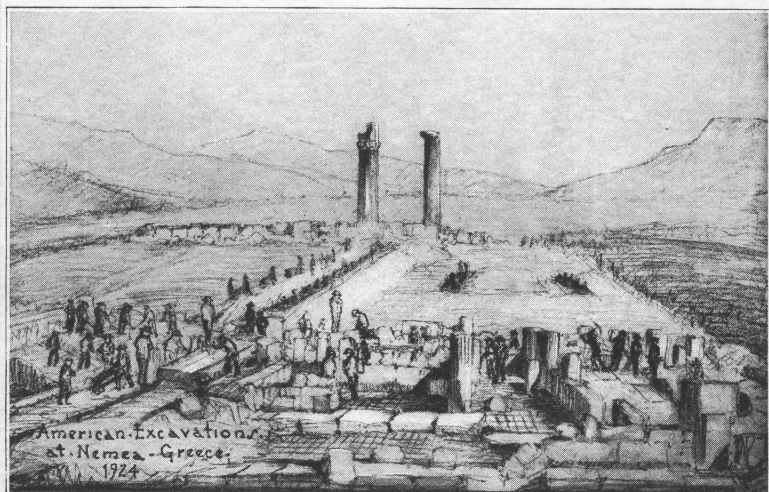


Blegen

University of Cincinnati
Department of Classics

Excavations in Greece



Report of the Campaign of 1924
carried on at

NEMEA

UNIVERSITY OF CINCINNATI

DEPARTMENT OF CLASSICS

Excavations in Greece

REPORT ON THE CAMPAIGN
OF 1924 CARRIED ON AT

NEMEA

By CARL WILLIAM BLEGEN

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Classical Studies at Athens*

WITH A FOREWORD BY

W. T. SEMPLE

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FOREWORD

The inception of the idea that an excavation might be conducted in Greece by the Classical Department of the University of Cincinnati was due to a visit in Cincinnati by Professor Edward Capps, of Princeton University, Chairman of the Managing Committee of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens, made during the spring of 1923. Among many other inspiring ideas left with us by Professor Capps there was also the suggestion that it was quite feasible for Cincinnati to conduct an excavation in Greece. Our confidence that there was a public in Cincinnati to whom such an idea would appeal was made strong by the fact that in the course of the same spring a sum totaling \$5,000.00 had been subscribed by friends of the Classics in Cincinnati toward a \$150,000.00 total endowment of the American School at Athens.

The enterprise was further strengthened by a visit made in Cincinnati in November, 1923, by Mr. Bert Hodge Hill, Director of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens. Through Professor Capps' influence, Mr. Hill, during a brief period of rest in America from his exacting duties as Director of the American School, was induced to assume the extra burden of a trip to Cincinnati. During his stay here he led the discussion at a meeting of the Classical Round Table, a very interesting association of business and professional men who take pleasure in turning for an hour or two each month from the preoccupations of their daily life to a consideration of things classical. In the evening of the same day, Mr. Hill gave an illustrated lecture at the home of one of the members of the Round Table to which a larger public was invited. In conversations with Professors Capps and Hill arrangements were made for the conducting of the excavation by the School at Athens, the School to give scientific direction, leaving what sums might be raised in Cincinnati to be devoted entirely to the actual work of excavation. Due to these arrange-

ments and the very great enthusiasm aroused by the visits of Professors Capps and Hill, the response of the Cincinnati public to an appeal for funds was immediate and generous. The site chosen for the excavation was Nemea, a shrine of ancient renown, situated in the northeastern corner of the Peloponnesus. Excavations were actually begun late in April and carried on well into June. An interesting and scientific presentation of the results of this excavation is given in the following article by Mr. Carl William Blegen, Assistant Director of the American School at Athens. The results of this single campaign are so encouraging and the opportunities for noteworthy contributions to Greek archaeology are so great that we feel it will be not only a duty, but a privilege to continue the investigation in future campaigns. Our hopes are naturally very high, indeed—for example, a wonderful statue may be discovered, or something of that sort. It is necessary, however, to restrain our eagerness in that respect and to confine our reasonable expectations to the gaining of scientific information concerning the history and development of one of the most important sites of the ancient Greek world.

