in unsealed contexts in the current excavations had been cut by handsaws, damage that probably belongs to this period. Much of the remaining stone, marble decoration, and revetment of the Roman buildings was lost to this quarrying, although the number of architectural blocks preserved remains substantial.¹⁵

Extensive excavations began at Ashkelon in 1920 under the auspices of the Palestine Exploration Fund (PEF) and under the direction of John Garstang, then director of the British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem, and his assistant, W.J. Phythian Adams.¹⁶ These campaigns, conducted from 1920 to 1922, had two main aims: exposing a complete stratigraphic sequence of occupation on the site, carried out on the sea cliff and in a large step trench in grid 38, and thoroughly excavating the area where the sculpted pilasters had been found. Garstang himself oversaw two seasons of excavation in the area of the Roman forum—his field 61, or grid 47 according to the current grid system.

⁸Boehm and Eck 2012.

⁹The cavea and orchestra of the theater have now been built over by a modern theater constructed by the Israel Parks Authority. The famous Bir Ibrahim, the Well of Abraham, mentioned by Late Antique and Islamic sources seems to have been constructed in the cavea or orchestra of the theater. The British campaigns of the 1920s excavated the Bir Ibrahim and dated the remains to the “medieval” period but reported very little about the remains or finds (Garstang 1922, 113). The main theater has never been excavated, but surveys of the area have revealed the fragments of a single seat from the theater (Stager 1991, 110).

¹⁰Schick 1888. Schumacher (1886, 175) seems to have been aware of these sculptures in 1886: “a renowned native antiquarian at Acca told me secretly that at Askalan [*sic*] marble statues were discovered, and that he had the intention of looking after them shortly.”

¹¹Reinach 1888.

¹²Savignac 1905.

¹³Meryon 1846, 3:155.

¹⁴Schumacher (1886, 172–73), who published detailed descriptions of his travels in Palestine, colorfully described the still-swift disappearance of marble architectural blocks from the site in 1886 as follows: “Here we were informed that the Government had forbidden further excavations, but that nevertheless every suitable marble piece is transported as it is, or, in case of considerable weight, sawn into portable slabs and sold to Gaza and Jaffa, to be placed over the entrances of private buildings. . . . In struggling through the ancient site, thoroughly grubbed into, the noise of a saw struck our ears, and on approaching we found several natives at work cutting a slab of beautiful white marble into pieces. . . . The unmerciful saw, guided by three apathetic natives, two of which were pulling and one pouring sand and water into the cut, forced its way deeper and deeper into this valuable antiquity, and on my return homewards I found the slab cut into pieces of 1 foot thickness and partly carried away. *O tempora, O mores!*” See also the similar description by Conder (1875, 155–56) almost a decade earlier.

¹⁵For further unprovenanced architectural and sculptural finds from Ashkelon, see Thiersch 1914, 67–73.

¹⁶For a full description of these excavations, see Schloen 2008.

The excavations of the PEF cleared large portions of the southern part of the monumental building, now known as the basilica of Ashkelon, and subsequent trenches and probes followed the building north.

The excavations of the PEF were published promptly in five articles in the organization's *Quarterly Statement*.¹⁷ The team published a general plan of the site, drawn with reference to the contemporary cadastral field boundaries (fig. 3),¹⁸ a phase plan, a reconstruction of the basilica phase (fig. 4), and a few photographs of the finds. The following summary of the discoveries and interpretations of the British excavations draws on these publications and unpublished photographs of the excavations from the archive of the PEF.

The PEF plan illustrates four architectural phases: Byzantine, Roman, Early Roman, and Hellenistic. Our excavations have demonstrated that by and large the drawing of the architecture is accurate. We have located the main walls and features on the plan and confirmed their projection through further excavation in the eastern portion of the building, which was not excavated previously. However, significant walls and features have been located that do not appear on the plan of the PEF.¹⁹ The addition of these features, along with much greater stratigraphic control, significantly changes our understanding of the monuments and their date in this part of the city.

The current excavations have also revised the phasing and interpretation of the series of buildings in this area. Garstang suggested that the main architectural phase illustrated in the PEF plans—a basilical structure with an apsidal southern end, along with marble architectural and sculptural fragments—belonged to the “early Roman,” by which he meant the Herodian, period. Reinach had also previously dated the Nike pilasters stylistically to the Augustan period, and Garstang followed this date in his reconstruction and associated them with the basilica.²⁰ Drawing on the scattered literary testimonia for the architecture of

the site, Garstang proposed the following sequence of building phases:²¹

The stoutly built apse of a basilica or “Curia” in the south of field 61, seems to have been the main feature of early Roman date. To this Herod the Great added sumptuous marble colonnades and cloisters as a sort of forecourt and main entrance. The whole overlay and completely replaced the previous avenue of columns heading for the Bir Ibrahim. When the apsidal basilica was ruined, at any rate on or about the fourth or fifth century, its form suggested the convenient hemispherical foundation for a theatre, which was then constructed. . . . After the theater had been razed the still rounded contour suggested to the new Arab population the *mihrab* for their great mosque. . . . Probably, as will be seen from the quotations below, it was called the mosque of Omar.

Subsequent studies have demonstrated definitively that most of the preserved architectural fragments date stylistically to the Severan period, not to the Early Roman or Herodian era.²² In particular, the numerous Corinthian capitals belong typologically to the Severan period, and the Nike and Isis pilasters date to the same time.²³ These elements, therefore, cannot belong to a building of Herodian or Early Roman date. Since the excavations of the PEF, there have been several attempts at offering alternative restorations of the basilica complex that take into account a redating and reconsideration of the architectural members. Diplock, for example, believed that the sculpted pilasters and the architectural fragments belonged to the Augustan period and reconstructed the complex very much along the same lines as Garstang (fig. 5a).²⁴ Stager retained Garstang's open-air colonnade, though offering a reconstruction drawing with an entablature reminiscent of the porticoes of the forum at Leptis Magna

¹⁷ Garstang 1921a, 1921b, 1921c, 1922, 1924; see also Albright 1922; Grant 1922.

¹⁸ Although uninhabited since its destruction during the Crusades, the site was extensively used for planting gardens by the residents of the nearby village of Jura because of the abundant groundwater and the shelter the ramparts offered from the encroaching sands.

¹⁹ These include the substantial second apsidal wall of the Severan bouleuterion/odeum building and the solid core of the seating area beneath the cavea.

²⁰ Reinach 1888; Garstang 1922, 1924.

²¹ Garstang 1922, 115. The quotations Garstang references are Joseph., *BJ* 1.422 (peristyles of Herod); Ibn Battuta (who visited the site in 1325) 1.81 (Mosque of Omar). In the last publication of the excavations, Garstang (1924, 25) variously labeled the Early Roman phase the bouleuterion, or “senate house,” of Ashkelon but retained the interpretation and phasing described above.

²² Watzinger 1935, 97; Avi-Yonah 1976, 128; Vermeule and Anderson 1981, 15; Schneider 1986, 45–7; Stager 1991; Fischer 1995.

²³ Capitals: Fischer 1990, 31–55 (Severan Corinthian capitals in Israel), cat. nos. 166–69 (the Ashkelon capitals). Pilasters: Vermeule and Anderson 1981, 15; Schneider 1986, 45–6.

²⁴ Diplock 1971.

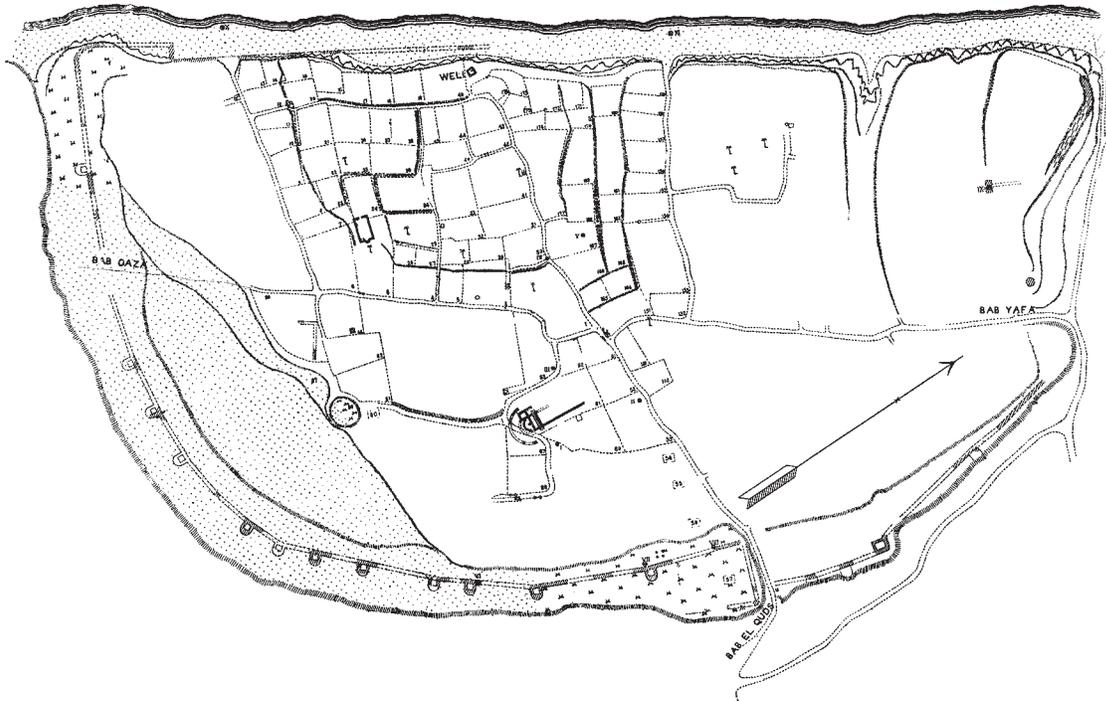


FIG. 3. Plan of Ashkelon from PEF excavations (after Garstang 1922, pl. 1; courtesy Palestine Exploration Fund, London).

and adjusting the date of the structure to the Severan period (see fig. 5b).²⁵

In an important series of articles, Fischer offered a thorough reconsideration of the evidence and an alternative reconstruction. Fischer argued that the building should correspond to a more traditional basilical-type building, with an apsidal end and a covered nave and aisles. Fischer reconstructed the building with a second story and a third attic story, restoring the sculpted pilasters to the outer wall of the apsidal portion of the building in the attic—that is, the southern interior wall of the basilica (see fig. 5c, d).²⁶ Fischer restored the relatively numerous smaller column capitals, bases, and shafts to the second story of the colonnade, along with several blocks of the entablature.²⁷ Fischer's stud-

ies have also offered many valuable contributions toward refining the date and overall significance of the monumental architecture at Ashkelon and provided a detailed investigation of the sculptural assemblage, as well as establishing the provenance of many of the marble architectural fragments and situating the building program within the wider regional context of the marble trade.²⁸ This new phase of research in many respects builds on Fischer's studies and seeks to answer some of the unresolved questions that have necessarily remained in the absence of new excavations.

The current excavations in the center of the Roman city have added significant new data and substantially clarified the form of the Severan building and the sequence of architectural phases that preceded and followed it. Ceramic and stratigraphic evidence demonstrates that the Severan-period architectural members that all previous studies have associated with the basilical architectural phase illustrated by

²⁵ Stager 1991.

²⁶ Fischer's reconstruction (1995, 142, fig. 23) replaced the heart-shaped column capitals on the southern end of the building with engaged pilasters against the wall of the apsidal end of the basilica. But this reconstruction departed too much from Garstang's (1924, pl. 1) plan of the preserved foundations, the accuracy of which has been confirmed by the current excavations.

²⁷ Fischer 1995, 123–27.

²⁸ See Fischer (1995, 148–49) for the study carried out by Ze'ev Pearl of the provenance of selected marble pieces from Garstang's excavations. On the context of the building program and the marble trade, see Fischer 1990, 1995, 1998; see also Fischer 2008, 2009.

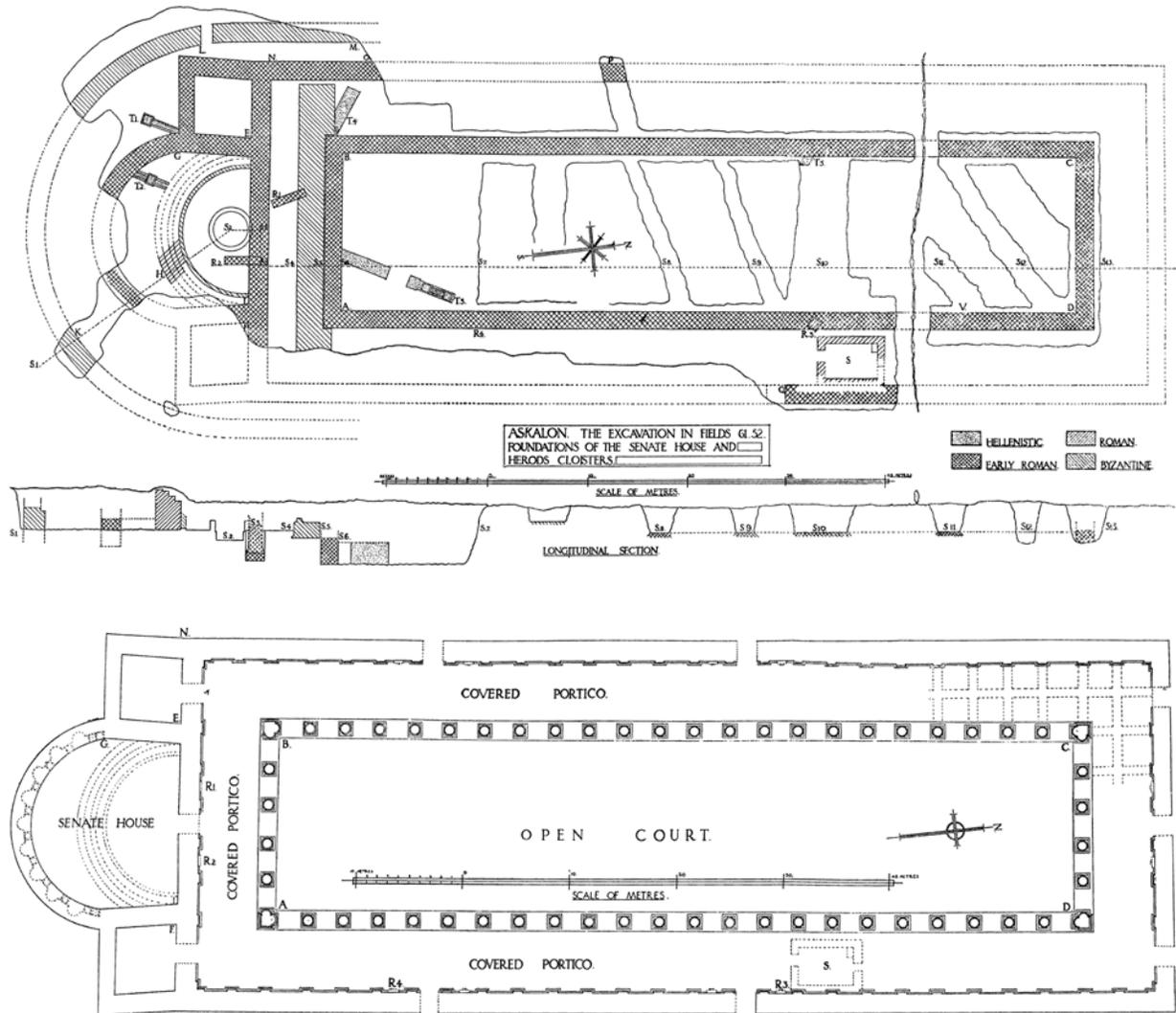


FIG. 4. PEF phase plan and restored plan of the basilica: *top*, plan of PEF excavations, field 61 (grid 47) (after Garstang 1924, pl. 1; courtesy Palestine Exploration Fund, London); *bottom*, Garstang's proposed reconstruction (after Garstang 1924, pl. 2; courtesy Palestine Exploration Fund, London).

Garstang cannot be associated with an early phase of this building but rather belong to a later Severan enlargement and reconfiguration of the structure. There are accordingly two major Roman phases: a basilica/bouleuterion of Early Roman date, and a subsequent renovation of the apsidal end of the basilica into the architectural form of an odeum and a reconfiguration of the basilica hall in the Severan period.

THE 2008–2012 EXCAVATIONS: AN OVERVIEW

At the close of their excavations, the PEF expedition backfilled most of the excavation area but left a portion of it open and protected within large retain-

ing walls constructed from stones taken from several of the excavated buildings. Many of the architectural fragments and the sculpted pilasters found in the excavations were placed inside as a kind of open-air museum, where they remained until the summer of 2009; others lay scattered around the site.

Because of the challenges of excavating such a large area, the new phase of excavations from 2008 to 2012 focused on the area that includes the southern end of the basilica uncovered during the PEF excavations. This area was chosen because it would allow for a thorough investigation of the bouleuterion phases and also a portion of the basilical hall. Concentrating on the

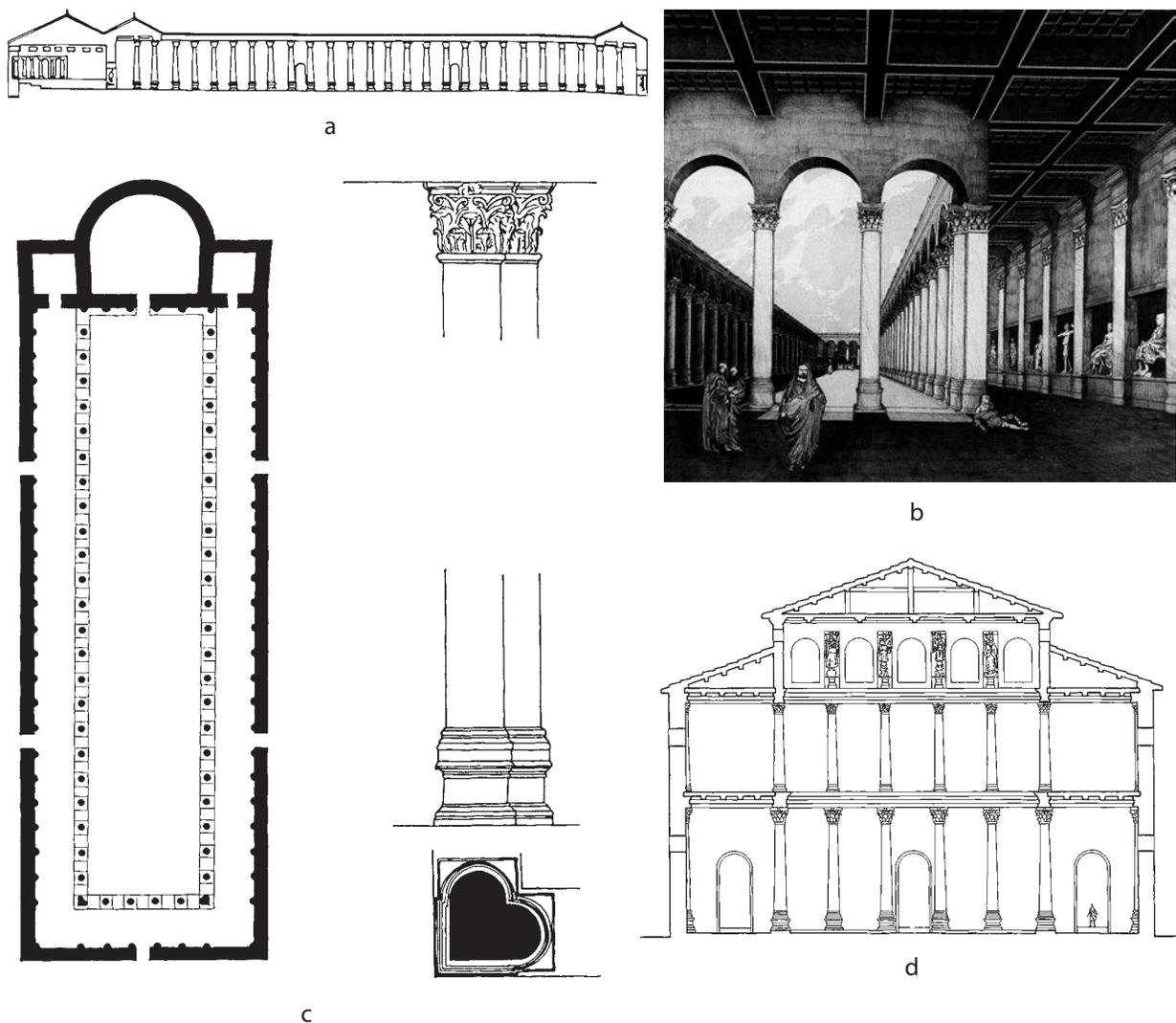


FIG. 5. Proposed reconstructions of the basilica: *a*, Diplock's reconstruction of the basilica (Diplock 1971, pl. 9); *b*, Stager's reconstruction of the basilica (Stager 1991, 40; courtesy L. Stager); *c*, Fischer's restored plan of the basilica (Fischer 1995, figs. 23, 24); *d*, Fischer's restored elevation (Fischer 1995, fig. 25).

eastern half of the apsidal end of the building, where Garstang did not excavate, would also allow us to reveal a stratigraphic sequence that could be compared with the exposed architecture in Garstang's "open-air museum." Prior to excavation, a survey of the open field to the north was conducted with ground-penetrating radar, where the plan of the PEF shows the long north-south walls of the colonnade.²⁹ The geophysical survey was able to detect the line of the earlier trenches for the long walls to the north but, because of the disturbed

nature of the area and the depth of the foundations, added little in terms of determining the presence of additional architecture or adjacent structures, or confirming Garstang's plan. At the close of the 2012 season, the entirety of the southern end of the Roman buildings had been excavated (figs. 6, 7), revealing a complete stratigraphic sequence of the phases of occupation in this part of the site.³⁰ The new excavations have revised

²⁹ Conyers 2007, 7–18.

