THE WALL DECORATION OF THE HIERON IN SAMOTHRACE

When excavation of the Sanctuary of the Great Gods in Samothrace was resumed after the Second World War, one of our major objectives was thorough investigation of a building partially explored in the nineteenth century by the first modern excavators of the Sanctuary, who called it the New Temple. It has proved to be one of the most remarkable cult buildings of ancient Greece and to have served as the *epopteion*, the building in which initiation into the higher degree of the Samothracian mysteries took place (Pl. I.). Known in antiquity as the Hieron and built ca. 325 B.C., it was the third *epopteion* on its site, replacing two predecessors, one archaic, the other early classical. From these forebears, a number of the most significant features of its ground plan were derived, including the segmental apse in which the cella terminated (Pl. II).

The *mystai* who passed from the lofty Doric porch of the Hellenistic building into the cella entered a rectangular hall lined on its long sides by low marble benches interrupted by a pair of lateral doors and culminating in a stepped platform contained within an apse covered by a wooden ceiling of conical form (Pl. III). It is the widest chamber up to its date hitherto discovered in Greece or the Greek East to have been roofed without the aid of an interior colonnade. With a clear span of 10.72 m. it exceeds all earlier buildings outside Samothrace and Sicily in its breadth of undivided space.² The tim-

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1. The Hieron was excavated under my supervision, largely between 1948 and 1953, as part of the work conducted in Samothrace under the auspices of the American School of Classical Studies in Athens by Karl Lehmann as director of the Archaeological Research Fund of New York University from 1938-1960. The results of these excavations, originally published in preliminary reports in the *American Journal of Archaeology, Hesperia, and Archaeology*, are gradually appearing in final form in *Samothrace, Excavations Conducted by the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University (Bollingen Series LX)*. Volume 3 of this series, devoted to the Hieron, will go to press early in 1965. Until its publication, the reader is referred to Professor Lehmann’s *Samothrace. A Guide to the Excavations and the Museum*, Second Edition Revised, Locust Valley, 1960, for a brief general description of the Sanctuary, including the Hieron, and of the rites celebrated within it. I shall confine documentation of my statements about the Hieron to the specific topic discussed here—the decoration of the cella walls—and ask the reader to await the forthcoming volume for full evidence regarding other features of the building.

bers of its trussed roof were concealed by a wooden coffered ceiling adorned with cast bronze mouldings. Lit by flickering lamplight during the nocturnal rites, the cella must have been rich in contrasts, now gleaming as light fell on the marble pavement and the white upper wall or picked out the metallic edges of the shadowy coffers, now muted as it struck the firm full colors of the lower wall. For the walls of the Hieron were faced on the interior with a variety of painted, stuccoed decoration familiar from domestic and funerary architecture in both the Greek East and the Latin West in the Hellenistic age. But no other cult building in the Greek world is known to have had such decoration. Since it is a conspicuous feature of a building in several respects unique in the history of Greek architecture, it may be of interest to consider the evidence for its use in the Hieron and to reflect on the implications of its presence there.

Although the Hieron collapsed in a terrific earthquake toward the mid-sixth century A.D. and until recent times was subjected to severe plundering, hundreds of the marble and poros blocks of which the cella walls were built were recovered over it and in its immediate vicinity when the building was excavated in the late forties and early fifties. Among them were the majority of the L-shaped blocks from its rear corners. They could be fitted together block on block, thereby establishing the structural system of the wall with absolute certainty. On the exterior, it was composed of nine marble courses of drafted-margin masonry rising above a smoothly dressed dado and crowning string course (Pl. IV). Six of the nine courses were high stretchers; three were low binders. Each course of binders alternated with two superimposed courses of stretchers; that is, the six courses of stretchers were arranged in three groups of two superimposed courses separated from each other by single courses of binders. One of the low binding courses topped the wall, as a string course crowned the orthostate. The bold, ornamental pattern of the drafted masonry walls offered a rich contrast to the simplicity of their smooth dadoes. It was further enhanced by the unfluted pilasters terminating the walls on both the lateral and rear faces of the southern corners of the building, which at once balanced and reiterated the antae at its north and, with them, provided at each end of the building powerful verticals that framed and united the horizontal courses of the wall.

