

The Theatre at Messene:

Building Phases and Masons' Marks

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ON THE MASON MARKS BY KLEANTHIS
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Abstract

The Messene theatre, built in the 3rd century BC and abandoned in the late 4th century AD, was used for both performances and political assemblies, according to literary and epigraphic testimony. The cavea, which is divided in eleven cunei, is supported by a strong retaining wall with arched gateways leading to the upper diazoma. No traces of the 3rd century BC wooden stage remains; the 2nd century BC scene building would have been rolled away on wheels and stored in a skenotheke. A ramp on the west side leads to the lower diazoma. Manumissions are inscribed on some of the stone seats. Six thrones for city dignitaries and several bases for honorary statues are set around the orchestra. A permanent stage with a proscenium of slender Ionic columns and semi-columns was constructed in the 1st century AD. A colossal three-storeyed scenae frons with a low broad pulpitum, constructed in the second half of the 2nd century AD, replaced the previous permanent stage; it was financed by Tiberius Claudius Saethidas Caelianus II, high priest of the Sebastoi for life and Helladarch of Achaia. The sculptural programme of the scenae frons is related to his ancestors and the Roman emperors Trajan, Hadrian, Septimius Severus, Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus with whom the family kept close ties. He was questor of the province Sicilia, augur and tribunus of the plebs and patron of the coloniae Abellinatum in Italy. Marble statues were erected in the niches of the scenae frons of Isis Pelagia, of Hermes and two portraits on Hermaic stelai. The Christianised inhabitants constructed their houses on the epitheatron and a built basilica nearby.

The contribution on the mason marks focuses on the masons' marks used in the different phases of the theatre at ancient Messene, on each occasion only in specific parts of the structure. Different systems of counting or of making signs to facilitate construction and repair have been observed in the retaining walls, in the scene building and in the sculptural decoration of the theatre. This study aims to contribute to the understanding of the structure's architectural planning, the reconstruction of its exterior and ground plan and the dating of the individual construction phases, based on the mason's marks.

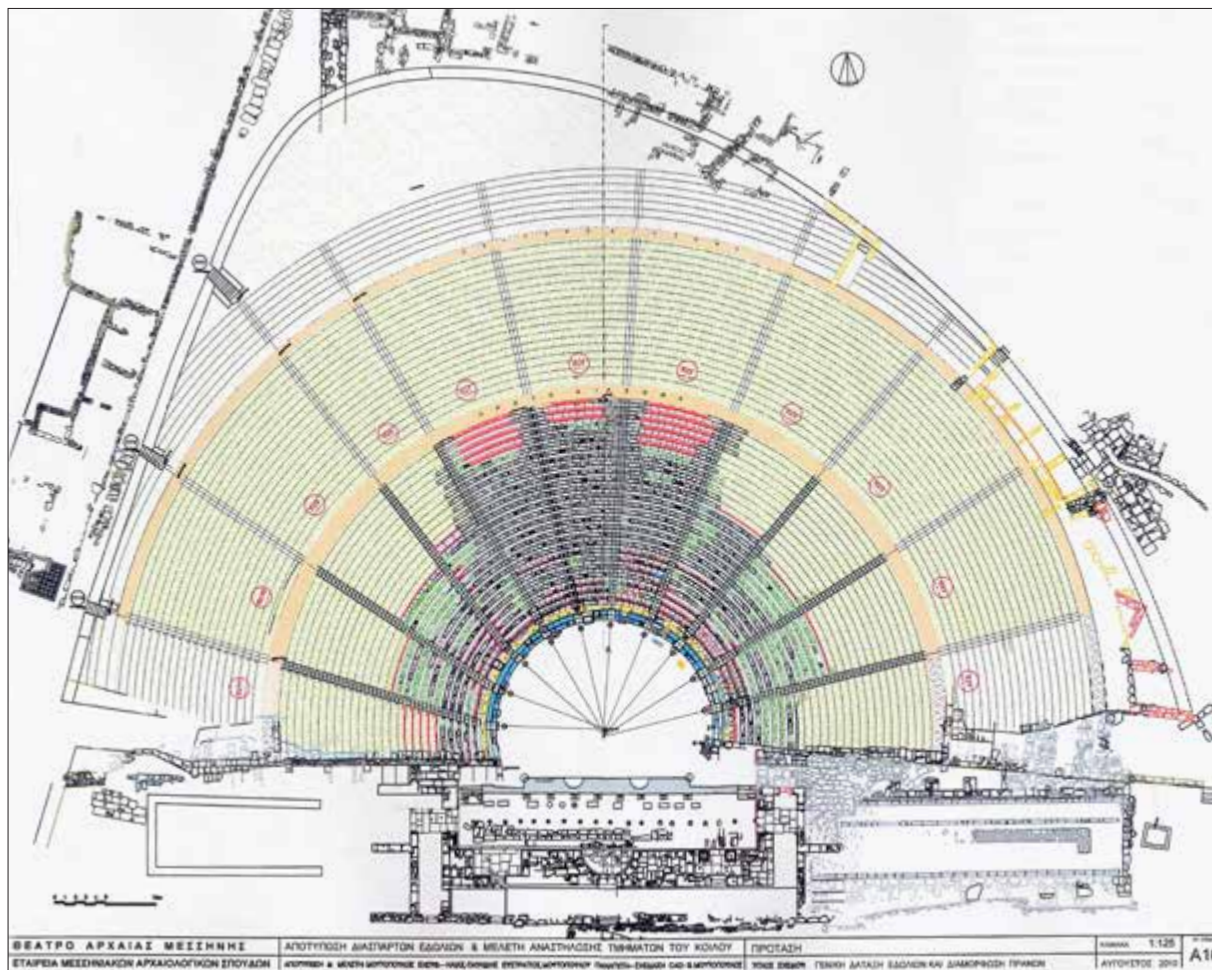


Fig. 1a. The theatre at Messene.

The theatre at Messene, with its cavea 106.83 m wide and its orchestra 23.56 m in diameter, falls into the category of the large theatres of late Classical/Hellenistic antiquity (Fig. 1a–b).¹

It was not only used as a place for performances and spectacles; it also functioned as a place for mass political assemblies, as a *locus par excellence* in the town for the promotion of the city, where the festival fever reached its height.² According to Plutarch (*Aratus* 50.1–3), a crucial meeting between king Philip V and Aratus, the Sicyonian general of the Achaean League, took place at the

theatre at Messene in 214 BC, the day after a revolt in which city officials and two hundred elite citizens were massacred.³ This historical event is a *terminus ante quem* for the construction of the theatre. The inhabitants of the Messenian capital gathered in the theatre in 183 BC to see the great general of the Achaean League, Philopoemen of Megalopolis, paraded after his captivity.⁴ According to the testimony of the *oktobolos eisphora* inscription (IG V1, 1432.6), dated to the 1st century BC, Aristokles, son of Kallikrates and secretary of the *synedroi*, “ἐποίησεν ἐν τῷ θεάτρῳ τοὺς διαλογισμούς”, presented his accounts in

¹ Themelis 2010b, 19–39.

² Generally Kolb 1981; Spawforth 1989, 193–7; Nielsen 2002, 1–4; Dickenson 2012, 128–33.

³ Fine 1940, 129–65; Roebuck 1941, 91–3; Mendels 1980, 246–50.

⁴ Tit. liv. 39.49.6–12; Plut. *Vit. Phil.* 19; According to literary sources Polybius had written a treatise under the title *Φιλοποίμενος βίος ἢ εγκώμιον*; cf. Errington 1969, 189–91; Lauter 2002, 375–86, figs. 11, 12a–b.



Fig. 1b. View to the orchestra and the cavea of the theatre from the NE.

the theatre in front of the *synedroi*, the consul Memmius, the general Vibius and all the citizens.⁵

The cavea of the theatre is partly hewn out of the natural rock and partly set on an artificial fill of stones enclosed in a grid of walls. The strong horseshoe-shaped outer retaining wall of the cavea is built with limestone blocks in a system similar to that of the fortification walls of Messene, interrupted approximately every twenty metres by gateways with pointed arches (Fig. 2). These gateways lead via staircases to the upper passageway (*diazoma*), while radial staircases descend to the orchestra and divide the cavea into eleven *cunei*. The arched gateways that provide ac-

cess to the cavea from the outside are a structural element, which makes the Messene theatre a special case, prefiguring the theatres and the amphitheatres of the Roman era.⁶ An unusual feature is the broad staircase attached to the northwest part of the retaining wall of the cavea, which was probably used in exceptional cases as an upper *parodos* for the surprise descent of actors to the stage.⁷

The imposing wall in front of the east *parodos* is constructed of neatly joined rectangular limestone blocks, which are preserved to a height of about 6 metres (Fig. 3); there are buttresses at regular intervals attached to the north side of the wall. This was not a retaining wall of the

⁵ Migeotte 1997, 51-61.

⁶ *Vitr. De Arch.* 5.6-7; Isler 1989, 141-53.

⁷ *Plut. Vit. Demetr.*, 34.4-5. A wooden upper scene is mentioned in the expense account of the theatre at Delos in 274: Dinsmoor 1949, 305.



Fig. 2. Retaining wall of the cavea. View from the east. In the foreground a mosaic floor of a villa.

Fig. 3. North and east wall of the skenotheke from the SW.



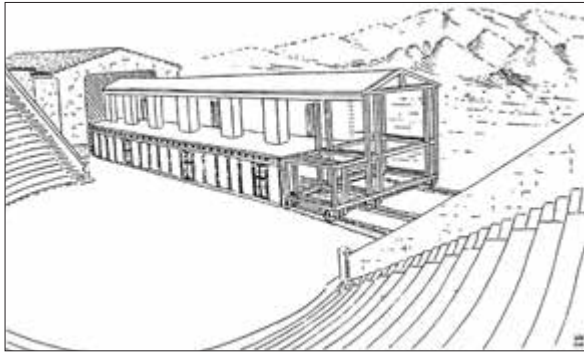


Fig. 4. Reconstruction of the movable stage (H. Bulle).