³⁰ All data from the current phase of excavation notebooks are available online (Leon Levy Expedition to Ashkelon Database [<http://digashkelon.com/current-projects/>]).



FIG. 6. Aerial view of the excavation area, view to the southeast toward the theater and ramparts.



FIG. 7. Aerial view of the excavation area.

the sequence of building phases in this area of the site as follows (fig. 8):³¹

1. Phase 7. Late Hellenistic (late second century to first century B.C.E.): monumental public or administrative building.
2. Phase 6. Early Roman (first century B.C.E. to first century C.E.): basilica/bouleuterion complex.
3. Phase 5. Severan (193–235 C.E.): bouleuterion/odeum complex and redesign of the attached basilica hall.
4. Phase 4. Late Byzantine to Early Islamic (late fifth to seventh century C.E.): dismantling and reuse of parts of the bouleuterion/odeum ruins for a large residential complex.
5. Phase 3. Fatimid (late 10th to 11th century C.E.): residential quarter.
6. Phase 2. Crusader (late 12th century C.E.): residential quarter.
7. Phase 1. Mamluk, Ottoman, and modern (1191–1918 C.E.): ephemeral pitting and quarrying.

THE MONUMENTAL HELLENISTIC COMPLEX

The current excavations have clarified substantially the nature and extent of pre-Hellenistic and Hellenistic occupation on this part of the site and the overall development of the urban plan of Ashkelon from its refoundation in the Persian period to its emergence as the leading polis of the southern Levant. At the current state of research, the preserved foundations suggest the earliest building phase was a monumental, rectangular Hellenistic building with an attached portico oriented parallel to the seacoast. The portico probably opened onto a street, and this structure was likely mirrored on the western side of the street by another portico and building of similar design and dimensions. The massive dimensions of the building(s) provide a sense of the size and scale of this structure, which surely must have been a civic or administrative building of some importance. It is difficult to draw comparisons with other sites without further knowledge of the building plan, but in scale and construction it recalls large administrative complexes found in Palestine, such as the Monumental Hellenistic Complex at Tel Dor or the administrative building at Kadesh.³²

³¹In accordance with the Leon Levy Expedition to Ashkelon system, the phases are numbered in descending order from the earliest to the most recent. For an explanation of the Ashkelon recording methods and grid system, see Master 2008, 185–95.

³²Dor: Martin et al. 2011, 143–45. Kadesh: Herbert and Ber-

A clear picture of the new development of this part of the site in the Late Hellenistic period has emerged from the current excavations. The complex was founded on massive leveling fills deposited above bedrock, which contained almost exclusively Iron I–II sherds.³³ These fills represent the preparation of this area for use in the Late Hellenistic period, and we may surmise that the material for these fills was simply carved out of the nearby south tell and deposited here when the monumental building projects commenced. This portion of the site, although well within the circuit of the Middle Bronze Age ramparts, was therefore not a developed part of the Persian city, which was confined mostly to the south tell (see fig. 2).

This central part of the site, first developed in the Hellenistic period, became the monumental center of the Late Hellenistic city. The eastward expansion of the city grid of Ashkelon in the Hellenistic period followed the orthogonal pattern established on the south tell at the beginning of the Phoenician refoundation of the city in the Persian period, sometime in the late sixth century B.C.E.³⁴ Earlier excavations in grids 38, 50, and 51 each uncovered streets laid out parallel and perpendicular to the seacoast (see fig. 2). Comparison of the orientation of the Hellenistic walls and the likely course of streets in grid 47 with the orientation of the streets and insulae of Persian and Hellenistic date in grids 38, 50, and 51 demonstrates that these two areas of the Hellenistic city were laid out on the same grid.³⁵ In grids 38 and 51, the orientation of the domestic blocks was maintained, on the same axis, from the period of the Phoenician refoundation in the sixth century B.C.E. (grid 51, phase 7; grid 38, phase 13) through at least the Byzantine period (grid 51, phase 2; grid 38, phase 3).³⁶ Thus, in the Hellenistic

lin 2003; Berlin and Herbert 2012.

³³These findings are consistent with Garstang's (1924, 31) description of his Hellenistic walls, which were founded "upon original earth mixed with sand, in which we found fragments of late Philistine pottery."

³⁴By permission of the Persian king, Ashkelon was refounded by Tyre and administered directly from a royal palace: "πόλις Τυρίων καὶ βασιλεία" (Pseudo-Skylax 104.25–8).

³⁵For the evidence for the Persian-Hellenistic city plan from grids 38 and 50 on the south tell, see Stager et al. 2008b, 315–19. For the excavations in grid 51, see Birney's (2008–2014) preliminary reports.

³⁶The Persian grid system is similar to the urban planning of other Phoenician sites in the southern Levant of the same period. While regularly ordered and orthogonal, the streets respect the curvature of the tell to some extent and are not entirely

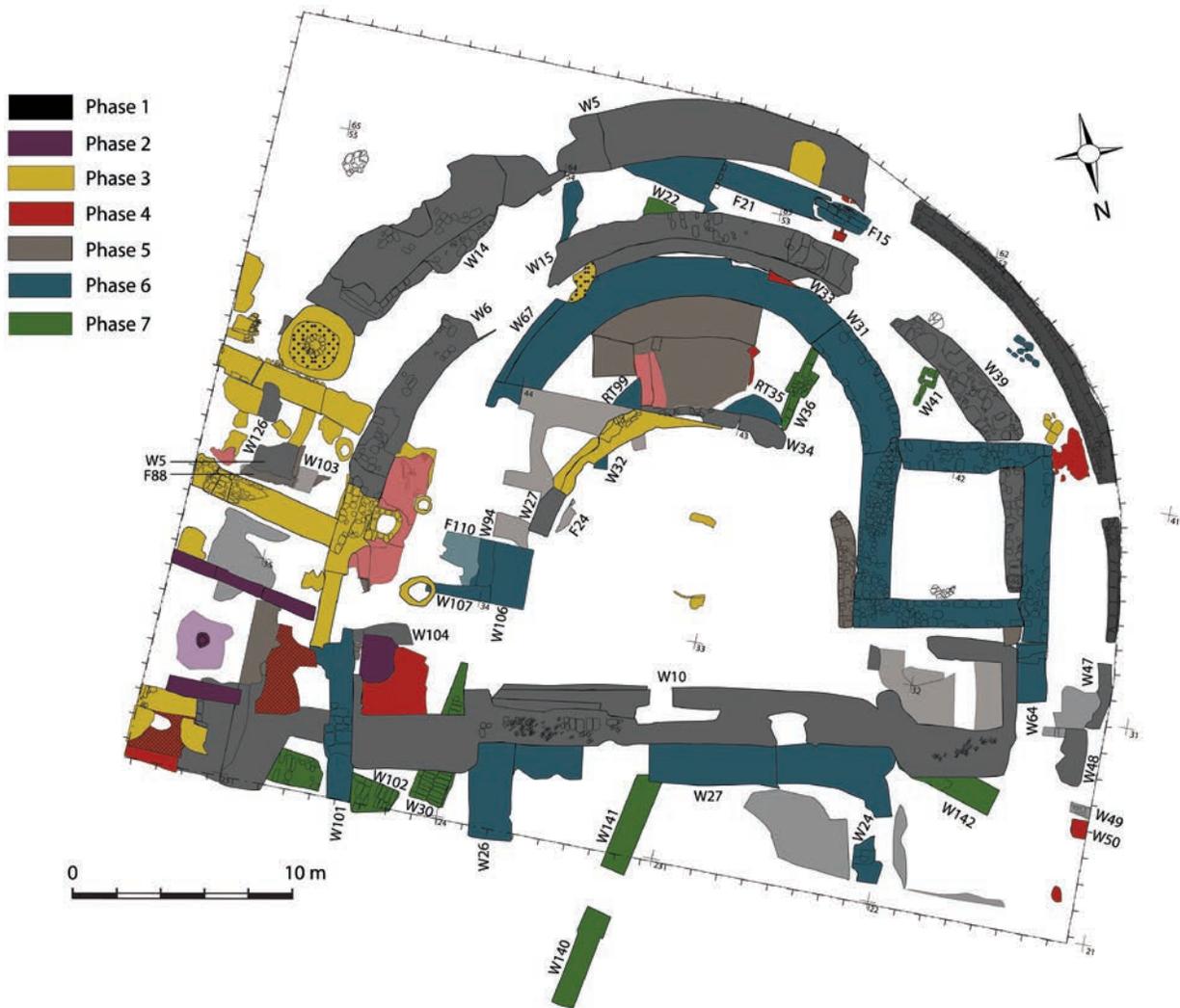


FIG. 8. Phase plan of 2008–2012 excavations (drawing by S. Matskevich).

period, the monumental and (at least some of) the domestic quarters of the city were integrated into the same orthogonal plan, oriented relative to the seacoast, whereas the monumental buildings of the Roman period broke with the preexisting grid and represent a thorough reorientation of the civic center of Ashkelon in the Early Roman period. The residential quarters of the Roman city on the south tell maintained the Persian grid system, but a new system, oriented to the cardinal points, was established for the forum area.

A general sense of the plan of the Hellenistic complex can be derived from the architecture uncovered

by the current excavations and by the earlier British excavations.³⁷ Garstang's description of the construction technique of several walls composed of "flat Ashlar stones placed on edge,"³⁸ along with a photograph (online fig. 1),³⁹ leaves little doubt that these walls are in fact part of the same construction phase as those now revealed in the eastern portion of the excavation area. The current excavations have revealed the northwest corner of a substantial building represented by Walls W30 and W102 (fig. 9), along with a section

³⁷ Garstang 1924, 30–1. The walls are labeled T1–T5 on his plan.

³⁸ Garstang 1924, 31.

³⁹ See AJA Online for all online-only figures accompanying this article.

straight. For further discussion of urban planning in the Persian-period southern Levant, see Shalev and Martin 2012.



FIG. 9. Northwest corner of the Hellenistic building in square 47.34 (view to the east).

of a north–south wall in the southern portion of the excavation area that belongs to the same phase, if not to the same structure (W22). If W30 and W22 do in fact represent a continuous wall, the side of this building would measure more than 30 m. The ashlars are large (averaging 0.69 x 0.23 x 0.38 m) and represent some of highest-quality masonry on the site, consisting of a single row of stretchers against which is laid a double row of headers. On each course the pattern alternates, so that from the side the pattern appears as a course of headers followed by a course of stretchers. The construction is typical of Hellenistic ashlar masonry in the region, with the exception of the use of mortar.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, the quality of the masonry and the composition of the mortar (a fine, white, reacted gypsum) is distinct from the Roman walls on the site, which employ more irregularly drafted kurkar sandstone ashlars joined with a thick, dark-gray, shelly concrete.⁴¹ Another short section of wall on the same orientation (W142, or T4 on the PEF plan) appears to mirror these walls, and the scaena wall of the Severan-period bouleuterion/odeum is founded directly on

top of this wall, in exactly the same way as W30. This suggests that another building of similar construction and dimensions likely existed here. Smaller, less deeply founded walls run on a parallel course between these two buildings (W36 and W41/T2 and T1). The better preserved of these two, W36, is directly in line with two sections of foundations uncovered during the British excavations (W140 and W141/T3). These walls are constructed of ashlars of similar dimensions to the other Hellenistic walls, but in short, square sections forming pedestals with beveled edges, with narrower extensions one ashlar in width (fig. 10).⁴² These foundations probably represent the stylobate of an exterior porch, and the pedestals likely accommodated columns. The distance between these parallel walls (ca. 4 m) may represent the course of a street running in between the two large buildings. If this reconstruction is correct, the exterior portico attached to the north–south running walls of the large buildings on either side of the street, spanning a distance of approximately 8 m. The intercolumniation of the colonnade measures approximately 1.3 m, and the columns, which do not survive, were likely constructed of local stone. The opening between Walls W140 and W141 (visible in online fig. 1) was flanked by larger square piers, which served as a propylon to the interior of the complex; this entrance is precisely in line with the northwest corner of the large building represented by Walls W30 and W102 in the eastern section of the excavation area. This reconstruction must remain hypothetical until further excavation clarifies the plan of these buildings, but in many respects the monumental scale and extent of this phase has become substantially clearer.

Garstang interpreted the smaller Hellenistic walls in a similar way, suggesting they formed a gateway and colonnade dating to ca. 300 B.C.E., which he believed led to the “Bir Ibrahim” (the well of Abraham mentioned in Christian and Islamic sources).⁴³ The PEF excavations in field 86, the putative site of the Bir Ibrahim, provided no evidence for this large well predating the Islamic period, and it is not clear that this feature existed in the Hellenistic period or that the monuments in grid 47 engaged with it in any way.⁴⁴ Rather,

⁴⁰For the method of construction, see Sharon’s (1987, 25–6, fig. 2c1) “Headers Against a Stretcher,” subtype “Fixed Side.” The Hellenistic city wall in Area A at Tel Dor was also constructed in this style.

⁴¹For a discussion of the composition of Roman cement, see Lancaster 2005, 51–65.

⁴²The treatment of the edges of the pedestals resembles the stylobate of other Late Classical to Hellenistic exterior porticoes constructed from local stone. See, e.g., the foundations of the palaestra at Olympia (Mallwitz 1972, 271, fig. 231).

⁴³Garstang 1922, 114–15; 1924, 31–3.

⁴⁴Garstang (1924, 33) identified the Bir Ibrahim with the *puteus pacis* mentioned by Anonymous Placentius (*Itinerarium*



FIG. 10. Hellenistic Wall W36.

it is apparent that this well is cut into the orchestra of the Hellenistic/Roman theater, suggesting that it post-dates any of the Hellenistic or Roman constructions in this area. It is more likely that these walls were oriented toward the theater, which may have also been built in this period. Thus, it appears that the course of a major street of the Hellenistic period ran through this area,

33): “Ibi est puteus pacis in latitudine maior, in modum theatri factus in quo usque ad aquam per gradus descenditur. Ibi requiescunt tres fratres martyres Aegyptii; propria quidem habent nomina, sed vulgariter Aegyptii vocantur” (There is a well of peace there of great breadth, constructed like a theater in which one descends by steps all the way to the water. There lie three Egyptian martyrs, who were brothers; they surely have their own names, but they are commonly called “the Egyptians”). In earlier publications, he also referred to the well in the orchestra of the Severan building in grid 47 as the “peace pool.” On the Madaba map, this monument is labeled as “[τὸ τῶ]ν Αἰγυ[π]τῶν” (the place of the Egyptians) and shown outside the city walls (Avi-Yonah 1954, 94). It is therefore evident that it cannot be associated with the theater or bouleuterion. Garstang (1922, 113) also hypothesized that the Bir Ibrahim preserved the memory of the ancient sacred lake of the goddess Dekerto mentioned by Diodorus Siculus (2.4.2), but Diodorus’ description indicates that it, too, was outside the city walls, “not far” (“οὐκ ἄποθεν”) from the city.

which was in all likelihood a major avenue connecting many of the public monuments of the Hellenistic city. On either side of the street, this phase included two large buildings of similar construction and scale.

The current excavations have also revealed a vaulted sewer that may provide further information about elements of the urban plan with origins in the Late Hellenistic city. The sewer, which runs southeast of the apsidal wall of the Early Roman basilica, contained no features of Hellenistic date, and it is likely an Early Roman (phase 6) construction with later modifications. The rear wall of the cavea of the Severan bouleuterion/odeum (phase 5) is founded on top of the sewer, providing a terminus ante quem for its construction. However, despite the sewer’s Roman date, the orientation of the sewer follows the Hellenistic city plan, suggesting that it was constructed on the line of an earlier sewer or street. If this reconstruction is correct, it would intersect with the line of the street represented by the north–south running walls discussed above and form the corner of a city block also represented by the edge of the eastern building (W22).

Ceramic evidence demonstrates that this extensive development of the city dates to the Late Hellenistic period. While the original floor levels for the Hellenistic

buildings were not preserved, the foundation trench for Hellenistic Wall W30 was identified and excavated. Diagnostic pottery recovered from the fills of the foundation trench included the following pieces (fig. 11):

1. From fill 47.34.F62.B7965, a semi-fine lagynos rim and neck of Late Hellenistic date (see fig. 11a); an Eastern Sigillata A body sherd; and a red/black-slip body sherd (predecessor to Eastern Sigillata A) dating to the third to second century B.C.E.
2. From fill 47.34.F135.B9477, a shouldered cooking pot with inturned rim, similar to Dor CP2,⁴⁵ late third to second century B.C.E. (see fig. 11b); a Cypriot saucer base and body, third to second century B.C.E. (see fig. 11c); and a red/black-slip bowl rim (predecessor to Eastern Sigillata A), third to second century B.C.E. (see fig. 11d).

Overall, the assemblage points to a late second-century date, and the presence of Eastern Sigillata A provides a terminus post quem for the construction of the building of the last quarter of the second century B.C.E.⁴⁶ The construction of this building closely coincides with the ceramic date for the refortification of the ramparts with a stone city wall and towers, which had been unfortified since the destruction of the city by the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar II in 604 B.C.E. This further indicates that the late second century or early first century saw a significant expansion and development of the city.⁴⁷

Given the likely late second- or early first-century B.C.E. date of these structures, it is tempting to connect this massive building project, the new development of a previously uninhabited part of the site, and the fortification of the ramparts with the end of Seleucid domination and the emergence of Ashkelon as an independent and autonomous polis in 104/3 B.C.E.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Stern 1995, 298–99, fig. 16.7, nos. 8–9.

⁴⁶ For the introduction of Eastern Sigillata A into Israel, see Slane 1997, 257–82. See Berlin (1997, 24) for Tel Anafa, where Eastern Sigillata A is first in evidence in the fills sealed below a building constructed ca. 125 B.C.E. At Tel Dor, Eastern Sigillata A appears between 150 and 100 (Stern 1995, 1A:43–4, 233–34; 1B:218–21). At Kadesh, Eastern Sigillata A is not in evidence in the destruction layer dating to 145 B.C.E. (Herbert and Berlin 2003, 24); see also Hayes 1985, 12–13. The chronology at Ashkelon is imprecise because of the lack of sufficient stratified Late Hellenistic/Early Roman deposits, but for a discussion of imports of Eastern Sigillata A to Ashkelon, see Johnson 2008, 5–18.

⁴⁷ For the evidence for the date of the Hellenistic fortifications, see Stager et al. 2008b, 240.

⁴⁸ For the history of Ashkelon in this period, see Avi-Yonah

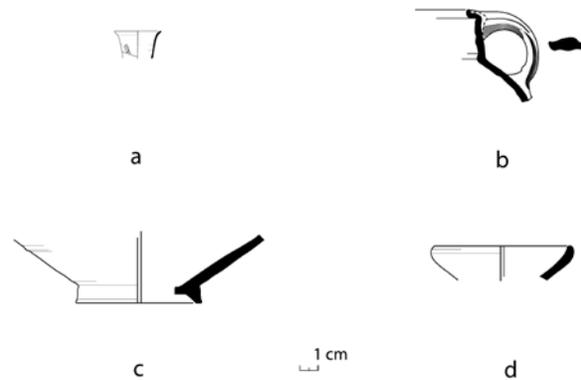


FIG. 11. Pottery from the fills of the foundation trench for Wall W30 (47.34.F62 and 47.34.F135) of the Hellenistic building: a, semi-fine lagynos rim and neck; b, shouldered cooking pot with inturned rim; c, Cypriot saucer base and body; d, red/black-slip bowl rim.

The city was apparently still unfortified during the campaigns of Jonathan Maccabee in the southern Levant in 144–143 B.C.E., when the people of Ashkelon twice submitted to his forces,⁴⁹ but by the beginning of the first century B.C.E. it was the only city of the coastal plain never taken by the Hasmonean king Alexander Jannaeus (103–76 B.C.E.).⁵⁰ Ashkelon remained independent throughout the period of Hasmonean

1976, 121–30; Fuks 2000a, 2000b, 2001. For the numismatic evidence, see Rappaport 1970; Spaer 1984; Voulgaridis 2000, 368–69; Gitler and Master 2010.

⁴⁹ 1 Maccabees 10.86, 11.60.

⁵⁰ When Strabo (16.2.29) referred to Ashkelon as a “small town” (πόλισμα δὲ μικρόν), he seems to have been drawing on Hellenistic sources (e.g., Artemidoros of Ephesos) that described the city before its expansion. He further described Gaza as having been uninhabited since the time of Alexander Jannaeus’ siege (16.2.30: “κατεσπασμένη δ’ ὑπὸ Ἀλεξάνδρου καὶ μένουσα ἔρημος”), which was clearly not the case in Strabo’s day, when it had been repopulated by Aulus Gabinius, the proconsul of Syria, in 56 B.C.E. (Joseph., *BJ* 1.155–70). According to Josephus, Gaza was destroyed by Alexander Jannaeus in 96 B.C.E. (*AJ* 13.357–64) and seems to have been severely reduced until the time of Gabinius (Glucker 1987). On the date, see Kushnir-Stein (2000–2002), who revises it to 95/4 B.C.E. The only coinage of this period is a poor series of lead issues from 78/7 (Hoover 2007, 70). It is therefore likely that Strabo drew on sources from the first half of the first century B.C.E., after Gaza’s destruction and before Ashkelon’s expansion, for his description of the southern Levant. Strabo’s account of Ashkelon should accordingly not apply to the Late Hellenistic/Early Roman period, when it seems that the city occupied all, or most, of the ca. 60 ha defined by the ramparts.

rule, and it was the only major polis in the southern Levant not incorporated into the kingdom of Herod the Great. Indirect evidence for the prosperity of the city in this period also comes from the growing presence of merchants from Ashkelon abroad, who appear increasingly in late third- to first-century inscriptions from the major harbor cities of the Hellenistic Mediterranean: Athens, Demetrias, Rhodes, Puteoli, and Delos.⁵¹ Evidence from the site itself points to extensive commercial contacts with maritime centers across the eastern Mediterranean.⁵² The expansion and fortification of Ashkelon in the late second or early first century B.C.E. helps explain this overall picture of Late Hellenistic prosperity and conforms well to the pottery dates of the fortifications and the construction of the Hellenistic complex in grid 47.