The structural system employed here, whereby two high courses alternate with a low binding course, appears to have been used for the first time on Pytheos’ Temple of Athena at Priene dedicated in 334 B.C.3 But the Hieron is

The earliest preserved building on which the wall blocks were allowed to retain their drafting for decorative effect. Retention of the protective layer of stone normally removed from smoothly dressed blocks, once they had been placed, occurs earlier in Greek architecture only on unfinished buildings, like Mnesikles' Propylaea on the Akropolis at Athens, or in the construction of terrace, fortification, and peribolos walls. On the Hieron, this functional, procedural device has been exploited for ornamental purposes — a technique that proved increasingly popular in the subsequent Hellenistic period and from which true rustication developed in Roman times. It would be tempting to ascribe to the unknown architect of the Hieron the distinction of having first discerned the aesthetic possibilities inherent in the traditional procedure of drafting blocks to facilitate the construction of a wall, given the lack of any earlier example of the intentional use of drafted-margin masonry for a building, but the fact that such masonry was imitated in Olynthian houses antedating 348 B.C. precludes this suggestion.

Unlike the low binding courses of the cella which penetrated the total thickness of the Hieron's walls, the high courses were built of thinner blocks which, like the orthostates, were clamped to poros backers, the combined thickness of the two faces in these courses being equivalent to that of the binders. The fact that the inner faces of the marble binders are slightly roughened, together with the character of the poros backers of which the inner face of the cella walls is largely composed, would in itself imply that these walls were stuccoed from top to bottom. It is not surprising, therefore, that quantities of fragments of the stucco coating that once adhered to them were found inside the cella and in its immediate periphery. The vast majority are painted a full, strong red or scarlet. Others, far fewer in number, are black, while a third group, the smallest in quantity, is white painted with faint, irregular and curving lines of red to suggest the veining of marble.

Both the red and the white fragments are panelled, that is, characterized by raised surfaces which stand 0.004 m. higher than their background or surrounding border (Pl. V). They imply that the inner face of the cella walls


5. See below, p. 283 and note 18.

6. The fragments illustrated on Pl. V were found together, along with other similar pieces, on the western side of the cella. They are stored in the Samothrace Museum under the ac-
imitated in stucco the effect of its outer marble face, seeming to be built of painted blocks with drafted margins above the level of the string course topping the orthostates. For the black fragments, which lack such drafted margins, are best understood as coming from a smooth black dado, given both the prevalence of black dadoes in Hellenistic stuccoed walls and the fact that they constitute the second largest group of fragments. The painted dado, too, would then have echoed the form of the smoothly dressed marble orthostates.

The preponderance of red fragments indicates that the walls were predominantly red. At some point, this color gave way to white, as the stripes of red paint preserved on the edge of certain fragments of white panelled stucco attest. These stripes of red pigment are similar in color to the red stucco but, unlike it, are created by the application of red pigment to the surface of the white stuccoed panel, rather than being bound into and actually constituting the surface of the stucco. They indicate that at least one white course was contiguous with a red course and imply that the inevitably slightly irregular joint between the two sections of stucco was corrected and straightened out by ruling over it a covering line or stripe of red paint of the same hue as the red stucco.

In addition to these panelled white fragments, a modest number of fragmentary white mouldings is preserved. Some belong to a type exemplified in Pl. VI. Fig. 1, an incomplete moulding related in basic type if not in its flatter profile to the marble pilaster and anta capitals of the Hieron (Pl. VI. Fig. 2), a type well-suited to serve as an epikranitis crowning the stuccoed inner face of the walls. Other fragments appear to come from another, more projecting, crowning moulding; still others, from engaged fluted columns little greater in depth than pilasters. In view of the analogy between these elements, it is clear that these fragments come from walls stuccoed to imitate the drafted margins of actual masonry, whether or not they were subsequently repaired.

