

## EXCAVATIONS IN PHILIPPI

In the years 1956-1957 I excavated the extra muros basilica in Philippi.<sup>1</sup> Inside the church many tombs were found with Greek inscriptions, which are of great importance because they help us to understand the life and the people of the city. After the publication of these finds, the Archaeological Society of Athens decided to sponsor the continuation of the excavations.

Towards the east of the Roman Forum, where the basilica B (Direkler) stands (excavated by the French Archaeological School of Athens, in the years 1922-1923, 1932-1935),<sup>2</sup> I had observed certain marble architectural parts which indicated that there might exist in the area, in addition to the two already excavated basilicas, more Christian buildings. The excavation started in 1958 but due to lack of funds was limited to a rather small section.

In the course of eight years, during which the excavation was in progress three to four weeks annually, the site became one of the largest contemporary excavation fields in Greece.<sup>3</sup> (Pl. I) The research is financed mainly by the Archaeological Society of Athens.

The boundaries of the excavation are the following: to the west, the Roman Forum, to the north, Egnatia Road, to the south another road that starts from the commercial market of the Forum and runs eastwards. Our site is still under excavation to the east and its termination has not as yet been defined.

The excavated section forms a huge complex of buildings, gathered to the north of an Octagon church, that measures 33 m. in length and 29, 70 m. in width. Externally the building is a square with the Octagon inserted into it. The encircling ambulatory follows the octagonal stylobate of the interior,

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1. St. Pelekanidis, "The extra muros early-Christian Basilica of Philippi." (in Greek) *Archaeologike Ephemeris* 1955(1961) p. 114 ff. R. Hodkinson, *Early Christian Churches in Macedonia and Southern Serbia*, (London 1963) p. 99 ff. Pl. 10-12 fig. 44.

2. P. Lemerle, *Philippes et la Macedoine Orientale à l'époque Chrétienne et Byzantine* (Paris 1945) pp. 420-21.

3. *Praktika Archaeologikēs Hetaireias* 1958 pp. 84-89, 1959 pp. 49-58, 1960 pp. 76-94, 1961 pp. 69-80, 1962 pp. 169-178, 1963 pp. 81-88, 1964 pp. 172-78.

which is 4,50 m. away from the walls of the church, and is supplemented by niches in the four corners and by an apse in the eastern part. Large pieces of white marble cover the floor of the central section, while the ambulatory and the niches are paved with a very rich in design *opus sectile*. Bases of columns were either *in situ* or close to their original positions. Unfortunately the architectural members that were found, i. e. columns, capitals, and upper parts of pilasters, were very damaged and therefore the restoration of the height of the colonnade is not possible. Similar architectural members of a smaller size prove that a second colonnade existed — based on the first one. Thus, we are able to state that the Octagon had two successive colonnades, covered with a dome or a pyramidal wooden roof, marble and mosaic decoration on its walls and a marble pavement.

One could enter this monumental building, which is still unique in Greece, from Egnatia Road through a long stoa, which is divided with two colonnades into three aisles and has a grandiose propylon with two exedrae on either side of it. It seems to me that only the side aisles were covered, while the central one did not have a roof. The narthex was paved with a rich in motives *opus sectile*. The central door to the church, the *Basileios Pyle*, was decorated with the very rich technique of Sidamara.

The Phiale of the Octagon is in every respect unusual. (Pl. II,1) It is located in the NW corner of the building; in a quadrangular room is inscribed another quadrangular, separated from the first one by a stylobate. On each of its four corners stands a column that carried an architrave. The area defined by the stylobate is paved by large marble pieces, one of which has a rose-shaped drainer. Water was furnished through a pipe to a large basin and from there, underground, to a pyramidal shaped fountain, that externally has successive horizontal cuts. The Phiale was probably covered with a dome. This form is a new element in what we know of the Early Christian architecture.