(= Art + Archaeology,
April 1925, pp. 175-184)

REPORT

ON THE

CINCINNATI EXCAVATION AT NEMEA

SEASON OF 1924

In the uplands between the Corinthian and the Argive plains lie three separate fertile valleys. The easternmost is that of Cleonae, from which a small river runs down to the Corinthian Gulf. The westernmost is the valley of Phlius through which passes the Asopus on its northward way. And between the two, divided from them by high bare ridges, extends the narrow vale of Nemea over which a striking table-topped mountain, the ancient Apesas, stands like a sentinel on the northeast. Until recently a lonely marshy waste, frequented only by wandering shepherds and their flocks, the valley has now, almost within the memory of the present generation, become a well-cultivated, productive region; and that this labor of reclamation has well repaid its efforts is attested by the prosperity of the modern village of Heraklion. Since the draining of the marsh no malaria scourges this pleasant little vale and the highland breezes make the climate most agreeable; while the north wind on a bright May day carries with it the fragrance of mile upon mile of blossoming vineyards.

Here, in this retired valley were held biennially the Nemean games, third in the series of the four great Pan-Hellenic festivals. In contrast with the splendor and pomp of Olympia and the grandeur and riches of Delphi there prevailed here rather the rural peace and simplicity of a secluded countryside. And yet the wreath of parsley was deemed no mean prize in the golden days of Hellenic athletic competition; nor did the austere Pindar scorn to commemorate the Nemean victory.

Already roofless and without an image in Pausanias' time, the temple of Nemean Zeus had suffered almost complete ruin when the first modern travelers came to see it. Only three Doric columns remain in place of the original thirty-four, one of them still supporting a precariously balanced capital, almost hurled down by some unremembered earthquake. Tall and slender in their proportions they rise to form the characteristic landmark of Nemea today. The floor of the temple is still in large part



The Vale of Nemea with Mt. Apesas in the background.

preserved and here and there a few blocks of the steps of the crepidoma, or platform, are yet in their original position. Many drums of the great columns, some in orderly line, some in confusion, and massive fragments of the superstructure lie scattered about the ruins, overgrown with formidable thickets of wild blackberry bushes. In their solitude and dignity these ruins form a worthy memorial of a great civilization long since passed away.

Though first made the object of excavation some forty years ago and re-examined briefly in 1912, Nemea is still, archaeologically speaking, practically untrampled ground. Not even the temple itself has yet been adequately published; and the precinct surrounding it is completely unknown. The stadium where the games were held is only conjecturally identified where a deep indentation in the hills suggests its shape. And yet there can be no doubt that other important buildings must once have stood about the temple, a gymnasium, perhaps a bouleuterion, a lodging place for officials and athletes, a prytaneum, and who knows what other structures to care for the throngs that twice in each Olympiad assembled here. It was with the purpose of exploring the precinct about the temple, and with the hope of finding some of these further buildings that the American School in the spring of 1924 undertook the task of carrying on excavations at Nemea. Though the results of its recent researches have not yet been published, the French School generously resigned its claim to the site,—another instance of the friendly and cordial relations which have always existed between the two institutions. The funds for the enterprise were

