

EXCAVATIONS AT PLOTINOPOLIS, 1977

Many years have elapsed since the site of the ancient city of Plotinopolis was identified with the hill of Ayia Petra outside Didymoteikho (Pl. II, fig. 1)¹, and the belief was expressed that the systematic excavation of it might one day yield more information about the earliest inhabitants of the area, the ancient Thracians.

This expectation was based on the following considerations: 1) Handmade "prehistoric" sherds were found at the foot of this natural stronghold, and some of them, which were not of a very good quality, probably date from the period at which the ancient Greeks arrived in the area after the second colonisation movement (at a rather late point in time this far north) and are therefore to be attributed to the early local inhabitants². 2) It seemed probable that this pottery, of the Hallstatt or early La Tène periods, could be fairly securely dated if an undisturbed deposit could be found containing sherds from imported wares. The main imports seemed likely to be from Attica, for the surface finds from the foot of the west side of the hill contained a relatively large number of Attic sherds dating from the 5th and 4th centuries B.C. 3) Our knowledge of the ancient Thracians is derived in large measure from Greek inscriptions from the Roman period, and the site, the strategic importance of which is indicated by the fact that Trajan selected it as the site for a new Roman city, must have been inhabited by Thracians not only in the beginning but also at a later period. This gave rise to the hope that it might prove possible to learn something of the original Thracian name of the city (cf. e.g. Uskudama-adrianopolis).

Because of these considerations, the excavation of Plotinopolis was awaited with some anticipation. One of the authors of the present report, being retired from the University of Thessaloniki and having resigned from the two excavations being conducted by the Philosophical Faculty in Macedonia, accepted the invitation of the General Directorate of Antiquities of the Ministry of Culture to undertake the excavation of Plotinopolis. In the event, the excavation did not take place, and it was only after the Institute for Balkan Studies expressed interest in an excavation in Thrace that the proposal to

1. G. Bakalakis, *Ἀρχαιολογικὲς Ἔρευνες στὴ Θράκη 1959-1960*, Thessaloniki 1961, p. 22ff, figs. 7-8 and Plates 3d, 5b and e.

2. G. Bakalakis, *op. cit.*, p. 22. Id., «Le Rayonnement des Civilisations Grecque et Romain...», *Actes VIII^e Congrès International d'Archéologie Classique* (Paris 1963), pp. 288-291.

excavate at Plotinopolis was revived. For different reasons, permission to excavate was delayed somewhat and it was only this year that it proved possible to make a start, with the collaboration of the Ephorate of Antiquities at Komotini.

In the meantime, much had happened since the first identification of the site with the hill of Ayia Petra. A joint visit was made to the hill in order to determine the location of the first trench, and despite the fact that the prospects did not seem promising, work commenced in September 1977.

Trenches for other purposes were opened on the hill by means of a mechanical digger. Remains of walls and fragments of building material including bricks, plaster and roof tiles were revealed dating from late antiquity. Hardly any remains were discovered of the monumental architecture attested by some fragments previously found on the hill and now housed in the Archaeological Collection at Didymoteikho, and there was almost no evidence for earlier occupation.