Fig. 5. Stone tracks of the rolling scene structure.

cavea, but the north side of a great shed, a *skenotheke*. The east, short end of the *skenotheke* is also partly preserved; at the south side only the levelling course, or *euthynteria*, of the demolished wall is preserved together with remains of buttresses corresponding to those of the north side. Three parallel stone tracks on the floor of the *skenotheke* were used to drag a movable skene on wheels, called a *scena ductilis* in Latin and *πηγγμα* in Greek (Fig. 4).⁸ The two

northernmost tracks are 2 m apart, while the third one is 5.1 m away from the second; all three start at a distance of about 0.40 m from the east side of the *skenotheke* and are preserved to a length of 38 m. The shorter distance between the first two tracks corresponds to the width of the proscenium, while the larger distance between the second and third corresponds to the *episcenium* of the movable stage (Fig. 5). The shed of the *skenotheke* was

⁸ Strabon 6.2.6; LSJ s.v. *πηγγμα*.



Fig. 6. West parodos wall, detail.

covered with roof tiles of the Corinthian type. Some pan tiles bear stamps with the inscription ΔΑΜΟΣΙΟΣ in relief. The typology of the antefixes of the ridge cover tiles dates to the middle Hellenistic times (275-150 BC).⁹

At Megalopolis, where the portico of the Thersilion had to be respected and the orchestra left open for popular festivals, the 3rd century saw the addition of a wooden stage which was rolled away on wheels and stored in a great shed, the *skenotheke*, erected in the west parodos.¹⁰ After the destruction of the city by the Spartan army of King Cleomenes in 222 BC the movable scene was discarded and a stone proscaenium was constructed. At this time the Thersilion lay in ruins. At Sparta the area in front of the orchestra was open to the area beyond.

For performances and spectacles a movable stage on wheels was erected in the Augustan period and stored in a *skenotheke* in the east parodos.¹¹ The remains of stone tracks recently brought to light indicate that the wooden stage, about 40 m long, was dragged on wheels for which tracks were provided similar to those at the Messene theatre.¹²

The retaining wall of the west parodos at Messene is built with several courses of neatly joined limestone blocks of fine workmanship (Fig. 6). It had to be dismantled and rebuilt slightly to the south in order to align with the north wall of the *skenotheke*, which is probably why the blocks bear mason's marks in the form of Greek letters.¹³ Directly above the recently restored retaining

⁹ Themelis 1994b, 155-65, pl. 55.

¹⁰ Dinsmoor 1949, 292; Meyer 1965, 1140-2; Petronotis 1973, 50-5, fig. 7; Felten 1987, 47, fig. 76.

¹¹ Bulle 1937, 3-5; cf. Mazois 1936, 64.

¹² Waywell, Wilkes & Walker 1998, 97-111.

¹³ On the mason's marks see the contribution of K. Sideropoulos in this volume 217-227.



Fig. 7. Ramp to the upper diazoma.

wall of the west parodos (behind the north wall of the *skenotheke*) there is a paved ramp leading to the first diazoma (passageway) of the cavea (Fig. 7).

A drainage channel (ὀχετός) around the orchestra passes under the SE part of the stage building and conducts rainwater into a covered duct.¹⁴ Some monolithic sandstone seats preserved around the orchestra are remains of the first Hellenistic phase that were no longer used in Roman times (Fig. 8).

The preserved limestone seats of the cavea can be classified into three different types: two composite and one monolithic. Manumissions of slaves inscribed on the

composite seat fronts date to the 3rd and 2nd centuries BC. One of them runs as follows:¹⁵

Ἐπὶ ἀγωνοθέτα Νικοδάμ[ο]ν ἀπελεύθερος εἰμί [Εὐ]
 θυ[μίδα]
 vacat
 Εὐθυμίδας ἀνέθηκε.

Nikodamos was the *agonothetes* responsible for the contests in honour of Dionysos.¹⁶ Manumissions are also inscribed on the stone seats of the theatres at Oeniadae, Delphi and Epidauros. Liberations of Messenian slaves

¹⁴ On the drainage channel of the theatre at Sparta: Waywell, Wilkes & Walker 1998, 97-111.

¹⁵ Themelis 2006, 37-40, pl. 27b; Themelis 2010b, 24-5, fig. 22b.

¹⁶ The office of the *agonothetes* was held by citizens who spent large sums from their fortune on *demothoiniai* (banquets for all the citizens) and distribution of money, food and sweetmeats during the spectacles (*IG VII*, 2712 from Akraiphia in Boeotia). At Athens, King Ariarathes V of Cappadocia (163-130 BC), King Gaius Julius Antiochus Epiphanes Philopappos of Commagene, and even the Emperor Hadrian himself (who was honoured with a statue in the theatre of Messene) served as *agonothetes* at the Panathenaea and the Dionysia of Athens (*IG II²* 3121, 1105). The Boeotian historian Plutarch also served as *agonothetes* of the Pythian games; he castigated super-rich *agonothetas* for squandering enormous sums (Plutarch, *Symposiasts* 5.5.2).



Fig. 8. Partial view of the orchestra and the first row of stone seats.

usually took place in the sanctuary of Artemis Limnatis on the south slope of Mt Ithome.¹⁷

Thrones for city dignitaries were set around the orchestra (Fig. 9). Two of them have lion's feet and separately worked footrests, and their backrests end in a duck's head turned backwards.¹⁸ The limestone base of

a bronze statue placed to the right (west) of the central stone throne bears the inscription:¹⁹

Σόφων Λυσικράτε[ος]
ἀγωνοθετήσας Διονυσί[οις]
Καλλικράτης, Λύσων ἐποίησαν.

¹⁷ The priest of this Messenian sanctuary was obliged to record every available musician, flute- or lyre-player, and specify where and when he was to play during the sacrifice, the mysteries or the various ceremonies. Emancipated slaves, including the Artists of Dionysos (actors, musicians, composers, singers), Olympic champions, artisans and rowing slaves constituted a separate class in Messenian society, according to the categories of citizens mentioned in the "inscription of the eight-obol levy" mentioned above; cf. Themelis, 2004b, 143-54. Several famous artists originated from Messene, such as the kitharodos (lyre-player) Oroikos, son of Philiskos, who participated in the performance at the festival of the amphictyonic Soteria at Delphi under the archon Cleondas, in 257/6 or 253/2 BC. Two Messenian kitharodoi, the brothers Eubios and Zobios, sons of Eubios, took part in musical events in Olous, Locris in the 2nd century BC and were honoured as consuls for their skill (*IC I*, 22, 4-A III). The Messenian actors Ariston, son of Euclides, and Philonichus, son of Philonidas, were active at Argos in the 1st century BC. Also in the 1st century BC the "Artists of Dionysos from Isthmus and Nemea travelling together to Elis" (*IV O*, 405), honoured at Olympia an art-loving Messenian nobleman as their *proxenos* (consul) and benefactor. Special mention is made of the "chorus artists" in the well-known inscription of the mysteries of Andania (*IG V* 1390; *Syll.* 697).

¹⁸ Themelis 2006, 42, pl. 24a-b.

¹⁹ Themelis 2006, 44-5, pl. 25b; Themelis 2010b, 40-3, figs. 62, 65, 87.



Fig. 9. The best preserved stone throne.



Fig. 10. Headless statue of a woman.

The 3rd century BC bronze statue of Sophon was made by the sculptors Callicrates and Lyson. Callicrates was an Athenian sculptor who collaborated with Zeuxippos, from Megalopolis, on the construction of a second bronze statue erected in the agora of Messene (inv. no 13919).²⁰ Callicrates was active at Epidaurus in the late 3rd century BC.²¹ At the southwest corner of the orchestra the headless marble statue of a tightly cloaked young woman was

brought to light (inv. no. 9928); it can be attributed to a known statue type dated to the 3rd century BC, thus corroborating the chronology of the first building phase of the Messene theatre (Fig. 10).²²

The rolling stage went out of use in the late Augustan/early Tiberian period, so the *skenotheke* was demolished and the ground around it rose by approximately 0.40 m; this demolition can be dated based on the evidence of

20 Zeuxippos and his father Phileas, also a sculptor, are mentioned in inscriptions from Megalopolis (IG IV, 745 and IG V², 143); they also signed a base of a statue at Hermione: *Corpus Inscr.* 1229 (Overbeck 1868, 300, no. 1585; Themelis 2004, 34).

21 IG V², 306; Stewart 1979, Appendix 157, period II: 266-10 BC. Fragments of a stone basin of the 3rd century BC brought to light in front of the proscenium (inv. nos. 11897+14646) bear on the rim the inscription: "[Dioscou]ridas [son of Anticrates] dedicated this to Dionysos". He is known through two further dedications to Artemis Orthia and Zeus Soter: Themelis 1991, 90; Themelis 1994a, 101-22; Themelis 2008, 211-22.

22 Lippold 1950, 290, pl. 99.4; Bieber 1977, 187, pl. 131, figs. 780-1; Linfert 1976, 54, pl. 17, figs. 87-8.

pottery and coins found in the fill above the stone tracks of the movable stage. The first permanent stage building with a proscenium of slender Ionic columns and semi-columns seems to have been constructed in front of the orchestra in the 1st century AD. Ramps provided access to the logeion of the Ionic proscenium. The dated finds brought to light in the fill of the first scene building include:

a) A fragment of a bronze fibula (inv. no. 16379) bearing the inscription AUCISSA, denoting the workshop of its production during the 1st century AD in northern Italy.²³ Fibulae of this type were very popular and widely distributed as indicated by numerous examples from Galatia, Germany, Britain and the Mediterranean including Olympia. b) A fragment of a red sigillata plate with a stamp in the form of *planta pedis* bearing the inscription CORNEL (=Cornelius), a known Arettine workshop of the Late Augustan period.²⁴ c) The handle of a Cnidian wine amphora with a stamp of period VII (78–30 BC).²⁵

The first permanent scene building was destroyed for unknown reasons around the middle of the 2nd century AD and most of its structural material and architectural members were incorporated into the structure of a new colossal three-storeyed scaenae frons dated to the third quarter of the 2nd century AD. A row of seventeen Ionic columns and semi-columns deriving from the proscenium of the first scene-building were used as supports of the c. 7 m deep and low wooden floor of the 2nd century AD stage, the so-called pulpitum of the western type (Fig. 11).²⁶ The construction of this completely remodelled permanent stage was made possible thanks to a generous donation from Tiberius Claudius Saethidas II, high priest of the Sebastoi for life and Helladarch of the Province of Achaia, namesake of his grandfather Caelianus I and son of the senator Tiberius Claudius Frontinus I. Saethidas Caelianus II was Questor of the Province

Sicilia, Augur, Tribunus Plebis and Patronus Coloniae Abelinattum. The story of Saethidas' ancestors and their deeds is told in two long decrees written on two marble statue bases erected in the eastern niche of the stage building.²⁷ The Saethidas family tree is partly known over a period of six generations from the time of Nero to Marcus Aurelius; this is a more or less complete form of the family tree based on epigraphic evidence (see Table 1). Pausanias visited Messene during the reign of Antoninus Pius in AD 155 and comments on the Heroon-mausoleum of this family in the stadium.²⁸

One of the limestone bases set up in the orchestra to the left of the stone throne mentioned above bore a bronze statue of the emperor Hadrian (AD 117–38), according to the inscription it carries (inv. no. 14565):²⁹

Ἀγαθῇ Τύχῃ
Αὐτοκράτορα Καίσαρα
Θεοῦ Νέρουα υἱόν,
Θεοῦ Τραϊανοῦ Παρθικοῦ
υἱόν, Τραϊανόν Ἀδριανόν
Σεβαστόν, ἀρχιερέα μέ-
γιστον Τιβ. Κλαύδιος
Φροντεῖνος Μάκερ Καμ-
πανός Τιβ. Κλαυδίου Σαι-
θίδα Καίλιανου, ἀρχιερέ-
ως καὶ Ἑλλαδάρχου τῶν
Ἀχαιῶν διὰ βίου υἱός, ἀνέ-
θηκεν.