Eastwards the Phiale is connected, through a two columned opening, with three successive compartments, which are on a higher level and are reached with a staircase. The first one which is a specific religious place, square in ground plan, continues the cult of a hellenistic sanctuary. Under it a vaulted tomb was found which contained the sarcophagus of the hero. The Christians, as they usually did, continued this cult, perhaps under the name of a saint unknown to us today. This spot is extremely interesting from the religious point of view. Besides the few religious utensils excavated, there were found at least 1500 coins, dating from the fourth century to Justinian. The next compartment, the Diakonikon, has at his eastern wall a built table and communicates with an external corridor, where the offerings were placed. The last

compartment with another built table and some constructions of religious purpose, is the Prothesis. This unit communicates with the Holy Bema directly; so, the whole section is divided into three parts, communicates with both the Bema and the Phiale, and being in a "supra ecclesiam e loco septemtrionali," follows exactly in location and purpose the Testament of the Lord and the Apostolic Orders.

North of the former compartments is the Baptistry. One enters to it from the narthex and through the Phiale. The new unit consists of five parts: a) the Anteroom, b) the Dressing room, c) the Room for the Catechumens, d) the Baptistry (Pl. II, 2), e) the Room for the *Chrism*. In the Catechism room and in the southeast and northeast corners of it, were found the exedrae of the Catechists, decorated with marble. The whole room had coloured marble decoration on the walls and white marble on the floor.

The Baptistry, square in ground plan, is transformed with the pillars, located to its four corners, to a cross in the basement and on the top. The pillars indicate that this section was covered with a dome. In the center of the square is the cross-shaped baptism font, which was supplied with hot water from the Caldarium. Two stairs lead to the bottom of it. The whole font is covered with *opus sectile*. We know from the mosaic pieces found, depicting figures and having inscriptions, that the ceiling, as well as the upper parts of its walls, were covered with mosaics. The figures belong perhaps to the Apostles and their order was somehow similar to the Baptistries of Ravenna. The only sure evidence we have is that the compartments belonging to the Baptistry were extremely majestic. The excavation of the Baptistry could be considered as one of the most interesting discoveries, because it completes our knowledge as regard to the placement of the different compartments and their purpose.

It is very rare for a Christian building to have an immediate connection with a thermae complex and even more to be supplied with hot water from it, as it happens in the Octagon of Philippi, where the two complexes have a common wall and entrances, communicating with each other. I don't know if any similar example exists elsewhere.