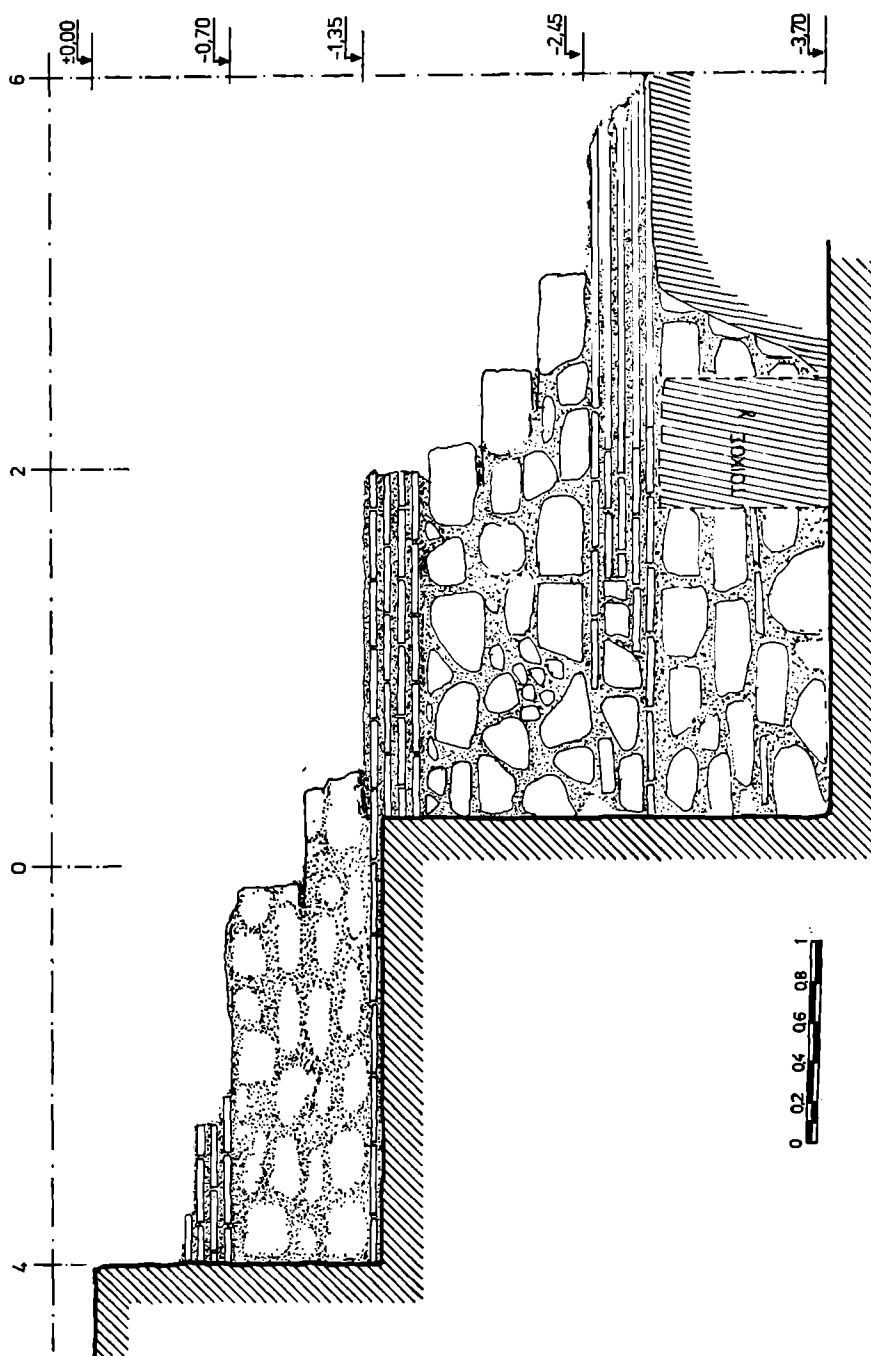
Thus, although it would not be accurate to describe the surface finds as misleading, it once more proved to be the case that they are more interesting than the discoveries yielded by or anticipated from the excavation of systematic sections and trenches (cf. the gold bust of Septimius Severus, which was found on the southern edge of the hill)³.

The first season this year lasted from September 2nd to October 20th and involved a very small number of workmen, since the pay offered for excavation work is no longer attractive⁴. Four trenches were opened on the sloping plateau at the summit of the hill, oriented approximately N-S and each of them 2m wide and 10m long. The first was 40m from the trigonometrical point (Pl. I, Δ) at the end of the ancient staircase cut into the rock⁵. The second was 13m from the SE corner of the first, and 11m from it, from W to E, the other two were the same distances away in the same direction. The relationship between them was thus stepped to some extent. A fifth trench was subsequently opened on the axis of trench III, at a distance of 20m from it (Pl. I).

3. Komotini Museum ΑΓΚ 207. AAA (1968) vol. 2, inset plate. *Ἱστορία τοῦ Ἑλληνικοῦ Ἔθνους*, Ἐκδοτικὴ Ἀθηνῶν, σ. 472 καὶ εἰκόνα.

4. Miss Evdokia Skarlatidou, of Komotini Museum, took an active part as an assistant on the excavation. Mr. Charalambos Bakirtzis, epimelitis for Byzantine antiquities at Kavala, took particular interest in the excavation, and the guardian of antiquities at Didymoteikho, Mr. Konstantinos Chatziyoannidis offered valuable assistance. Plans Pl. I, III, VIII, and drawings 1-3 are by Miss A. M. Tsangidou. Warm thanks are due to General Ioannis Ioannidis and to Major Dimitrios Karvounis for their ready support.

5. G. Bakalakis, *op. cit.*, p. 24, fig. 8 and Plates 6a-b.



Drawing 1. Trench IV, wall a (detail).

It was clear that bedrock would very quickly be reached in trench I, since at the summit of the hill in the NW, the bedrock is found at a higher level than the trench. This area in places has traces of ancient cuttings and in places has hollows which must have been bridged at some point in time by the defence-wall. It was decided nonetheless to begin at this point and proceed to the SE, following the natural slope of the ground.

The deposits in trenches I-III were hopelessly disturbed and contained traces of destruction by fire. Only a few fragments of walls and building material were found, consisting of pieces of roof tiles (pan-tiles roughly resembling the Laconian type and cover-tiles in the shape of half-pipes), pieces of bricks (original dimensions: 0.33×0.33 and 0.35 thick, or 0.15×0.32 and 0.35 thick) and unworked stones, and fragments of plaster containing a little finely ground potsherd (*kourasani*).