THE EARLY ROMAN BASILICA/BOULEUTERION

In the Early Roman period, a comprehensive new building program put the Hellenistic complex entirely out of use. This massive building, traditionally referred to as the Basilica of Ashkelon in the secondary literature, was constructed on a different orientation, cutting or incorporating the earlier Hellenistic walls in many places, at an oblique angle. This architectural phase represents an overall reconfiguration of this part of the city and the introduction of a new grid and road system to this quarter of the city (see fig. 2). As such, the basilica was undoubtedly part of a larger project defining a forum area and the overall embellishment and monumentalization of the city center in the Early Roman period.

Form and Function

This building, the primary focus of the British excavations of the 1920s, was originally identified as the bouleuterion, or “senate house,” of Ashkelon, and

Garstang argued that the long walls extending north were the secondary addition of an unroofed peristyle in the Herodian period.⁵³ Subsequent scholars have preferred to see the building as a fairly typical basilical plan. Balty, for example, in his exhaustive study of basilicas, curiae, and bouleuteria of the Roman world, has put it in the same class as better-known monuments such as the basilica at Samaria-Sebaste.⁵⁴ The plan of the building, as reconstructed by Garstang, is that of an approximately 100 x 30 m complex consisting of an apsidal southern end with two square side chambers and a long colonnade of 6 x 24 columns to the north. In most respects, the renewed excavations have confirmed the accuracy of the plan of the foundations, with some modification and additional detail (fig. 12). The following sections provide an overview of the elements of the structure revealed in the new phase of excavations, as well as the evidence for (1) dating the basilica to the Early Roman period, (2) disassociating this phase from the numerous Severan-period architectural fragments, (3) reconstructing it as a single rather than two-phase construction, and (4) identifying the apsidal southern end of the basilica as the bouleuterion of the city.

The Apsidal Wall and Central Chamber

The defining feature of the southern end of the phase 6 basilica is a large apsidal wall measuring 1.89 m wide and terminating on either end in square side rooms (W31). The wall is composed of drafted kurkar sandstone blocks joined with gray mortar characteristic of Early Roman construction at Ashkelon. The curve of the wall defines a semicircular area 15.66 m in diameter. A second apsidal wall (W34) following a similar curve before abutting the straight north-south walls of the side chambers was also preserved, with a section of seating. The PEF reports attributed the second apse and associated seating to the basilica but admitted that this reconstruction was conjectural.⁵⁵ This

⁵¹ Athens: e.g., *IG* 2²8388; 1028, line 148. Demetrias: Arvanitopoulos 1909, 294, no. 80; 399, no. 151; 1949–1950, 84, no. 257; 1952–1953, 8, no. 322; 17, no. 347; 18, no. 349. Rhodes: *IG* 12 118; Maiuri 1925, nos. 161, 162, 175. Puteoli: *CIL* 10 1746. Delos: Leiwo 1989 (on the famous Philostratos of Ashkelon, a very prominent banker who appears in 18 inscriptions from 140–130 and 90 B.C.E., as well as numerous other Ashkelonians active on the island in this period).

⁵² Not least in the range of imports found in Hellenistic layers. Compare also the large hoard of 46 coins ranging from the fifth century to the late second century, with issues from Samos, Kos, Teos, Knidos, Rhodes, Lycia, Side, Tyre, Cyprus, and elsewhere (Gitler and Kahanov 2008, 385–95).

⁵³ Garstang 1924, 25–9.

⁵⁴ E.g., Watzinger 1935; Balty 1991, 396: “mais l’on pourrait être tenté d’y voir une nouvelle basilique: l’hémicycle, de 13m de diamètre, s’inscrit en effet dans une salle absidée que flanquer deux annexes, à la manière du *tribunal* tripartite de certains de ces monuments. La construction serait de la fin du IIe ou début du IIIe siècle de notre ère et représenterait, si certains de ses éléments pouvaient être précisés par un complément de fouilles, un remarquable cas d’adaptation de schémas romains occidentaux à des réalités orientales.”

⁵⁵ Garstang 1924, 29.

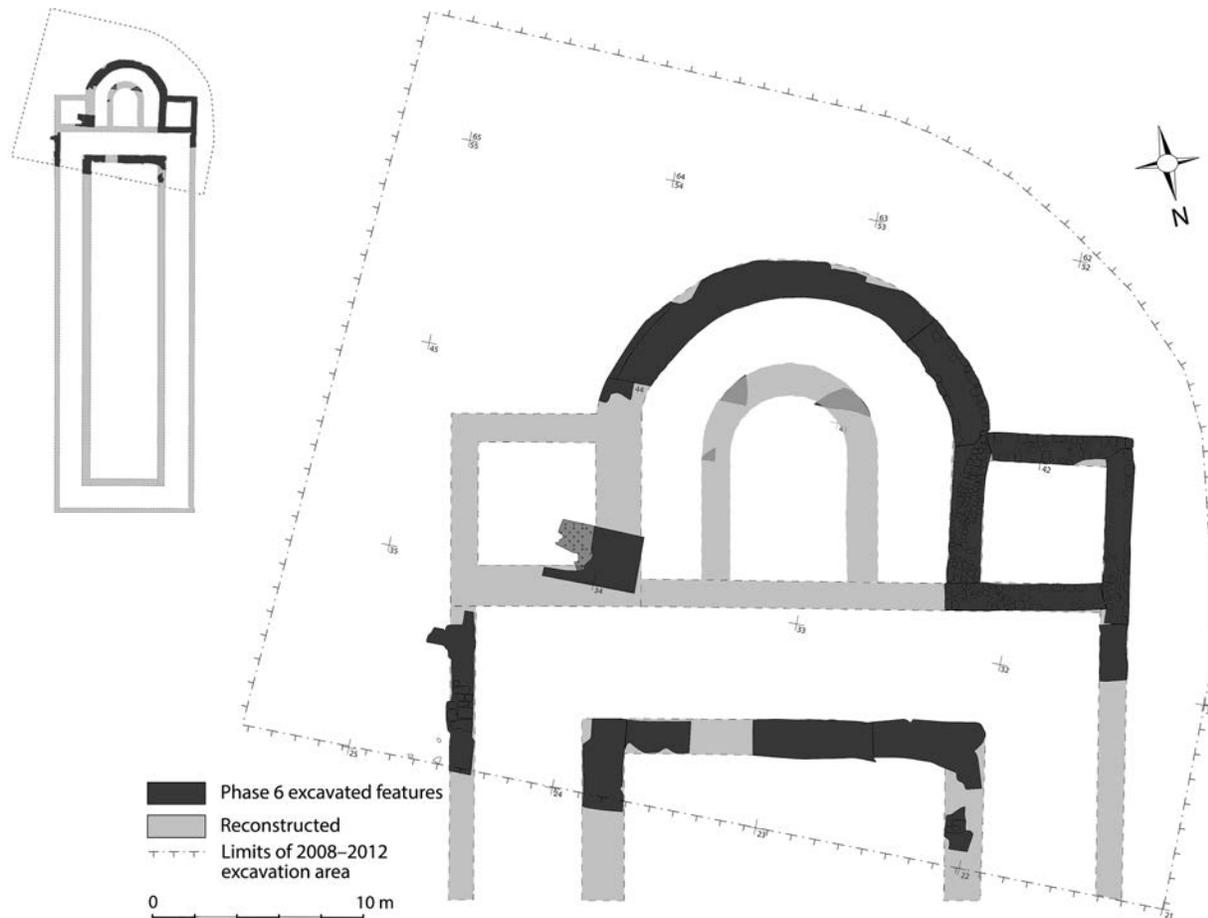


FIG. 12. The Early Roman basilica/bouleuterion (phase 6), showing the restored plan at top left and detail of area excavated from 2008–2012 at right (drawing by S. Matskevich).

wall in fact represents the orchestra wall of the Severan (phase 5) building and the lower seats of the *ima cavea* (discussed later in this article) and should be disassociated from the basilica. There are, however, traces of an interior apsidal wall on the same curve as the back wall of the chamber. A small fragment of a phase 6 apsidal wall (W32) along with the cut of two curved robbing trenches in the adjacent squares (RT99 and RT35) in fact represents a smaller apsidal wall that would have defined the northern limit of the seating and the edge of the floor for the council chamber of the basilica. This architecture has been nearly obliterated by later robbing and the construction of the phase 5 building, but the evidence does allow us to restore a smaller area of tiered seating to the basilica phase. This suggests that in place of a more traditional tribunal, the apse of the basilica at Ashkelon accommodated a larger section of seating more typical of bouleuteria or curiae.

The Side Chambers

Two approximately square rooms flank either side of the apsidal central space to the east and west. These define an interior space measuring 5.68 (east–west) x 5.82 m (north–south). If the reconstruction of this phase as a roofed basilica is correct, these square side rooms probably accommodated staircases for access to the upper galleries. The most important contribution of the new excavations for understanding the date and function of this building has been the excavation of sealed deposits below the floor of this eastern side chamber. A probe dug to locate this room in the 2012 season located the north–south wall (W94 and W106) on the western side of the eastern side chamber and the cornering east–west wall (W107). Excavation of the western and northern closing walls of the eastern flanking room revealed that the northern wall was founded 1 m deeper than the western wall, suggesting it was the

primary load-bearing wall for this part of the building. A well-constructed plaster floor was preserved (F110), reaching Walls W107 and W94. Diagnostic pottery from the makeup of the floor itself included only residual Iron II sherds. The fills sealed below the floor (F129) and the fill of the foundation trench for Wall 107 also included predominately Iron I and II ceramics, and the latest diagnostic pottery (several Phoenician semi-fine ware body sherds and a Late Hellenistic red/black-slip bowl body) provided a terminus post quem of the second century B.C.E.⁵⁶

Although the pottery recovered from the floor and the fills sealed by the floor does not provide a precise date, it does demonstrate that there is no evidence for dating this architectural phase as late as the Severan period, the date posited by scholars attempting to reconcile the architectural fragments with the original phasing of the PEF excavations. Additional evidence for dating is provided by the two inscriptions discussed below, which should not be disassociated from this building phase and help place the construction of the building sometime before the mid first century C.E.

The Basilica Hall

The British excavations investigated nearly the entire length of the basilica hall, mostly through long trenches along the walls. Garstang suggested that this part of the building was open at the center and that the interior court was paved with a plain tessera floor. Photographs from these excavations show sections of this tessera floor, although the relation of the floor to the wall is not entirely clear in the photographs. The floor may belong to either the Severan or a later Byzantine phase (online fig. 2).⁵⁷ One of the more enigmatic findings was a small rectangular structure in the eastern colonnade and opening to the south, which Garstang interpreted as a shrine belonging to a later, but still Roman, phase. The walls of this structure were apparently revetted with alabaster and marble.⁵⁸ Within this structure, Garstang found a life-sized nude male statue, which he identified as Apollo and associated with the structure; a colossal marble foot was also found in the vicinity.⁵⁹ There is one photograph of the discovery of

the statue preserved in the archives of the PEF (G290), but it does not help clarify the plan or appearance of this building, and the structure probably dates either to the Severan period or to a postclassical phase.

Exploration of this portion of the basilica has been limited in the current excavations. We have, however, uncovered portions of all the foundations recorded by Garstang—the western exterior wall (W64) and the walls of the interior colonnade (W24, W26, W27)—as well as the eastern exterior wall (W101) outside his excavation area. Overall, the current excavations have confirmed his restoration of the foundations, with some refinement of measurement: the east–west wall measures 1.81 m in width and the north–south wall 1.95 m. However, the new evidence for the date of the original building phase suggests that the architectural fragments found in quantity must be disassociated with this phase. No representative fragments of earlier architectural members have been found, and accordingly there is little evidence for the appearance of the colonnade in this phase apart from the foundations. The basilica hall was evidently reconfigured and embellished in the Severan period, along with the major renovation of the apsidal end of the building. It is to this architectural phase (i.e., phase 5) that the numerous column capitals, bases, and shafts and the architectural sculpture belong.

The Sewer System

Part of the development of the city in this period included the construction of a large, vaulted sewer system running from the southwest to the northeast. It passed just south of the apsidal wall of the phase 6 basilica and under the third apsidal wall of the later Severan-period building. The phase 6 drain (F15) was large, approximately 1.15 x 1.50 m. The interior of the sewer vault (F21) was constructed of cemented kurkar sandstone cobbles faced with drafted blocks (fig. 13). From the top of the lining it extends to a depth of 1.96 m and is 1.4 m at its widest point. As discussed above, the line of the sewer follows the grid of the Hellenistic city, and the sewer was likely placed directly in the path of the earlier Hellenistic street, where the empty space suggested a convenient spot for its construction.

⁵⁶ These comprise F129 (floor makeup) and layers L130, L131, L132, and L133.

⁵⁷ Garstang 1924, 29.

⁵⁸ Garstang 1924, 29; cf. Diplock 1971, 13.

⁵⁹ Garstang 1924. The identification of the nude male statue

as Apollo seems tentative, as there are no attributes on the statue associated with that deity, and the pose is not specific to Apollo. Indeed, its findspot may indicate an alternative interpretation: a dedicatory statue for one of the city's patrons, granted by the boule and demos.



FIG. 13. The sewer running below the rear wall of the Severan (phase 5) bouleuterion/odeum (view to the southeast).

Inscriptions and Date

Garstang associated the construction of the basilica with Herod and suggested that the colonnade was an unroofed peristyle.⁶⁰ He identified this colonnade with the notice of Josephus that “for the people of Askalon he [Herod] built baths and costly fountains, and in addition peristyles remarkable in their workmanship and size.”⁶¹ He additionally associated this testimony with a late tradition that Herod had been born in Ashkelon.⁶² Despite the incongruence with the stylis-

⁶⁰ See, e.g., the article quoting Garstang that ran in *ILN* under the title “How Herod Adorned His Birthplace” (30 December 1922, p. 1030). Garstang’s (1924, 29) reports make no mention of any evidence for roof tiles or drainage.

⁶¹ Joseph., *BJ* 1.422: “Ἀσκαλωνίταις δὲ βαλανεῖα καὶ κρήνας πολυτελεῖς, πρὸς δὲ περίστυλα θαυμαστά τὴν τε ἐργασίαν καὶ τὸ μέγεθος.” Josephus also mentions that Herod possessed a palace in Ashkelon, which Augustus gave to Salome, Herod’s sister, after Herod’s death (*AJ* 17.321; *BJ* 2.98).

⁶² Euseb., *Hist. eccl.* 1.6.2, 1.7.11 (citing *Chron. Pasch.* 465A;

tic features of the architectural members, a Herodian date for the building is repeated still in the secondary literature.⁶³

The original reconstruction published by the PEF also attempted to reconcile the form of the architecture, in plan a basilical structure, with the literary testimony, which only mentions “peristyles,” by suggesting that the peristyle was added to the apsidal portion of the building at a later date.⁶⁴ This would mean that the apsidal portion of the building predated the Herodian period and originally served as a freestanding bouleuterion. In support of this, Garstang maintained that there is a clear “realignment” of the foundations where the peristyle wall meets the corner of the western side room of the apsidal portion of the building (point N on fig. 4, top). This part of the foundations has been uncovered, and the walls appear to be bonded at this corner, although many of the stones here were reused to build a retaining wall of the open-air museum right over this connection, somewhat complicating this area (fig. 14). Nevertheless, on the current evidence, it seems that this “realignment” is not supported by archaeological evidence. Accordingly, the building is best interpreted as a single-phase basilical structure with a tiered apsidal chamber on the southern end, which served as the bouleuterion of the Early Roman city of Ashkelon.

The most precise evidence for the date of this building phase reported by the British excavations consisted of two decrees of the boule and demos of Ashkelon dating to the first century C.E. (fig. 15). Subsequent scholars have redated this phase to the Severan period on the basis of the architectural fragments and have either not taken the epigraphic material into account or assumed these inscriptions were simply moved to the new building in the late second century C.E. The ceramics from sealed deposits associated with the basilica

Julius Africanus; Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 52). Africanus claims Herod’s grandfather had been a *hierodoulos* at the Temple of Apollo in Ashkelon. This has often been viewed as Christian propaganda. For a discussion of the tradition, see Cohen 1999, 13–25. Schalit (1962, 109–60), by contrast, sees this as Jewish anti-Herodian propaganda; see also Schalit 1969, 40–51. No extant Jewish source, however, relates this tradition.

⁶³ E.g., Roller 1998, 218: “in its original form it is Herodian, and it is the peristyle mentioned by Josephus, and thus one of the best preserved of Herod’s architectural monuments outside his kingdom.” For Herod’s building projects and Herodian architecture in general, see Netzer and Laureys-Chachy 2006; Rozenberg and Mevorah 2013.

⁶⁴ Garstang 1922, 114; 1924, 25.

produced relatively little diagnostic pottery but included nothing later than the second century B.C.E. The mid second century C.E. was the latest ceramic date from stratified construction fills associated with the building phase overlying the apsidal portion of the basilica (phase 5) (discussed later in this article). Altogether, the ceramic evidence argues for an Early Roman date for the construction of the basilica and against disassociating the two decrees from this building phase. The two inscriptions therefore still provide the best terminus ante quem for the construction of the building.

The inscriptions were discovered “in the adjoining cloister” of the building, apparently the hall of the basilica.⁶⁵ Both inscriptions record decrees of the boule and demos of Ashkelon, commemorating benefactions of the honorands. The texts of these inscriptions were published by Hogarth in the *Quarterly Statement of the PEF*, without photographs or descriptions of the stones.⁶⁶ From their appearance and content (see fig. 15),⁶⁷ it is clear that both texts would have stood on bases under honorific statues, perhaps placed outside the entrance to the bouleuterion.⁶⁸

The first decree, a small white marble plaque (0.21 x 0.21 x 0.02 m), is closely dated by the identity of the honorand, a certain Aulus Instuleius Tenax, a centurion from the *legio X Fretensis*.⁶⁹

ἡ βουλὴ {1}
καὶ ὁ δῆμος ᾠλον
Ἰνστολήιον Τένακα
ἑκατοντάρχη
5 λεγιῶνος δεκάτης
Φρετηνσίας, εὐνοίας
ἔνεκα.

The boule and demos (honor) Aulus Instuleius Tenax, centurion of the tenth legion Fretensis, on account of his goodwill (toward the city).

⁶⁵ Garstang 1922, 115.

⁶⁶ Hogarth 1922, nos. 1, 2. The inscriptions are now located in the Rockefeller Museum in Jerusalem.

⁶⁷ The authors are grateful for the aid of Felicity Cobbing, executive secretary of the PEF, in locating the original images of these inscriptions in the organization’s archives.

⁶⁸ For a comparable placement of portrait statues of benefactors outside the bouleuterion at Aphrodisias, see Smith 2006, 69–70.

⁶⁹ Editio princeps: Hogarth 1922, 22–3. PEF registration no. G347. For further references, see *AEpigr* 1923, no. 83; *SEG* 1 552; Roussel 1924, 358; Lifshitz 1959, 53–67; Dobson 1978, 196; Di Segni 1991, 67; Dąbrowa 1993, 86, no. 19 A1; Ameling et al. 2014, no. 2335.



FIG. 14. The connection between the phase 6 bouleuterion side chamber and the exterior wall of the basilica (view to the east).

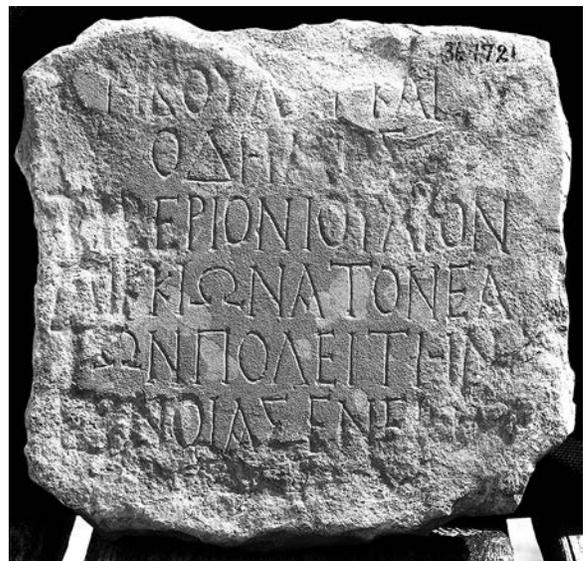
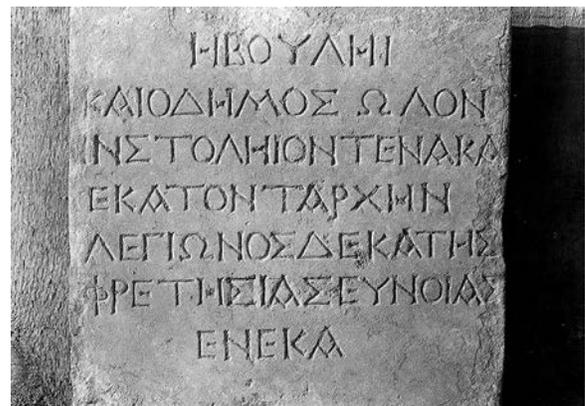


FIG. 15. Two honorary decrees of the boule and demos of Ashkelon: *top*, decree of the boule and demos of Ashkelon for Aulus Instuleius Tenax (PEF G347; courtesy Palestine Exploration Fund, London); *bottom*, decree of the boule and demos of Ashkelon for Tiberius Iulius Miccio (courtesy W. Eck).