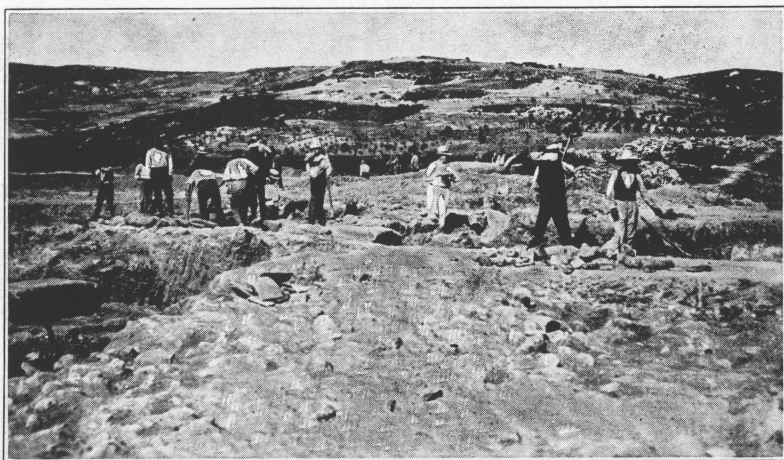


Trial trench in area of Gymnasium showing Byzantine wall.

provided by friends of the School and of Greece in Cincinnati, whose liberality alone made the excavation possible.

The staff in charge of the digging consisted of the Director and the Assistant Director of the School, P. H. Davis, Fellow of the School, Prentice Djuell, the architect, and C. A. Robinson. Operations began on April sixteenth and continued until June third. During the first half of this period Easter holidays and scarcity of labor proved serious obstacles to expeditious work; but after the middle of May conditions became more favorable.

Directly behind the temple on the west flows a small brook, almost dry in the summer, but occasionally after a heavy rain, swelled for a brief period to a raging torrent. It has cut for itself a deep bed running northward through the plain. In the banks of this *revma* were observed at three points the projecting ends of well-constructed Greek walls, built of squared blocks of *poros* laid in alternating courses of headers and stretchers, evidently the remains of an edifice of size and importance. These walls were examined, trenches were dug on both sides of the stream to determine the extent of the building, and when its limits were found the area was cleared, revealing finally the plan of the whole structure. By a curious fate a well-marked Byzantine floor and cobbled pavement appeared here below the level of the original Greek floor. Consequently for the greater part of our structure only the foundations are preserved. The plan is very simple, a long rectangle measuring some thirty-six by twenty meters with the long axis running from east to west. A heavy cross wall divides



On left, column-base in east hall of Gymnasium. In foreground, Byzantine cobblestone pavement.

the building into two parts. The eastern part is a great hall about nineteen meters square. This large room was once covered by a roof which was supported on four symmetrically spaced columns. The columns have disappeared but the four pier-like foundations on which they stood are still preserved and that in the southeast corner still carries the stylobate. Its top surface is badly worn and does not give sufficient evidence to determine whether the columns were of the Doric or of the Ionic order.

The Byzantine walls uncovered in the area of this east hall were built in part of re-used ancient material. Fragments of triglyphs and cornice from the temple had been so employed and one of the latter had still preserved the fine lines of the mouldings at the top of the overhang. A complete antefix of white marble was also found here, deeply carved with an anthemion pattern, the first antefix of the temple to be known. This antefix fits exactly into the cutting in a block of the marble sima of the temple found some years ago.

The western part of the building measuring about sixteen by twenty meters is again subdivided into two parts. The northern part forms a room fourteen meters wide which probably also originally had interior columns to support a roof. The stream passed directly through this room and to its activities may be due the disappearance of the column bases.

From the south side of this room a flight of triply-divided steps leads down to a series of three compartments at a lower level. The steps are steep, comparatively narrow, and roughly made. The central section descends southward to the