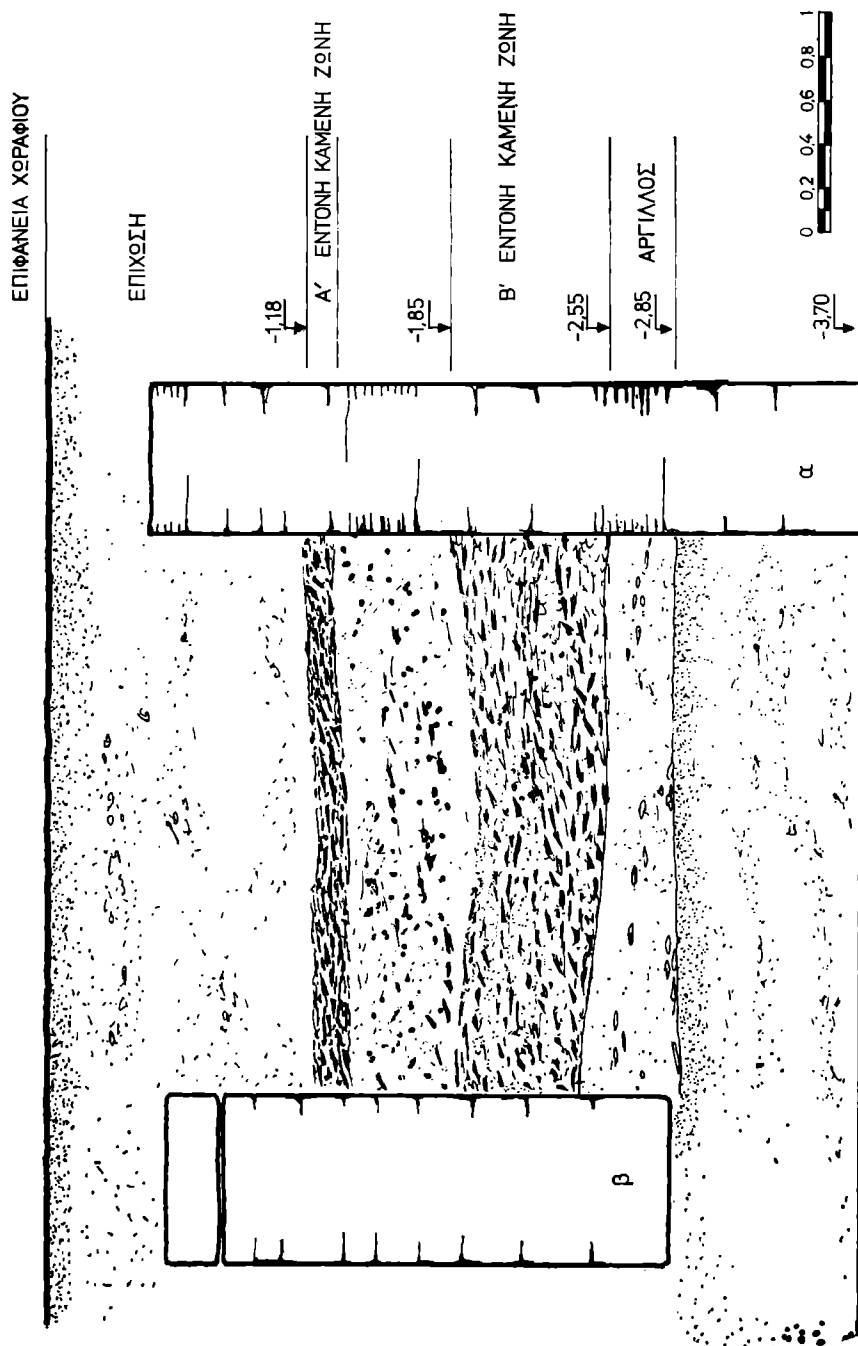
Housefloors could sometimes be distinguished by levelled off areas of rock and large fragments of *pithoi* that had been set into them, (trench I), and were sometimes defined only by the large fragments and the pointed bases of the *pithoi*.

The disturbed deposit reached a depth of 2m in trench III and contained Roman pottery (Arretine sherds), some Attic black-glazed ware, a small quantity of neolithic and a number of "handmade" sherds with a sparing use of incised decoration, that may belong to the local "Thracian" pottery we are trying to identify.

Of the movable finds, mention may here be made of a "Praxitelean" torso—a small-scale copy, now mutilated, that served as a trapezophoro or table-support (trench II, ΑΓΚ 2822, Pl. II, fig. 2)⁶, a bronze brooch from the 4th century (A.D. trench II, ΑΓΚ 2780, Pl. II, fig. 3a); a clay lamp with a handle in the form of a cross (trench III, ΑΓΚ 2953, Pl. II, fig. 4) that is obviously early Christian, without remains of a wall from that period.