Aulus Instuleius Tenax also happens to be known from a dated inscription on the Colossus of Memnon in Egypt from the year 65 C.E., when he was *primipilaris* of the *legio XII Fulminata*.⁷⁰ Since Instuleius Tenax appears with the rank of ἑκατοντάρχης (*centurio*) in the inscription from Ashkelon, a lower rank than *primipilaris*, this inscription should date from an earlier period of his career and accordingly before 65 C.E. Previous commentators have excluded this interpretation, since the *communis opinio* has held that Judaea was officially a procuratorial province in this period, independent from Syria, where the *legio X Fretensis* was stationed. Scholars have accordingly preferred to connect the inscription from Ashkelon with the Jewish War of 66–70,⁷¹ when the *legio X Fretensis* was transferred to Judea and ultimately used as an occupying force for Jerusalem.⁷² The legion's activity in Ashkelon is also evident from the countermarks of the legion on the coins of Ashkelon in 72/3, 76/7, and 85/6 C.E.⁷³ Recent scholarship, however, has shown that Judaea was still a part of the province of Syria after 44 C.E. and not an independent province until 70 C.E., making it possible that a centurion from the *legio X Fretensis* had some connection to a city in the southern Levant.⁷⁴ Eck has recently suggested that Aulus Instuleius Tenax may have been an officer assigned to the

staff of a procurator charged with administering the imperial domains in the region around Iamnia. These would have included the *basileion oikēsin* that Herod held in Ashkelon, which Salome, his sister, willed to the empress Livia.⁷⁵ As a member of the procurator's staff, Instuleius Tenax may have had dealings with the city of Ashkelon and the occasion to represent the interests of the city. It was for such help that the boule and demos may have honored Aulus Instuleius Tenax and set up his portrait statue in such a conspicuous public space.⁷⁶ Such a reconstruction is hypothetical, but it explains the lower rank of Instuleius Tenax in the inscription from Ashkelon and suggests that the date of the decree from Ashkelon should predate 65 C.E.⁷⁷

The second inscription is undated and honors a local citizen of Ashkelon.⁷⁸ It is likewise a decree of the boule and demos of Ashkelon, inscribed on a small pinkish limestone plaque (0.23 x 0.23 x 0.05 m), that would have stood below a portrait statue of the honorand:

ἡ βουλὴ καὶ
ὁ δῆμος
Τιβέριον Ἰούλιον
Μικκίωνα τὸν ἑα-
5 τῶν πολεῖτην
εὐνοίας ἔνεκα

The boule and demos (honor) Tiberius Iulius Miccio, their own citizen, for his goodwill (toward the city).

Tiberius Iulius Miccio, or possibly his father, gained Roman citizenship in the reign of Tiberius, and accordingly the inscription also can be dated to the mid first century C.E., making it roughly contemporary with the document above and probably earlier. Taken together, the two inscriptions demonstrate the basilica was constructed and functioned as the bouleterion

⁷⁰ CIL 3 30 (Bernard and Bernard 1960, no. 2): “A(ulus) Instuleius Tenax primipilaris leg(ionis) XII | Fulminatae et C(aius) Valerius Priscus (centurio) leg(ionis) XXII | et L(ucius) Quintius Viator decurio audimus Memnon[em] | anno XI Neronis Imp(eratoris) n(ostri) XVII K(alendas) April(es) h[ora—]” The *nomen gentile* “Instuleius” is rare, and there can be no doubt that this is the same individual who appears in the inscription from Ashkelon; Instuleius Tenax was probably of Italian origin (Dąbrowa 1993, 89, 102–6; 2000).

⁷¹ E.g., Isaac (1990, 136 n. 169) identified Instuleius Tenax as the garrison commander appointed to Ashkelon by Vespasian in 67/8. Josephus (*BJ* 2.457–60) writes that at the beginning of the Jewish War, after the massacre of the Jews at Caesarea, Ashkelon was attacked and destroyed by Jewish forces along with many of the cities of Palestine (September 66 C.E.). No archaeological evidence for this has ever been detected, and it is clear from the literary sources that Ashkelon was up and running after this. The people of Ashkelon retaliated by killing 2,500 Jews residing in the city (*BJ* 2.477). Jewish forces again attacked Ashkelon in November/December of 66, at which time it had a garrison consisting of a cohort of infantry and an *ala* of cavalry commanded by a certain Antonius (*BJ* 3.9–12).

⁷² Tac., *Hist.* 5.1.2.

⁷³ Dąbrowa 1993, 19.

⁷⁴ Eck 2007, 24–50; Labbé 2012.

⁷⁵ Joseph., *AJ* 17.321. The location of the palace is unknown. Kokkinos (1998, 112–13) conjectures that this is a former Persian palace taken over by Herod. He also argues that Herod used Ashkelon, although it was formally outside of his kingdom, as an administrative center.

⁷⁶ Eck in the commentary for Ameling et al. 2014, no. 2335; Eck 2015, 153–57.

⁷⁷ Goldsworthy (1999, 200–1) argues that Tenax was demoted because of his participation in the Twelfth Legion's disastrous retreat from Jerusalem in 66 C.E., but see Dobson's (1978, 196) earlier comments to the contrary.

⁷⁸ Editio princeps: Hogarth 1922, 22–3. See also *AEpigra* 1923, no. 84; SEG 1 553; Ameling et al. 2014, no. 2336.

of the city sometime before 65 C.E. The nature of the benefactions of these individuals, one a representative of Roman authority in the region and the other a wealthy local with Roman citizenship, cannot be known, but these decrees reflect the centrality of the institution of the boule in a period of great political and urban change.

Analysis and Discussion

Based on the epigraphic and ceramic evidence, the basilica/bouleuterion complex was constructed sometime before 65 C.E. Since the proposed date for the Hellenistic public buildings is the late second or early first century B.C.E., we should date the construction of the basilica—and the reconfiguration of the city grid—to the late first century B.C.E. or early first century C.E. The new orientation of the city grid suggests that the construction was a major transformation of the fabric of the city. The construction not only involved the dismantling of an important Hellenistic public complex, but it also entailed the comprehensive reorientation of the public center of the city, which was likely associated with the new east–west street from the Jerusalem gate to the southern tell. This new street system defined the Roman, Byzantine, and Islamic city,⁷⁹ and it remained the backbone of the street plan for the 19th-century cadastral system visible in early plans of the site (see fig. 3).

Ashkelon successfully negotiated the turbulent final decades of the first century B.C.E., establishing strong connections with Rome and Herod while preserving its independence. The city was on friendly terms with the family of Antipater,⁸⁰ supported Kleopatra VII,⁸¹ and served as a key naval base for Caesar's allies in the Alexandrian War in 48 B.C.E.⁸² Caesar's decrees reinstating John Hyrkanos, the last of the Hasmoneans, as high priest and ethnarch of the Jews, copies of which were inscribed on bronze tablets in Greek and Latin and placed in the Temple of Jupiter Capitolinus and in the temples at Sidon, Tyre, and Ashkelon, attest to

the central political and commercial place Ashkelon held as the leading Hellenistic polis in the southern Levant.⁸³ In the aftermath of Actium, Augustus confirmed Ashkelon's independence, assigning most of the important cities of the coastal plain—Gaza, Anthedon, Joppa, and Straton's Tower—to Herod's kingdom, with the exception of Ashkelon.⁸⁴ Augustus may have been concerned with preserving the independence of Palestine's major seaport (before the construction of Caesarea). Herod, of course, embellished the city with significant buildings, although it lay outside his kingdom, and it remained independent throughout the first century C.E.⁸⁵ By the mid first century C.E., Pomponius Mela described the city as "huge and very well fortified."⁸⁶ The overall picture that emerges of Early Roman Ashkelon is that of a flourishing seaport, a major regional center, and a recipient of extensive benefaction.⁸⁷

As we have seen, the basilica cannot be associated specifically with Josephus' testimony concerning Herod's benefactions, and his description of "περίστυλα" does not accord particularly well with the plan of the building. No evidence, therefore, explicitly links the structure to Herod. A building project of such scale, however, involving the wholesale reorganization of the plan of this section of the city and a systematic development of a forum, points to something beyond the patronage of a single local benefactor. Whether the impetus came from Herod, Roman imperial benefaction, or a wealthy class of local elites cannot be known, but the rapid transformation of the urban fabric of Ashkelon is a striking example of the impact of the coming of Rome on a Hellenistic polis of the southern Levant.

The form of the building, a basilical structure with a section of tiered seating at the apsidal end, which functioned as the bouleuterion of the city, is archi-

⁷⁹ This new east–west street can be identified with the southern branch of the decumanus visible in the Madaba map (Avi-Yonah 1954, 94).

⁸⁰ Joseph., *AJ* 14.10.

⁸¹ Whether Kleopatra sought refuge in Ashkelon in 49 B.C.E. is disputed. The city began minting tetradrachms with the portrait of Kleopatra on the obverse in 50/49. For the numismatic evidence, see Gitler and Master 2010.

⁸² Joseph., *AJ* 14.128, 139; *BJ* 1.187.

⁸³ Joseph., *AJ* 14.190–216.

⁸⁴ Joseph., *AJ* 15.217; *BJ* 1.396.

⁸⁵ Joseph., *BJ* 1.422; Plin., *HN* 5.68: "oppidum Ascalo liberum." Pliny's description dates to after the first Jewish revolt and points to the still-privileged position Ashkelon held under the Roman senatorial governors.

⁸⁶ Pomponius Mela 1.64.1: "ceterum in Palaestina est ingens et munita admodum Gaza . . . est non minor Ascalon." It was also a large enough city to furnish enough recruits for its own cohort in the Roman army, the *cohors I Ascalonitanorum*, from 18 C.E. (*CIL* 9 3664).

⁸⁷ Evidence for the Early Roman period elsewhere on the site is elusive, mostly because these levels are heavily disturbed by later building (Stager et al. 2008b, 216–17).

tecturally significant. It is one of the earliest basilical structures in the Levant and a remarkable blend of a Roman building type and Hellenistic bouleteria.⁸⁸ In general, it resembles the kind of elongated plan of basilicas in Asia Minor, which were heavily influenced by the architecture of the Hellenistic stoa.⁸⁹ The closest parallel to the basilica of Ashkelon is the basilica at Samaria-Sebaste, which also seems to have served as the bouleterion of that city.⁹⁰ The basilica at Samaria was located on the shorter east side of a large rectangular forum complex measuring 72.5 x 128.0 m. The building itself measures 72.5 x 32.6 m with an interior colonnade of 4 x 16 columns. The northern end of the basilica contained an apsidal area of concentric seating similar to that at Ashkelon. However, the phasing of the basilica is difficult. The original excavators identified two phases: In the first, Herodian phase the forum complex and basilica were laid out. In this phase, the north colonnade of the forum extended all the way to the east, running above the north wall of the basilica, and the area of tiered seating was rather small. In the second phase, when the forum and basilica lay in ruins, the northern end was enlarged, pushing the north wall of the basilica back to the northern edge of the forum terrace and creating a deeper apse, circumscribing the center of the seating area with a massive foundation of masonry. This expanded the seating capacity of the structure; at the same time, the columns in the interior were replaced, along with some of the bases, and the apse displaced all the columns north of the 12th. Pilasters were placed where the 14th and 15th columns originally stood, and the orchestra could be entered laterally from the two side aisles, creating a true *aditus maximus*. The excavators associated this phase with the promo-

tion of Samaria to the status of a *colonia* by Septimius Severus, when much of the site was reconstructed and embellished, and the stylistic features of the capitals confirm this date.⁹¹ A joint expedition subsequently excavated the site from 1931 to 1935 and conducted limited exploration in the area of the forum. Their final report revised the date of the original construction of the basilica and the forum to the Severan period, with subsequent alterations in late antiquity.⁹² They did not systematically counter the reconstruction of the original excavators, and Herodian and Severan dates are variously reported for these buildings in current scholarship.⁹³ If the phasing of the Harvard team is correct, the progression of the basilica at Samaria from a relatively typical basilical plan in the late first century B.C.E., which also accommodated the boule of the city, to a reconstructed and much enlarged bouleterion in the Severan period closely mirrors the transformation of the phase 6 basilica complex of Ashkelon in the Severan period.

THE SEVERAN BOULEUTERION/ODEUM

The plan of the Early Roman basilica was substantially altered and enlarged in the Severan period, when the apsidal southern end was thoroughly redesigned and monumentalized into a much larger space, converting it into the architectural form of an odeum (fig. 16). We speak of a conversion rather than a total leveling and rebuilding of the architecture because the phase 5 building so clearly respects the main apse of the Early Roman basilica, and the overall dimensions and plan of the building were dependent on and constrained by the earlier architecture in many respects. For example, the *scaena* wall (W10) of the phase 5 odeum is constructed precisely between the outer walls of the basilica hall; the *versurae* are built in the space between the inner and outer walls of the earlier colonnade; and the orchestra wall was built precisely between the inner walls of the flanking rooms of the basilica. In addition, the hall of the Early Roman basilica appears to have been reused and adapted to the needs of the Severan building, with completely new architectural members put in place. These architectural fragments and sculpted pilasters, found in quantity

⁸⁸On the origins of the basilica, see Welch 2003. For the form and function of basilicas and their adoption in the Roman East in general, see Ohr 1975; Nünnerich-Asmus 1994. The civil basilica at Aphrodisias also dates to the first century C.E. (Stinson 2008). For an overview of the introduction of the basilica into Greece and Asia Minor, see Cavalier et al. 2012.

⁸⁹For the date and form of the civil basilica at Aphrodisias and a discussion of the basilica types of Asia Minor, see Stinson 2008.

⁹⁰For the most recent discussion of the basilica and its use as a bouleterion, see Balty 1991, 507–9. Garstang (1924, 29) also drew parallels between the basilica at Samaria and the bouleterion at Ashkelon, noting that “the building at Samaria, though on a small scale, is in fact very similar in its leading features to our own.”

⁹¹Reisner et al. 1924, 211–19, pls. 47–51, plan 12.

⁹²Crowfoot et al. 1942, 35–6, 55–7, plan 1.

⁹³E.g., Roller 1998, 209–13 (Herodian); Netzer and Laureys-Chachy 2006, 81 (Severan); Magness 2012, 184 (Herodian).

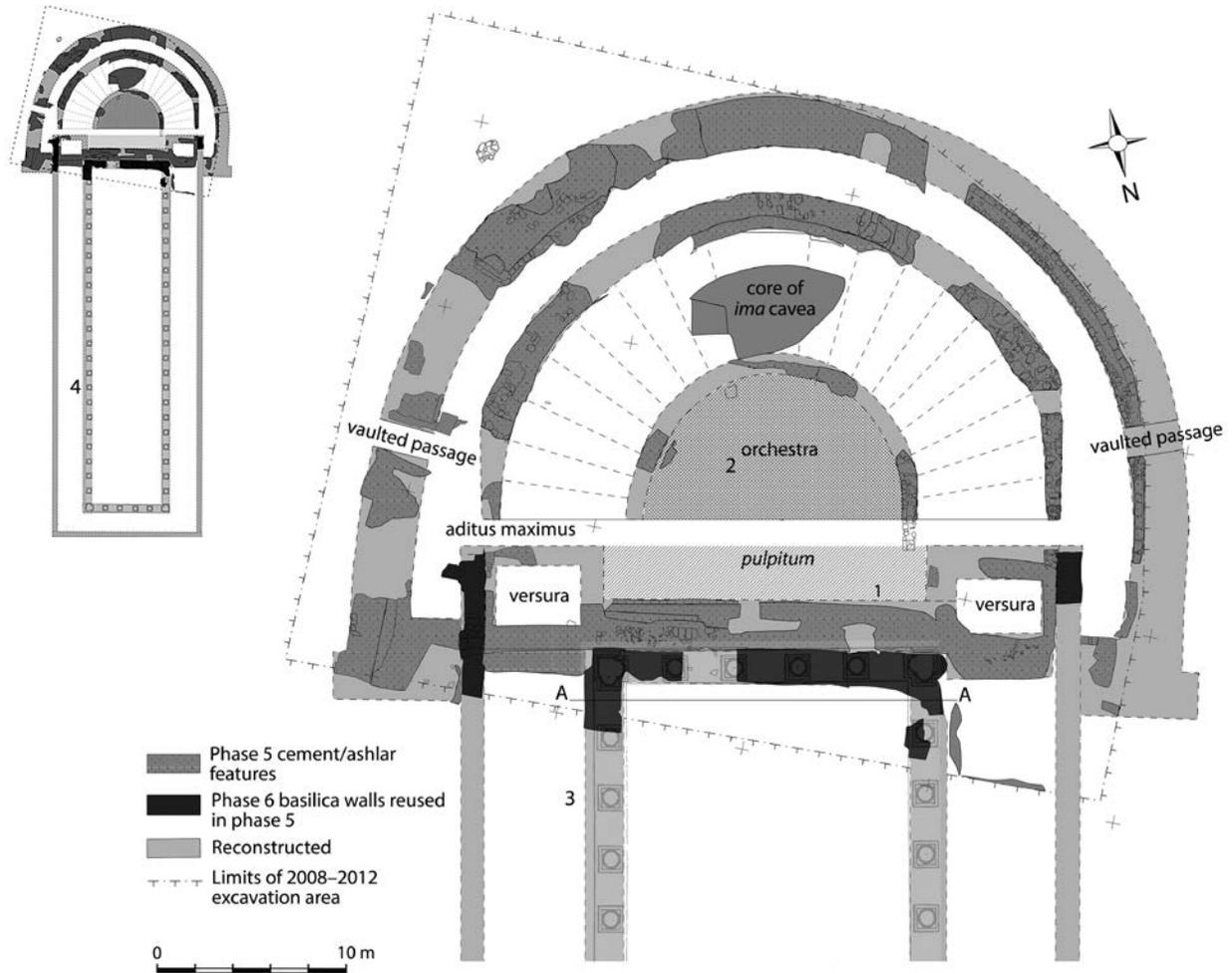


FIG. 16. The Severan bouleuterion/odeum and basilica (phase 5), showing the restored plan at top left and detail of area excavated from 2008–2012 at right (drawing by S. Matskevich). Numbers 1–4 mark the findspots for appx. 3, cat. nos. 1–4.

during the excavations of the PEF and in the current phase of excavations, can therefore be assigned to the Severan redesign of this structure. For the sake of clarity, the southern end of this phase is referred to here as the bouleuterion/odeum to distinguish it from the earlier phase, though it should be kept in mind that the basilical hall was also redesigned and still in use.

The renovation and expansion of the apsidal end of the Early Roman basilica/bouleuterion complex into the architectural form of an odeum, which almost certainly continued to serve as the city's bouleuterion, is a relatively natural progression. Buildings attested as bouleuteria in the Hellenistic and Roman world often also served various other purposes in addition to serving as the meeting place of the boule. They functioned as lecture halls and venues for musical performances

and sometimes contained a stage for theatrical productions.⁹⁴ Odea, in turn, served a variety of civic functions beyond their usual association with musical performances. As the architectural form of the odeum became more common in the second century C.E. and proliferated throughout the empire (and as populations of many of the cities of the east rose), odea frequently replaced older bouleuteria, which were converted into larger facilities that could accommodate more people and provide more flexible, multiuse

⁹⁴Lecture hall: *Ars Rhetorica* 27.E 354, 542–43; *Lib., Or.* 1.72, 87, 104. Musical performances: McDonald 1943, 63. Stages and theater: McDonald 1943, 210–14 (Messene and Miletus). On the use of odea, see also Kolb 1981, 88 n. 7.

structures.⁹⁵ Indeed, as Meinel has shown, the architectural form of the “vollentwickelten römischen Odeion” grew out of the prototype of Hellenistic roofed bouleuteria combined with Roman theater design.⁹⁶ Accordingly, the usage of the terms “bouleuterion” and “odeum” in the literary and epigraphic sources is frequently imprecise, giving rise to a vexing situation for scholars attempting to fit these structures to strict typologies. When there is no textual evidence to match with the archaeological remains, there has been considerable latitude in the terminology. However, even in cases where we have such attestations, the “dual use” of these structures seems to have been widespread, and the issue is best resolved by not stressing strict divisions between these two terms and uses.⁹⁷

That buildings of the form traditionally called odea served also as the meeting place of the boule is attested fairly widely. Thus, the small theater or odeum at Kanatha in the Decapolis is referred to as “τοῦ θεατροειδοῦς ὠδείου” (the theater-like odeum) in a donation inscription found in the building, but further epigraphic evidence indicates that it also was the meeting place of the boule, and the inscription reveals that it was in fact the *proedros* of the boule who contributed the funds.⁹⁸ Likewise at Gerasa, the smaller north theater is called an odeum in a dedicatory inscription on the *valva regia* of the structure from 165/6 C.E.,⁹⁹ but seat inscriptions designating places for members of each phyle of the city almost certainly demonstrate that the odeum was also the meeting place of the boule.¹⁰⁰ Very similar inscriptions designating space by phyle have also been recovered in the theater at Neapolis (Shechem/Nablus).¹⁰¹ In the absence of epi-

graphic evidence, odea have often been identified as bouleuteria on the basis of their location in the city.¹⁰²

Bouleuteria/odea of this type are relatively common in the Roman East, but there is considerable variation in their size, plan, method of construction, and decoration, depending on local circumstances, available building materials, and the size and importance of the community. In the later second and early third centuries, odea and bouleuteria of this type and of similar dimensions to the building at Ashkelon proliferated widely in Asia Minor and the east. These belong to the category referred to as “monuments non-inscrits” by Balty to distinguish them from earlier bouleuteria regularly inscribed by a rectangular wall.¹⁰³ Mazor and Najjar, in their recent publication of the odeum at Beth Shean (ancient Nysa-Scythopolis), distinguish between “monumental” and “small” odea in Syria-Palestine. To the former belong examples such as the odea at Philadelphia, Gerasa, and Philippopolis and to the latter the odea at Petra, Kanatha, Pella, and Nysa-Scythopolis.¹⁰⁴ The difference lies primarily in size and dimension, as well as the level of architectural decoration and embellishment. This distinction is useful, although the precise dimensions and plan of each of these buildings in actuality vary considerably depending on where they are situated in the urban plan. The bouleuterion/odeum at Ashkelon belongs to the category of larger, more elaborately decorated odea of Syria-Palestine.