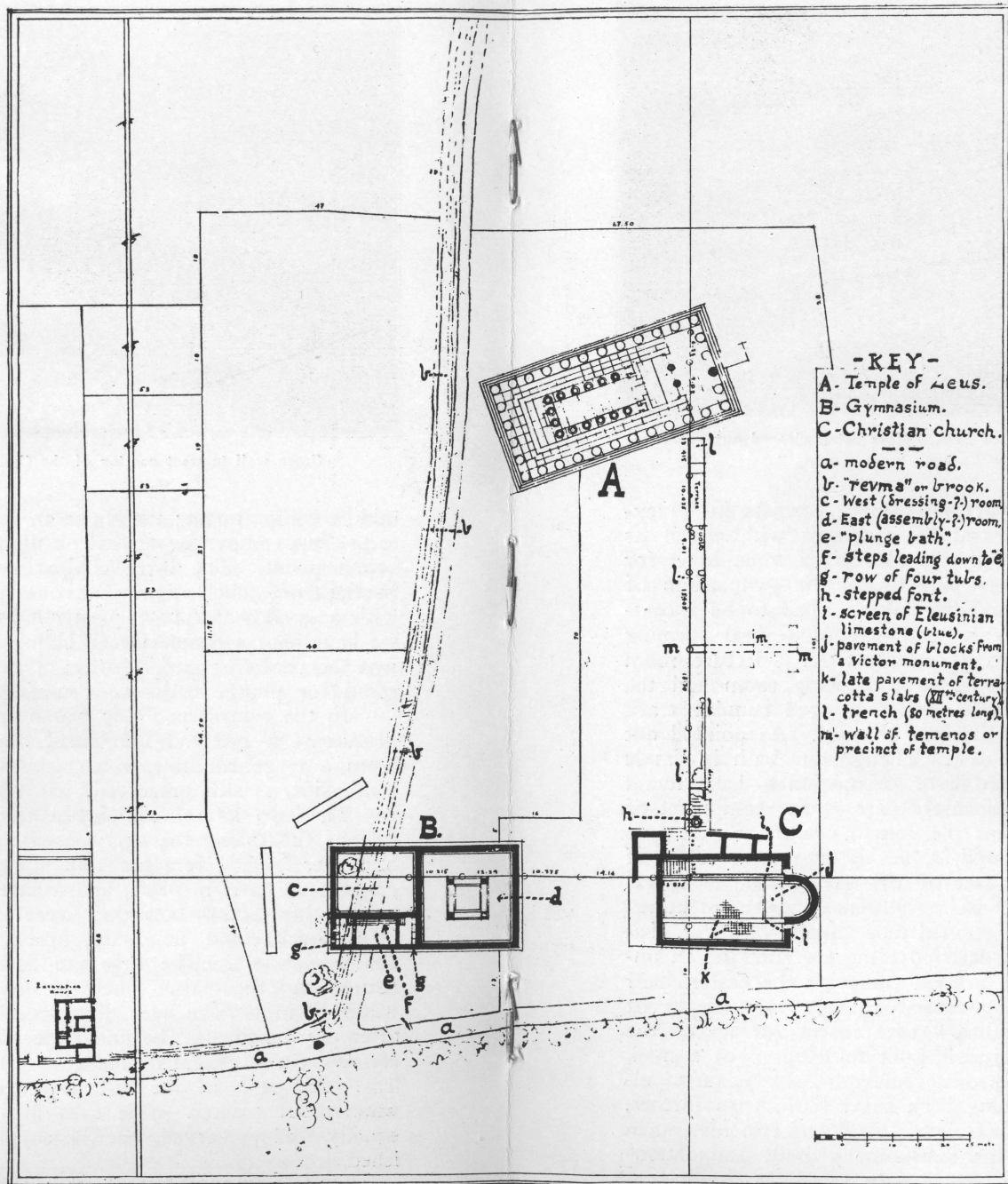
Cross wall in west section of the Gymnasium—from the south.

middle compartment; the flight on the left goes down eastward to the east compartment; that on the right, westward to the west compartment. The three compartments were separated by low barriers not much more than one meter high. All are paved with a good waterproof plaster. There can be no doubt that we have here a simple Greek bath. In the central compartment was the pool for plunge baths; at each side of it was a smaller room for plunge baths and rubbing down.