Our predecessors, too, reported the discovery of similar fragments of panelled red stucco (see A. Conze, A. Hauser, and G. Niemann, Archäologische Untersuchungen auf Samothrake, Vienna, 1875, p. 69, fig. 23). A chemical analysis of the very fine stucco and its hair-thin line of color is given in note 2 on the same page. They interpreted these panelled fragments, which are sometimes composed of two layers, as evidence of a second, presumably later, coat of stucco. But the upstand on these fragments is by no means invariably created by the application to the background of a second layer of stucco. In the light of the comparative material available today, it is clear that these fragments come from walls stuccoed to imitate the drafted margins of actual masonry, whether or not they were subsequently repaired.

7. Cf., for instance, the black dadoes in Delian houses: Marcel Bulard, Peintures murales et mosaïques de Délos (Fondation Piot, Monuments et Mémoires, XIV), Paris, 1908, especially pp. 124 f.

8. As is most frequent, again, at Delos: ibid., p. 125.

9. Also found in the cella or along its walls.
and comparable architectural features in moulded stucco known from De­
los,10 it seems reasonable to assign them to a similar position in the upper­
most part of the wall, namely, to the zone equivalent to the greater part of
the outer entablature.

Although the exact appearance of these stuccoed walls cannot be proven,
especially the respective heights of the black, red, and white zones, the
proportion of fragments of each variety preserved suggests that they were
divided into three parts: a black dado surmounted by a central area largely
of red panelled courses but topped by at least one, more probably, two courses
of veined white, crowned by a white moulded epikranitis, and terminating in
still another white zone decorated with engaged colonnettes and bordered
at the top by an appropriate entablature or crowning moulding (See Pl. III).11
This last zone would be entirely suitable behind the outer architrave and frieze
and immediately below the wooden coffered ceiling. For the wall proper would
thus be crowned by an epikranitis occupying the very position internally that
the pilaster and anta capitals do externally; it would itself be coordinated in
height with the outer marble courses of drafted-margin masonry and, like
them, rise above a smoothly-dressed dado topped by an equally smoothly-
dressed string course. The precise nature of both this string course and the base
course normally present in such walls cannot be determined, given the ab­
sence of any evidence in regard to the former, which often appears to have
been red;12 since two of the black fragments show traces of red veining, they
have, therefore, been assigned to the unmoulded string course. Nor can the
more significant problem of whether the main portion of the stuccoed wall
literally echoed the structural system of its blocks be absolutely resolved —
that is, whether its painted courses repeated the sequence of binders and stretch­
ers characteristic of its outer face or, as in the majority of the preserved
later Delian examples, were isodomic. But in view of the precedent for such

149 ff., 158 ff., as well as F. Wirth, "Mittheilungen aus dem Kerameikos V. Wanddek­

No triglyphs were found among the stucco fragments recovered in the Hieron. They
have been introduced into the restored wall on the analogy of the related tomb at Pydna
(for which see below, p. 284) and of certain houses at Priene and Delos: Wiegand-Schra­

11. For an example of a similar sequence of red and white courses in which white not
only serves as the uppermost course of a red wall but also appears to have been topped,
above its crowning moulding, by another white course, see Bulard, ibid., fig. 39 = Pl. XI,
from room a of the House of the Trident.

12. For Delian examples see Bulard, ibid., p. 125.
a sequence of stuccoed binders and stretchers (cf. Pl. VII)\(^{13}\) and the fundamental logic of an interior decorative system which here, as elsewhere, would reflect an outer structural scheme, I have assumed that this was, indeed, the case.\(^{14}\) The curving wall of the apse was differentiated from the remainder of the cella decoratively, as it is structurally, its largely poros surface being smoothly stuccoed and painted a uniform scarlet.\(^{15}\) Whether the conical wooden ceiling above the apse was also stuccoed and painted must remain uncertain.