Two limestone walls appeared in the upper levels of trench IV (*a* and *b*, Pl. III, IV, fig. 5) running approximately (Pl. III; IV, fig. 5) east-west, and as work proceeded it became clear that they went to a considerable depth. Wall *a* is built of courses of brick with stones and lime between the joints (drawing 1). It is more carefully constructed than wall *b*, which is crumbly and is merely a foundation wall. The two walls are almost parallel and the space of 2.50-2.60m between them, appears to have been roofed, since a layer of roof tiles was discovered at a depth of 1.18m below the surface. From this depth down to 2.55m there is a burnt deposit with two easily distinguishable layers (draw-

6. The letters ΑΓΚ denote the inventory no. of Komotini Museum and ΑΓΔ that of the Collection at Didymoteikho.



Drawing 2. Section between walls a and b, and burnt deposit (trench IV).

ing 2). The fire had melted pieces of glass vases or of flat pieces of glass used as window panes.

Wall *b* is later than wall *a* and both of them rest, at a depth of 2.20m-2.30m, on a third wall (*c*) which runs at an oblique angle to them (NE-SW, Pl. IV, fig. 6). Wall *c* is built of unworked stones and without plaster, though there are squared-off stones at some points, and is founded directly on the bedrock. One end of it turns towards the NW (Pl. V, fig. 7) and the other is interrupted by wall *a*. It is 0.60m thick and preserved to a height of 0.50m. It is impossible at present to assign a date to wall *c*, since the deposit is disturbed not only at this level, but to a depth of 3.10m from the top of the trench, at which lie the foundations of wall *a*.

All the levels in trench IV as well as its very disturbed deposits, contained large numbers of Arretine sherds, large fragments of vases, pieces of "cast" lamps, a few examples of Attic black-glazed ware from the 4th century B.C., black-glazed ware of the type known as "west slope", sherds from s.c. Megarian *skyphoi*, *skyphoi* from Roman Period and prehistoric sherds, including neolithic and the supposed "Thracian" ware (Pl. V, figs 8 and 9). There were also fragments of decorative clay reliefs and of clay figurines (Pl. VI, fig. 10). Finally, there were a number of marble fragments, most of them architectural members (Pl. VI, fig. II a,c,d; 12a-e; 13a-e; Pl. VII fig., 14a, e).

A large fragment of a lead pipe was found in square 0-2-A of trench IV. It was at a depth of 0.80m. and was not *in situ* (AKΔ 136, Pl. VII, fig. 15). In fact there are two pieces of the pipe plus the ring by which they were connected. There is a horizontal bed 7cm wide on their outer surface, and the sediment on the inside is not very thick. They are designed to cater for water under great pressure, and the aqueduct of which they were part was apparently used only for clear, drinking water.

Trench IV was later extended on two sides (Pl. I;III). A bronze arrow-head (Pl. II, Fig. 3, 6) was found in square 0-4, Δ-E with many other later objects, hemispherical lumps of iron rust found over the whole area of it at a depth of 2m. They may be the refuse from metal smelting. Their hemispherical shape is probably derived from the vessel used to draw off the molten metal. The diameter ranges from 13-15cm and their height reaches 7cm; the flat surface is slightly hollow. Along with them were found fragments of roof tiles and plaster cement which had burnt and fused so that they resemble "hard biscuit".

Even after the extension of trench IV, it still proved impossible to follow the course of wall *c*, for two large displaced blocks of stone were discovered at a high level (Pl. III, square B-4; fig. 7). Trench V was therefore opened on the axis of trench III and 20m away from the south side of it (Pl. I; VIII).

Fragments of plaster and large quantities of rubble were found in all the squares in trench V (Pl. VIII, 0-2, AB) from a depth of 0.60-1.00m.

A brick wall was found in the square 0-2-B-Γ (Pl. VIII) at a depth of 1.40m, running NW-SE and founded directly on the bedrock. The levelled surface of another wall, of "poros", was found in the square 0-2-ΔE, at a depth of 0.80m, and as work proceeded it became clear that at a number of points there were sockets in the stones, roughly in the shape of a double axe, for clamps; wooden link employed for binding blocks of stone (Pl. VII, fig. 16, cf. Pl. VIII, square 0-6-4, Γ-Z).

The extension of the trench beyond the original 10m revealed a great part of this wall, running N-S, 9.5m long, and is constructed of large blocks of stone. It may have been part of the *krepis* of some structure, since the east face of it forms a "πατούρα", i.e. a notch from the underlying two courses (Pl. VIII, square 0-2, Δ-Z). At the beginning of the northern section there are three courses; this then reduces to two (Pl. IX, fig. 17, cf. Pl. VIII, square 0-2, Γ-Z) and the south end of the wall has only a single course of *spolia* (Pl. IX, fig. 18), amongst which is the upper part of an inscribed stele dating from the Roman period (Pl. IX, fig. 19). The inscription, which is damaged and difficult to read, consists of two lines:

... ANA. PO. Σ — — Ν
— — ΒΟΥΛΗΚΑΙ
... .