In the central pool the water must have stood to a height of almost a meter. The small opening by which it entered from a large conduit, which passes behind the room on the south side, is still preserved.

The two lateral compartments are provided each with a row of tubs along the extreme side wall. That on the east is best preserved. Here the four tubs, cut from large blocks of *poros*, still stand in place, and a small water channel above and behind them shows how they were supplied with water. Small holes which could, no doubt, be closed by wooden plugs open above each tub. The tubs are hollowed out, rounded at the bottom and the ends. There is no opening for the escape of water; it must have been dipped out whenever it was necessary to empty the tubs. The underside of the tubs is cut away in a concave curve except at the ends which thus take the form of legs. All parts of the tubs were coated with thick layers of water-proof plaster. The tubs in the west room are almost equally well preserved, but the supply channel behind has vanished.

Quite in keeping with the rustic character of Nemea is



Map of the Cincinnati Excavation at Nemea—Campaign of 1924.



Tubs in east compartment of Bath, before being cleared out.

the simplicity of this bath. Its importance consists in its excellent state of preservation and the clearness with which its arrangements may be made out. It also gives some basis for the identification of the whole building as the gymnasium of Nemea. It is true that the building is too small to be a complete gymnasium, but it may be one unit of several forming the whole. Here then we have possibly a large lecture room or assembly place and adjoining it a dressing room and the bath. The usual long colonnade with a covered running track must be sought elsewhere to the east or west. As pointed out below it probably lay to the east. Though our bath is simple and small, it is nevertheless no slight satisfaction to have found it when we reflect that it was surely part of the equipment of the Nemean games as early as the fourth century B. C.

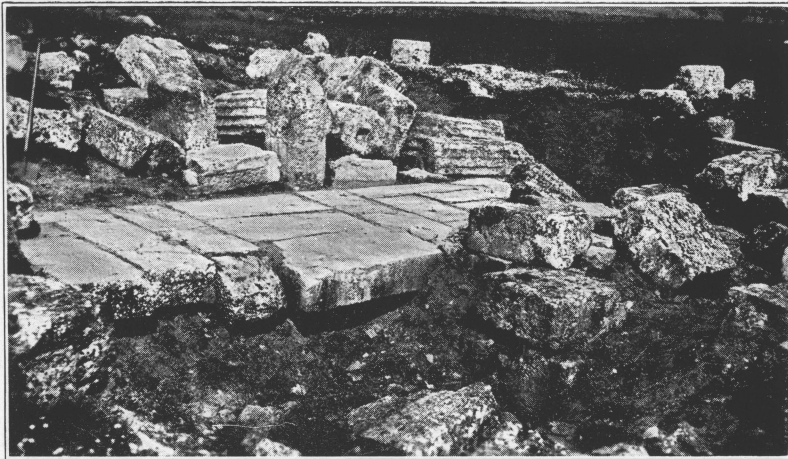
A large and regular mound, some eighty meters south of the temple and immediately east of the gymnasium, which is strewn with ancient blocks, has traditionally been identified as the tomb of Opheltes. It seemed more likely, however, that it was merely formed of the debris covering the ruins of an important building. During the present campaign the eastern half of this mound was accordingly cleared away to a depth of about two meters. Not far below the present surface of the ground were uncovered the crudely built foundations of a small chapel of perhaps the sixteenth or seventeenth century, surrounding which lay a cemetery going back several centuries farther. Beneath the chapel the graves at a depth of two meters, in the center of the mound, the substantially built foundations of a large Christian church of early date (sixth to eighth cen-



Typical Byzantine graves in cemetery above the early Christian church.

tury?) appeared. These foundations are very heavy and constructed with mortar. The materials used are, for the most part, fragments and large blocks from the temple—a significant fact for the date of the destruction of the temple. The church is a simple basilica in plan with apparently a narrow narthex, and on the north side a small, added chapel and a baptistry. In the center of the latter is a stepped font made of brick and mortar covered with white marble revetment. Portions of the pavement of the church still remain here and there in the nave and the aisles. This pavement consists of small, square terra-cotta plaques and is almost certainly not the original pavement of the church. From the evidence of coins it would seem to date from not much before the twelfth century.

