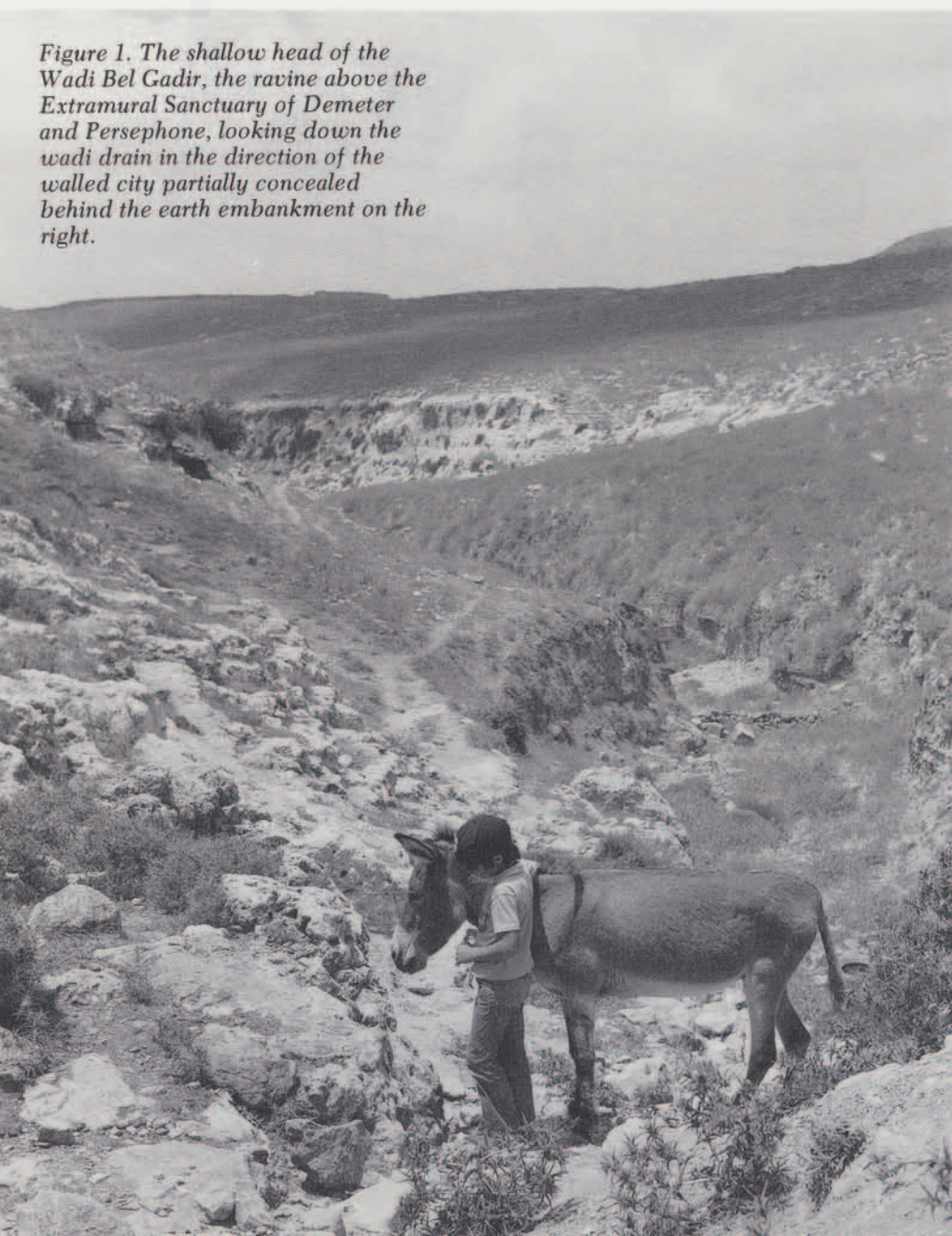


The Sanctuary's History and Architecture

Figure 1. The shallow head of the Wadi Bel Gadir, the ravine above the Extramural Sanctuary of Demeter and Persephone, looking down the wadi drain in the direction of the walled city partially concealed behind the earth embankment on the right.