The dedicator is Tiberius Claudius Frontinus Macer Campanus, son of Tiberius Claudius Saethida Caelianus I, high priest of the *Augusti* for life and Helladarch of the Koinon of the Achaeans, the first Messenian senator in the reign of Hadrian.³⁰ His cognomen Μάκερ (or Μάχερ), in Latin *Macer*, appears in three ephebic inscriptions from Mess-

23 Themelis 2010b, 36.

24 A stamp from the same workshop has been found at Knossos: Sackett & Branigan 1992, Y2.

25 Zobolas & Tzamourani 2011 (unpublished study on the stamped wine amphoras from Messene).

26 Liljenstolpe 1999, 117–54; Isler 2011, 93–100.

27 Themelis 2000b, colour pl. 4.

28 Cf. Cassius Dio 52.19.4; Alföldy 1975, 282–3; Brunt 1990, 267–81. See note 30 below.

29 Themelis 2005, 42–4, pl. 25a.

30 The same man is honoured on an inscribed base in the eastern niche of the theatre's scaenae frons: Themelis 2000a, 80–2. Pausanias makes reference to this Saethidas (4.32.2), stating that heroic honours were paid to him by the people of Messene at his Mausoleum south of the Stadium; cf. Luraghi 2008, 309–16. On his senatorial rank: *PIR*² C 872; Halfmann 1979, 174, no. 93: *RP* II, MES 142.



Fig. 11. Left: substructure of 2nd century scaenae frons. Centre: elements of early Roman proskenion re-used as supports below 2nd century pulpiti. Right: 2nd century frons pulpiti of brick-faced concrete.

ene dating to the 1st century AD (inv. nos. 2494, 10905, 14610).³¹ He also held the office of *consul suffectus* under Antoninus Pius (IG VI, 533 and 1455; CIL X, 1122-4).³² From Latin inscriptions, we know that the Messenian family of the Saethidae possessed great landed properties not only at Messene but also at Abellinum in Campania since the time of the emperor Nero and the φιλόκαισαρ founder of the family Tiberius Claudius Saethidas, great-grandfather of Tiberius Claudius Frontinus.³³

According to an inscribed statue base found in the agora of Messene (IG VI, 1451), the high priest of the Se-

bastoi and Helladarch Tiberius Claudius Saethidas Caelianus II dedicated a bronze statue of Marcus Aurelius when the latter was Caesar under the emperor Antoninus Pius (AD 139-61).³⁴ Saithidas Caelianus II and his brother Tiberius Claudius Frontinus Nikeratos also dedicated a bronze statue of the emperor Marcus Aurelius and another of Faustina II in the agora in the year 163/64 during the emperor's 18th *tribunatio*.³⁵

The skene and scaenae frons constitute a massive structure, 33 m long and 4 m wide, made of re-used limestone and sandstone blocks. The scaenae frons and

³¹ Themelis 2000a, 90-2, pl. 55.

³² The *consul suffectus* served in the later part of the year and had less prestige than the *consul ordinarius* after whom the year was named.

³³ A reconstruction of the family tree of the Saethidae family covering only four or five generations has been proposed by Tod 1905, 43 and Kolbe, IG V, 1451; 1455a; 512; RP II, MES stemma XVI.

³⁴ Cf. Themelis 2002, 44-5, fig. 38b, dedication of a statue of Antoninus Pius.

³⁵ The bases of the above two statues stand in front of the south side of the Messana temple: Themelis 2006, 46-7, pl. 37; cf. the family tree of the Saethidae in Baldassara 2007, 25-36, 46; cf. Spawforth 2002, 101-7; Luraghi, 2008, 318-22; Maa 2006, 325-38; Luraghi 2008, 191-202.

pulpitum were faced with marble slabs, some of them decorated with masks and animals in relief or bearing inscriptions commemorating the benefactions of the Saethidae family. Niches on the lower storey of the scaenae frons communicate through axial doors with spacious rooms backstage. The *parascaenium* was constructed across the west Hellenistic parodos. Two symmetrically placed entrances with paved floors to the east and west ends of the pulpitum lead into the *hyposcaenium*. A vaulted passageway led to the orchestra from the east. The floor of the Roman orchestra was paved with coloured marble slabs similar to those of the ekklesiasterion at Messene.³⁶

Unfluted columns supported the Ionic entablature of the scaenae frons; those of the lower storey, 5 m high, are made of grey granite and green and white marble, and are crowned alternately with Corinthian, Ionic and Pergamene capitals.³⁷ Some of the architraves and the geison bear mason's marks. The eastern rectangular niche contained honorific statues of Tiberius Claudius Saethidas Caelianus II and his wife (or mother); the latter adopts the type of the Great Herculaneum Woman, which is mainly used to portray mature women (inv. nos. 9625, 12286, 14481).³⁸ The "ruined proscenium" of the theatre (*τὸ κατερημμένον προσκήνιον*) and its repair is mentioned among other items in the long decree written on the marble base of Caelianus II's statue, of which only fragments are preserved. According to the same decree, a Messenian embassy was sent to the emperor in Rome "to bear witness to the great benefits provided" to the city of Messene by the honoured Saethidas (Caelianus II).

Two larger than life-size headless statues were found in front of the central semicircular niche of the scaenae frons: a colossal figure (inv. no. 11875), probably of Had-

rian, dressed in a Greek himation, and a colossal cuirassed torso, probably of Trajan, wearing the *paludamentum* over a richly decorated body cuirass, "Muskelpanzer" (inv. no. 11876).³⁹ The iconography on his cuirass refers to Trajan's victories against the Parthians and other "restless" neighbours of the empire.⁴⁰ A similar statue of Trajan found at Olympia, dedicated by Herodes Atticus, dates to the Antonine period.⁴¹ A colossal marble head of Lucius Verus, co-emperor with Marcus Aurelius from AD 161 to 169, was found in the west niche of the Messene theatre. Verus is depicted as a mature man with the *corona civica* on his head.⁴²

To conclude, it was Saethidas Caelianus II who sponsored the construction of the monumental stage building. The sculptural programme of the scaenae frons involves his ancestors and the emperors (Trajan, Hadrian, Septimius Severus, Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus) with whom the family was closely connected, as shown by Greek and Latin inscriptions found in the Peloponnese and in Italy, in particular at Abellinum. The decoration of the Roman stage building presents close similarities to that of the Nymphaeum of Regilla at Olympia. It seems that the wealthy and ambitious Saethidas Caelianus II tried to equal the success and fame of Herodes Atticus.⁴³ The high quality of the sculptural decoration in both buildings (the Olympia Nymphaeum and the Messene theatre) betrays the hands of Athenian sculptors from Neoattic workshops who were commissioned to work at both places.⁴⁴

Sculpture fragments and statues were brought to light in the fill of the pulpitum fallen from the niches of the second and also probably the third storey of the scaenae frons. One of these was a marble statue in the round of

³⁶ Birtachas 2008, 66.

³⁷ Themelis 2007, 26, pl. 25b; Themelis 2010b, 29, fig. 31.

³⁸ Themelis 2010b, 30, fig. 35.

³⁹ See for example the similarly dressed Julian in the Louvre and Hadrian from Cyrene in the British Museum, although a recent reconstruction of this statue seems to have demonstrated that head and body did not originally belong together: Oppen 2008, 68, fig. 53; cf. Bieber 1977, 134-5, pls. 629-39; Themelis 2001, 67-8, pls. 36-7; Themelis 2010b, 31, fig. 37; cf. Stemmer 1978, 47-9, no. IV 1-2, pls. 27, 28, 1-3.

⁴⁰ Themelis 2001, 68, pls. 38-41; Themelis 2010b, 31, fig. 38; Niemeyer 1968, 149-62; Gross 1940, 133, no. 76, pl. 2a; Stemmer 1978, 149-62.

⁴¹ Treu 1890-1897, 271-2, pl. 65, fig. 2; Bol 1984, 20-1; Schleif & Weber 1944; Fuchs 1959; Karanastasi 1995, 225, n. 110; three marble statues of emperors with body cuirasses have been found in the theatre of Taracco in Spain: Koppel 1985, 19-21.

⁴² Themelis 2001, 69, pls. 46-7. Lucius Verus visited Athens in 162 AD and made a dedication at Eleusis on his way to the East to wage war against the Parthians: Kienast 1990, 143-5; Clinton 1999, 97-8. A monument was erected in AD 166 at Eleusis by Herodes Atticus in honour of Marc Aurel and Lucius Verus: IG II², 4779; Clinton 1997, 97-9; cf. Oliver 1970.

⁴³ Herodes Atticus (103-78 AD) kept close links with Hadrian; after Hadrian's death he was one of the tutors of the young crown princes Marc Aurel and Lucius Verus. A monument was erected in 166 AD at Eleusis by Herodes Atticus in honour of Marc Aurel and Lucius Verus: Oppen 2008, 188-9.

⁴⁴ Generally Fuchs 1959; Becatti 1940, 7-16; Pollitt 1986, 169-84.



Fig. 12 a. Portrait of a man on herm-stele (Messene Museum inv. no. 11998).