The screen at the end of the nave was made of slabs of hard, blue limestone (Eleusinian stone) set on edge. Other similar blocks and slabs of white limestone in alternating rows formed the pavement before the altar inside the screen. These blocks evidently come from the base of some victor monument of the fourth century B. C., in which white stone was employed for the lower courses and blue stone for the top of the pedestal on which the figures stood. From the cuttings in the top of these blue blocks it appears that the monument was probably a chariot group. The blue stone is unfortunately very brittle and on many of the blocks the face has flaked off. No inscription to identify the monument has yet been found and it may be that this epigraphic evidence is irretrievably lost. The monument was one of large size, as no less than



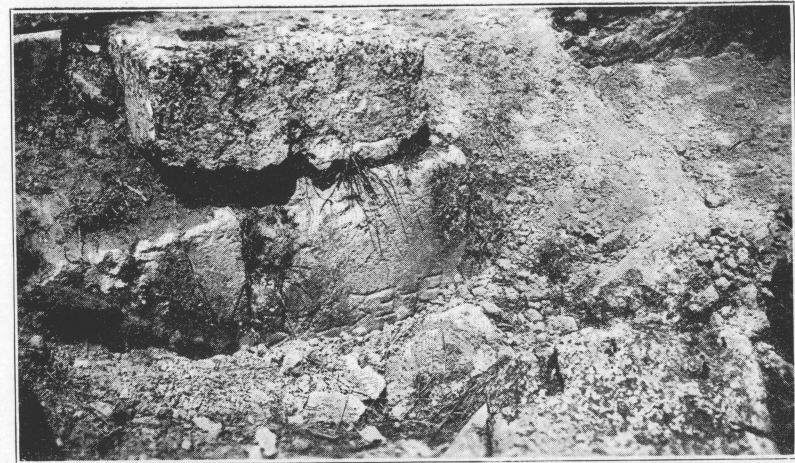
Pavement in apse of church made of limestone block taken from base of ancient monument.

twelve blue slabs may be counted and about the same number of white.

Save for its size, the church has no features of special architectural interest. But in the last few days of the campaign it was discovered that the south wall of the church rests in part on an earlier wall. Of this latter it was possible to clear only a small extent. It consists of two or three courses of foundations on which stand low orthostate blocks *in situ*, and seems to be of Hellenic construction. A similar wall passed across the north side of the apse of the church, but below the church floor. This wall resembles Roman work as the foundations appear to be made of rubble, but the piece uncovered is so small that there can as yet be no certainty in dating. It includes a threshold block with an upright stone on either side. The upright on the west is a re-used block set in upside down, on which is cut in large letters an inscription reading (transcribed into Roman letters): TELESTAS.

In any case it is clear that an ancient building exists beneath the church and it is apparently preserved for some height above its floor level. What this building was can only be determined by further excavation. In the meantime it may be conjectured that it is another part of the gymnasium, since its south wall seems to align with the south wall of the building containing the bath.

The work of clearing this large Christian church was constantly stimulated by the hope that among the great number of ancient stones used in its construction not a few might be found bearing inscriptions. It was always possible that a



Ancient wall beneath floor of apse showing re-used inscribed block, the inscription on which reads: TELESTAS.