⁹⁵ Meinel (1980) is the standard work on the use and function of odea. See also Bieber (1961, 220–22) on theaters in general and a brief treatment of odea. For Syria-Palestine, see Segal 1995. For a comprehensive treatment of the Roman world, see Sear 2006.

⁹⁶ Meinel 1980, 246–314.

⁹⁷ Architectural form is not a basis by which to distinguish odea and bouleuteria. Kockel (1995, 35) considers the distinction unhelpful and highlights the fact that Vitruvius (7.5.5) does not distinguish between small theaters and political meeting places. For the problem of distinguishing odea and bouleuteria, see Balty 1991; Gros 1996, 308–16; Sear 2006, 38–42.

⁹⁸ IGRR 3 1235; cf. Frezouls 1961, 84; Freyberger 2004, 24. For the wider context, see Bowsher 1992, 277.

⁹⁹ Clark et al. 1986, 229; Augusta-Boularot et al. 2004, 481–569.

¹⁰⁰ Retzleff and Mjely 2004, 37–48.

¹⁰¹ Segal 1995, 78–80.

¹⁰² E.g., Balty 1991; Sear 2006, 40–2. Balty considers the location of a small theater/odeum the primary criterion for determining whether a monument with no epigraphic evidence served as a bouleuterion. For Balty, proximity to the agora and other civic buildings is a *sine qua non* for a bouleuterion. Fossel (1967) identified the so-called odeum at Ephesos as a bouleuterion on this basis, and Bier (2008, 161) sees the location on the central north–south axis of the north agora as evidence that the monument at Aphrodisias was the city’s bouleuterion. Bier also points to the sculptural program as a criterion but notes that the sculptural program may have been deliberately ambiguous. At Aphrodisias, the scaenae frons of the bouleuterion carried representations of Zeus and also the Muses and Apollo. A similar ensemble is present in the theater of Aphrodisias, where statues of Apollo and the Muses alongside Demos and Nikai decorated the scaenae frons (Erim and Smith 1991, 71–9). Cf. McDonald (1943, 279–81) on deities worshiped in political meeting places and Gneisz (1990, 206–8) on the duality of Apollo in particular.

¹⁰³ Balty 1991, 511–51. The earliest known building of this type is the bouleuterion at Ephesos, which was first constructed in the Trajanic period (Bier 1999, 16–19; 2011, 81).

¹⁰⁴ Mazor and Najjar 2007, 219.

While the design of Roman theaters and bouleuteria/odea in Palestine and Arabia had many affinities with those of Asia Minor, in general they more strictly follow the design principles of western theaters. Odea and small theaters built in the Roman period in Greece and Asia Minor often held on more tenaciously to Hellenistic traditions, maintaining in particular certain aspects of the design of bouleuteria, such as rectangular closing walls and a *koilon* or *cavea* exceeding a semicircle.¹⁰⁵ In Palestine and Arabia, by contrast, the *cavea* generally does not exceed a semicircle; the *analemmata* are parallel to the stage; there are covered *parodoi*; and the stage building is rectangular.¹⁰⁶ The basic dimensions and data of the bouleuterion/odeum, along with similar monuments, are summarized in table 1. The following sections investigate the individual architectural components of the building in detail.

The Cavea

The bouleuterion/odeum was built on a relatively flat area of the site, sloping with a gentle (but structurally insignificant) upward grade toward the ramparts, and the decision to enlarge the building into a theatrical structure meant that the new building required substantial structural support. The Severan building reused the walls of the earlier basilica/bouleuterion to some degree for buttressing. The size of the *cavea* and construction of the wall account for these limitations, but the dimensions of the structure were probably constrained more by the decision to reuse the colonnade of the basilica than a desire to use the apsidal end of the basilica as support for the foundations of the *cavea*.

The Walls. Three concentric apsidal walls supported the *cavea*, the first inscribing the area of the orchestra, the second providing support for the *ima cavea* and the lower portion of the *summa cavea*, and the third functioning as the closing wall of the structure as well as supporting the upper portion of the seating and the superstructure.¹⁰⁷ The closing wall of the building (W5) is massive, measuring 2.74 m in width and preserved to a maximum height of 3.25 m. It is constructed of kurkar sandstone ashlar blocks set in a shelly lime concrete. The construction of this largest wall is typi-

cal of all the phase 5 odeum walls: large kurkar ashlar averaging 0.28 x 0.27 x 0.52 m arranged in a somewhat irregular header-stretcher pattern and leveled with a fill of fieldstones and unworked pieces of kurkar between courses. The walls were then encased by poured concrete held in place by wooden forms. This method of construction is evident in several sections where traces of the original wooden framing for the construction of the walls are preserved. This ashlar/concrete construction technique is quite similar to the method of construction of the walls of the odeum at Corinth.¹⁰⁸

The second of these three concentric walls (W15) is considerably narrower, averaging 0.79 m in width. In the central curve on the interior face of the second wall of the *cavea*, an additional wall 0.41 m in width was added (W33), founded less deeply than Wall W15 but similar in construction, widening this wall to a total of 1.20 m. Its width is exactly the distance between the second *cavea* wall and the southern face of the phase 6 basilica apsidal wall, but its precise function is difficult to determine. It is possible that the basilica wall stood higher at the time of the construction and was robbed out later and that originally this addition spanned this distance and served to retain the core of the *ima cavea*.

As the second wall approaches the *analemmata*, it narrows considerably before straightening almost completely and terminating. These narrower sections abut the interior of the north-south walls of the phase 6 side chambers, which would have provided additional support. The *cavea* walls on either side terminate in a good edge, curving inward slightly and suggesting the beginning of the spring of a vault. The walls of the *analemmata* that would have formed the south wall of the *aditus maximus* are not preserved.

Finally, the orchestra wall, measuring 0.89 m in width, circumscribes an area 13.35 m in diameter before meeting and directly abutting the inner corners of the basilica side chambers. The orchestra wall, which was better preserved in one section of the British excavations, originally stood 1.5–2.0 m above the orchestra floor.

Substructure and Construction. As with most buildings of this type, the lack of a natural slope meant that the slope of the *cavea* was entirely artificial. The *ima cavea* was supported by solid fill, while the *summa cavea* was supported by a series of radial walls and vaults. Much of the area between the second and third apsidal walls was heavily reused and robbed in

¹⁰⁵ Meinel 1980, 225–45. Odea of this type can be found at Argos, Epidauros, Bouthrotos, Nikopolis at Istria, Taormina, Anemourion, Messene, Termessos at Knidos, Cretopolis in Pisidia, Kos, and Rhodes.

¹⁰⁶ See Sear 2006, 105–13.

¹⁰⁷ It may have been designed to carry the weight of the trusses of the main beams of the roof.

¹⁰⁸ Broneer 1932, 17–19, figs. 11–13.

TABLE 1. Summary of data for the bouleuterion/odeum at Ashkelon and other regional bouleuteria and odea.

	Date (C.E.)	Dimensions (m)	Estimated Seating Capacity	Orchestra Diam. (m)	Aditus Maximus (width. [m])	Pulpitum (m)	Scaena, Incl. Versurae (m)	Reference(s)
Ashkelon ^a	Severan	44.60 x 29.58	1,100–1,400	13.35	1.60	20.8 x ca. 3	30.20 x 2.81	–
Nysa-Scythopolis ^b	first half of 2nd c.	30.75 x 23.70	560–630	9.2	4.2	16.7 x 3 x 1.2	30.75 x 2	Mazor and Najjar 2007, 193
Philippopolis ^a	244–249	42.2 x 34.35	1,500–1,900	11	4	20.2 x 4.5 x 5.4	37.3 x 2	Segal 1995; Sear 2006
Gerasa (North Theater) ^b	165/6	44 (width.)	2,200–2,800	12.65	2.65	30.20 x 4.20 x 5.25	42 x 2.8	Sear 2006, 312
Philadelphia (Amman) ^a	188/9	38 (width.)	1,250–1,550	10.75	4	22 x 3.6	38	Sear 2006, 315–16
Kanatha ^a	second half of 2nd c.	37 x ca. 25	800	12.8	2.87	19.7 x 3.7	(not preserved) x 2.95	Mazor and Najjar 2007, 214–15
Pella ^a	late 1st/early 2nd c.	38.5 x 31.2	1,000	ca. 11.25	2.8	23 x 2.3	38.5 x 2.2	Sear 2006, 313
Ephesos ^b	second half of 2nd c. (with earlier Trajanic or Flavian phase)	47.5 x 32	1,800–2,200	9.20	2.6	30 x 4	42 x 1–2	Bier 2011

^a Roof unknown.^b Roof known.

the Islamic period, effacing much of the original substructure of the bouleuterion/odeum. A section of what appears to be a stoutly constructed radial wall (W103) was discovered, and, although cut by later Islamic pitting, it is clearly bonded to the rear wall of the cavea and would likely have spanned the gap between the second and third apsidal walls of the cavea. This radial wall is deeply founded and would be suitable to support the weight of the cavea. A second section of an even thicker radial wall (W14) measuring approximately 2 m wide is also evident to the north of this wall, but it, too, was heavily robbed in the Islamic period. The original vaulting is more poorly preserved. Garstang did note the discovery of “vaults” associated with the third apsidal wall during his excavations, and an unpublished photograph from his excavations is labeled in this way, but the details are hard to discern.¹⁰⁹ Further photographs show sections of the vault of the aditus maximus, and the current excavations have revealed a vaulted passage leading from the rear of the odeum into an ambulatory between the second and third apsidal walls (discussed later in this article).

The *ima* cavea rested on a solid core of masonry built on top of a series of construction fills. These layers comprise a thick fill overlaid by a thin layer of crushed and compacted kurkar sandstone.¹¹⁰ The date of the ceramic material recovered from these fills suggests that they were original construction deposits used to fill in the open portions of the phase 6 basilica and to level and solidify the area before filling it in with the core to support the seating. Part of this core remains, a large section of a semicircular platform composed of small squared ashlar blocks set in gray mortar and concrete built against the north face of the foundations of the phase 6 basilica’s apsidal wall (fig. 17).¹¹¹ This core of masonry was detected only in the central portion of the *ima* cavea, and it is not clear whether it originally spanned the entire area between the first two apsidal walls or whether the walls of side chambers of the phase 6 building (filled with leveling deposits) served to support this part of the cavea.

Seating. The British excavations found several rows of seats of the cavea extending from the orchestra

wall, but nothing of these remains today, and no other preserved sections of seating have been identified in the course of excavation. The seats and the standing portion of the orchestra were apparently removed to expose earlier phases beneath. A photograph shows the standing portion of these seats, which appears to begin at the top of a high orchestra wall approximately 1.5–2.0 m above the level of the orchestra floor (online fig. 3). In our excavations, we have found no sections of the orchestra wall preserved to this height, but much of this wall was robbed and reused as the foundations for a late, straightened wall of a small Fatimid structure built on the ruins of the *ima* cavea.

The lack of a single preserved seat presents some difficulty for reconstructing the plan of the cavea, its capacity, the position of the diazoma, and the method of dividing it into *cunei*. Nevertheless, some basic details of the seating can be determined on the basis of the proportions and similar examples. The distance from the back of the orchestra wall to the back of the closing wall measures 14 m. Based on the average seat dimensions of Levantine theaters,¹¹² this would accommodate approximately 16–20 rows of seating and a capacity of 1,100–1,400.¹¹³ In terms of capacity, it puts the bouleuterion on the order of cities like Philipopolis and just below major cities of Asia Minor, such as Aphrodisias and Ephesos. While we do not have any information for the composition of the boule at Ashkelon, it is clear that this would have far exceeded the number of its members.¹¹⁴ The additional space accordingly would accommodate larger numbers for the other uses of this multipurpose structure.

¹¹² Sear 2006, 31, table 3.4.

¹¹³ The seating capacity of theaters and odea has been estimated in different ways. Moretti (1954, 148–58) based his calculations on the number of rows of seats, but as Sear (2006, 26) has shown this method is deceptive as it takes no account of the geometry of the cavea. Forni (1968) developed a formula based on the geometry of the cavea, subtracting the area not available for seating and assuming an area of three people per 1 m². Sear (2006, 26) has shown that this formula underestimates the capacity of the theater. The method proposed by Sear is certainly more accurate, but because of the poor preservation of the cavea and the fact that we lack reliable information about the size of the seats, the number of *cunei*, or how much of the cavea may have been unavailable for seating, we must apply a much rougher means of estimation.

¹¹⁴ E.g., the boule of Ephesos had 450 members at the time of C. Vibius Salutaris’ endowment in the reign of Trajan (*IvE* 1a 27, lines 220–26).

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Garstang 1924, 32: “the main outer curve (with floors, steps and vaults).”

¹¹⁰ Layers 47.45.L104 and 47.45.L118.

¹¹¹ The core of the theater at Samaria-Sebaste was constructed in a similar manner—a “solid mass of masonry which was composed of old material piled up against the early fortifications” serving as the support of the cavea (Crowfoot et al. 1942, 58).



FIG. 17. Core supporting the *ima* cavea of the bouleuterion/odeum (view to the northeast).

The Parodoi and Entrances

The orchestra of the bouleuterion/odeum was accessible through two covered passageways, the *parodoi* or *aditus maximi*, which led from the ambulatory between the second and third walls of the cavea into the orchestra. Because of later robbing and reworking of these areas, these passageways are not well preserved, but the basic details can be outlined. On the eastern side of the bouleuterion/odeum, the second wall of the cavea narrows considerably as it approaches the *analemma* and lines up directly with the southeastern corner of the *versura* wall. The distance between these two walls is 1.6 m at its narrowest part, and there is a slight springing visible at the top of the walls, which would have formed vaults. This passage is mirrored on the western side in the area excavated by the PEF, where better-preserved vaulting is visible (online figs. 4, 5). It is unclear whether the *aditus* continued straight through to the exterior of the building, as in most theaters and odea, or whether one turned to the left or right between the second and third walls to exit, as in the east *aditus* of the north theater at Gerasa or the *aditus* of the odeum at Philippopolis. There is no trace of the continuation of the eastern *aditus* through

the closing wall of the odeum, where all this architecture is severed by the cut of a massive Islamic sump pit, and the PEF plan illustrates a solid wall on the western side.¹¹⁵ Likewise, the continuation of this passageway past the orchestra wall into the orchestra is not preserved. Here, large Islamic-period robbing trenches have removed all the stone from the *analemma* wall. Two vaulted passages opened to the exterior of the building roughly one-third of the way along the exterior wall of the cavea. One of these was uncovered in the current excavations, with the well-preserved spring of the arch (F88; fig. 18),¹¹⁶ and the PEF plan shows a complementary break in the exterior wall, precisely where the staircase of the open-air museum was constructed and probably visible in one of the PEF photographs (see online fig. 4).

¹¹⁵ The standing wall in Garstang's excavation area was substantially altered by the construction of his open-air museum and is not a reliable guide.

¹¹⁶ A deeply founded Islamic wall was sunk directly into the center of this former passageway, where the empty space offered a convenient place for laying deep foundations.



FIG. 18. Eastern entrance to the orchestra of the bouleuterion/odeum (view to the south).

Revetment

The *opus caementicium* sections of the bouleuterion/odeum were originally revetted with marble and other decorative stones, as well as molded and painted plaster. None of this revetment remains in situ, but extensive traces of this decoration were recovered throughout the excavation area, providing a broad sense of the overall effect of the decoration of the structure. A wide variety of marble, porphyry, and other stones were used to adorn the walls of the building, but none of these fragments can be placed with any certainty. Many of the interior walls were faced with molded plaster, fragments of which were recovered in the fills related to the dismantling of the bouleuterion/odeum sometime in the late fifth to seventh centuries C.E. (discussed later in this article). Moldings include bead-and-reel and egg-and-dart patterns and highlight the use of plaster painted light yellow, red, black, and green, giving the illusion of marble revetment. Many walls were faced with plaster that was scored and finished with a beveled edge in imitation of fine ashlar masonry (fig. 19). The overall effect was a dramatic polychromy, and it is clear that the expense put into the building was considerable.

The Orchestra

It is apparent from the extant photographs of the PEF excavations that a substantial portion of the orchestra floor was discovered intact and in situ. Photographs of these excavations show a marble *opus sectile* paving that clearly belongs to this phase (fig. 20, top). In the PEF photographs, one of the Nike pilasters is clearly lying on this floor, and the Nike/Atlas pilaster is visible just to the north, with the base of the pilaster resting at floor level and its side leaning on the scaena wall. Assuming that this floor belonged to the Byzantine period, the British excavations continued through the orchestra floor of the bouleuterion/odeum to locate remains of the earlier building and in the process dismantled the large Islamic well in the center of the orchestra until reaching the east–west cross wall of the phase 6 basilica.

Although almost all of the orchestra floor was disturbed by the earlier excavations and ancient activity, a small portion was located still intact on the eastern side of the orchestra, reaching the orchestra wall, with one small fragment of the marble paving and the negative of several others. This small portion of *opus sectile*, which represents the same floor shown in figure 20



FIG. 19. Wall plaster fragments from the interior of the bouleuterion/odeum.

(top), was composed of white marble. Fragments of *opus sectile* pieces were found in other colors (green, red),¹¹⁷ but these were found in the backfill of the PEF excavations and cannot be securely associated with the orchestra floor from this phase. From this small fragment and the images preserved in the PEF archive, it is clear the *opus sectile* paving of the orchestra floor included a complex pattern based on a square module, with larger and smaller square sections of pavement inscribed by triangles (see fig. 20, middle).¹¹⁸

In addition to informing us of the original level of the orchestra floor, this fragment provides valuable insight into the construction methods of the structure. A full profile of the floor and its bedding is preserved, including tiles in a mortar base, supported by a cobble subfloor, a thin layer of mortar set into a 0.10 m layer of soft clay laid on a thick bricky fill (see fig. 20, bottom).¹¹⁹ Between the floor and the face of the first wall of the cavea, there is a thin channel that points to the original presence of a decorative facing against the orchestra wall, and here a single 0.15 m thick fragment of marble was found standing in situ. The presence of vertical tiles on the eastern edge of the preserved portion of the orchestra floor suggests that there may have been a channel between the facing of the wall and the floor of the orchestra. This does not necessarily mean that the structure was unroofed and that this channel served as drainage for rainwater; rather, it is more likely that a channel of this size was used to draw water away from the floor during cleaning.¹²⁰

Roofing

Locating secure evidence for the roofing systems and restoring the plan of the beams is a notorious problem for *theatra tecta*. Although most buildings of this type generally are assumed to have been roofed, the evidence for their actual roofing is often thin and indirect, and accordingly such reconstructions must remain hypothetical.¹²¹ In instances where no evidence



FIG. 20. The orchestra floor: *top*, orchestra, *opus sectile* floor (PEF G337, “Marble floor below the Peace statue from S. 1920”; courtesy Palestine Exploration Fund, London); *middle*, *opus sectile* pavement with line drawing overlaid (PEF G302, “Marble pavement of Chorus with ‘Peace’ and well 1921”; courtesy Palestine Exploration Fund, London); *bottom*, section of the orchestra floor (view to the northeast).

¹¹⁷ Garstang (1921a, 15) noted that the floor was “two colors” but did not specify further.

¹¹⁸ For a discussion of the patterning of *opus sectile* pavements, see Dunbabin 1999, 254–61.

¹¹⁹ For descriptions of the construction of floors, see Plin., *HN* 36.61–4; Vitruvius, *De arch.* 7.1; Blake 1930, 17–20.

¹²⁰ See Meinel (1980, 123) for comparanda for such channels in roofed odea.

¹²¹ For an overall account of the construction techniques of such roofs, see Courtenay 1993, 182–205. On the development and reconstruction of roofed theaters, see Izenour 1992 (with

many fine illustrations). For the roofing systems of Roman odea in particular, see Meinel 1980.

for roofing exists, we cannot rule out the possibility that these structures were open or covered by large *vela*. The main criteria suggested in the absence of secure textual or archaeological evidence are usually the presence of large pieces of carbonized wood, quantities of roof tiles and nails, and iron bands or ties for joining the main trusses; a lack of interior drainage; and, finally, the thickness of the outer walls of the *cavea* and stage building. Additional structural details occasionally provide evidence for particular roofing systems.¹²² In the case of the bouleuterion/odeum at Ashkelon, the extent of later robbing and disturbance has left little evidence for the roof of the building. However, numerous roof tiles were found in one large leveling fill associated with the earliest dismantling of the structure in the Byzantine period, along with many nails and tacks as well as debris and decorative elements associated with the odeum (discussed in more detail later in this article). However, no large fragments of carbonized wood have been detected, and the orchestra floor is too fragmentary to supply evidence for drainage. The best evidence for the existence of a roof in this phase is perhaps found in the sheer thickness of the foundations of the outer walls, both the rear curved closing wall and the *scaenae frons* (stage building) wall with which it is bonded. While they lack clear indicators such as exterior buttressing, the massive dimensions of these walls and their thickness is more than sufficient for the support of the *cavea* and the architecture of the *scaenae frons*, pointing to the additional function of these walls for carrying the weight of the roof. In addition, the corners of the building terminate in large piers suitable for supporting the weight of the roof. Lastly, Bier has suggested that the similarity in width of larger odea and bouleuteria of this type, which reach a maximum width of approximately 48 m, corresponds to the limits of roofing technology.¹²³ Overall, the evidence suggests that the bouleuterion/odeum was almost certainly roofed, but the roofing system cannot be reconstructed with any precision.