The reconstruction of the wall decoration of the Hieron described above and illustrated in Pl. III is based primarily upon excavation evidence, evidence in part provided by fragments of stucco found in the building and, therefore, coming from the latest phase of a building used over many centuries in the course of which it was more than once subjected to damage and repair. Although the cella was constructed and the lower courses of the porch foundation laid ca. 325 B.C., the porch was not completed until shortly after the mide-second century B.C.\(^{16}\) More than a century later, in the early Imperial age, the Hieron, like other structures in the Sanctuary, was shaken by an earthquake that damaged its rear akroteria enough to require their replacement. Once again, in late antiquity, the building appears to have suffered from a slight tremor. Any of these events, whether completion of the building in the second century B.C. or subsequent repair of it, might well have been the occasion of refurbishing or redecorating the interior of the cella. This complicated building history provokes a cogent question: to what extent does the decorative system reconstructed here reflect the original appearance of the early Hellenistic Hieron? Was its stucco wall decoration simply repaired

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13. Room 3 in the Maison de Kerdon at Delos: ibid., fig. 30, pp. 92 f., a house dated in the mid-third century (Chamonard, op. cit., pp. 126 f.).

14. Such simulated courses are normally separated by incised or black painted lines. Since there is no trace of the former technique on our fragments, it is possible that the necessary lines separating courses and dividing them into blocks were painted. The fact that one fragmentary white moulding (Acc. No. 48.467) has a dark edge seems to confirm this suggestion.

15. Our predecessors also found in this area both fragments of red stucco and a second variety which they described as blackish, dark-green (op. cit., p. 69). Conceivably, a low zone at the base of the scarlet wall above the floor level in this section of the abaton was painted green for some symbolic reason; but the instability of the black fragments that we have recovered elsewhere in the cella suggests that the fragments reported by the Austrians were originally black. Inasmuch as we are uncertain about this point, we have refrained from introducing this hypothetical zone into the restored longitudinal section illustrated in Pl. III.

16. As I have remarked above in note 1 (à propos the reconstruction and character of the Hieron as a whole), it is not possible to present or summarize in this brief article the extensive archaeological evidence in support of the building history outlined here.
or renewed according to the original scheme when circumstances demanded it or was the decorative system of which we have found such ample traces a creation of the second century B.C., the century in which the porch was completed and from which so many examples of related wall decoration are preserved? Re-examination of the essential features of this decoration will clarify the problem and may point toward its solution.

The most significant ingredients of the stucco wall decoration of the Hieron are two: division of the wall into three zones, a dado, a central area, and a more richly ornamented crowning section; and simulation of drafted-margin masonry. Imitation of such masonry in stucco, a feature of later Hellenistic houses ranging from Sicily in the West to Delos and Priene in the East, occurred in Olynthian houses before 348 B.C. The well-preserved houses of Delos provide many examples of the use of an elaborate architectural motif in the uppermost tier of a tripartite wall (cf. Pls. VIII, IX). Indeed, at first sight, the walls of the Hieron with their black dado, their predominantly scarlet panelled courses, their white mouldings and miniature crowning colonnade are so strikingly similar to such Delian houses in their decorative system as to imply that that system was introduced in the cella when the porch was

17. Examples of stucco wall decoration imitating drafted-margin masonry have been discovered in recent years in the House of Ganymede at Morgantina dating from the period 250-211 B.C. (Erik Sjöqvist, "Excavations at Morgantina [Serra Orlando], 1959, Preliminary Report IV," A.J.A., 64 [1960], pp. 131 f.) and in the apparently still earlier third century houses at Villa Jacona. The latter are exhibited on the wall near Case 23 in the Museum at Gela (Piero Orlandini-Dinu Adamesteanu, Guida di Gela, Milan, N. D., p. 36: Pietro Griffo, Sulle orme della civiltà gelese, Agrigento, 1958, p. 21).

For examples from Priene and Delos see Wiegand-Schrader, op. cit., pp. 308 f., figs. 333 f. and Bulard, op. cit., pp. 98 ff., 129 ff.; and, for further discussion of the background and development behind the Delian system of wall decoration, Joseph Chamonard, Le quartier du théâtre (Ecole française d'Athènes, Exploration archéologique de Délos, VIII), Paris, pt. 2, 1924, pp. 367 ff., 387ff.; and Wirth, op. cit., pp. 35-42. The latter's assumption that the use of incision antedated the appearance of plastically modelled panelled courses simulating drafted-margin masonry and constituted an earlier phase in the development of the First Style was disputed by Achille Adriani, La nécropole de Moustafa Pacha (Annaire du Musée gréco-romain [1933-34, 1934-35]), Alexandria, 1936, p. 129, and has, of course, been invalidated by these later discoveries.