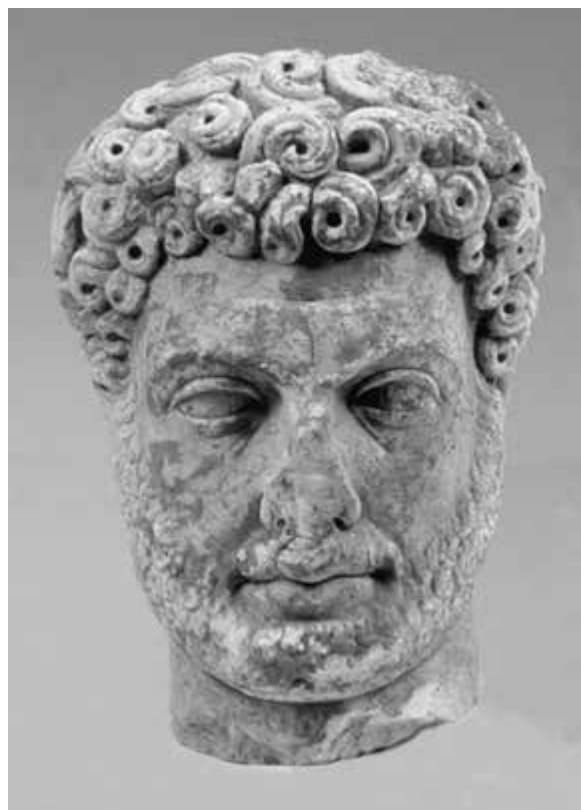


Fig. 12 b. Portrait of a man on herm-stele (Messene Museum inv. no. 12342).

Isis Pelagia (inv. no. 12000).⁴⁵ No prominent statue of Isis Pelagia comparable to this one from Messene has been found so far. Isis Pelagia and Isis Pharia appear in a similar type mainly on coins struck by Hadrian in AD 131.⁴⁶ This statue of Isis Pelagia, protector of sailors, may have been brought to the theatre from the Sanctuary of Isis and Sarapis, which was situated to the south. Other finds included: a) a marble statue of Hermes (inv. no. 11999), a copy of the Antonine era made after a late Classical original;⁴⁷ b) a marble hermaic stele carrying the portrait of a man, a work most probably of the early Antonine period

(inv. no. 11998); and c) a second marble herm-stele (inv. no. 12.341) of the same date

carrying a male portrait with spiral hair curls, short beard, moustache and full lips. The expressions and facial traits of both herm-stele portraits are similar; they probably represent the brothers Caelianus II and Frontinus Niceratus (Fig. 12a, b).⁴⁸

Statues, mainly of bronze, portraying prominent Messenians and benefactors of the city were erected around the orchestra. One of these bears an inscription of the 2nd century AD (inv. no. 13067):⁴⁹

45 Themelis 2011, 97-109; the goddess is depicted moving towards the right. Her outstretched left foot is placed on a ship's ram. She was holding the (lost) foresail that billowed in the wind, herself acting as the ship's mast. Aslant on her left shoulder hangs a garland, a distinctive attribute of this Hellenised Egyptian divinity, who was worshipped and greatly loved by devotees throughout the Mediterranean.

46 Geissen 1974-1982, 1121-4; Brit. Mus. Cat., Aeolis 116; *LMC*, s.v. *Isis*, nos. 269-72 (V. Tran Tam Tinh).

47 Themelis 2007, 27, pl. 26a.

48 Themelis 2002b, 28-9, pls. 25-6.

49 Themelis 2002b, 27-8, pl. 22a.

Ἡ πόλις
Τι(βέριον) Φλάβιον Ἴσ[ο]-
κράτη, ἥρωα [φιλό]-
σοφόν νέον Π[λά]-
τωνα ἀρετῆς πά-
σης ἔνεκεν.

The statue was a posthumous honour paid to Tiberius Flavius Isocrates the New Plato.⁵⁰ Only Christianity provided a serious threat to Neoplatonism (a term itself to be of medieval origin), a fact that is explained by the close spiritual affinity between the two dogmas. It is worth noting that two other Messenian philosophers are attested in this inscription.⁵¹ The Messenian intellectual known here as the “new Plato” would have acquired the right of Roman citizenship as a member of the local oligarchy as well as enjoying the favour of the Imperial court, as generally happened with academics of the period.⁵²

Some of the stones of the drainage channel around the orchestra bear holes for the wooden posts of a railing installed to protect the spectators during gladiatorial games and other sports in late Roman times. Gladiatorial sports usually took place in the city’s stadium.⁵³ The use of stones from the retaining wall of the cavea in the final building phase of the nearby Arsinoe Fountain indicates that the gradual abandonment and stone robbing of the theatre had begun in the early 4th century AD.⁵⁴ The economic decline of Messene, a phenomenon seen across the entire Imperium Romanum, was accompanied by the dramatic reduction of its population. The colossal theatre was finally converted into a “quarry” by the inhabitants of the late Roman Messenian capital.⁵⁵

Immediately to the west of the theatre, on the other side of a narrow two meter wide street, is the Theatre’s Quarter. The architectural remains belong to luxury dwellings of the Roman period (2nd to 4th century AD) constructed on the ruins of Hellenistic and early Roman houses.⁵⁶ The banqueting halls are paved with colourful mosaics.⁵⁷

The remains of a large middle Byzantine and late Byzantine settlement occupy the upper part of the cavea, extending to the north and east.⁵⁸ The inhabitants of this settlement are responsible for the destruction of the epitheatron, the demolition of the northeast and east retaining wall of the cavea, and the shifting and robbing of many of the stone seats. Their settlement spread across the north and northeast part of the cavea, extending south of the scene building and east towards the Arsinoe Fountain and the north stoa of the agora. It is an extension of the early Byzantine building complex located along the east side of the Asklepieion and north of the Sebasteion. The area between the theatre, the Arsinoe Fountain and the agora seems to have been inhabited mainly from the 9th to the 15th century, although a watermill was constructed in front of the fountain in the 6th century AD. The pottery includes fragments of handmade and wheel-made vessels, many of which are glazed with painted and incised decoration.⁵⁹ With stones taken from the theatre the inhabitants of Medieval Messene constructed not only their houses but also one of their basilicas, located close to the old theatre. The stone seats of the cavea were pushed down and piled up in the orchestra area, and then carried away by pack animals.⁶⁰ The theatre continued to be quar-

⁵⁰ The Neoplatonic School appeared as a trend of reversion to classical Greek philosophy, “true philosophy”, as opposed to the Sophists, Cynics, Stoics and dogmatic professional philosophy teachers. It took a definitive theoretical frame in the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD, represented mainly by Plotinus (204-70 AD) and his successors; Themelis 2010a, 33, fig. 48.

⁵¹ Euameros, the earlier, was a follower of the School of Cyrene and friend of Cassander (350-297 BC). There followed the famous Peripatetic Aristotle, who was active around AD 180 (or earlier), an opponent and contemporary of our Neo-platonist Tiberius Flavius Isocrates. Aristotle probably taught the well-known Alexander of Aphrodisias, who was teaching in Athens between 198 and 221 AD.

⁵² Touloumakos 1972, 57-92.

⁵³ Veyne 1990, 398-403; Welch 1998, 127-35; Scheid 2009, 25-34; Themelis 2001b, 119-26; Themelis 2001a, 9-20.

⁵⁴ Reinholdt 2009.

⁵⁵ Themelis 2002b, 40-1.

⁵⁶ Themelis 2010b, 37, fig. 52.

⁵⁷ Themelis 2010a, 89-110.

⁵⁸ Themelis 2010b, 36-8, figs. 51-3.

⁵⁹ Themelis 2002a, 20-58.

⁶⁰ Themelis 2003, 26, pl. 21; Themelis 2004a, 51, pl. 23.

ried without interruption throughout the period of use of the basilica and the settlement, up to the early 15th century. A limekiln, 2 m wide, was built against the east retaining wall of the cavea near the east ramp.⁶¹ The fill around the kiln yielded Byzantine pottery of the 11th to the 13th centuries AD.⁶² Along the eastern retaining wall of the cavea, four rooms were constructed and used as workshops and humble residences to serve the needs of the limekiln.⁶³ Clusters of Christian cist graves and fragments of funerary inscriptions were brought to light in the fill of the west parodos and the *skenotheke* as well as among the ruins of the proscaenium and the cavea.

Phases of the Messene theatre

- a) Early 3rd century BC. Stone cavea. Removable wooden scene building and stage.
- b) Early 2nd century BC. *Skenotheke*, rolling scene building (*scena ductilis*).
- c) 1st century AD. Stone skene and proscaenium of Hellenistic type with Ionic colonnade.
- d) 2nd century AD. Three-storeyed scaenae frons with broad stage (pulpitum) and sculptural programme of Tib. Cl. Saethidas Caelianus II (162/9 AD).
- e) Late 3rd/early 4th century AD. Abandonment of the theatre.
- f) 7th 15th century AD. Theatre used as a quarry and burial ground for the Christian settlement and the basilica.

The Mason's Marks from the Theatre of Messene (Kleanthis Sidiropoulos)

The practice of using masons' marks in ancient construction,⁶⁴ although rooted in the prehistoric period⁶⁵ and widely distributed throughout Greek world,⁶⁶ never acquired the authority of an inflexible rule among craftsmen. Thus, the occasional presence of such signs on only some buildings or parts of buildings, and sometimes on repairs, is a phenomenon common in Greek cities of the historical period.⁶⁷

A typical example of this phenomenon may be found at the theatre at Messene (Fig. 1a), where masons' marks are connected in one way or another, but always partially, across all the individual historical phases of the building's architecture and construction, from its original foundation down to its current restoration.

Because of the size of the theatre structure as a whole and the obvious financial burden it laid upon the public purse and private donors, it probably took a long time to build and would therefore have progressed toward completion in stages. If this meant that different teams of craftsmen were active in each stage, it would account for the use of masons' marks in the original phase of the theatre exclusively on the retaining wall of the west parodos, specifically its lower (eastern) section.

Figure 13 shows the wall supporting the west side of the koilon that allowed the creation of a stepped parodos.⁶⁸ Its structure is made up of the following repeated pattern (Fig. 6): on top of the levelling course (euthynteria), the visible stepped toichobate with a lifting boss

61 Themelis 2010b, 39, fig. 55.

62 Themelis 2010b, 38, fig. 54.

63 Themelis 2010b, 39, fig. 56.

64 I am grateful to Professor P. Themelis for his help and the trust he has shown in me. The drawings are from the archive of the Society of Messenian Archaeological Studies, while the photographs are by the author. The text was translated by St. Kennell.