¹²² E.g., at Aphrodisias the rear wall of the bouleuterion contains eight large buttresses corresponding to the engaged piers of the *scaenae frons* wall that would have supported the large timber trusses spanning the building (Bier 2008, 154–56). At Sagalassos, the rear wall of the odeum is particularly well preserved, and beam holes for the roofing system are still in evidence (Ferrero 1969, 40; Balty 1991, 523–24; Sear 2006, 375).

¹²³ Bier 2008, 157.

The Scene Building and the Scaenae Frons

The construction of the *scaena* wall was one of the most important features of the remodeling of the earlier basilica complex. A massive ashlar and concrete wall 30.20 m long x 2.72 m wide was built against the foundations of the basilica, and this wall served as the foundations for the bouleuterion/odeum's *scaenae frons*.¹²⁴

Construction. The *scaena* wall was founded directly on top of the large Hellenistic walls, incorporating them into its construction. It currently stands 1.59 m high. Approximately 0.59 m up the northern side of the wall there is a transition between the better-faced section and the rougher foundation courses. The wall, including the piers for the *versurae*, corresponds exactly to the outer walls of the phase 6 basilica colonnade, and the back of the *scaenae frons* wall is constructed precisely at the southern edge of the interior colonnade. The *scaena* wall is the same length as the wall of the phase 6 interior colonnade, and the *versurae* fit in between the outer edges of the phase 6 interior colonnade and the phase 6 exterior walls. It is likely that when the *scaena* wall was constructed, the now-robbled foundations of the colonnade stood at least to the height of the transition between the foundation courses and the better-drafted upper courses of the *scaena* wall. This clear relation is suggestive evidence that the colonnade of the basilica was reused and adapted for the new design of the Severan structure.

The *scaena* wall itself—that is, the space between the two *versurae*—was actually constructed in two distinct sections. The main wall, bonded on either side with the square piers accommodating the *versurae*, measures 1.25 m wide and is founded more deeply than the wall approximately 1.47 m wide built against it. The two-phase construction of the wall to produce an overall width of 2.72 m can probably be explained by the fact that only the rear portion of the wall would have had to carry the bulk of the weight of the superstructure and roof, while the rest of the wall could be less substantially built, supporting only part of the *columnatio* and the back of the *pulpitum*.

¹²⁴ For a recent comparative treatment of the architecture of the *scaenae frons*, see Ramallo Asensio and Röring 2010. See Öztürk (2009) for the architecture of the *scaenae frons* of the theater at Perge.

The Pulpitum. Nothing of the stage itself and none of the foundations supporting the stage or any underground vaulting have been preserved. The *pulpitum*, which would have been made of wood, was 20.8 m wide. Vitruvius (*De arch.* 5.6.2.) recommends not more than 5 Roman feet (1.47 m), and indeed it has been shown that most theaters conform to this elevation. Theaters of the Levant tend to have a stage height that is slightly higher than this, generally 1.45–1.60 m,¹²⁵ and we may surmise that this building conformed to this standard.

The Versurae. The scaenae frons terminated in square versurae or basilicas on either end.¹²⁶ The outer walls of the two adjoining rooms are part of the same construction of the scaenae frons wall, and the north–south walls are bonded to the main east–west wall. The interior rooms are not quite square, measuring 4.7 (east–west) x 3.15 m (north–south) on the eastern versura and 4.78 (east–west) x 3.12 m (north–south) on the western versura, and they would have accommodated staircases for access to a second story and probably to the upper gallery of the attached basilica hall (discussed later in this article). The versurae had been reused as the foundations for a large Byzantine building, and the original flooring had been replaced by a white mosaic, but beneath this surface and its bedding levels clearly lay Roman bedding layers and construction fills. Here, in the western versura, a section of the subfloor makeup was excavated in one of the few areas undisturbed by later activity. This subfloor sequence proved to be almost identical to the layers of bedding below the orchestra floor. The same construction fills have been identified south of the scaena wall, between the interior and exterior walls of the colonnade and reaching the northern side of the scaena wall itself. This is additional evidence suggesting that the colonnade of the basilica was reused in this phase, but further excavation will be needed to establish the precise relation of these fills to the building. Ceramic material recovered from the bedding layers in the east versura included the following diagnostic pieces (fig. 21):

1. From fill 43/12.47.34U128.B9316, an imitation Attic black-slip bowl base (see fig. 21a); a plain unguentarium body, Late Hellenistic; an Eastern

Sigillata A bowl rim, early first century C.E. (see fig. 21b); a stamped amphora handle, first half of the second century B.C.E.; an Eastern Sigillata A outturned rim bowl (see fig. 21c); and an Eastern Sigillata B plate base (see fig. 21d).

2. From fill 43/12.47.34U128.B9268, a discus lamp handle decorated with an acanthus motif, first to second century C.E. (see fig. 21e); a lamp nozzle, first to second century C.E. (see fig. 21f); an Eastern Sigillata A plate base (see fig. 21g); an Eastern Sigillata A bowl rim (see fig. 21h); and a juglet rim (predecessor to Eastern Sigillata A), third to second century B.C.E.
3. From fill 43/12.47.34.U127.B9246, a thin-walled ware rim, first century C.E.
4. From fill 43/12.47.34.U127.B9234, a Cypriot sigillata krater with outward folded rim, Hayes Form 41.1 (Hayes 1991, fig. 19), first half of the second century C.E. or slightly later (see fig. 21i); and an Italian sigillata cup rim (see fig. 21j).

No coins besides two dating to the reign of Antiochus IV (175–164 B.C.E.) were recovered from the sealed construction fills within the western versura.¹²⁷ Overall, the diagnostic material obtained from the construction layers belongs predominately to the first to early second centuries C.E. A single piece of Cypriot sigillata provides a construction date for the building of sometime after the first half of the second century C.E. This terminus post quem allows us to associate the construction of this building with the Severan architectural members and puts the date of the building, or at least its completion, sometime in the Severan age.

The Architecture of the Scaenae Frons. The existence of a *columnatio* that decorated the scaenae frons of the bouleuterion/odeum can be posited on the basis of several architectural fragments and parallels with other buildings of similar scale and adornment from the Severan period. Nothing of the *columnatio* remains in situ, and accordingly any attempt at restoration must remain hypothetical; however, several architectural fragments can be associated with it (fig. 22; appx. 1). Three fragments of architrave and sculpted frieze blocks, as well as a single fragment of a cornice or tympanum, are preserved (see appx. 1, cat. nos. 1–4). These are too

¹²⁵ Sear 2006, 33, table 3.8.

¹²⁶ For the terminology of these rooms as employed by the ancient sources, see Sear 2006, 9. Sear maintains that the term “basilica” has better authority in the ancient testimony. For the sake of clarity, the term “versura” is used here.

¹²⁷ These include MC#63057, Antiochus IV, Ptolemais, 175–164 B.C.E. (Houghton et al. 2008, 92, no. 1479); MC#63059, Antiochus IV, Ptolemais, 175–164 B.C.E. (Houghton et al. 2008, 91, no. 1478).

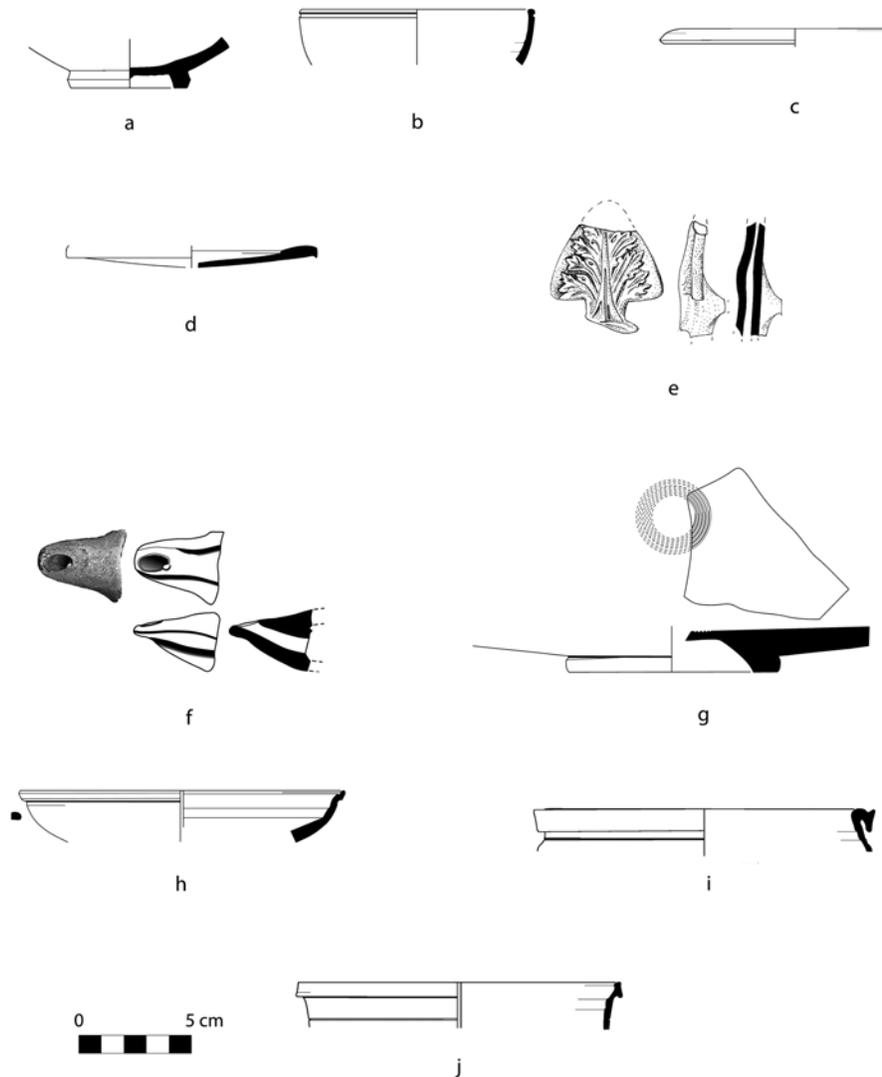


FIG. 21. Diagnostic pottery from the construction fills of the east versura of the bouleuterion/odeum: *a*, imitation Attic black-slip bowl base; *b*, Eastern Sigillata A bowl rim; *c*, Eastern Sigillata A outturned rim bowl; *d*, Eastern Sigillata B plate base; *e*, discus lamp handle decorated with an acanthus motif; *f*, lamp nozzle; *g*, Eastern Sigillata A plate base; *h*, Eastern Sigillata A bowl rim; *i*, Cypriot sigillata krater with outward folded rim; *j*, Italian sigillata cup rim.

small to belong to the second story of the main order of the colonnade of the basilical hall attached to the bouleuterion/odeum. All of these are of proportions more appropriate for the scaenae frons. In addition, several Corinthian capitals of smaller dimensions (an average diameter of 0.51 m) are preserved along with corresponding Attic-Ionic bases and marble column shafts (see appx. 1, cat. nos. 5, 6). These can be associated with one another based on the proportions for the Corinthian order worked out by Wilson Jones and

restored to a column height of approximately 5.3 m.¹²⁸ The fragments of the entablature are too small to be associated with the columns of the first story, but proportionally they would fit the entablature of the second story well, based on the ratios recommended by Vitruvius¹²⁹ and attested by better-preserved *columnationes*.

¹²⁸Wilson Jones 2000, 150–51; see also Wilson Jones 1989.

¹²⁹Vitr., *De Arch.* 5.6.6.



a



b



d



f



c



e



g

FIG. 22. Architectural members possibly belonging to the *columnatio* of the scaenae frons: a, cornice or tympanum block; b, architrave-frieze block; c, architrave-frieze block; d, architrave-frieze block; e, Corinthian capital; f, column base; g, column shaft.

The Severan theater at Sabratha in North Africa, for example, is nearly contemporary and stylistically has a very similar entablature; other examples include scaenarum frontes of similarly sized Severan bouleuteria/odea in Asia Minor and Syria-Palestine.¹³⁰ No column bases, shafts, or capitals can be associated with the second story, but the overall column elevation should measure approximately 3.98 m.

While the elevation of the columns attributed here to the first story of the *columnatio* could conceivably be appropriate for the second story superimposed above the order represented by the large column capitals, shafts, and pedestaled bases (appx. 2), as Fischer suggested,¹³¹ they are somewhat small for the upper story. The reduction would be greater than one-quarter of the lower order and therefore somewhat severe, and the capitals are of a different type stylistically.¹³² In addition, the column shafts of this order were likely a gray-white marble, whereas the shafts of the larger order are brecciated marble (*pavonazzetto*). These factors suggest these orders do not belong together and the smaller capitals, bases, and shafts should be attributed to the first story of the *columnatio* of the scaenae frons; furthermore, the architrave and frieze blocks, cornice block, and smaller capital should be restored to a smaller entablature on the second story. The large capitals, pedestaled bases, and *pavonazzetto* column shafts accordingly belong to the attached basilical hall. When these elements are taken together, a hypothetical elevation of the scaenae frons can be suggested (fig. 23) that accords well with better-preserved examples from odea of similar dimensions from sites such as Ephesos and Aphrodisias. Five openings are restored, *exempli gratia*, in a manner similar to many bouleuteria/odea of Asia Minor and the east: a large central *valva regia* and four smaller *hospitalia*. Hypothetical though these doorways are, they would correspond well to the intercolumniation of the larger order in the colonnade of the basilical hall located behind the scaena wall. The dimensions are such that the columns of the south wall basilica colonnade would fall precisely behind the pairs of columns on the scaenae frons carrying the *ressaults*. It is also clear that the architects

intentionally designed the scaena wall to be the same dimensions as the colonnade of the basilica. Thus, it is highly probable that these spaces communicated with one another, and one could pass from the basilica hall in the northern part of the building through the openings in the stage wall to enter the bouleuterion/odeum.

The Basilica Hall

The renewed phase of excavations conducted only a limited investigation of the area immediately behind the scaena wall. Nevertheless, there is evidence to suggest that the foundations of the basilica were adapted to serve as a monumental hall and approach to the bouleuterion/odeum in the Severan phase of the building: (1) The dimensions of the scaena wall were clearly planned to respect and match the length of the foundations for the phase 6 colonnade, and these spaces likely communicated with one another. (2) The *versurae* of the bouleuterion/odeum fit precisely between the interior colonnade wall and the exterior wall of the basilica, suggesting they were intended to replace the function of the square side rooms of the phase 6 basilica. The *versurae* would contain a stairwell that would allow access to a second-story gallery, just as the phase 6 side chambers had. (3) Subfloor bedding layers of identical construction to those in the *versurae* and below the *opus sectile* orchestra floor were found across large areas of the basilica, and, though disturbed, they appear to have originally reached the north side of the scaena wall. (4) Numerous architectural fragments belonging to the basilica colonnade date to the Severan period and were found in large numbers in the area directly behind the scaena wall, within the limits of the colonnade foundations (online fig. 6). It is now clear that the architectural fragments belong to the same building phase as the bouleuterion/odeum, based on the stylistic criteria of the capitals and on the context pottery from the building itself.

These pieces are proportionally too large and too numerous to be used in the scaenae frons, and elsewhere heart-shaped columns are used exclusively as corner columns in colonnaded structures and would not have been used on the scaenae frons itself.¹³³ The size and proportion of the architectural fragments

¹³⁰ Sabratha: Caputo 1959, esp. pl. 65. For Asia Minor, compare the scaenae frons at Aphrodisias (Bier 2008).

¹³¹ Fischer 1995, 123–27, fig. 25.

¹³² These belong to Type IIIDc in Fischer's typology. See Fischer (1995, 129) for further discussion of parallels for these types of capitals.

¹³³ Elsewhere in the region, they are predominantly used in the corners of basilical structures. E.g., in the Caesareum at Nysa-Scythopolis (Mazor and Najjar 2007) or the basilica at Dor (Stern and Sharon 1992, 128–31). For heart-shaped columns in general, see Büsing 1970; Coulton 1976, 136–37.

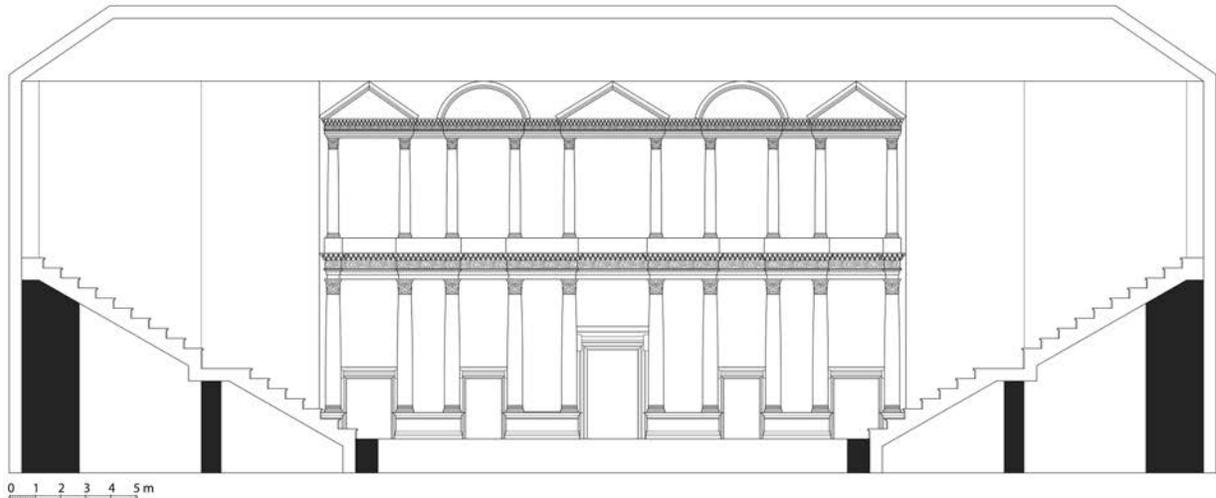


FIG. 23. The Severan bouleuterion/odeum: hypothetical restored elevation of the scaenae frons (drawing by L. Woolf).

suggest the following reconstruction: the heart-shaped column shafts of *pavonazetto*,¹³⁴ along with the corresponding white Corinthian capitals and heart-shaped pedestaled bases, were located in the four corners of the colonnade, just as Garstang suggested. The other brecciated column shafts, white marble capitals, and pedestal bases formed the rest of the colonnade. Representative pieces of this architecture are catalogued and illustrated below (fig. 24a–i; see also appx. 2, cat. nos. 1–9). Little of the entablature is preserved, except for one architrave block that was reused for a Byzantine inscription (see appx. 2, cat. no. 9). Based on these architectural members, a restored section of the interior of the basilical hall can be proposed (fig. 25). Several smaller capitals of the same type are extant (see fig. 24j; appx. 2, cat. no. 10). They are an appropriate size for the second story of the basilica (giving an overall column height of ca. 6.3 m), but their provenance is unclear and they cannot be securely associated with the building. It is possible this was an open portico, forming an elongated porticus post scaenam similar to those found at Ostia or at the Theater of Pompey, but it is more likely that it closely maintained the plan of the phase 6 basilica and remained roofed. In this case, we may assume the existence of a second story.

In plan, therefore, the Severan phase was truly a monumentalization of the earlier basilica, and it

¹³⁴ For the use of this marble in Syria Palestine, see Pensabene 1997.

maintained the same basic design: a long rectangular basilica that opened into an apsidal council chamber on the southern end. Each of these elements, however, was renovated in keeping with the tastes of the Severan age. The basilica end was embellished with marble and breccia architectural elements, and the bouleuterion was enlarged into the form of an odeum, following the trends of late second/early third-century public architecture in the Roman East.

The Sculptural Program

Four well-known sculpted pilasters belong to the decoration of the phase 5 bouleuterion/odeum. These include the Nike alighting on a globe supported by crouching Atlas, a Nike holding a palm frond, a fragmentary portion of a third Nike, and the goddess Isis accompanied by Horos/Harpokrates (fig. 26).¹³⁵ The first two Nike pilasters were found just south of the scaena wall, one (the Nike with the palm branch) directly on the *opus sectile* floor of the orchestra (see

¹³⁵ The Isis pilaster has the same width as the three Nike pilasters and was constructed in a similar manner, leading to the conclusion that all the pilasters belong to the same building program. Despite the facts that the Isis pilaster was discovered, in secondary deposition, the farthest from the building, is constructed of different marble (see Pearl's section "Provenance of Marble Pieces" in Fischer 1995, 148–49), and differs substantially from the other pilasters in subject matter and quality, its dimensions and method of attachment are identical to the others, leaving little doubt that all four belong to the same building.



a



b



c



d



e



f



g



h



i



j

FIG. 24. Architectural elements belonging to the Severan basilica hall: *a–d*, Corinthian capital; *e*, Attic-Ionic column base and plinth; *f*, column shaft; *g*, Corinthian heart-shaped capital; *h*, heart-shaped column base; *i*, heart-shaped column shaft; *j*, Corinthian capital, second story(?).