Simulated drafted masonry appears, too, in the vaulted tomb illustrated by M. Rostovtzeff, Ancient Decorative Painting in South Russia (in Russian), St. Petersburg, 1913, pls. XXIX-XXXI.


19. Cf., for example, Chamonard, op. cit., pl. 1, fig. 83, from the Maison de Dionysos, and pt. 2. pl, XVIII, from the Maison de la Colline.
completed in the second century B.C. — whether or not it was repaired or renewed later. But a tripartite division of the painted, stuccoed wall, including the introduction of an ornamental, architectural motif in the uppermost zone, occurs earlier in the princely Macedonian tumulus at Pydna (Pl. X).20 Nor is it likely that this scheme, which was to remain a feature of later wall painting, was invented for that tomb. Evidently the basic ingredients of the wall decoration of the Hieron had already come into fashion when the cella was constructed.

A significant difference between the decoration in the Hieron and the tomb at Pydna and the later houses at Delos is the absence in the former two of that conspicuous and characteristic feature of Delian walls, an elaborate painted, moulded, and ornamented zone between the orthostates and the wall proper (cf. Pls. VIII-IX, XI-XIII).21 For the dado at Pydna, painted to suggest veined marble orthostates resting on a black base and topped by a blue string course, if richer and more varied in color than the severe dado of the Hieron, is still far simpler than the Delian dadoes with their plastic mouldings and occasional friezes. In the Hieron, the severity of the dado coupled with the absence of an ornamental zone directly above it lends to the wall a far greater simplicity. When compared with it, the more advanced Delian walls appear to be elaborations of a basic scheme they have in common with the Hieron.

This prime difference between the wall decoration of the cella and the ornamental system of the late Hellenistic Delian walls together with the long-established earlier tradition of scarlet stuccoed walls in Samothrace and elsewhere,22 with the imitation in stucco of drafted-margin masonry at Olynthos at least as early as the mid-fourth century B.C., and with the tripartite division of the wall into dado, scarlet central area and a more elaborate crowning zone in the early Hellenistic tumulus at Pydna suggests that the wall decoration of the Hieron shown in Pl. III reflects the original appearance of the late-fourth century cella. Its retention and probable renewal in later centuries would constitute one more example of the extreme conservatism of a sanc-


21. Cf., for example, Bulard, op. cit., figs. 39, 43, 45, pl. VI A a-c, and Chamonard, op. cit, pt. 1, fig. 83, pt. 2, pls. XVIII-XIX.

22. Red stucco fragments have been recovered in numerous places in the Sanctuary and in more than one fill, including that of the pronaos of the Hieron. They include panelled frag-
tuary in which the venerable buildings of the past were preserved essentially unchanged throughout Roman antiquity.

One conspicuous feature of the interior decoration of the Hieron appears to be without parallel among extant wall painting of the fourth century—the engaged order that provides the wall with so elegant a crown. Yet the fact that the great rotunda dedicated to the Megaloi Theoi by Arsinoe only a few decades after the construction of the Hieron was adorned with an engaged order in the uppermost tier of its interior (Pl. XIV) indicates that this ornamental feature existed in Greek architecture long before its stucco surrogates in Delian houses. Built of the same Thasian marble employed for the marble fabric of the Hieron, both the inner and outer faces of the wall were marble. Hence the interior of the building was neither stuccoed nor painted. On the exterior, the massive drum was smoothly dressed between the two ornamental courses that define its top and bottom, the upper, a binding course that supported the gallery at the summit of both the inner and outer walls, the lower, a richly carved base restricted to the outer face of the wall. But on the interior, the wall was again divided into three zones: a smoothly dressed dado, surmounted by a wall of drafted-margin masonry crowned by an engaged Corinthian colonnade backed against the Doric piers beneath the outer entablature. The use of an engaged order to crown the wall of a building erected in the second decade of the third century B.C. suggests that the presence of a similar feature in the nearby Hieron only a few decades earlier does not in itself imply a late Hellenistic date for the interior decoration of its cella. The very fact that a course of drafted-margin masonry topped by a pair of profiled courses has been introduced between the smoothly dressed dado of the Arsinoeion and the main drafted margin masonry of its wall again illustrates the degree to which motifs characteristic of late Hellenistic wall decoration were anticipated at least as early as the beginning of the third century (cf. Pls. VIII, IX, XI-XIII). Conversely, the absence of this element in the far simpler decoration of the Hieron provides another argument for considering it part