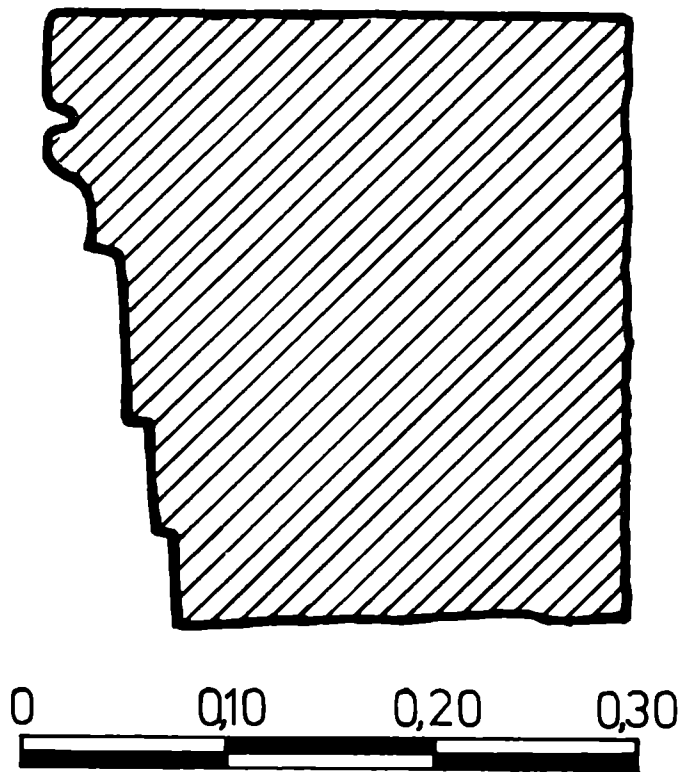
At right angles to this wall there are two others which are roughly parallel and 2.75m apart. They are built of reused blocks of stone, moved from their original position, with lime cement as a binding agent (Pl. VIII, square 2-8, Γ-E). The visible surfaces of the blocks were worked with a toothed chisel like the preserved courses of the *krepis*, and at some point in time they were systematically smashed while still in position. The thick layer of rubble deriving from this destruction of the building material (in Pl. VIII, square 0-4-8, E-Z) it was 1m deep) is enough to indicate the scale of the damage, which makes it difficult to say anything more at present about the building, its date and its subsequent fate.

To the east of the wall with the sockets for clamps there is a mud-brick wall, 7.65m long, running NE-SW. The top of it had been hollowed somehow and a pithos set on it. To the east of this wall there is a "πίθων" (cellar) with three more *pithoi in situ* (Pl. VIII, square 2-6, Δ-Z; Pl. X, fig. 20).

A later cross-wall (0.65m thick and 1.15m high) bordering this room on the south was built of *spolia* amongst which were two fragments of an unfluted column made of granite (Pl. X, fig. 21, cf. Pl. VIII, square 0-2, E-Z, c).

There is a second cross-wall 2.50m to the south of the first, which thus creates a second room (Pl. X, fig. 20). This wall is 0.80m thick and 0.90m high, and two fragments of a stone threshold were re-used in its construction. The pivot holes are preserved, complete with the lying lead (Pl. X, fig. 22; Pl. VIII, square 0-4, H-Θ, th).

In this room, to the west of the large mud-brick wall, was found a marble plaque of the Roman period carved in relief with an arched finial at the



Drawing 3. The profile of the epistyle or lintel (Pl. XI, fig. 28).

top. It measures 0.13m × 0.11m. The scene depicts a rider of the well-known "Thracian horseman" type, riding a horse that is galloping to the right (ΑΓΚ 2824, Pl. XI, fig. 23).

A small ring-stone was found in the same area, though to the east of the wall, at a depth of 1.30m. It has an incised scene depicting two figures, one of whom is winged [Victory] and is crowning the other (Pl. XI, fig. 24).

Fragments of architectural members were found at several of points in the extension of the trench. They include marble *cymatia*, pieces of marble

capitals, and column bases (ΑΓΚ 2799, 2798, 2793, 2816, 2806, 2807, 2815, 2797, Pl. XI, fig. 25; Pl. VI, fig. IIb; 12f; 13f; Pl. VII, fig. 14b, d), the composite base of an Ionic column (ΑΚΔ 139, Pl. XI, fig. 26), and a composite Doric capital (ΑΚΔ 140; Pl. XI, fig. 27). There was also a large part of an epistyle or lintel made of crumbly sandstone (ΑΚΔ 138, Pl. XI, fig. 28; drawing 3)

The pottery found in trench V did not differ greatly from that of trench IV. There were a large number of Arretine sherds, some black-glazed and handmade "prehistoric" wares (Pl. XII, fig. 29), and fragments of "cast" lamps dating from the Roman period (Pl. XII, fig. 30).

A number of bronze coins⁷ were in all five trenches, amongst them two "τεσσαρακοντανούμια" from the period of Heraclius in trenches I and II, and a coin from the period of Constantine II (minted A.D. 330-335); there was also a badly worn ancient Greek coin from trench IV.