65 See Begg 2004a; Begg 2004b with the older bibliography.

66 For an abundant but not exhaustive bibliography of the wider topic, see Herrmann 1990, 83-5; Cooper 1996, 354-68; Reinholdt 2009, 151-5. However the original task set by O. Broneer (Broneer 1954, 28, n. 11: "there is an urgent need for a general study of 'masons' marks' in all their uses and at all periods of Classical architecture") remains unfulfilled.

67 At Messene masons' marks have been observed in the following locations apart from the theatre: on the later funerary monuments by the Arcadian Gate (20 and 21), which were constructed of spolia (Themelis 1997, 83-4, pl. 37b); on sandstone blocks of the foundations of the city wall; on some parts of the Arsinoe Fountain, though the marks here are from various systems (Reinholdt 2009, 151-5); of the excavated parts of the Agora, on *stoae*, the temple of Messene, the *Treasury*, and the *Bouleuterion* (Themelis 2010c, 105-25); only on the columns of an as yet unexcavated Doric propylon in the NW of the Agora; in the whole Asklepieion complex and the surrounding structures (Themelis 2010d, 165-209; Sioumbara 2011, 4-13), only on the first course above the euthynteria of the later Artemision (Chlepa 2001, 15); on the Roman villa (Themelis 2010d, 217-8), a single example (the word ΟΥΙ) on a stone close to an interior threshold; in the stadium and the surrounding buildings, only in the E stoa (Themelis 2007, *Prakt* 46); and scattered repair marks on a few columns. Nothing similar was noted in the sanctuaries on Ithome (Themelis 2004b, 143-54).

68 Today, partly dismantled and under restoration.

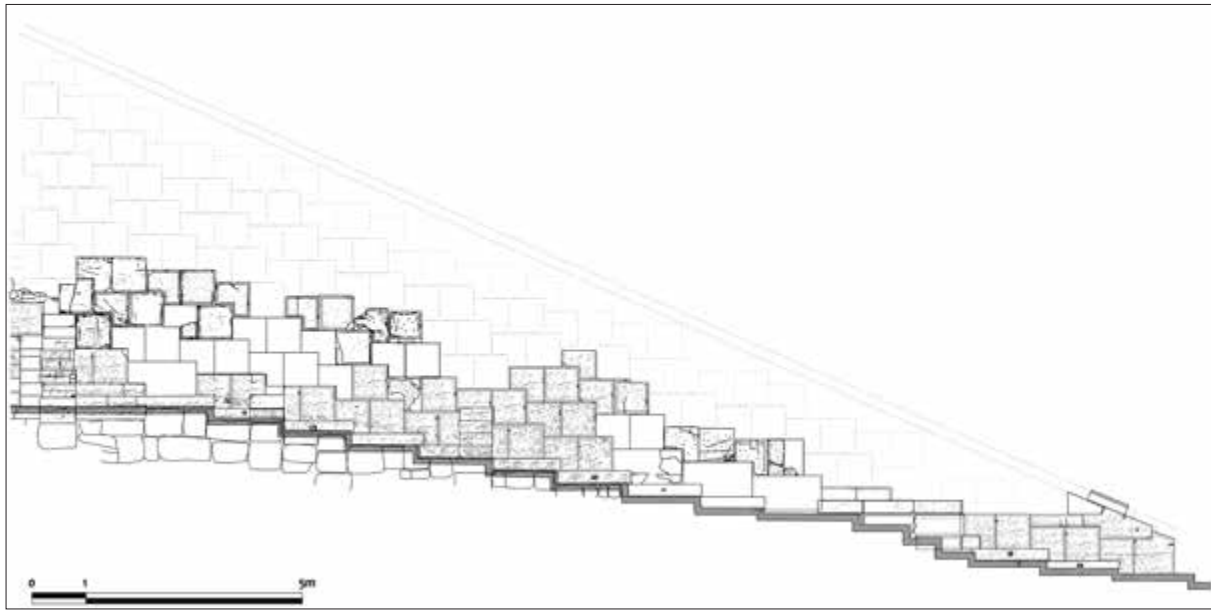


Fig. 13. Retaining wall of *W parodos*. Reconstruction drawing of the façade.

(*ancon*) bears a series of large rectangular double orthostate with a false joint in the middle and an L-shaped left (west) side. This element in turn supports two blocks which together repeat the length and arrangement of the orthostate, and the same technical model is continued through eight more courses up to the highest point. The regularity of this quasi isodomic structure with a course height of 2 feet (c. 0.634 m)⁶⁹ is facilitated by the standard length of the blocks and the repetition of the structural elements. Absolute geometric precision is disturbed only by the two supporting buttresses and, of course, by the sloping edge with its crown moulding. Economy of construction required that the wall be built of pairs of blocks instead of single large ashlar blocks.

The overall complexity of the form of the retaining wall appears to have encouraged, if not indeed necessitated, the use of masons' marks as follows (Fig. 14): some toichobate blocks bear an identifying letter in the centre of the upper surface, while the orthostates always have letters high up on their faces, more or less next to the false joint, with the alphabetic W–E sequence indicated

with the letter rho (P) at the east end. From this point upwards, the system becomes more complicated, since the stones are almost identical in size but differ in thickness and the location of their metal elements (e.g. clamps, dowels). Thus, near each of the eastern joints the course is marked with one letter; a second letter underneath the first indicates the position of the stone within the course, always west to east.

The craftsman, then, did not need to specify the course when he inscribed the ordinal number "first" (A) on the first block; since the stone was distinguished by its size, it therefore left no margin for doubt and signified only the sequence of the stones within the course. In contrast, he designated the courses above and beyond it with the letters B, Γ, Δ, E and so on, and the order of the blocks within them with unambiguous, carefully inscribed letters from A to at least Σ; for example, in the second course we encounter stones with B/A, B/B, B/Γ and so on, in the third Γ/A, Γ/B, Γ/Γ, and in the fourth Δ/Γ, Δ/Δ and so on.⁷⁰

An additional series of huge, deeply cut identifying letters was added from the third course on, this time on

69 For the Arsinoe Fountain, Reinholdt (2009, 167–72) suggests the use of a foot of 32.5 cm; in Asklepeion, Sioumbara (2011, 202–3) proposed a shorter foot (31.84 cm), which is used here.

70 Cf. Reinholdt 2009, 152.

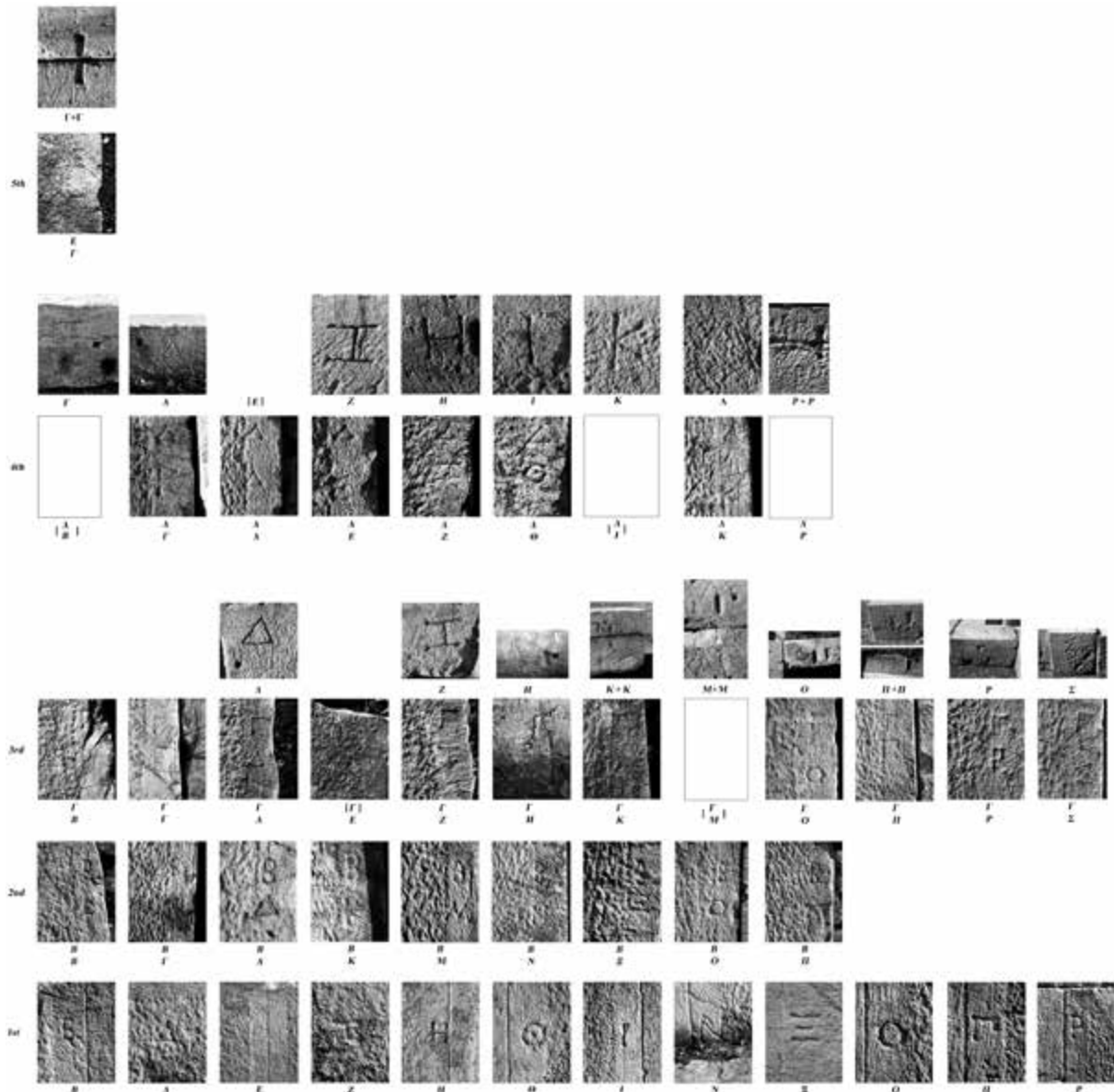


Fig. 14. Retaining wall of *W parodos*. Preserved masons' marks by course.

the narrow top edge of each stone. Since this set of letters shows the internal sequence of the stones in the course above and is repeated twice on each pair of blocks, its presence does make the relationship between the two courses easier to discern.