DONALD WHITE

Archaeologists know from experience that Demeter sanctuaries can be counted on to warehouse large quantities of objects. The worship of the mother and daughter goddesses demanded more than anything else the placation of the forces of Nature and the Afterlife through the dedication of gifts on a regular calendrical basis. Their precincts, from Sicily to the coast of Asia Minor, have been found choked with votive accumulations not unlike our own at Cyrene. Less immediately predictable are the elements of their architectural design which, depending on purpose, time and place, can consist of everything from rooms in converted houses to isolated shrine buildings to full-blown compound sanctuaries supplied with protective surrounding walls (*periboloi*), altars, storage chambers, underground votive pits, fountains and other lustration facilities, initiation halls, monumental entranceways, independent sacred houses or, less commonly, temples, and finally even the occasional cave to remind the cult's initiates of Persephone's reluctant entry into the Underworld. As we shall see, the Cyrene Sanctuary falls into something like the latter category (compound sanctuary).

The City of Cyrene

Cyrene was the leading city of the Libyan Pentapolis or 'Region of the Five Cities.' It was settled by Greek colonists from Thera and other island and mainland cities toward the end of the 7th century B.C. (see Uhlenbrock's box on the founding of Cyrene, and Schaus, this issue), and its formal existence as a center for organized Hellenic life persisted until the Arab invasions (A.D. 643). The ancient town was established about 13 km (ca. 8 miles) inland from the Mediterranean on the 600 meter-high crest of a limestone plateau known today as the Gebel Akhdar or "Green Mountain" (Fig. 2). The plateau or

gebel forms an important physical barrier separating coastal eastern Libya from the Saharan region to its south. During the winter and early spring the mountain heights block the southerly drift of water-laden clouds, squeezing from them enough rain to support a fertile, temperate northern Mediterranean environment a mere 64 km north of one of the most incandescently arid and sterile regions on the globe.

Cyrene's agriculturally based economy thrived on the export of wheat, legumes, fruit, sheep and goat-derived products, horses, and a highly sought-after herbal plant known as silphium (Fig. 3; see box), which grew exclusively on the Libyan *gebel*. The city itself lay inside a protective circuit of stone defensive walls, erected during the Ptolemaic era, that measure overall just under 1,600 m northwest by southeast and ca. 1,100 m northeast by southwest (Fig. 4). It rose on two massive hills. The southwest hill (on which lie the acropolis, agora, and forum) is totally free of modern building; the northeast is largely covered with the old Arab village of Shahat, stands of reforested evergreens, and cultivated ploughlands, and remains largely unexplored.

The ancient urban center was divided by three main roads. The Valley Road follows the sloping valley between the two hills to the Sanctuary of Apollo with its standard Greek entrance gateway, temples,

altars, fountains, theater, and, later, Roman-period baths. The second road, named after the city's first king Battus, connects the still unexcavated acropolis zone with the city gymnasium and Roman-period forum. The third road crosses the main axis of the city east of the forum. At its intersection with the Valley Road were more temples, a basilica, and a series of important Roman-period urban villas. Off in the northeast corner of the walled city rose a massive temple dedicated to Zeus (currently undergoing reconstruction) and the city's still unexcavated circus or hippodrome.

A century-long experiment with a republican form of government followed the collapse of Cyrene's hereditary monarchy around 440 B.C. The region then fell under the control of the Egyptian Ptolemies after Alexander the Great's death in 323. By the early 1st century B.C. it was swallowed up by the Romans, but continued to retain its distinctively Greek cultural bent until overrun by the Arab forces of Amr Ibn el-Aasi in the 7th century A.D.

The Sanctuary's Foundation and Appearance

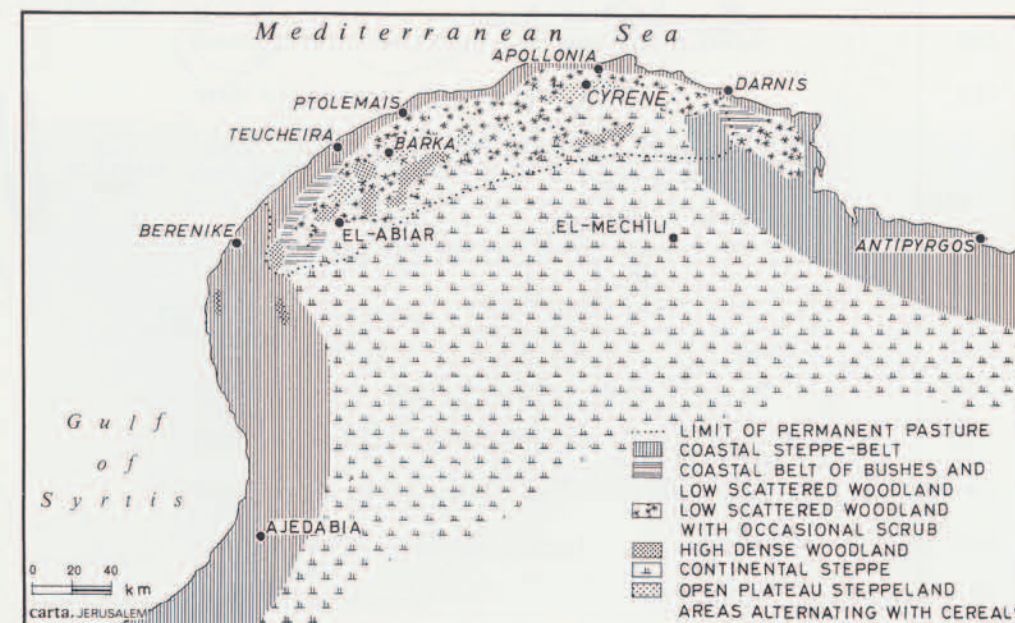
The Extramural Sanctuary of Demeter and Persephone was laid out about a generation after the initial