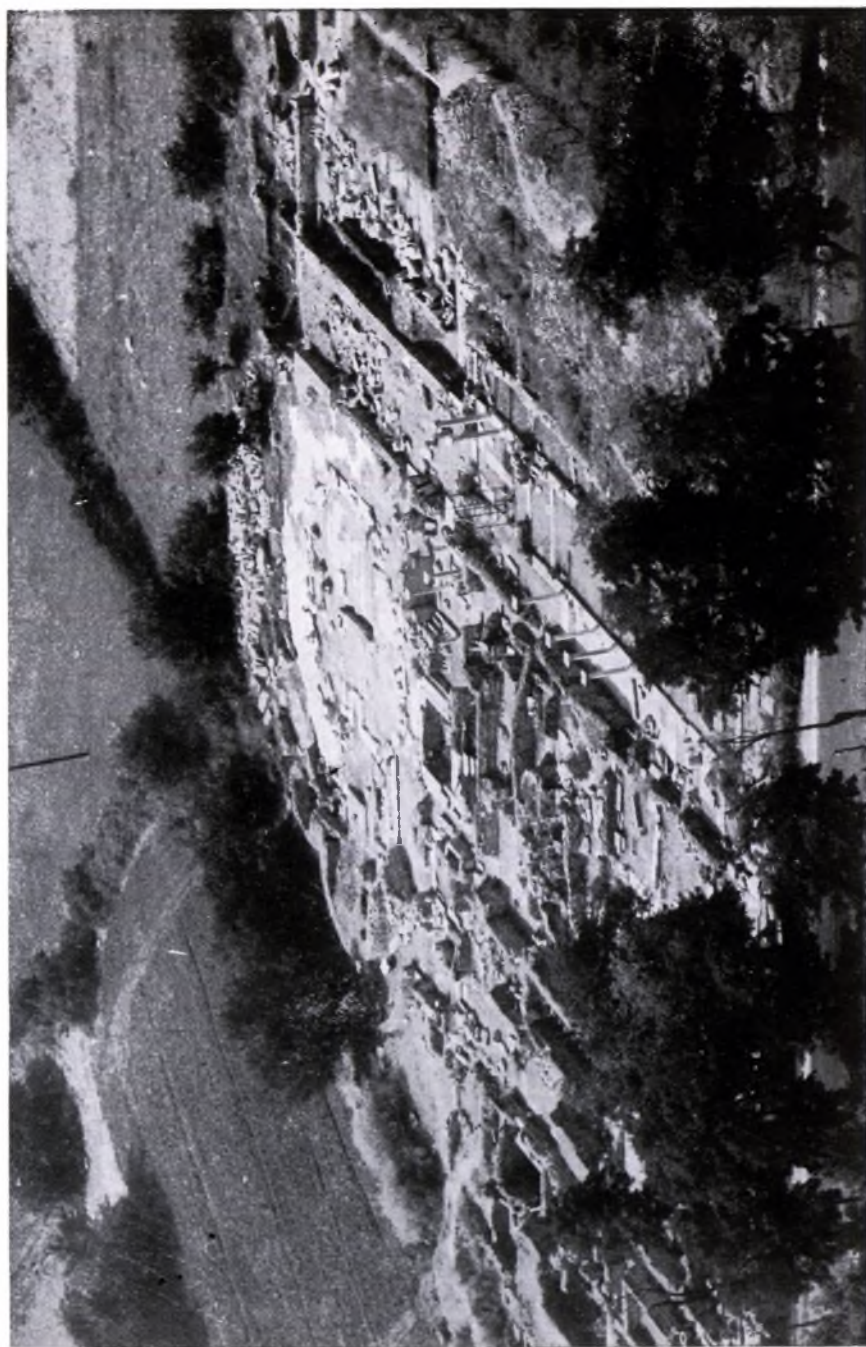
These thermae have all the typical characteristics of the similar Roman constructions. (Pl. III) Their entrance is on the Egnatia Road through the south wall of the exedra, east of the stoa. First, one comes to a yard that has to its three sides a colonnade; around the court are located small rooms for the needs of the bathers, such as: toilets, a cistern giving water to the toilets, a "swimming pool" and some other rooms of which we don't know the exact purpose. This atrium communicates, through many entrances, with the main parts of

the *thermae*, the *Frigidarium*, the *Tepidarium* and the *Caldarium*. There is also another comparatively small room, with a round basin close to which was found, *in situ*, the base of a column, which indicates the possible existence of a shower.

The eastern boundary of the complex is a secondary street, leading from the *Egnatia* to a door, and through it to the *Daktylios*, around the apse. Eastwards of this street, (which in the middle of it has a large pipe for drainage) are being excavated rooms, serving, as we see from their constructions and objects, for the storage of different goods, such as oil, wine, wheat etc. The excavation in this section will be continued.

Trenches on the pavement of the Octagon prove that under it existed an older temple, smaller than the Octagon, with an unknown, for the moment, architectural form. Various representations and geometric forms, in mosaic, cover the floor of the building. (Pl. IV) To this older building belongs, perhaps, the atrium, west of the Octagon, which is on a much lower level. The atrium has stoas to the three sides of it; the excavation uncovered the stylobate and some columns *in situ*. The south stoa has a majestic entrance, of which we don't know yet the complete form because this section is still under excavation.

Many years are required for the complete excavation of Philippi, because there are still monuments covered by the tobacco fields. The excavation of those will solve many problems concerning the life of this so important city for Christianity, where Paul preached for the first time in Europe and baptized the first Christian, the woman Lydia.



*General View of the Excavated Section of the Octagon*



*1. The Phiale of the Octagon*



*2. The Main Room of the Baptistry*





*General View of the Thermae and of the Stoa Leading to the Octagon*



*Mosaic Pavement of the Temple under the Octagon*