It is as yet unknown why a Hellenistic craftsman chose

to show that he knew the whole Alphabet only in one particular spot out of the entire theatre.⁷¹

The letter forms – Z, Θ, M, Π and Σ are the most diagnostic – suggest a date in the 3rd century BC and connect the construction of the wall and the consequent use of masons' marks to the first establishment of the monu-

⁷¹ In other theatres the use of masons' marks was more limited. On Corinth: Stillwell 1952, 17, 21, 30, 34-5. On the odeum at Corinth: Broneer 1932, 64, 136-7 and 140. On Sikyon: McMurtry & Earle 1889, 273. On Eretria: Heermance 1896, 322. On Delos: Replat & Béquignon, 1927, 411, n.1. On Philippi: Collart 1928, 102. On Aegae: Bohn 1889, 40-1, fig. 48.

ment or the rebuilding of the analemma, as the previous author has already presented in detail.⁷²

Two structural changes to the theatre at Messene at the beginning of the 1st century AD are particularly significant: the obvious obsolescence of the *skenotheke* due to the elimination of the Hellenistic wooden scene building and its replacement with a stone one; and the slight relocation of the curved retaining wall in the southeast part of the koilon.⁷³

This first permanent scene building today constitutes an architectural ghost. It was demolished and parts of its structural materials – the sandstone colonnade and the limestone wall blocks – were re-used in approximately the same place for the 2nd century AD stage building.⁷⁴

Its disiecta membra can be recognised with some effort in the krepis of the existing scenae frons. A first look thus shows that, besides the loss of the original plan, we have neither the complete dimensions of the blocks nor (the most important thing for our present purpose) the full set of complex masons' marks they bore. The blocks are placed in a way that best suits their re-use, in combinations and locations completely unrelated to their original positions (and certainly not as the craftsman who made the marks originally intended). Today, we can see the back side of some of them with the masons' marks, but the thickness and the principal face have been lost. On other blocks, the short upper side with useful pry holes and just a few cuttings for clamps is visible, but neither the back nor the front sides are. Most importantly, no masons' mark can be seen, even if we can assume the existence of one with absolute certainty – this is truly a difficult puzzle.⁷⁵

To sum up the evidence for masons' marks,⁷⁶ however, it seems that the first scene building had an oblong rectangular plan with proportions of about 1:11. Its length can be restored with relative certainty from the masons' marks of the courses, where the joints are numbered with the same identifying segmental letter at both ends and go from A at least as far as Ω, running east to west on

the lowest course and boustrophedon thereafter. As the stones of uniform thickness (1⅓ feet/0.433 m) are also of identical length (3 feet/c. 0.96 m), this gives us a total length of 75 feet/23.8 m.

On a block with the letters I-K is an oblique dove-tail shaped cutting, an indication that at this spot, 28 feet distant from the southeast corner, there was an adjoining block of an oblique sandstone wall. At a corresponding location to the west was a second parallel oblique wall, since in a course that is numbered from west to east its point of contact with the joint given the letters € – €ω is shown by the related anathyroses.

The tripartite internal division of the scene building can be completed with a ground plan based on the length of the short side, as obtained from a section of the architrave with the masons' marks A-B whose edges preserve anathyroses for the connecting walls. The hyposcenium can consequently be restored with relative ease: the interstitial space is shown by an Ionic architrave in sections 2.07 m/6½ feet long, and the Ionic column drums preserved in the area (Fig. 11) together with the half-columns, which clearly comprised the facing ends of the oblique walls, formed a ten-columned stoa. On the architrave frieze cornice, at a height of c. 3.2 m, was set the wooden floor of the proscaenium.

This plan seems to correspond completely to the sandstone foundation which is preserved in the middle of the latest pulpitum, the interpretation of which has previously caused problems. With this analysis, the architectural ghost of the earliest scene building has acquired flesh and bones, and a place to stand.

The limestone walls of the scene building had a slightly curved and half-worked exterior face with pronounced chisel marks, and a fairly smooth interior surface with masons' marks that were clearly then plastered over, giving the overall effect of a pseudo-isodomic construction. The two lowest courses were made of stone blocks 2 feet in height and 3 feet long. The first course just has the signs A, A-B, B-Γ and so on down to Ψ-ω, using the joint as the

⁷² See above, Themelis, 000.

⁷³ See above, Themelis, 000.

⁷⁴ The scattered masons' marks are evidence for the re-use of materials in the theatres of Corinth (Stillwell 1952, 21 and 34-5; Broneer 1932, 64, 136-7), Sikyon (McMurtry & Earle 1889, 273) and Eretria (Heermance 1896, 322).

⁷⁵ For a similar case in Olympia see Herrmann 1990, 86-9.

⁷⁶ Cf. the parallel of Corinth Stillwell 1952, 21, 34-5.

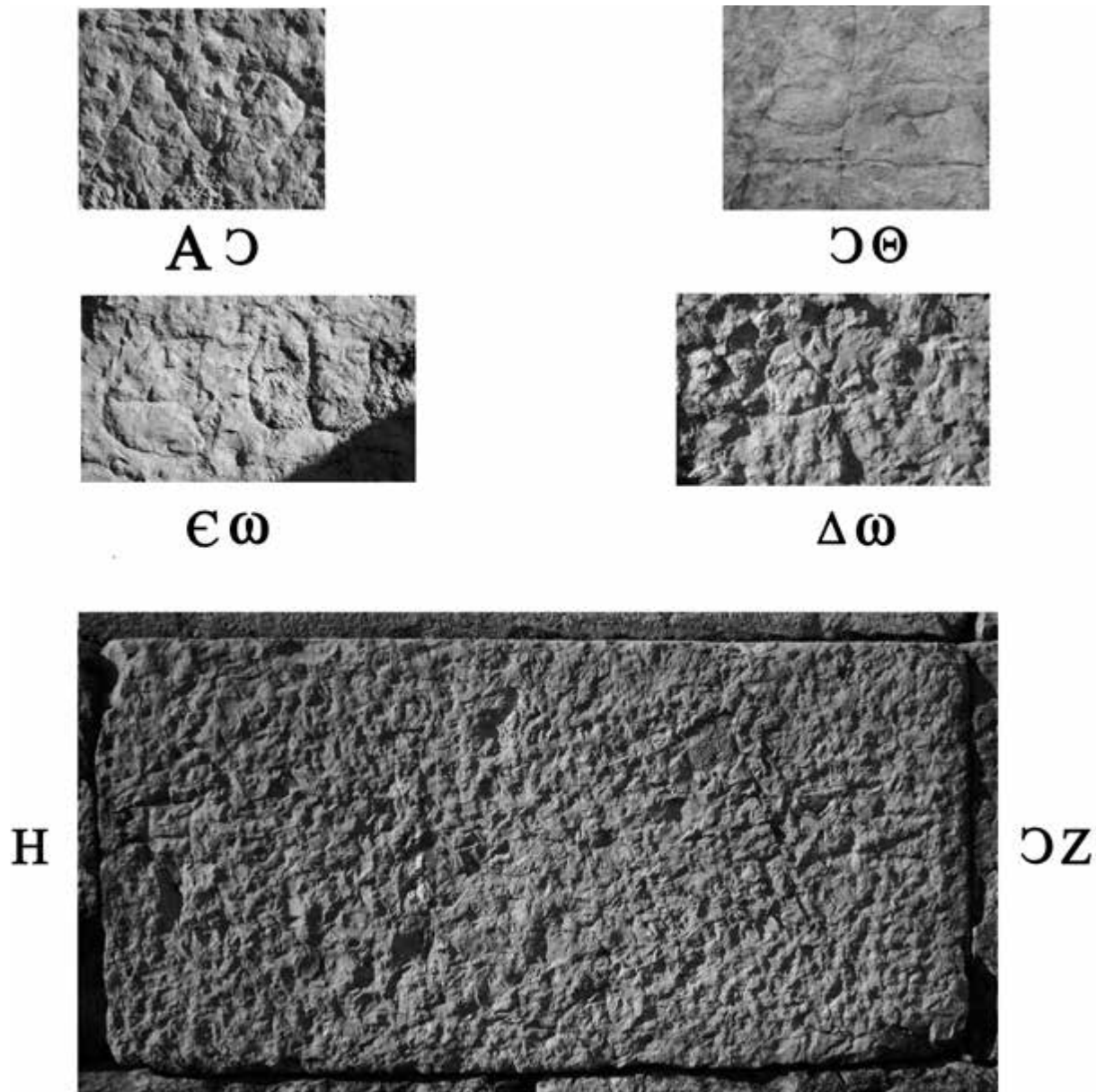


Fig. 15. Early Roman skene. Masons' marks from 5th and 6th courses.

point of reference. To distinguish the second course of equal height, the ordinal number B ("second") was added before or after, thus AB-B, BG-B; BA, BA-B, BB-G; A-B, AB-B, BG-B, TD-B.

In the third course, the height of the blocks is reduced to 1.5 feet (c. 0.48 m),⁷⁷ and the system of simple sequential order is employed again, with pairs of letters on both sides of the joint. In the fourth to sixth upper courses

⁷⁷ The upper courses consist of similar blocks 1.5 feet high and 3 feet wide, but at some point the regularity of length was abandoned, leaving only the height constant.