lucky turn of the spade might bring to light an inscribed front block of the monumental chariot group giving a clue to its identification and perhaps even the name of the artist who made it. And the chance of finding some of the numerous epigraphical records, which must from time to time have been set up at Nemea, seemed very favorable. These hopes were unfortunately not entirely realized. As stated above, the church was for the most part built of material taken from the temple, chiefly wall blocks, complete or fragmentary; and though many of these bore mason's marks deeply cut in large letters, they provided no inscriptions. One inscription, alone, came to light and that in a sadly mutilated state; but it is sufficient to show that such records did exist and, undoubtedly, still lie hidden beneath the ground of Nemea. This inscription is on a fragment of limestone, broken on all sides, which was built into a late wall at the east end of the south aisle of the church. It contains part of eighteen lines probably of an official decree; and unfortunately, too little is preserved to give a consecutive idea of the contents. Beginning with a list of names it proceeds to mention the Nemean games and, perhaps, also those at Argos, and then refers to Lucius Mummius, the proconsul, and a mission of ten ambassadors. Farther on Mummius is named again and something done for the Argives (?) according to their desires. The rest is almost too incomplete even for speculation. There can, however, be no doubt that we have an historical document bearing on the eventful period just before or after the conquest of Corinth by Mummius in 146 B. C. when Greek independence was finally crushed by the

Roman legions. If some additional fragments of this inscription could only be found, who knows what interesting and important details they might give us of that tragic moment in Greek history? One should like very much to know what the mission of those ten ambassadors was, whether they were sent to deal with Mummius and, if so, what terms they obtained. Perhaps, when digging is renewed at Nemea, the answer to some of these questions may be found.

Between the temple and the church just described lay an open field, planted to oats, which seemed particularly inviting to excavation. Accordingly, a right of way through the oats having been purchased, a broad trial trench was marked out here about eighty meters long, and for the greater part of this distance digging was carried down to virgin soil. No buildings were found in this area. But about half way between the two ends of the trench at a depth of 1.10 m. the lowest course of a thick wall built of *poros* blocks came to light. This wall runs approximately east and west and two small supplementary trenches, opened in line with it farther east, showed that it continued on eastward into the adjoining vineyard. To the north of this wall a hard, well-made pavement (at a depth of about one meter below the present level of the ground) extends right up to the temple itself. Clearly then we have here the pavement of the precinct surrounding the temple and our wall is, without a doubt, the precinct wall—now for the first time discovered. This wall does not run parallel to the temple and it appears, therefore, that the latter was differently oriented from the precinct and not symmetrically placed within it. This leads to an inquiry as to the date of the precinct wall; and here it must be admitted the evidence is as yet inconclusive. Only the lowest course is preserved and that is in a very ruinous state. The *poros* had decayed and grown so soft that it could be dug away almost as easily as the surrounding earth. By careful cleaning with a knife, however, it was made clear that the course consisted of headers laid on earth apparently without foundations. In the deposit covering the pavement were found a few small coins mostly in miserable condition and apparently of late Roman times; and a fairly considerable amount of pottery in small fragments. Some of this pottery is clearly Hellenistic, and if this may be used as a criterion, it is possible that the pavement as we have it is approximately contemporary with the temple. Beneath the pavement the character of the finds changed completely. Here were unearthed two fragments of figurines of terra-cotta of a primitive type, many small potsherds, chiefly of Corinthian or Proto-Corinthian style, some curiously shaped slivers or spikes of lead, and numerous fragments of bronze. Of the latter the most interesting was the



Excavating in the church. The broad trench and Temple in background.

lower part of a small figurine, consisting of a rectangular base (with moulding in front and with two holes on top for attachment) on which are still preserved the two feet of the figure. This latter was represented in the typical archaic standing attitude with the left foot advanced. The figure was cast solid. Evidently these are the scattered remnants of votive offerings of early date.