foundation of Cyrene and lasted in use until badly damaged by an earthquake in A.D. 262 (see Fig. 3 in Preface; Figs. 6, 7) and eventually totally destroyed by an even more severe earthquake in A.D. 365. In its heyday, which when measured in terms of architectural expansion seems to have coincided with the reigns of Trajan through Antoninus Pius (A.D. 98 through 161), the Sanctuary covered more than 9,000 sq m. Its structures were distributed over 20 m of abruptly rising ground, broken into three major divisions prosaically designated the Lower, Middle, and Upper Sanctuary levels.

Entry to the lower northwest corner from the nearby walled city was gained in antiquity by means of a bridge (S27/S28) across the wadi drain (Fig. 5: nos. 6,7). Narrow steps cut in the steep opposite face of the wadi above the bridge permitted access to the city's agora (Fig. 5: nos. 10,11) through some still undisclosed opening in the walled ramparts. A monumental staircase (Fig. 5: no. 4) connected the Sanctuary's upper grounds to an unidentified walled complex (Fig. 5: A,B) installed at a higher level on the great hill rising to the south. The principal entrance to the Upper Sanctuary during the Roman period was provided by a four-columned propylaeum or gateway (S20; Fig. 11), strategically positioned in front of the junction of the monumental hillside staircase and the ancient road leading back to the

Figure 2. The Libyan Pentapolis, showing areas of natural vegetation across the Gebel Akhdar and the steppe desert to its south.

S. Applebaum, *Jews and Greeks* (Leiden, 1979), 349



Silphium

To judge from its emblematic depictions on the pre-Hellenistic Cyrenean coins, the silphium plant was composed of a strongly ribbed stalk crowned by a terminal umbel (i.e., a flower whose pedicels or stems spring from the same point to form a rounded cluster) and two opposing pairs of protuberant leaves, as well as axillary umbels that sprang obliquely from the stalk (Fig. 3). From an early time it was harvested as an uncultivated wildflower by the native Libyans, who transmitted their knowledge of its food and medicinal properties to the first Greek colonists. The juice was used as a condiment and drug, the stalk eaten as a vegetable, and the residue fed to cattle. A recent article has even suggested that it was used as an ancient oral contraceptive (Riddle and Estes 1992:226, 230). Since it grew wild, its survival depended on two conditions. First, that it not be overharvested, and second that the Libyan herdsmen keep their sheep and goats from eating it.

Apparently as early as the 3rd century B.C. the Libyans began a deliberate sabotage of silphium out of protest against excessive taxation and the restriction of their traditional grazing lands. By the 1st century A.D. its rarity made silphium an extremely expensive commodity to acquire on the foreign market, and by the beginning of the 5th century the plant was virtually extinct, although, interestingly enough, Bishop Synesius (b. Cyrene ca. A.D. 370) seems to have known of its



Figure 3. Silphium plant on a 5th century B.C. silver drachm of Cyrene excavated in the Sanctuary of Demeter and Persephone. Native only to the upland gebel or plateau region, the juice and stalk of this umbelliferous succulent were highly valued in antiquity as a drug and condiment, and provided a highly profitable export crop from the 6th century B.C. onward. (Coin shown four times actual size.)

Inv. 69-39

existence as a cultivated plant. Reports of its re-discovery on the Gebel Akhdar by an Italian botanist during the summer of 1991 remain to be confirmed.