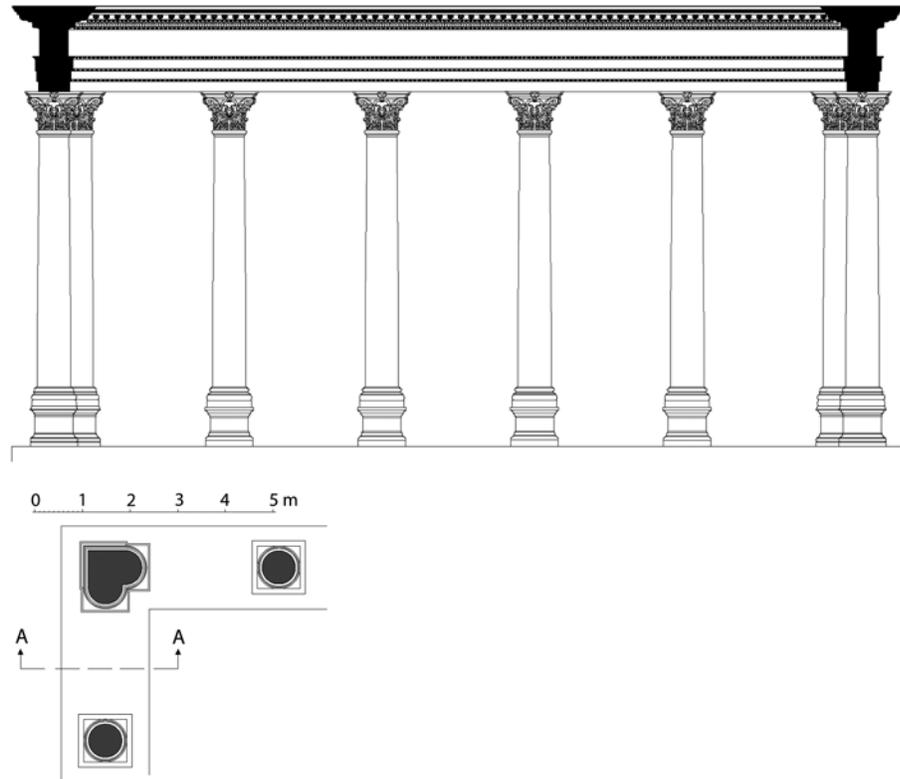


FIG. 25. The Severan basilica (phase 5), showing restored elevation of the main order of the interior colonnade (section A-A on fig. 16) at top and the southeast corner foundations at left (drawing by L. Woolf).

online fig. 6), the other (the Nike with Atlas) on top of the scaenae frons itself. The Isis pilaster was found along the foundations of the eastern colonnade. Although Reinach and Diplock dated the statues to the early first century, the heavy use of the running drill and other stylistic features date them securely to the Severan period, as scholars have subsequently recognized.¹³⁶ These are catalogued in appendix 3, and the discussion here focuses on the architectural setting of the pilasters.¹³⁷

In terms of both composition and placement, the architectural sculpture from Ashkelon is best compared with monumental facades and porches, as Fischer has noted.¹³⁸ At Corinth, the Captives Facade formed a monumental decorative facade enclosing the open square in front of the Lechaion Road basilica.¹³⁹ In

the Athenian Agora, the renovations to the Odeion of Agrippa in the mid second century employed caryatid giants on its facade.¹⁴⁰ The north facade of the terrace supporting the Temple of Domitian at Ephesos also carried a series of figured pilasters, and “Las Incantadas” in Thessaloniki supported the second story of a Corinthian stoa flanking the Roman agora.¹⁴¹ These facades employed freestanding pilasters, which were common through the first and second centuries, whereas by the late second or the third century figured pilasters tended to be set into the walls and more frontally composed.¹⁴² The Ashkelon pilasters are of this

et al. (1941, 55–88), and for a full reconsideration of the monument, see Strocka 2010. For the sculpture, see Johnson 1931, 101–7; Vermeule 1968, 83–8. For recent discussions of the (controversial) date of the figures, see Sturgeon 2003, 354 n. 16; Strocka 2010.

¹⁴⁰Thompson 1950, 103–24, pl. 60.

¹⁴¹On the Domitian terrace, see Bammer 1978–1980, 67–90, figs. 14, 15.

¹⁴²Palagia 1989, 125.

¹³⁶Vermeule and Anderson 1981, 15; Schneider 1986, 45–6.

¹³⁷For a fuller discussion of these pilasters, see Fischer’s (1995, 130–40) excellent discussion, with references.

¹³⁸Fischer 1995, 139, 145–46.

¹³⁹For the architecture of the Captives Facade, see Stillwell



FIG. 26. Architectural sculpture belonging to the Severan phase: *a*, Nike alighting on a globe supported by a crouching Atlas; *b*, detail of Atlas; *c*, *d*, Nike; *e*, Isis and Horos/Harpokrates.

second, fully engaged, type, and a closer parallel can be found in fragments of at least six architectural sculptures in secondary use in the Severan basilica at Leptis Magna.¹⁴³ They all depict draped female figures stylistically very close to those from Ashkelon, but standing at 1.5 m they are less than half as tall. Their location in the basilica cannot be determined, but judging from their elongated proportions, Ward-Perkins suggested

they were intended to be seen from below and restored them to the attic of the basilica. Palagia attributed a series of Heracles pilasters from Sparta, probably dating to the Severan period, to the scaenae frons of the theater, drawing on parallels such as the Amazon pilasters from Ephesos.¹⁴⁴ Another close parallel comes from new excavations at Meninx (Jerba, Tunisia), where

¹⁴³ Ward-Perkins 1952, 120, pls. 25, 26; Floriani Squarciapino 1974, 155–63. For an isotopic analysis of the marble, which, like most of the Ashkelon marbles, comes from Prokonessos, see Walda and Walker 1988.

¹⁴⁴ Palagia 1989, 126 n. 29. For Ephesos, see Hartswick's (1986) reconstruction of the other figures that likely accompanied the Amazon (Dionysos, Ephesos, and a Satyr). Hartswick suggests they would have decorated the proscenium wall, as at the theater of Dionysos in Athens.

second-century figured pilasters decorated the upper story of a portico connecting the basilica to the forum square to the north.¹⁴⁵

There are not enough architectural fragments preserved to restore the location of the figured pilasters with any confidence, and any suggestion must remain hypothetical. Their findspots suggest they were originally located somewhere near the wall of the scaena, or on the interior of the south wall of the basilical hall. The complete Nike was found resting on the scaena, and presumably it was the least disturbed by secondary robbing. The second Nike was found on the orchestra floor (see online fig. 6) but was certainly disturbed during the quarrying of stone, and the other pilasters are less complete the farther they are from the scaenae frons wall, suggesting they were farther from their original placement. Judging from the placement of similar architectural sculpture on comparable facades, the pilasters most likely belonged to the south interior wall of the colonnade of the basilica, forming a monumental approach to the interior of the bouleuterion. Fischer has proposed a similar reconstruction, restoring them to the third, attic story of the south wall of the basilica.¹⁴⁶ This is an attractive, if necessarily hypothetical, placement, but it is worth noting that the existence of a third story is conjectural, and at this height the details of the sculpture would have been difficult to discern. An alternate possibility is that they decorated the second story of this same southern wall of the basilica hall, in a manner more similar to the parallels adduced above.¹⁴⁷

Several other pieces of sculpture can be associated with the building. The most important of these include a colossal sandaled foot found in the excavation of the basilica hall, near the small shrine in the east colonnade (fig. 27).¹⁴⁸ It resembles types from Caesarea and



FIG. 27. Colossal sandaled foot found in the basilica hall (PEF G379, “Excavations eastward from Tyche discovering colossal foot,” 1920; courtesy Palestine Exploration Fund, London).

Ephesos and may represent either a seated Zeus or the divine embodiment of the demos of Ashkelon, an appropriate piece for the bouleuterion.¹⁴⁹ Also recovered in this area was a life-sized nude statue found just to the east of the Isis pilaster. It apparently represented a deity and was identified as Apollo by the excavators, but as the statue lacks any specific attributes of Apollo, it may rather be a portrait statue. There were also other statue fragments: a draped female figure and a small statuette of a crouching Aphrodite.¹⁵⁰ If all these pieces belong to this building, the overall assemblage is closely comparable to the range of sculpture found in theaters and bouleuteria in the Roman East.¹⁵¹ The program clearly stresses victory and prosperity, strongly conveying the imperial message of Rome, particularly in the wake of Septimius Severus’ victory over his rivals. The inclusion of Isis alludes to prosperity and links the overall program to other prominent Severan connections to Isis and Serapis—in particular, on coinage displaying Julia Domna on the obverse and Isis on the reverse with the legend “SAECVLI FELICITAS.”¹⁵² At the

¹⁴⁵ Fentress et al. 2009, 135–47, figs. 10.12, 10.15; see also Morton 2002, 2003.

¹⁴⁶ Fischer 1995, 143–45. Fischer (1995, 146) rightly questions Garstang’s suggestion that the pilasters flanked doorways. This reconstruction lacks convincing parallels, and the pilasters more likely formed a group intended to be seen as a whole.

¹⁴⁷ Similar pilasters from theaters probably decorated the proscenium wall rather than the *columnatio* itself, making it unlikely that pilasters should be restored to the *columnatio*, even though they are approximately the same height as the proposed upper order of the scaenae frons.

¹⁴⁸ Now located in the Rockefeller Museum, Jerusalem (lgth. 0.92 m x ht. 0.39 m); see also Vermeule 1981, 5; Vermeule and Anderson 1981, 11. It was initially publicized as a statue of Herod (“Herod’s Statue Found,” *New York Times*, 4 August

1921, 12). Watzinger (1935, 98) wanted to connect this piece to the imperial cult and accordingly saw the building as dedicated to this use.

¹⁴⁹ Vermeule 1981, 11.

¹⁵⁰ Draped female figure: Jerusalem, Israel Antiquities Authority, inv. no. S 928, ht. 0.58 m (Merker 1973; Wenning 1983, 111–12, pl. 16.4; Fischer 1998, 138). Crouching Aphrodite: Jerusalem, Israel Antiquities Authority, inv. no. S 896, ht. 0.50 m (Garstang 1922, 117; Iliffe 1933, 110–12; Vermeule and Anderson 1981; Fischer 1998, 139).

¹⁵¹ E.g., compare the assemblages from the bouleuterion and theater at Aphrodisias or the theater at Nysa-Scythopolis.

¹⁵² For a general discussion of Severan patronage of Serapis and Isis, see Grant 1996, esp. 76–9.

same time, Isis could allude conveniently to the individual Tyche of the city of Ashkelon (and possibly Dekerto-Ichthys), and the overall sculptural assemblage of the complex prominently displayed the distinctive identity of the polis and its civic institutions and the status of local honorands, deities, and governmental bodies.¹⁵³

Discussion

The late second century was a time of great urban renewal in Syria-Palestine, and many cities of the region reached the height of their prosperity in this period. Septimius Severus initiated a large number of building projects, rewarding the cities that sided with him against his rival Pescennius Niger.¹⁵⁴ Septimius Severus himself visited the region, but it is unknown whether he had any specific interaction with Ashkelon. Other building projects at Ashkelon—Stanhope’s “temple” and probably a colonnaded street—suggest that the city was greatly embellished in this period.

The building was a central civic monument, almost certainly continuing to serve as the bouleuterion of the city, and this expansion closely parallels second-century developments in other parts of the empire. Bouleuteria/odea of the type found at Ashkelon began to be constructed widely in Syria-Palestine in this period, particularly in the second half of the century.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³ Cf. Belayche 2003, 120: “L’aristocratie ascalonite commanditaire a donné au bâtiment un visage double, impérial et local. Sur les quatre pilastres retrouvés, trois figurent des Victoires ailées coiffées d’un *polos* et debout sur un globe porté par Atlas agenouillé. Elles réquisitionnent au service de l’idéologie locale le message impérial de triomphe universel. Le quatrième pilastre nous intéresse davantage car il exprime une idéologie plus locale, certes toujours articulée avec l’*imperium Romanum* et la *providentia* qu’il procurait. Il confiait la protection du bâtiment à une Isis-Tychè, reconnaissable au nœud de son vêtement et au haut *polos* décoré qui la coiffe.”

¹⁵⁴ For the wider context of Palestine and the east, see Segal 1997; Ball 2000, 246–450. This process can most clearly be seen at Samaria, where much of the urban center was redesigned after the town was promoted to the status of a colony and given the name Lucia Septimia Sebaste. A papyrus dated to 359 C.E. documenting the sale of a slave in Ashkelon (*Aegyptische Urkunden aus den Königlichen [later Staatlichen] Museen zu Berlin*, Griechische Urkunde 1 316, lines 2–3) demonstrates that the city had the status of a colony in the fourth century, but it is not clear when this was granted, and the document still (inaccurately) refers to Ashkelon as *libera*: “ἐν κολωνίᾳ Ἀσκ[άλωνι] τῆ πιστῆ καὶ ἐλευθέρᾳ.”

¹⁵⁵ For a comprehensive treatment of theaters and odea in Israel and Jordan, see Segal 1995.

Kanatha, Nysa-Scythopolis, Gerasa, and Philippopolis all have structures of similar design built in precisely this period,¹⁵⁶ many of which were used for meetings of the boule. Ashkelon was a well-known center of learning in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, and the structure would also have functioned as a lecture hall or performance space.¹⁵⁷ Elsewhere in the region, ritual theater and the Maiumas festival were important civic events, both of which took place in small theaters.¹⁵⁸

There is no secure textual or epigraphic evidence for what the bouleuterion/odeum at Ashkelon was called in antiquity. Theophanes, a wealthy businessman from Hermopolis in Egypt, visited Ashkelon between 320 and 324 and mentioned some of the city’s principal monuments: a temple, an odeum, and a theater.¹⁵⁹ It may well be that the odeum mentioned by Theophanes is the Severan bouleuterion/odeum. As we have seen, “odeum” was hardly a technical term in antiquity, and Theophanes’ use of this term does not preclude the identification of this building as the bouleuterion of the city. It is also conceivable that the city had an odeum in another part of the site that has not been located, as in some of the larger cities of the east. Theophanes’ purchase of entry to these venues also demonstrates that performances were conducted

¹⁵⁶ Kanatha: Butler 1920, 346; Freyberger 2004. Nysa-Scythopolis: Mazor and Najjar 2007. Gerasa: Clark et al. 1986, 205–302; see also Balty 1991, 541–45; Segal 1995, 72–4; Sear 2006, 312. Philippopolis: Brünnow and Domaszewski 1904–1909, 2:4–79; Butler 1920, 376–96; Frezouls 1952, 64–7; Coupel and Frezouls 1956; Balty 1991, 439–43.

¹⁵⁷ Stephanus Byzantius (131–32) provides a list of the grammarians and philosophers from Ashkelon. As the leading Hellenized polis of the southern Levant, Ashkelon had a developed theatrical tradition. Philo (*Leg.* 203–205) mentions a certain Apelles of Ashkelon, a tragic actor, who incited Caligula to persecute the Jews, “discharging his poison from Askalon.” Philo goes on to explain there was an irreconcilable hatred between the people of Ashkelon and the Jews.

¹⁵⁸ For ritual theater and its architectural context, see Nielsen 2002. For the Maiumas festival, see Segal 1995, 11 n. 33. For the festival at Ashkelon, see Dvorjetski 2001.

¹⁵⁹ *P. Ryl.* 4 627, 213–22: “ἐν Ἀσκάλων (δραγμαὶ) χ | *vacat?* | [. . .]ρω προνωπ [- -] | ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ | βασιλικῆ περι | κεχρυσωμένη | εἴσοδος θεατρον | καὶ ὠδιον | γ ὁμοί(ως) | χ[ο]ῖας η | δ ὁμοί(ως) χοῖας η.” Pace Fischer (1995, 121), the “βασιλικῆ περικεχρυσωμένη (sc. εἰκῶν)” does not mean “gilded basilica” but rather “gilded [statue] of the emperor.” “βασιλικῆ εἰκῶν” is the equivalent of “*imago imperatoris*” in Latin. Thus, Theophanes purchased and dedicated a gilded image of the emperor in the forecourt of a temple at Ashkelon. See the commentary by Roberts (Roberts and Turner 1952, 123); cf. Matthews 2006, 55.

in both the odeum and theater in the early fourth century C.E.

THE BOULEUTERION/ODEUM IN LATE ANTIQUITY

Ashkelon continued to flourish in late antiquity, when the population of the city and its hinterland reached its peak and the port remained a major commercial node of the eastern Mediterranean, particularly as an exporter of locally produced wine.¹⁶⁰ The history of its cultural and political institutions, however, is comparatively less well documented. Beginning already in the fourth century, the importance of civic meetings and governing bodies such as the *boule* and *ekklēsia* began to decline at varying rates in cities of the east.¹⁶¹ While they certainly continued to be important throughout late antiquity, the frequency with which they convened and how they met is less well known.¹⁶² Theatrical performances, including tragedy and comedy, were widespread in the Roman East into at least the third century, but they began to give way to mime and pantomime by the late third and fourth centuries.¹⁶³ Theaters and odea became used for the performance of mime, and many were also converted for use in performances of water theater.¹⁶⁴ The eventual transformation and reuse of theaters in the Late Byzantine/Medieval period was also widespread. After initially being adapted for various types of entertainment (gladiatorial games, *venationes*, aquatic shows), theaters gradually began to go out of use as settings for public gatherings and assemblies. Often they were drastically converted, reused, or quarried in late antiquity.¹⁶⁵ Some, such as the theater at Mamas

(Shumi), just north of Caesarea, or the theater at Bosra in Syria, were transformed into fortresses.¹⁶⁶ Others were given over to domestic inhabitation, as in the case of the theater of Carthago Nova (Cartagena) in Spain, which was quarried and heavily overbuilt by domestic buildings.¹⁶⁷ The bouleuterion/odeum at Ashkelon followed the latter pattern. After continued use as a public building into at least the fifth century C.E., buildings were terraced up the slope of the cavea of the partially dismantled odeum, reusing and adapting some of its walls. Intensive reuse and modification of the Severan-period architecture continued through the Late Byzantine period, and elements continued to be dismantled well into the Fatimid period.

There is evidence that before this major transformation of the urban fabric of the city, the bouleuterion/odeum continued to be used for something resembling its original purpose in Late Antique Ashkelon. This can be seen most dramatically in an inscribed acclamation dating to the fourth to sixth century C.E. and discovered during the excavations of the PEF (fig. 28):¹⁶⁸

αὐξί
Ἀσκαλά[ων]
αὐξί Ῥώ-
μη

Advance Askalon, Advance Rome!

The acclamation is inscribed on a large, reused architrave block of gray-white marble, measuring 0.73 m wide x 0.34 m high x 51 cm deep. On the right side, the face of the architrave block, there is a worn bead-and-reel decoration. The text is carved within a central medallion 0.26 m in diameter flanked by elongated acanthus leaves. The letters, averaging 5.5 cm, are fairly even and well cut, with letterforms suggestive of the fourth to sixth centuries C.E.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁰ For the settlement history of the region, see Huster et al. 2015. For the wine industry, see Eck and Zissu 2001, 189–96; Johnson and Stager 2008, 479–88; Mayerson 2008, 471–78. See also the commercial text known as the *Expositio totius mundi et gentium* 29 (Rougé 1966) and Amm. Marc. 14.8.11–12.

¹⁶¹ Jones 1964, 722; Cameron 1976, 238; Liebeschuetz 1992. The latest use of the formula “boule kai demos” at Aphrodisias dates to the late 360s (Roueché 1989, 42–3, no. 22).

¹⁶² Legal sources attest to the enduring imperial concern in late antiquity for the functioning of city councils (*Cod. Iust.* 10.32; *Cod. Theod.* 12.1).

¹⁶³ Bieber 1961, 250. For the transformation of theater in late antiquity, see also Cottas 1931.

¹⁶⁴ For the adaptation of the odeum at Corinth for water shows and the date of these conversions (ca. 225), see Broneer 1932, 447. Broneer’s phasing has not been accepted universally.

¹⁶⁵ For the alteration of Near Eastern theaters in late antiquity, see Retzleff 2003.

¹⁶⁶ Mamas (Shumi): Shenhav 1993; Segal 1995, 69–70; Sear 2006, 304–5. Bosra: Segal 1995, 53–5; Sear 2006, 308–9; see also Brünnow and Domaszewski 1904–1909, 3:1–84; Frezouls 1952, 69–79; Finsen 1972. The fortress dates to the Ayyubid dynasty (12th to 13th centuries).

¹⁶⁷ Ramallo Asensio and Ruiz Valderas 1998.

¹⁶⁸ Editio princeps: Hogarth 1922, 22–3 (*SEG* 1 554; Ameling et al. 2014, no. 2334). PEF registration no. G303; British Mandate registration no. 47-7398.

¹⁶⁹ The stone is now located in the open-air museum in Afri-dar, Ashkelon.



FIG. 28. Byzantine inscription from the bouleuterion/odeum (appx. 2, cat. no. 9): left, right side; middle, front; right, top (S. Ehrlich).

The inscribed block was found in the PEF excavations in grid 47, but the findspot was not recorded. Hogarth, in the *editio princeps*, assumed that the inscription belonged to the Early Roman basilica (our phase 6). Fischer likewise assumed that the stone belonged to the basilica phase, although he dated it to the Severan period.¹⁷⁰ Feissel, however, has rightly noted that the letterforms appear Late Antique and that Constantinople is probably to be understood in the reference to Rome.¹⁷¹ This view is supported by autopsy of the stone and the fact that it is inscribed on a reused architrave block belonging to the entablature of the main order of the Severan basilica hall.

Acclamations, the corporate expressions of a group of people, have their origins in religious practice. The practice of putting an acclamation in writing, as a physical representation of the wish or consent of a group, became particularly common in the later Roman empire.¹⁷² Although $\alpha\upsilon\tilde{\xi}\iota$ + the vocative is one of the most common formulas of public acclamations,¹⁷³ the inscription from Ashkelon, which names a specific city and the Roman empire as a whole, is otherwise unparalleled. Acclamations such as this can praise individuals (usually benefactors)—for example, Albinus from Aphrodisias¹⁷⁴ or Traianus, likely not the emperor, from another acclamation on an inscribed mosaic from a

rural site just outside Ashkelon¹⁷⁵—or cities such as Ephesus or Perge.¹⁷⁶ The inscription from Ashkelon expresses the symbolic affirmation of the linkage between the prosperity of the city and the well-being of the Roman empire.