Since the construction of the temple as it now stands can certainly not be dated earlier than the latter part of the fourth century, it is clear that we must expect to find somewhere the remains of a temple of much greater antiquity. For the Nemean games were already flourishing in the sixth century and the scanty remnants of votive offerings found below the pavement of the precinct are, as we have just seen, considerably more ancient still. Recent researches have established the fact that almost all Greek temples of the classical period were built over the remains of earlier structures. Thus we now know that there were at least two earlier Parthenons; the same is true of the Heraeum at Olympia; at Delphi the Alcmaeonid temple preceded the building of the fourth century; and at Sunium the remains of a *poros* temple still appear beneath the temple of Poseidon; to mention only a few examples. Accordingly, an examination was begun to see if the same state of affairs exists at Nemea also. At three points in the foundations, where it was possible to dig without disturbing the existing construction, small pits were sunk into the deeper levels. This investigation is not yet completed and cannot be until a number of huge fallen blocks and column drums have

been moved out of the way; and it is, therefore, too early to make any definite statement about the results. It may safely be said, however, that certain blocks were, in fact, uncovered which can have no meaning in connection with the present temple, but must belong to a preceding structure. Further exploration of these remains is almost certain to produce valuable results and one need not be over-sanguine to hope that new, interesting light may also be obtained on the internal arrangement of the fourth century temple.

This preliminary account of the excavations at Nemea can not be concluded without mention of some trial trenches in another direction. Immediately to the west of the village of Heraklion rises a hill called Tsoungiza (a small hill) crowned by a dome-like top. Village tradition asserted that the mound contained antiquities and quantities of stone were said to have been extracted from it. An examination of the hill showed that prehistoric potsherds lay scattered over the surface of the ground. Part of one day with a small force was consequently given to investigation of this hill. It proved to be the site of a prehistoric settlement of some extent. Though the deposit of earth covering the native rock which forms the hill was very thin, traces of at least two layers of occupation came to light. The uppermost yielded a number of sherds of Mycenaean pottery, but no recognizable remains of buildings. The hill has been much denuded and, no doubt, practically the whole of this Mycenaean layer has long since been washed away. Directly beneath this top soil an undisturbed early Helladic stratum was reached. Poorly built walls of small simple houses appeared in each trench, with trodden earth pavements and in one case a row of three pithoi sunk into holes in the floor. Several baskets of potsherds were collected, including the normal types of characteristic early Helladic pottery, with a somewhat higher proportion of wares of the patterned class than usual. These trenches were purely exploratory, but sufficed to show that there is a good, early Helladic settlement at Tsoungiza which may some day be excavated, if desired, at very small expense.

The important discoveries made at Nemea this year, therefore, have a wide, chronological range. The site and date of this prehistoric settlement at Tsoungiza has been established. No real excavation was, however, attempted here, but our efforts were concentrated on the buildings of the classical and later periods in the vicinity of the temple. Traces of the temple precinct and its encircling wall were uncovered and beneath the temple itself there is evidence, not yet clearly revealed, of an earlier structure. In the bed of the stream to the southwest of the sacred precinct was found the large building containing the simple Greek bathing establishment, with



"Tsoungiza"—hill just west of Heraklion on which stood the pre-historic settlement of Nemea.

adjoining dressing rooms and large covered hall. This dates from the fourth century and, perhaps, formed part of the gymnasium. Beneath the mound traditionally known as the grave of Opheltes, were uncovered first the Christian church in basilican form and beneath that, remains of an ancient building. In the south aisle of the church was unearthed an official inscription which, although only a fragment, establishes the existence of such records at Nemea. Scattered remains of votive offerings suggest that a temple deposit may somewhere be discovered.

This brief summary of results shows clearly, however, that much still remains to be done. Further excavations should be carried on in the temple; the precinct wall should be traced for its entire course; and the vineyard to the east of the temple should be explored to find the ceremonial approach leading up to the sanctuary. The building beneath the church should be cleared, and investigations should be made in a field farther

to the west, where many *poros* blocks have been found, indicating the presence of another large Greek building. And lastly, the stadium yet remains unexplored. Renewed efforts at Nemea, therefore, should be of great value in throwing light on the various stages of the development of this site from a prehistoric settlement to one of the four great religious and athletic centers of the Greek world.

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