Trench V yielded bronze coins from the reigns of Aurelian (Antoninianus), Galerian, Constantine II, Arcadius (*Aes* III, minted A.D. 395-408), Theodosius II (minted A.D. 408-423), and a number of badly worn coins.

Trenches I-III were covered again, but this was not done in the case of the two small neighbouring areas created by the extension of trenches IV and V. These were fenced in by the Ephorate of Antiquities at Komotini which also undertook the protection of the rights of the owner of the land. Although the aims, set out at the beginning of this report were not all achieved, a new archaeological site is being created on the hill of Ayia Petra.

Thessaloniki

7. The coins were identified by the Numismatic Museum in Athens.

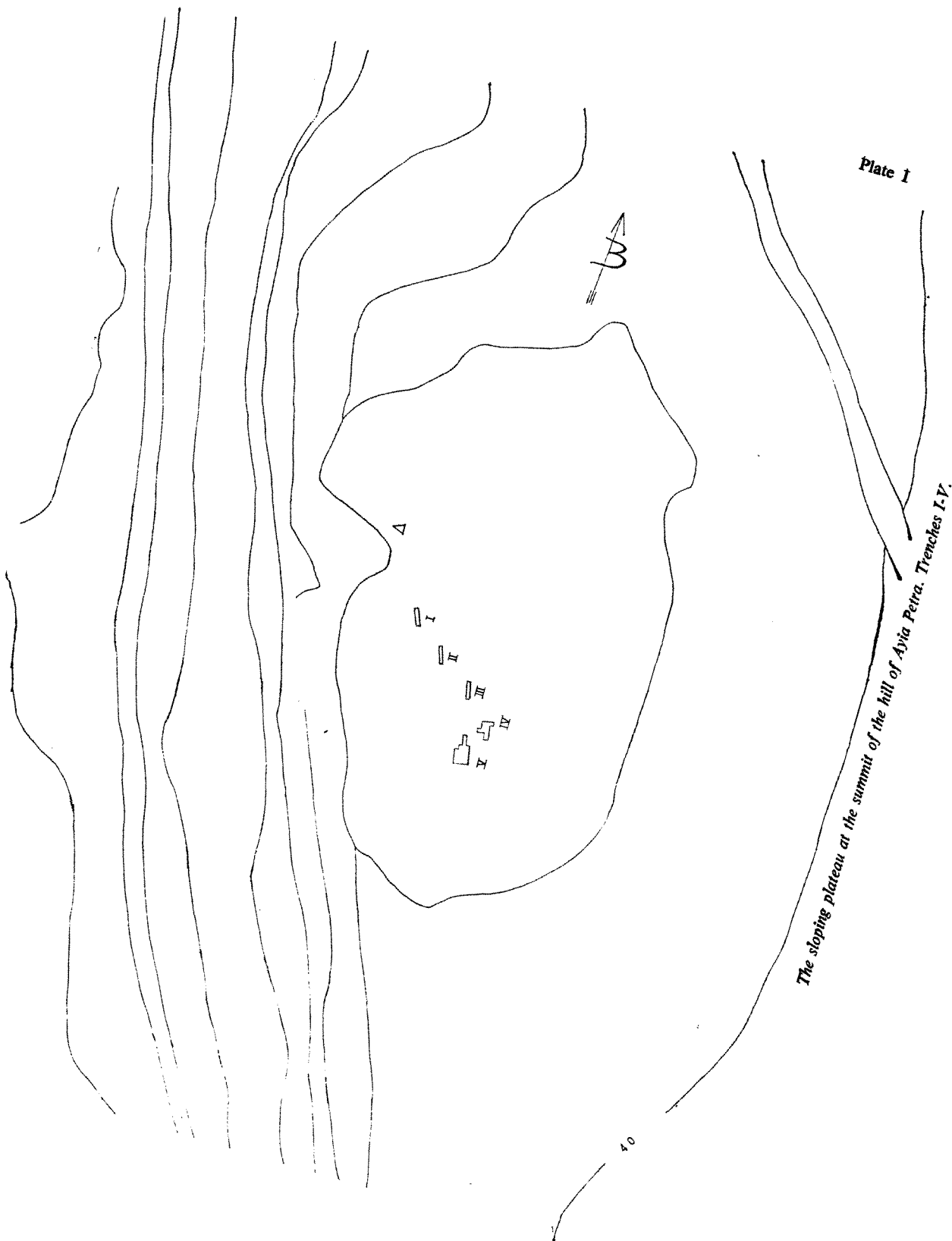
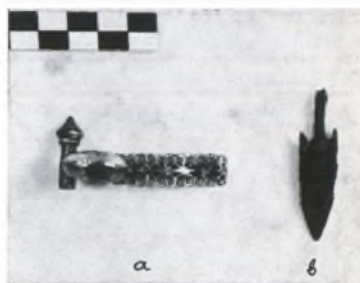




Fig. 1. The hill of Ayia Petra from W.