As such, the sentiment expressed is strikingly similar to the message of the sculptural program of the Severan building phase, suggesting that the structure continued to be used for some kind of civic meeting or assembly at the time the acclamation was inscribed. The reuse of this phase 5 architrave block suggests that while the Severan building was still in use, it was in significant disrepair, possibly unroofed with parts of the entablature collapsing.¹⁷⁷ As popular assemblies began to decline in the fourth century, there was likely less use for dedicated bouleuteria in eastern cities, although theaters and odea continued to be used for more informal assemblies.¹⁷⁸ In Ashkelon, the enduring importance of the institution of the boule is still attested in the reign of Justinian by the fate of the wealthy president of the boule, Anatolius, whose estate was ultimately seized by the emperor.¹⁷⁹ It is to this context of the

¹⁷⁵ SEG 37 1471 (Ameling et al. 2014, no. 2395): “ $\alpha\upsilon\tilde{\xi}\iota$, Τραιανέ.” The architectural context argues against identification with the emperor.

¹⁷⁶ *IvE* 3090: “[εις τοὺς αἰῶνας] $\alpha\upsilon\tilde{\xi}\iota$, ἡ μεγάλη Ἐφε[σίῳν πόλις]”; SEG 34 1306, col. 2 (a series of acclamations for Perge introduced by the formula “ $\alpha\upsilon\tilde{\xi}\iota$ Πέργε”).

¹⁷⁷ Compare the situation in Late Antique Aphrodisias, where the bouleuterion continued to be used and adapted well after the roof had collapsed (Bier 2008, 163–66).

¹⁷⁸ Jones 1964, 722; Cameron 1976, 238.

¹⁷⁹ Procop., *Historia Arcana* 29.17–25. The passage also mentions that the law stipulated that when a *bouleutēs* died without a male heir, one-fourth of his property should go to the bouleuterion of the city (29.19: “ὕπὸ τοῦτου χρημάτων τὸ μὲν τεταρτημόριον δίδοσθαι τῷ τῆς πόλεως βουλευτηρίῳ”) and the rest to his heirs. For a fourth-century president of the boule from Ashkelon, cf. *Suda* E3770, s.v. “Eutokios.”

¹⁷⁰ Fischer 1995, 148: “It seems to sum up the message of the basilica, combining the imperial message with the personification of the city through its Tyche. Ascalon praises the imperial power, victorious over all its enemies, and Isis-Tyche and her attendants expect to enjoy the ensuing stability thanks to the imperial power.”

¹⁷¹ Feissel 1996, no. 489: “‘Rome’ - - désigne probablement Constantinople.”

¹⁷² For a discussion of acclamations, see Klauser 1950; Roueché 1984.

¹⁷³ Robert and Robert 1960, 23.

¹⁷⁴ Roueché 1989, nos. 83.i–xx, 84.

shifting civic landscape in late antiquity that our inscription likely belongs.

The bouleuterion/odeum complex continued in use until sometime between the late fifth and early seventh centuries C.E. The destruction and dismantling event is most clearly evident in a large fill full of the rubble of the odeum between the second and third apsidal walls of the cavea (fig. 29). This destruction debris contained large quantities of gypsum wall plaster fragments, fragments of marble revetment and paving stones, roof tiles, and bronze nails and tacks. Many of the stone fragments were faced with a pale yellow molded plaster mimicking stone architecture with simple beveled edges or an egg-and-dart pattern. Diagnostic pottery from this layer included fragments of African Red Slip and other Late Roman wares, and several Gaza jar rims.¹⁸⁰ The level fill of tacks, plaster, stone, and revetment sealed by subfloor layers is suggestive of a systematic process of deliberate dismantling rather than a period of slow decline or destruction by fire.

Many open areas beneath the former cavea and between the apsidal walls of the substructure were sealed by thick Byzantine leveling fills that were put down for the construction of a series of surfaces. In many places, the walls of the cavea were reworked, forming the core of a large complex. Part of this construction included a series of additions designed to straighten the curve of the second apsidal wall and to provide a well-laid face for the interior of the new building, largely constructed of kurkar sandstone blocks taken from the odeum itself. Several white tessera and tiled floors belong to this phase. The versurae were also transformed into rooms of the new Byzantine building. A similar process of dismantling can be detected within the versurae as between the apsidal walls, where a thick layer containing large amounts of plaster debris, mostly painted, is sealed by Byzantine subfloor fills and a white tessera floor. The floor level of the eastern versura was thus raised and converted into a room associated with a large complex extending to the south and east. The earlier excavations removed any trace of this building phase in the area of the orchestra and north of the scaenae frons wall, and the massive Islamic well dug into



FIG. 29. Destruction debris of the bouleuterion/odeum (view to the south).

the center of the cavea demonstrates that this whole area was heavily disturbed by later activity. However, the western versura was not excavated previously, and the same sequence of Byzantine mosaic floor and subfloor fills as in the eastern versura was detected, suggesting that this construction extended across the span of the phase 5 building.

This large Byzantine suite of rooms appears to have been domestic in nature. The Byzantine phase is heavily disturbed by later Fatimid reuse and construction. In this phase, a series of small courtyard houses were built over the Byzantine building and east of the apsidal walls. The area to the west appears to have been exterior space in this period, where a large number of sump pits, wells, and cisterns were constructed, cutting the earlier phases. Many of these features were dug directly into the ashlar masonry of the phase 5 apsidal walls, using them for lining and structural support. A large bell-shaped cistern was dug into the middle of the outer wall of the cavea, and the most emblematic feature of this phase, the massive well measuring more than 3 m in diameter, was dug into the center of the orchestra, the “peace pool” of the early excavation reports.¹⁸¹ No trace of the “mosque of Omar” mentioned in the British reports was detected during the current excavations.¹⁸²

CONCLUSIONS

The new excavations in grid 47 provide a detailed view into the long-term history of Ashkelon and the

¹⁸⁰This destruction layer (47.45.L76.B9524) contained four Gaza (or Ashkelon) jar rims (fourth to seventh century C.E.). The layer above this (47.45.L67), which appears to be a leveling fill for the preparation of the construction of the Byzantine rooms, contained many Gaza jar rims and one Late Roman C rim (fourth to sixth century C.E.) from 47.45.L67.B7515.

¹⁸¹Cf. the massive well dug into the orchestra of the main theater, the so-called Bir Ibrahim.

¹⁸²Garstang 1922, 115–16; 1924, 33.

civic and urban life of a major maritime entrepôt of the southern Levant. This area considerably clarifies our understanding of the major changes made to the city plan in the Hellenistic and Roman periods. The Late Hellenistic period saw a dramatic expansion of the city, which first began to extend from the “old city” of the Persian period on the south tell into the empty space between it and the ramparts. This was a major project, which involved substantial infilling and leveling to prepare it for the construction of new monumental architecture and the extension of the Persian grid system to this part of the site. The expansion of the city corresponded with the fortification of the ramparts and possibly the construction of the city’s theater. This monumental center of Ashkelon subsequently was redesigned in the Early Roman period, along with a wholesale reorganization of the grid system in this part of the city.

The sequence of building phases revealed in this section of the civic center reflects the dramatic changes in the urban form of the city. Ashkelon was unique in its ability to maintain its independence and importance through chaotic changes in the Late Hellenistic and Early Roman periods. The new evidence for the expansion of the Hellenistic city demonstrates the vitality and importance of Ashkelon and suggests a level of prosperity not attested by the literary sources. In the Roman period, the further monumentalization of the center of Ashkelon points to the city’s role as a major cultural and economic node within the High Empire. The public buildings of the Roman city confidently advertised the community’s place within the empire and its claim to individual status and privilege. The long life of the bouleuterion complex demonstrates the resilience and centrality of the civic life of a Hellenistic city under Roman rule and the unique blend of Hellenistic, Roman, and local traditions that characterized the Roman East. This is best seen in the modification and continued use of this complex in late antiquity, which illustrates the durability of Late Antique civic institutions with unusual clarity. Finally, the dismantling of the bouleuterion and the transformation of the city center reflect the ultimate eclipse of Graeco-Roman civic organization at Ashkelon.

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Appendix 1: Architectural Elements Belonging to the Scaenae Frons of the Bouleuterion/Odeum

Registration numbers beginning with “47-” refer to British Mandate registration numbers; all others refer to the architectural catalogue of the Leon Levy Expedition.

Catalogue Number: 1 (see fig. 22a).
Registration Number: 47-7194.
Item Type: Cornice or tympanum block.
Location: Ashkelon Expedition Stone Depot.
Findspot: PEF excavation site.
Preserved Dimensions: Lgth. 0.34 m; width. 0.79 m; ht. 0.21 m.
Material: White marble (Prokonessos?).
Description: Bead and reel (ht. 0.03 m); palmette (ht. 0.18 m).
Attribution: Scaenae frons, second story.

Catalogue Number: 2 (see fig. 22b).
Registration Number: 47-7162.
Item Type: Architrave-frieze block.
Location: Ashkelon Expedition Stone Depot.
Findspot: PEF excavation site.
Preserved Dimensions: Width. 0.93 m; ht. 0.25 m; depth 0.39 m; ht. of bead and reel 0.04 m.
Material: White-gray marble (Prokonessos?).
Description: Broken on back, sides, bottom; rope marks from reuse as a well head; two bead-and-reel moldings separated by fascia.
Attribution: Scaenae frons, second story entablature.

Catalogue Number: 3 (see fig. 22c).
Registration Number: 47-7189.

Item Type: Architrave-frieze block.
 Location: Ashkelon Expedition Stone Depot.
 Findspot: PEF excavation site.
 Preserved Dimensions: Wdth. 0.67 m; ht. 0.50 m; depth 0.33 m; wdth. of frieze portion 0.41 m; bead-and-reel ht. 0.04 m; floral design ht. 0.2 m.
 Material: White marble (Prokonessos?).
 Description: Broken on one end; sawn on bottom and one side. The top is the original surface with mason's marks: E K | Λ. Deep channel cut in back from secondary use.
 Attribution: Scaenae frons, second story entablature. Probably a section of a *ressault*.

Catalogue Number: 4 (see fig. 22d).
 Registration Number: 47-7134.
 Item Type: Architrave-frieze block.
 Location: Grid 47.
 Findspot: PEF excavation site.
 Preserved Dimensions: Wdth. 0.72 m; ht. 0.51 m; depth 0.20 m.
 Material: White marble (Prokonessos?).
 Description: See entry for catalogue number 3.
 Attribution: Scaenae frons, second-story entablature.

Catalogue Number: 5 (see fig. 22e).
 Registration Number: Ashkelon Excavations 93.
 Item Type: Corinthian capital.
 Location: Grid 47 basilica field.
 Findspot: PEF excavation site.
 Preserved Dimensions: Capital diam. 0.47 m; capital ht. 0.59 m; acanthus leaf ht. 0.18 m.
 Material: Gray-white marble.
 Description: One volute broken; circular dowel hole.
 Attribution: Scaenae frons, first story.

Catalogue Number: 6 (see fig. 22f).
 Registration Number: 47-7190.
 Item Type: Attic-Ionic column base.
 Location: Ashkelon Stone Depot.
 Findspot: PEF excavation site.
 Preserved Dimensions: Total ht. 0.28 m; pedestal maximum preserved width 0.59 m; base diam. 0.61 m.
 Material: White marble (Prokonessos?).
 Description: Nearly complete; square plinth damaged on three sides, one corner preserved; complete torus.
 Attribution: Scaenae frons, first story.

Catalogue Number: 7 (see fig. 22g).
 Registration Number: Ashkelon Excavations 98.

Item Type: Column shaft.
 Location: Grid 47.
 Findspot: Unknown.
 Preserved Dimensions: Lgth. 2.17 m; depth 0.47 m.
 Material: Gray-white marble.
 Description: Broken at bottom.
 Attribution: *Scaenae frons*, first story(?).

Appendix 2: Architectural Elements Belonging to the Phase 5 Basilica Hall

Registration numbers beginning with "47-" refer to British Mandate registration numbers.

Catalogue Number: 1 (see fig. 24a, b).
 Registration Number: Ashkelon Excavations 51.
 Item Type: Corinthian capital.
 Location: Ashkelon Expedition Stone Depot.
 Findspot: PEF excavation site.
 Preserved Dimensions: Wdth. of capital 1.21 m; ht. of capital 0.92 m; wdth. of architrave groove 0.69 m; wdth. of acanthus leaf 0.26 m; ht. of acanthus leaf 0.32 m.
 Material: White marble (Prokonessos).

Catalogue Number: 2 (see fig. 24c).
 Registration Number: 47-7197.
 Item Type: Corinthian capital.
 Location: Ashkelon Expedition Stone Depot.
 Findspot: PEF excavation site.
 Preserved Dimensions: Diam. of capital 0.65 m; ht. of capital 0.90 m.
 Material: White marble (Prokonessos).

Catalogue Number: 3 (see fig. 24d).
 Registration Number: Ashkelon Excavations 96.
 Item Type: Corinthian capital.
 Location: Grid 47 basilica field.
 Findspot: Unknown.
 Preserved Dimensions: Total ht. 0.90 m; ht. of acanthus leaves 0.28 m (top), 0.32 m (bottom row).
 Material: White marble (Prokonessos).

Catalogue Number: 4 (see fig. 24e).
 Registration Number: 47-7191.
 Item Type: Attic-Ionic column base and pedestal.
 Location: Ashkelon Expedition Stone Depot.
 Findspot: PEF excavation site.
 Preserved Dimensions: Diam. of column base 0.90 m;

wdth. of pedestal 1.10 m; ht. of pedestal 0.89 m; total ht. 1.22 m.

Material: White marble (Prokonessos).

Catalogue Number: 5 (see fig. 24f).

Registration Number: 47-7170.

Item Type: Column shaft.

Location: Ashkelon Expedition Stone Depot.

Findspot: PEF excavation site.

Preserved Dimensions: Lgth. 3.18 m; diam. 0.77 m.

Material: Brecciated marble (*pavonazzetto*).

Catalogue Number: 6 (see fig. 24g).

Registration Number: Ashkelon Excavations 44.

Item Type: Corinthian heart-shaped capital.

Location: Ashkelon Expedition Stone Depot.

Findspot: PEF excavation site.

Preserved Dimensions: Wdth. 0.88 m; ht. 0.91 m; depth 0.73 m.

Material: White marble (Prokonessos).

Catalogue Number: 7.

Registration Number: Ashkelon Excavations 95.

Item Type: Heart-shaped column base (see fig. 24h).

Location: Grid 47 basilica field.

Findspot: Unknown.

Preserved Dimensions: Wdth. of bottom plinth 1.61 m; ht. of bottom plinth 0.62 m; wdth. of base 1.64 m; ht. of base 0.23 m; wdth. of heart-shaped platform 0.40 m, 0.42 m; ht. of heart-shaped platform 0.27 m; diam. of lobes 0.89 m.

Material: White marble (Prokonessos).

Catalogue Number: 8 (see fig. 24i).

Registration Number: 47-7171.

Item Type: Heart-shaped column shaft (double-engaged corner column).

Location: Ashkelon Expedition Stone Depot.

Findspot: PEF excavation site.

Preserved Dimensions: Lgth. 1.42 m; wdth. 1.26 m; point to center 1.03 m; diam. of engaged column 0.70 m.

Material: Brecciated marble (*pavonazzetto*).

Catalogue Number: 9 (see fig. 28).

Registration Number: 47-7398.

Item Type: Architrave block, reused for Byzantine inscription.

Location: Antiquities Courtyard, Afridar, Ashkelon.

Findspot: PEF excavation site, in phase 5 building.

Preserved Dimensions: Max. preserved wdth. 0.34 m; ht. 0.51 m; depth 0.73 m.

Material: White marble.

Catalogue Number: 10 (see fig. 24j).

Registration Number: Ashkelon Excavations 104.

Item Type: Column capital.

Location: Grid 47.

Findspot: Unknown.

Preserved Dimensions: Ht. 0.75 m; depth 0.55 m.

Material: White marble.

Appendix 3: Sculpted Pilasters Belonging to the Bouleuterion/Odeum

Findspots are plotted on fig. 16.

Catalogue Number: 1.

Dimensions: Wdth. 0.95 m; ht. 3.56 m; depth 0.68 m.

Description: Nike alighting on a globe supported by Atlas. Complete. Face damaged. Beveled cornice above ht. 0.18 m; sculpted section 2.62 m (Nike 2.08 m). The group stands on a pedestal 0.94 m high, projecting 0.26 m from the relief. The surfaces of the pilaster are roughly tooled on the back, top, sides. The Nike wears a tall *polos*, mostly broken, reaching to the top of the cornice. Right arm raised, probably holding a laurel wreath. The Nike wears a peplos belted around the waist and stands with her right leg slightly advanced and left foot slightly turned. With her left hand, she gathers her peplos.

Representations of Nike alighting on a globe, a symbol of world rule, become much more common in the reign of Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius and increase even more in the reign of Septimius Severus, appearing frequently on the reverse of his coins.¹⁸³ Beginning with Septimius Severus, the globe appears on the emperor's armor.¹⁸⁴ The image of Nike on a globe was also popular in the art commissioned by legions or their officials, such as the marble altars of the *legio VI Ferrata* from Legio-Ceparcotnei and the altar of the *legio XII Fulminata*.¹⁸⁵ The image was also popular in Roman painting of the period.¹⁸⁶ However, depictions of Nike on a globe

¹⁸³ Hölscher 1967, 42. For the significance of the globe, see also Arnaud 1984, 537–602.

¹⁸⁴ Hölscher 1967, 24–5, 168.

¹⁸⁵ Vermeule and Anderson 1981, 15, figs. 27–30.

¹⁸⁶ Compare the series of painted Nikai from the second-century C.E. Tomb of the Three Brothers at Palmyra (Kraeling 1961–1962), the painted wooden panel from the Palmyrene Gate at Dura-Europos from the mid second or mid third century C.E. (Chi and Heath 2011, figs. 2–25), or the wall painting from a tomb in Gnathia (Hölscher 1967, pl. 3.2).

supported by Atlas are very uncommon. An inscribed relief from the high aqueduct of Caesarea dedicated by the *legio X Fretensis* depicts Nike on a globe that is, according to the authors, supported by an Atlas, although the Atlas figure is very difficult to see in the published photographs.¹⁸⁷ The atlas figure is based on the prototype of the Farnese Atlas,¹⁸⁸ but the facial features resemble the Samian Herakles of Myron.¹⁸⁹ It is also related to the satyrs, Sileni, or atlantes found in Roman theaters supporting the stage.¹⁹⁰

Catalogue Number: 2.

Dimensions: Wdth. 0.91 m; ht. 2.29 m; depth 0.50 m.

Description: Nike with palm branch. Bottom of the block sawn off. Face damaged. The pose is slightly more frontal than catalogue numbers 1 and 3, with the left leg slightly advanced. In the broken portion at the bottom, traces of a globe are visible. The Nike holds a large palm branch in her right hand, which extends to the bottom of the cornice and bends with it. In her left, she holds up a laurel wreath at the level of the cornice, which is broken but still clearly visible. She wears a high *polos*, with two coils of hair extending to her shoulders as in catalogue number 1. Her peplos is gathered and tied in a manner similar to catalogue number 1, but the handling of the drapery, which has deeper, less delicate folds, distinguishes it from catalogue number 1. Hölscher attributes this type to a prototype introduced by Augustus into Rome after the Battle of Actium.¹⁹¹

Catalogue Number: 3.

Dimensions: Wdth. 0.92 m; ht. 0.68 m; depth 0.49 m.

Description: Fragmentary Nike. Top and bottom of block sawn off. Left knee and thigh preserved; part of right thigh. The left leg is slightly advanced. Very similar to catalogue number 1, and the opposite pose suggests these were paired.

Catalogue Number: 4.

Dimensions: Wdth. 0.92 m; ht. 1.00 m; depth 0.74 m.

Description: Isis and Horos/Harpokrates. Bottom of the block sawn off. Facial features are preserved. Isis wears a diadem and a high *polos* with common attributes of Isis: sheaves of wheat, a crescent moon, and stars. Her garment is tied in the "Isaic knot" and bears the fringe characteristic of Isis. Her arms are bent at the elbow, suggesting she held some attribute of Isis or Tyche, such as a cornucopia or *aphlaston*, now lost.¹⁹²

The identification of the small figure has been debated. He wears a diadem with an emblem bearing a five-pointed star. His left arm extends behind the right shoulder of Isis; in his right hand, he holds his himation and possibly another small object. Wenning argued for identifying a portrait of a young Caracalla in the features of the small figure, paired with a portrait of Julia Domna as Isis, which would provide a terminus post quem of ca. 208 for the construction of the complex, when this portrait type emerged.¹⁹³ Belayche viewed the group doubling as Isis-Tyche and Harpokrates and Dekerto/Atargatis and Ichthys.¹⁹⁴ Krug interpreted the smaller figure as a young priest of Serapis, on the basis of the emblem on the figure's diadem and compositional parallels from Palmyrene art.¹⁹⁵ Krug further suggested that the priest may have been a donor who funded the construction of the building. The suggestion is intriguing but remains far from conclusive. While a certain level of general polysemy cannot be excluded, the imagery is still most straightforwardly read as Isis and Horos/Harpokrates. The Isis figure has a hairstyle that is dissimilar to other portraits of Julia Domna, and the similarities of the smaller figure with Caracalla portraits are somewhat general and do not account for the association with Isis.

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¹⁸⁷ Olami and Ringel 1974; 1975, 148–50, fig. 4B, pl. 3.

¹⁸⁸ Schneider 1986, 47 n. 224 (with bibliography).

¹⁸⁹ Vermeule 1981, 15.

¹⁹⁰ E.g., the well-known Silenus or satyr from the Theater of Dionysos in Athens (Travlos 1971, 551, fig. 689). For these types, see Schmidt-Colinet 1977. For the iconography, see *LIMC* 3:1, s.v. "Atlas," nos. 32–45, 47a. For parallels for kneeling Atlas carrying a globe, see Schneider 1986, 45 n. 211.

¹⁹¹ Hölscher 1967.

¹⁹² For a full discussion of the iconography, see *LIMC* 5:773, no. 175, s.v. "Isis."

¹⁹³ Wenning 1992, 506–10.

¹⁹⁴ Belayche 2003, 119–120.

¹⁹⁵ Krug in Fischer 1995, 135–36.

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