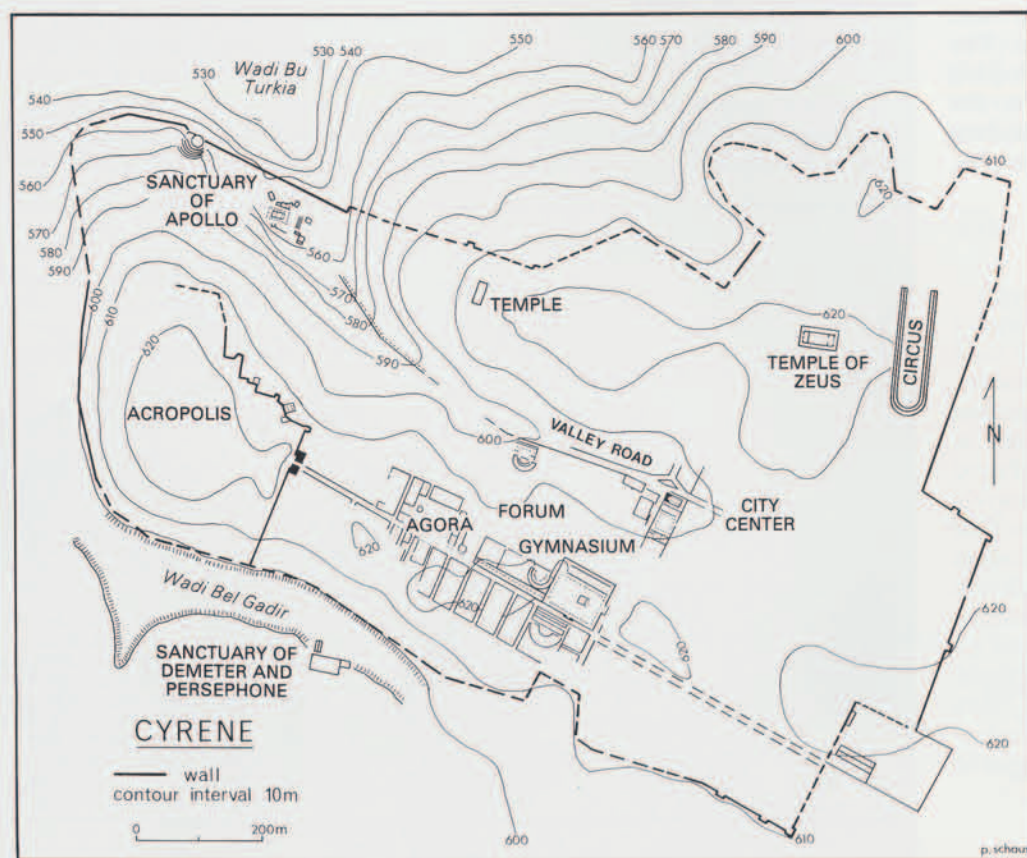


Figure 4. Plan of ancient Cyrene, showing the location of the Sanctuary of Demeter and Persephone south of the line of the city's defensive wall across the Wadi bel Gadir

southeast suburban quarter of the city along the rim of the wadi. In this way the Sanctuary grounds were architecturally linked with both the city and the countryside that lay to its south.

Architectural Features

The individual components making up the Sanctuary in its final pre-earthquake development (Preface, Fig. 3; Figs. 6, 7) are mainly local variations of the same stock features previously detailed for other full-blown Demeter sanctuaries: a system of terraces (T11-T13, T15, T20-T22), interior retaining walls (W1, W2), and stairways (G2, R1-R4) surrounded by an outer lateral peribolos (T14, T17, T18). These in turn support, contain, and give access to a variety of independent shrine houses (S1, S5, S6, S7, S8), storage rooms (S9, S11, S12), water installations (F1, F2), a votive dump (S18), cult rooms variously distinguished by columnar-fronted entrances and/or mosaic floors (S10, S16), an open-air access corridor with mosaic floor (S22), as well as the already mentioned colonnaded propylaeum (S20) and Southwest Building (S17). A number of units still elude positive identification (S2-S4, S14, S23, S24, S25, S26). While no permanent altars have come to light, the relatively large number of portable stone altars found, ranging in height from a few centimeters (for burning incense?) to over a meter and a half, undoubtedly helped to accommodate most of the sacrificial activity taking place within the Sanctuary's central core. The major permanent altars remain to be discovered at some future date on the level of the Upper Sanctuary.

In the absence of detailed information about the still largely unexcavated colonnaded Southwest Building (S17), which, on analogy with Eleusis (the best-known of all of Demeter's mainland sanctuaries), could be an initiation or mystery hall (where sacred rites were conducted in secrecy), the most memorable features of the Cyrene installation are its hillside terracing, propylaeum, and independent shrine houses.

