

ABSTRACT

At the invitation of the Greek Ministry of Culture, the Swiss School of Archaeology in Greece conducted a two-season excavation in the ancient Theater of Eretria between 1997 and 1998. The campaigns consisted of stratigraphic exploration and cleaning operations, under the direction of Hans Peter Isler with the collaboration of Elisa Ferroni. The Swiss School completed the topographical and architectural drawings of the monument. A team from the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich reviewed the monument's state of preservation and drew up several proposals for its protection and conservation.

The building of the Theater

The *skene* lies directly on the natural ground, while the orchestra was excavated in the physical soil. The recent investigations noted the irregularity of the ground surface and confirmed that it was not as homogeneous as it appears today. This information had already been recorded by the American excavators, who noted that the southern part of the *skene* was built on a two-course foundation, probably to compensate for a slight declivity. However, this structure could be related as well to the repairs carried on during the third phase of the *skene*.

The study of the long wall projecting west of the *skene* (on which were erected the honorary monuments) revealed another irregularity of the terrain. North of this wall, a depression was partially filled up with stones, whose top level corresponds to the floor of the western *parodos*.

The koilon

The excavations confirmed that the *koilon* was composed of an artificial mound. It consisted of 30 rows of seats and was not delimited by any retaining wall. At the summit, the flattened surfaces suggest the existence of five to six rows for standing. The material excavated from the *koilon* dates to the second phase of the Theater, that is to say around 300 BC or somewhat later.

The orchestra and the water pipe

Elements of the *orchestra*'s original floor still subsist, as well as later repairs. A layer of compacted clay containing sand can be associated with the re-use of the orchestra as an arena. Holes carved in the first row of seats suggest that a barrier was erected in order to protect the audience. The holes carved in

the *Euripos* could have served for setting up of a *velum*. Some remains of the painted decoration on the stucco coatings of the *Euripos* seen by the American excavators still exist.

A water main used for drainage leaves from the south-western part of the *Euripos* and continues under the *skene*. It was probably linked to the canalisation system spotted by the American excavators near the Sanctuary of Dionysos. The water main was made of large *poros* blocks, in which was carved a canal. The canalisation made of clay elements which was unearthed by the Americans in the eastern section of the orchestra was part of later repairs.

The skene

The *skene* belonging to the first phase (pl. 83, 1) contained five rooms. Since the southern foundations were renovated during the third phase, they are not preserved in their original state. The threshold was located between the interior angles of the *paraskenia* and formed the limit of the *skene*, which was not very high.

The first phase of the *skene* was preceded by an early building, later abandoned. This is demonstrated by the levelling of the area by a layer of *poros* fragments. Although the function of the wall erected to the west is unclear, it clearly belongs to the first phase of the *skene*; it was built on natural ground and was not surmounted by any construction.

The vaulted passage under the *skene* belongs to the second phase (pl. 83, 2). It was dug in the natural terrain. The vault was waterproofed by a mixture of earth and lime. The floor of the *skene*'s second phase is identical with that of the first phase. The later wall of the *hyposkenion* has no foundations and lies directly on the natural ground. The *poros* threshold of the *proskenion* is contemporary, although it is buried deeper in the ground. The southern wall of the *skene* must be almost entirely linked to the third phase (pl. 83, 3). This fact was unknown so far.

The dates of the three phases of the Theater

The first phase of the *skene* can be dated to the last third of the 4th century BC, on the basis of the stratified material. A coin from Athens dating to the years 330–322/317 provides a *terminus post quem*. No stratified find gives a date for the second phase of the *skene*. However, the second phase is contemporary with the *koilon* (ca 300 or in the years immediately after).

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

The third phase of the *skene* must be dated after the second century BC. This date is confirmed by some modest finds coming from the *orchestra*.