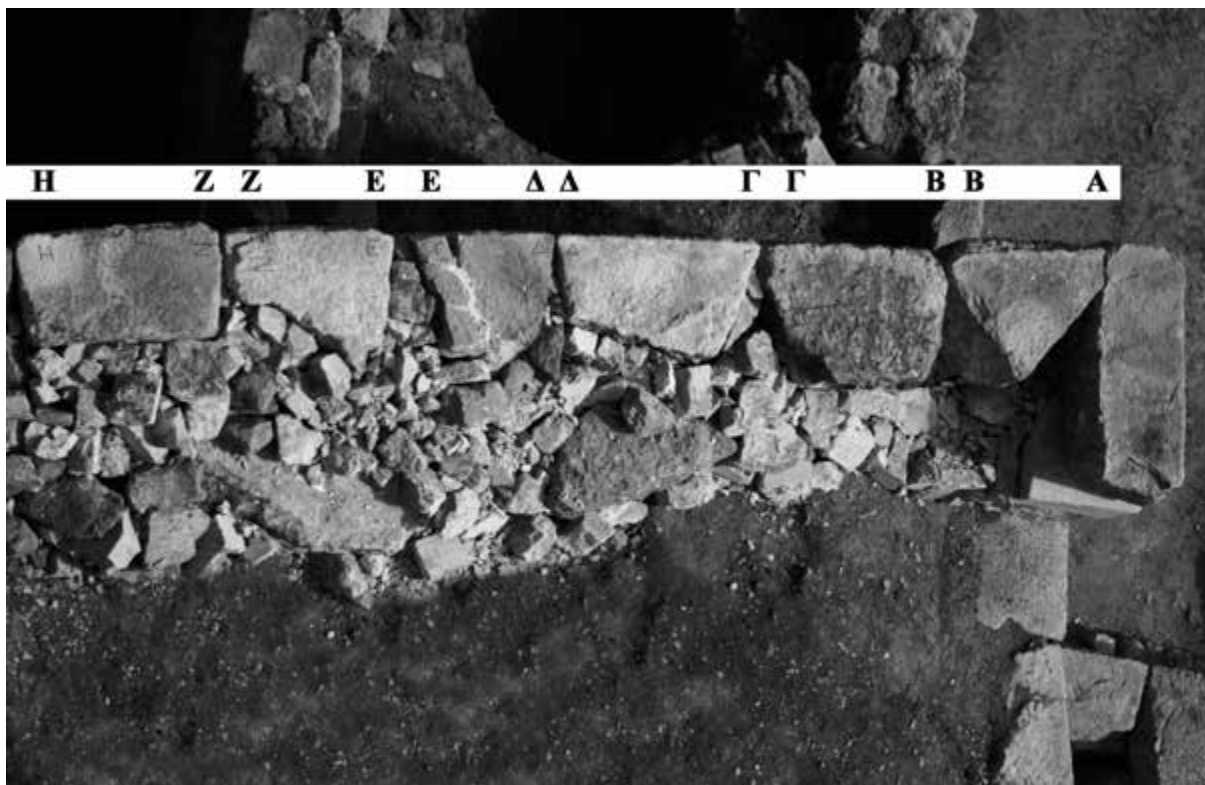


Fig. 16. SE corner of retaining wall of the cavea. Ceiling plan and masons' marks.

of equal height, the symbols become more complex for differentiation, with the addition of either a Δ (for the fourth course)⁷⁸ or a combination (Fig. 15) where the sign C is inscribed facing either right or left before or after the identifying letter; it seems that the lunate capital epsilon (ϵ) is likewise used, sometimes facing the usual way (ϵ), sometimes backwards (ϵ).

Perplexingly, cursive omega (ω) is also used, not only as an identifier by itself, but also accompanying other letters. We are inclined to conclude that the combinations on both sides of the joints are made up of the same letter, to be accompanied either by ϵ - ϵ or by)- ω .

Beyond this, the obvious distinguishing feature is the lateness of the date. Letters such as the lunate sigma (ς) in place of the usual four-barred one (Σ), the corresponding lunate epsilon (ϵ) instead of E and the small cursive omega (ω) instead of the monumental Ω are the most

typical and can be associated with the early Roman period.

The slight relocation of the curved retaining wall at the southeast edge of the koilon is also revealed as a repair by the masons' marks on the narrow upper sides of its stones.⁷⁹ The limited use of masons' marks, exclusively in the section between the stairs and the corner of the building, the place of their engraving, their association with the alterations to the ground plan, and of course their letter forms, all point to the Roman period. During the work of ordering and re-erecting the retaining wall, it was established that many of the blocks were out of place, both in terms of alphabetic sequence and of their orientation. In any case, the construction, though slapdash in some ways, had all the features of ancient building technique: concern for joints, care for the height of the stones assembled from a variety of original structures, absence of

⁷⁸ For a similar logic in the theatre at Aegae, see Bohn 1889, fig. 48.

⁷⁹ See above, Themelis, for an extreme example of the association of masons' marks with transfer of the entire edifice. Also see Dinsmoor 1940, 1-52, especially 15-8; Korres 1983, 201-7.



Fig. 17. SE corner of retaining wall of the cavea before and after restoration.

mortar and especially the use of small unworked stones as fill. The masons' marks in this specific section of the theatre show, then, by both their very existence and their lack of expertise, two structural interventions that, while Roman, cannot be dated later than the 3rd century AD. As has already been mentioned, the latest repair that has been identified goes back to the middle of the 2nd century AD, based on epigraphical and other data. In the case of the retaining wall, it represents the phase of ignorance of masons' marks, while the earliest phase that created the marks is clearly connected with the first stone stage building and consequently with the beginning of the 1st century AD. What is more, the masons' marks on both the first scene building and the retaining wall share the same sequential logic.⁸⁰

These letters were carved in an alphabetical sequence, usually again two on each block, on the top, not on the face, and especially going from the centre outwards. We think it likely that this practice is connected with a project of scheduled removal and relocation of the wall, not of new construction which, if nothing else, would have been from the outside in, meaning that the letters would have run in a different direction.

No symbol exists designating the courses, but only the sequence of blocks within each course, since the different course heights made course identifiers. It thus appears that each course began with the letter A near the first joint of the cornerstone, continued regularly with the stone A-B, then B-I and so on to be completed in the tower-

shaped remnant south of the stairway with the letter T or X, depending on the length of each of the available blocks (Fig. 16).⁸¹

Once again, the diagnostic letters are, for example Θ, the lunate C, and Π. Their size and form vary from the gigantic H-Θ (12+ cm) in the eighth course to a very unobtrusive four centimetres high in other cases, a fact that betrays the existence of multiple letter-cutters. Moreover, the whole procedure of making signs on a retaining wall of this period was very unusual in the evidence from Messenia – and, as far as I know, from a wider geographical area.

In addition, it has the hallmarks of improvisation, recognisable in the variety of letter forms and the uneven uprights of careless letter-cutting.

Despite all these features of negative quality, it is evident that the reconstruction work (Fig. 17) of the last two years has made good use of the presence of masons' marks to completely transform the disheartening heap of ruins uncovered by the excavations and cleaning.

The phase of large-scale repairs to the theatre at Messene, financially supported by the Saethidae, has been set out by Professor Themelis.⁸² The use of masons' marks has again been verified in the new, imposing scene building that was constructed. The size, complexity, and richness of its design and construction necessitated an organised array of masons' marks, sometimes with certain original solutions. In principle, the letters in the colonnades proceed completely independently. On each

⁸⁰ As also on the *stylobate* of the Arsinoe Fountain (Reinhold 2009, 153-4) and on the eastern stoa of the Gymnasium at Messene.

⁸¹ Given this regularity the stone with the word PY-IIA at both ends is inexplicable.

⁸² See above Themelis, ooo.

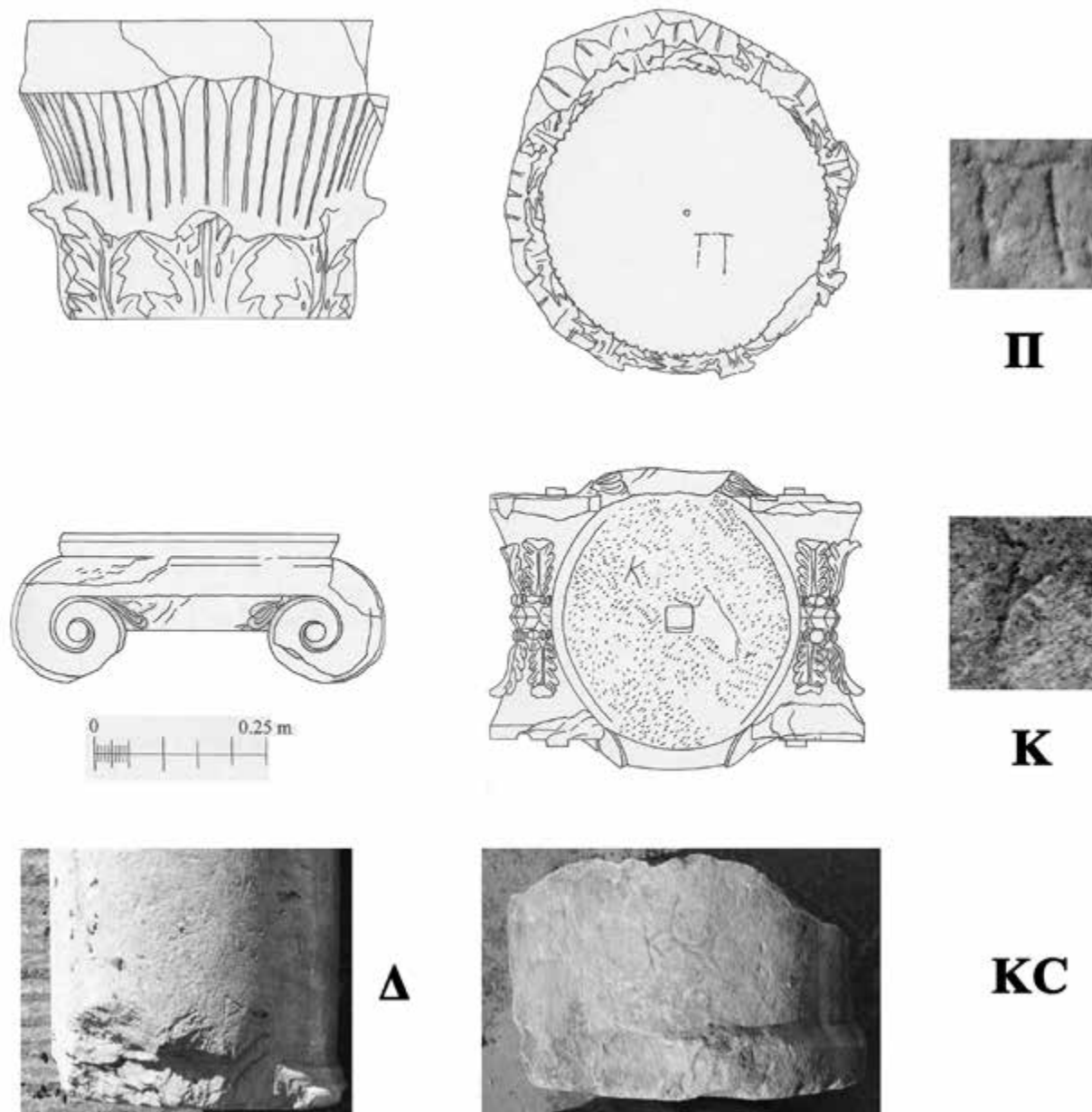


Fig. 18. *Scenae frons*, 2nd century AD. Masons' marks from the colonnade.

column, the same letter is used to mark the base, the shaft and the capital, and the complete columns in fact run in continuous numerical sequence from east to west and bottom to top: examples (Fig. 18) are the bases with A and ΣT, the shafts with Δ and K and the capitals with K and Π.