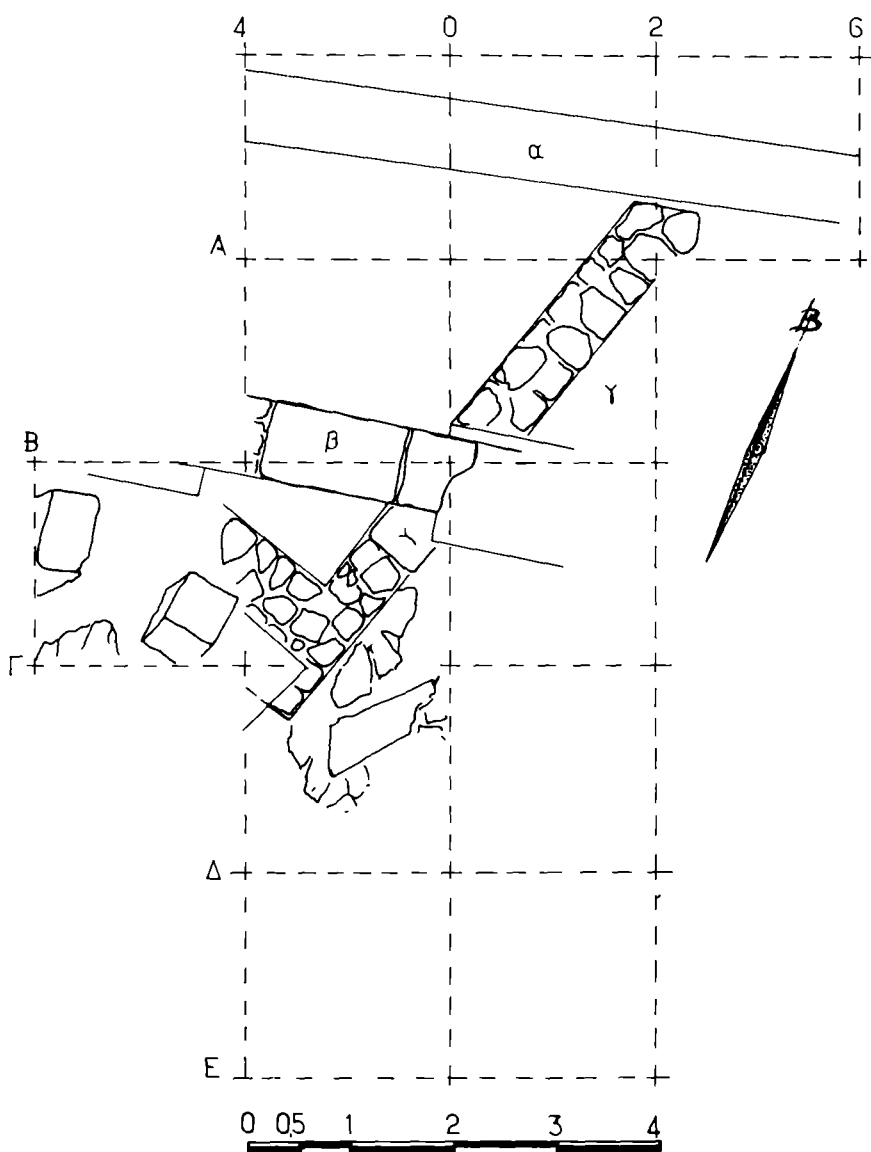
*Fig. 2. Mutilated torso-τραπεζοφόρο
(table-support) from trench II.*



*Fig. 3. a) Bronze brooch, 4th c.
A.D., from trench II.
b) Bronze arrow-head, 5th c. B.C.,
from trench square IV, 0-4, Δ-E.*



*Fig. 4. Clay lamp.
Early christian
period (trench III).*



Trench IV enlarged.



Fig. 5. Walls a and b, of limestone. (Trench IV; cf. Pl. III, a-b).



Fig. 6. Walls a, b and c. (Trench IV; cf. Pl. III, a,b,γ).



Fig. 7. Walls b and c (γ) in trench IV; cf. Pl. III, a, b, γ.



Fig. 8. Arretine sherd with embossed decoration, and a sherd from a roman skyphos with the representation of a «renator». (Trench IV).



Fig. 9. Two «prehistoric» hand-made sherds. (Trench IV).



Fig. 10. Pieces of decorative clay reliefs and clay figurines. (Trench IV).



Fig. 11. Fragments of marble volutes from Ionic capitals. (Trench IV, a, c, d; from Vd).



Fig. 12. Fragments of marble capitals (from trench IV, a-e; from Vf).



Fig. 13. Fragments of marble cymatia (from trench IV, a-e; from Vf).