ments, an indication that before the porch was completed in the second half of the second century B.C., stuccoed walls reflecting drafted-margin masonry were already in use in Samothrace. Most recently, they have appeared in enormous numbers in the great Stoa on the western hill, which also appears to antedate this period.

23. I am indebted to Stuart M. Shaw for the drawing illustrated in Pl. XIV. It, and the brief description that follows, reflect Mr. Shaw's exhaustive study of the superstructure of the Arsinoeion in recent years. His re-examination of the extant blocks has yielded a reconstruction of the building differing from that of Hauser (op. cit., I, pl. LV) in a number of respects. It will appear in Volume 7 of Samothrace (Bollingen Series, LX).

24. In the older reconstruction cited in n. 23, this member has been used upside-down as a crowning course above the outer orthostates.
of the original design for the late-fourth century building, whether or not it was renewed in later times.

If this conclusion is correct and the painted, stuccoed walls of the Hieron reflect the original appearance of the cella, the character of this decoration provokes two other questions: what is the source of this style and where was it invented?

It is probably not by chance that the analogies to the painted decoration of the Hieron occur exclusively in the realm of domestic or funerary architecture. A building for congregational worship rather than a temple, its function, hence its interior installation, differed from that of the orthodox temple and might well have stimulated its architect to draw on decorative forms normally associated with domestic decoration in designing its interior. In any case, the simulation of drafted-margin masonry in the Hieron and the basic ornamental system of its stuccoed walls may be paralleled in earlier or near-contemporary architecture only in those two traditionally interrelated spheres, the domestic and the funerary. The fact that the earliest examples of these primary features occur on Macedonian soil, the former at Olynthos, the latter at Pydna, raises the final question: was this style of decoration destined to have such long and widespread popularity in the later Hellenistic world a Macedonian invention? Was it, for example, devised for some royal or princely residence and subsequently imitated in the bourgeois houses of Olynthos and in royal or noble tombs? It is tempting to speculate on this possibility. If the Hellenistic wall decoration classified in its Italian variant as First Style painting was originally a Macedonian invention, its presence in a sanctuary venerated by the Macedonian royal house — in a building that may well have been a gift of Alexander's half-brother, Arrhidaios — would be especially understandable. Perhaps the excavations now being carried on with such spectacular success in Macedonia will provide the answer to this question.

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25. The wall decoration of the heroa at Kalydon and Assos should doubtless be associated with the same domestic funerary tradition. For illustration of these stuccoed walls see E. Dyggve, F. Poulsen, K. A. Rhomaios, Das Heroon von Kalydon (Det Kgl. Danske Videnskabelens Selskab, Skrifter, Historisk og Filosofisk Afdeling, 7 Raekke IV, 4), Copenhagen, 1934, p. 384, fig. 104, and p. 391, and J. T. Clarke, F. H. Bacon, R. Koldewey, Investigations at Assos, Cambridge, 1902, pp. 109 ff., 111, fig. 1, 113, fig. 2.

By the later Hellenistic age, this style of wall decoration had, in any case, been adopted for other types of building, witness the Prytaneion in Magnesia: Carl Humann, Julius Kohste, and Carl Watzinger, Magnesia am Maeander, Berlin, 1904, p. 138, fig. 150.
PLATES
The Wall Decoration of the Hieron in Samothrace
The Wall Decoration of the Hieron in Samothrace

Pl. III
The Wall Decoration of the Hieron in Samothrace
The Wall Decoration of the Hieron in Samothrace
The Wall Decoration of the Hieron in Samothrace

Pl. X
The Wall Decoration of the Hieron in Samothrace
Pl. XIII

The Wall Decoration of the Hieron in Samothrace