The Ionic geisa, however, which essentially divided the building into storeys, are marked more elaborately⁸³ by reference to the statues that adorned each of their niches.⁸⁴ Thus, the one containing Isis Pelagia has a geison marked with "Isis" (Fig. 19), misspelled twice (ΙΣΗΣ and ΙΣΣΙΣ), and a lintel is labelled more precisely with "work

⁸³ Cf. Guarducci 1974, 385-7; Reinhold 2009, 152.

⁸⁴ See above Themelis, ooo.

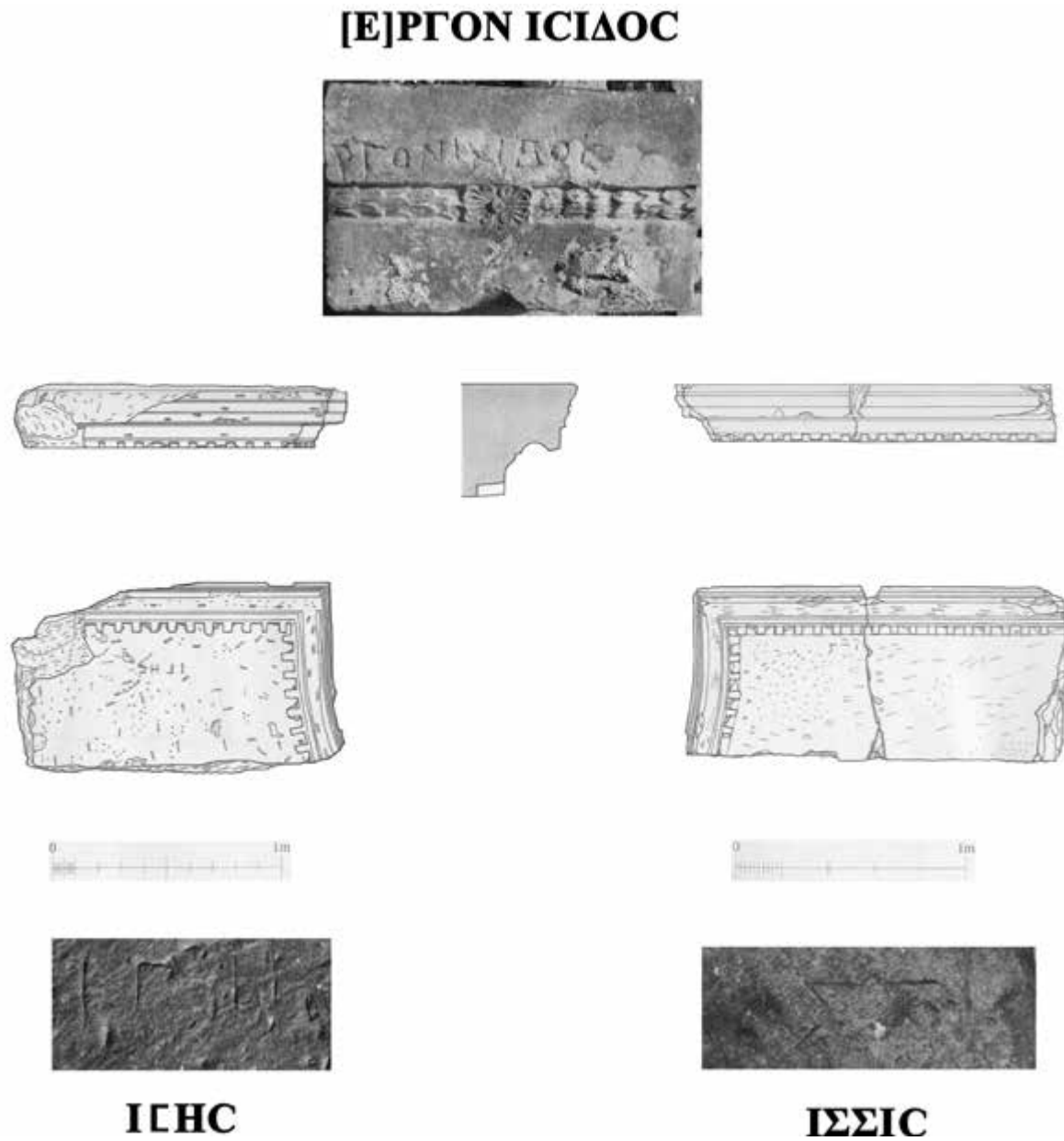


Fig. 19. Scenae frons, 2nd century AD. Masons' marks from the niche of Isis.

(=statue) of Isis" (ΕΡΤΟΝ ΙΣΙΔΟΣ),⁸⁵ proof that the rare statue of Isis in fact stood in the central semi-circular niche of the second storey.

The corresponding rectangular niche that bore the mark "παῖς" (=child) has its geison inscribed four times with ΠΑΙ[C] (Fig. 20); the enigmatic ΙΟΥ, representing

either a misspelled "υἱοῦ" (=son) or a contracted form of "Ιουλίου" (=Ιουλίου), comes from a niche whose statue is probably lost. In the apse that contained the hermaic stelai of benefactors, the symbols begin on the bases and continue without pause even as far as the shoulders of the herms; note the Γ and Δ on the second one (Fig. 12a).

⁸⁵ Themelis 2011, 102, fig. 13.

ΠΑΙ [C]



ΙΟΥ



Fig. 20. Scenae frons, 2nd century AD. Masons' marks from the niches.

Finally, individual masons' marks have also been identified in the anathyroses of blocks from buttresses, on scattered limestone seats and even on the marble wall revetment.⁸⁶

As scattered as the quarrying remains⁸⁷ – the incised ligature ΔΑ (=δαμόσιος/public)⁸⁸ – the masons' marks on the public theatre of Messene have perhaps become, as it were, the “salt” (ἅλας) that seasons its restoration.

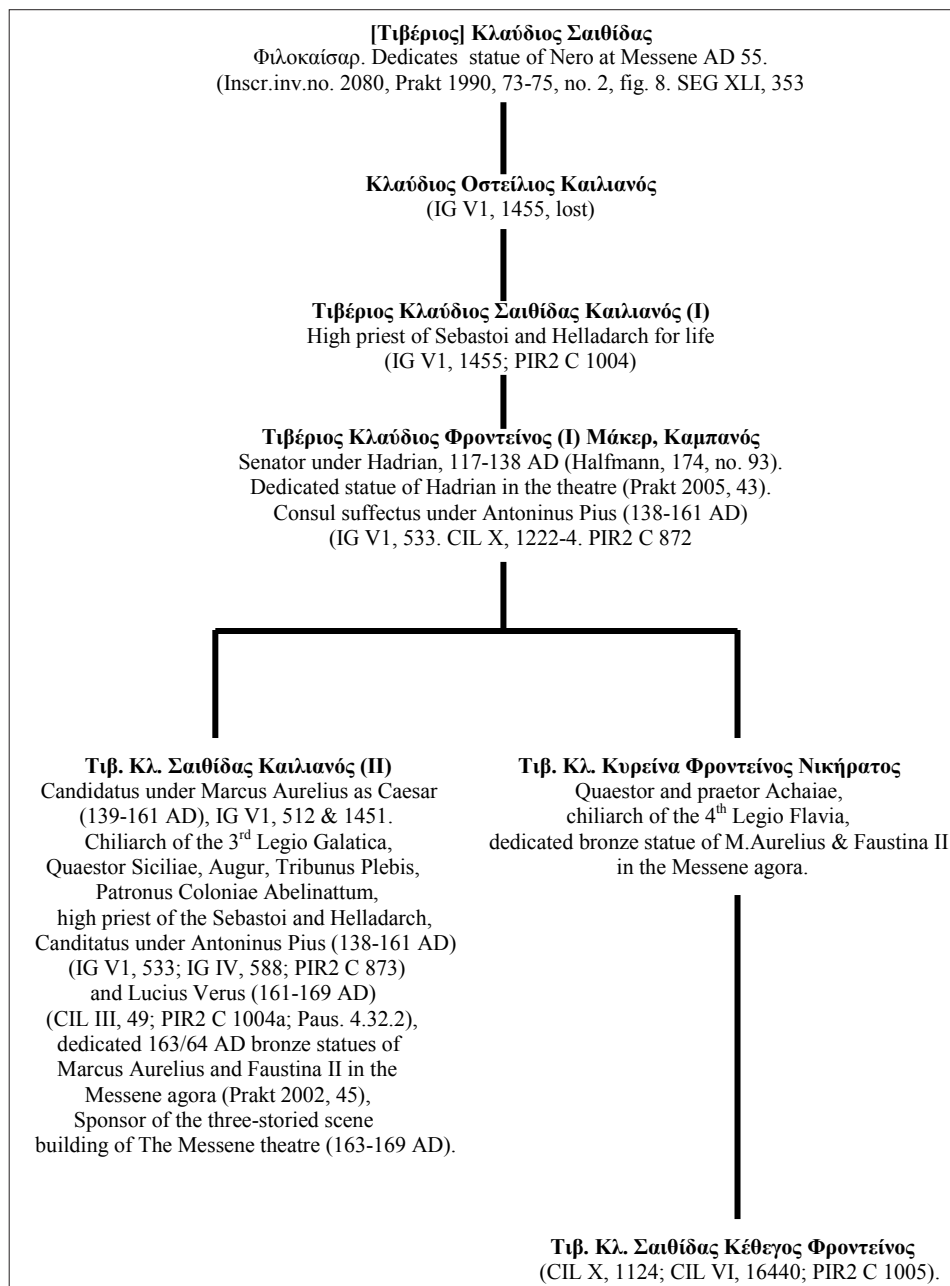


Table 1. *Family tree of the Saithidai*

⁸⁶ Cf. the parallels at Corinth (Stillwell 1952, 17, 21) and Sikyon (McMurtry & Earle 1889, 273).

⁸⁷ At Diolkos (Koutsoumba & Nakas 2009), there are analogous marks recognised as trademarks of quarrymen. Here they are marks of the “customer”.

⁸⁸ Cf. above Themelis, 000, discussing the same inscription on tiles.

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