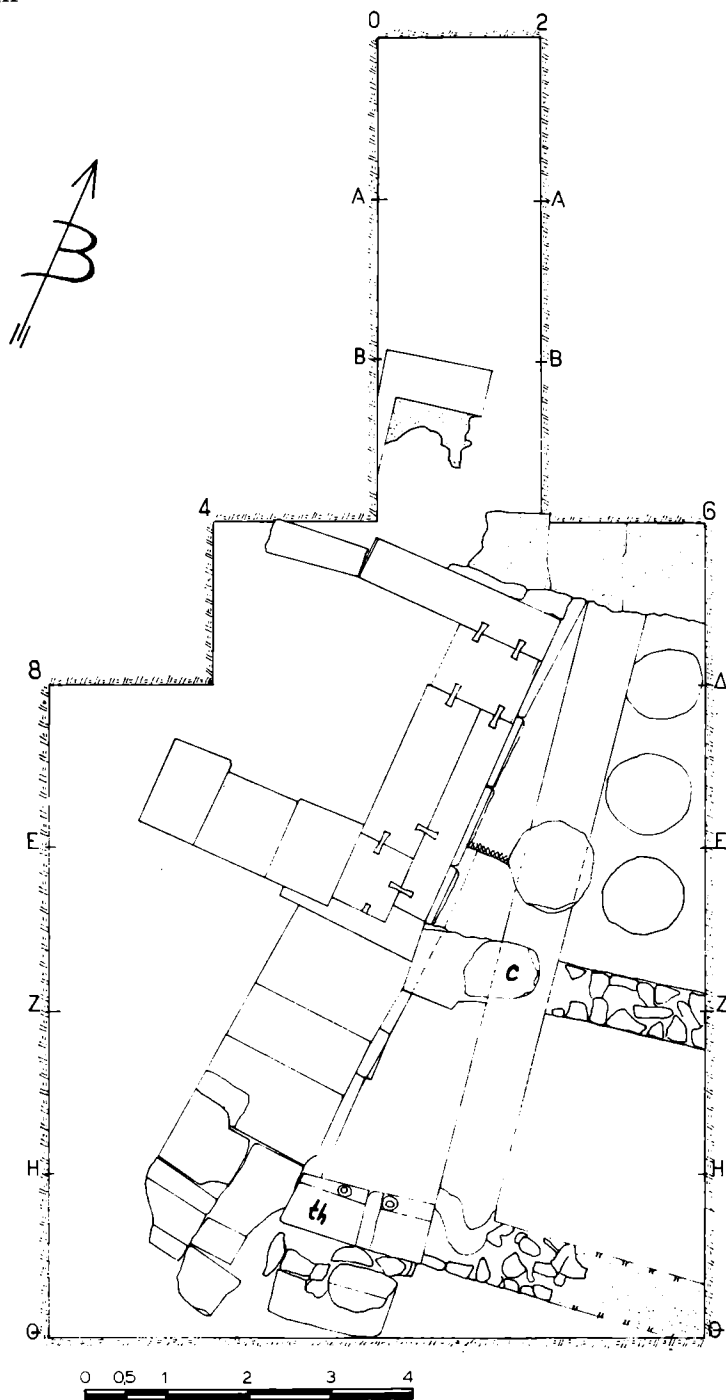
Fig. 14. Fragments of marble bases from Ionic or Corinthian capitals (from trench IV, a, e; from V, b, d).



Fig. 15. Piece of lead pipe. (Trench IV).



Fig. 16. The surface of the poros wall showing the sockets for clamps and the «pithon» from W. (Cf. Pl. VIII, square 0-2-4, I-Z).



Trench V enlarged.



Fig. 17. The «krepsis» with the walls at right angles to it, and the spolia at the south end, from N. (Cf. Pl. VIII, square 0-2, Γ-Z).



Fig. 18. The spolia at the south end of the «krepsis»-wall, from N.



Fig. 19. Part of an inscribed stele built into the spolia. (Cf. fig. 18; Pl. VIII, square 0-4, Η-Θ).



Fig. 20. The brick wall, the traverse walls and the «πιθών», from N. (Cf. Pl. VIII, square 2-6, E-Θ).



Fig. 21. The first cross wall where two fragments of granite columns are built, from SW. (Cf. Pl. VIII, square 0-2, E-Z, c).



Fig. 22. The second cross wall with fragments (th) of a threshold, from N. (Cf. Pl. VIII, square 0-4, H-Θ, th).



Fig. 23. Relief plaque with the s.c. «Thracian Horseman». Roman period. (Trench V).



Fig. 24. Ring-stone with an incised scene. (Trench V).



Fig. 25. Fragments of architectural members. (Trench V).



Fig. 26. A composite base of an Ionic column.



Fig. 27. A composite Doric capital.



Fig. 28. Part of an epistyle or lintel (profile). (Cf. drawing no. 3).



Fig. 29. «Hand-made» sherds with handles. (Trench V).



Fig. 30. «Cast» lamps from the Roman period. (Trench V).