Terracing

The post-A.D. 115 monumental terrace wall (T20) separating the

Lower from Middle Sanctuary is the latest addition to a series of similar terracing devices that go back to the foundation of the Sanctuary at the end of the 7th century B.C. (Fig. 8). Its impressive thickness covers vestiges of an Archaic rubble wall (P8/P9), succeeded by a late 6th, early 5th century pseudoisodomic (low alternating with high courses) cut-stone terrace (T3/T4), which in

turn was replaced by a more conventional ashlar or squared-block facing (T10) of Augustan date around the time of Christ. In a literal way the terrace physically incorporated every major developmental phase experienced by the Sanctuary over a 750-year period.

The most flamboyant aspect of this terrace had nothing to do with its latest and most massive T20 facing

Timeline

	Colonization of Cyrene by Greeks from island of Thera; establishment of Battiad monarchy	632 B.C.
Archaic Period	Settlement of remainder of the Libyan Pentapolis by Cyreneans and other Greeks	ca. 630-580
	Foundation of the Extramural Sanctuary of Demeter and Persephone	610-600
Classical Period	End of Battiad monarchy and establishment of Republican government at Cyrene	ca. 440
	Death of Alexander the Great; establishment of Ptolemaic rule over the Libyan Pentapolis	323/22
Roman Republican Period	End of Ptolemaic rule and beginning of Roman administration	96-74
	Death of Cleopatra; creation of the Senatorial province of Crete and Cyrenaica	31
Roman Imperial Period	Jewish rebellion levels much of Cyrene and other Pentapolis centers; isolated Sanctuary is spared significant damage	A.D. 115
	Major earthquake wrecks Sanctuary	262
	Second and greater earthquake completes destruction of Sanctuary and much of Cyrene	365
	Arab invasions of Pentapolis	643
	Influx of nomadic Beni Hilal and Beni Suleim extinguish remaining vestiges of urban life in Cyrene	11th c.
	Turkish occupation of Tripoli	1551
The first European traveler, Claude Lemaire, reaches Cyrene	1706	
Italian seizure of Libya from Turks	1911	
Establishment of modern Libyan state	1951	
First season of excavation in Sanctuary	summer 1969	
Col. Gaddafi establishes control	Sept. 1969	
Final study season	summer 1981	

The Museum's Excavation

Of the Sanctuary's three internal divisions, only the Middle Sanctuary has been archaeologically investigated in something approximating its entirety. When The University Museum took over the project in 1973 (see box in Preface), a decision was made to limit activity on the level of the Lower Sanctuary to clearing its overburden of scrub brush and to recording whatever wall features already stuck up above the ground without benefit of excavation. As work progressed through the mid-1970s it became increasingly plain that the grounds which we had initially assumed made up the site's climactic element constituted

instead a middle zone and that the western half of what must have been originally the actual Upper Sanctuary was dominated by a large colonnaded hall-like building (see Preface, Fig. 3: S17). This led to a further decision to limit the exploration of the Upper Sanctuary to a series of test trenches while attempting to complete the excavation of all of the Middle Sanctuary features that came to light south of the expedition's railway line. With the Museum's presence in Libya halted in 1981, the practical result was that the entire southern upper edge of the Sanctuary, including the back of the large Southwest Building (S17), had to be left buried.

but instead was linked with the preceding T10 phase, when a facing of such exceptionally regular block units was thrown across the eastern two-thirds of the Middle Sanctuary that its excavators immediately nicknamed it the 'Thirty-Two Centimeter Wall' (Figs. 7, 8). When this was installed as a reinforcement to the pseudoisodomic wall around the beginning of the present era, its builders backfilled the ca. 3-5 m deep V-shaped gap (Fig. 9) between its inner face and the sloping bedrock scarp with earth mixed with massed

concentrations of artifacts. This created in effect a gigantic storage bin filled with discarded votive paraphernalia.

The deposit behind the wall seems best explained as fill carried from dumps of votives buried at earlier times in other parts of the Sanctuary grounds, combined with the debris of dismantled buildings. From what was learned from several controlled tests, the man-made objects fall into four broad categories: (1) pottery and lamps; (2) stone and terracotta statues, statuettes, and figurines; (3)

personal ornaments such as gems, seals, jewelry, and pendants; and (4) miscellaneous objects ranging from glass (cups and bowls) to faience (figurines), iron (utensils, blades), bronze (fragments of sheeting, strainers, rings), alabaster (bowls, jars), and terracotta (loom weights).

Sherds and terracotta figurines, dating mainly from the 6th and 5th centuries B.C., were recovered in unusually heavy concentrations. A total of 52 stone statue and statuette body fragments, 10 head fragments, 7 relief fragments, and a nearly intact

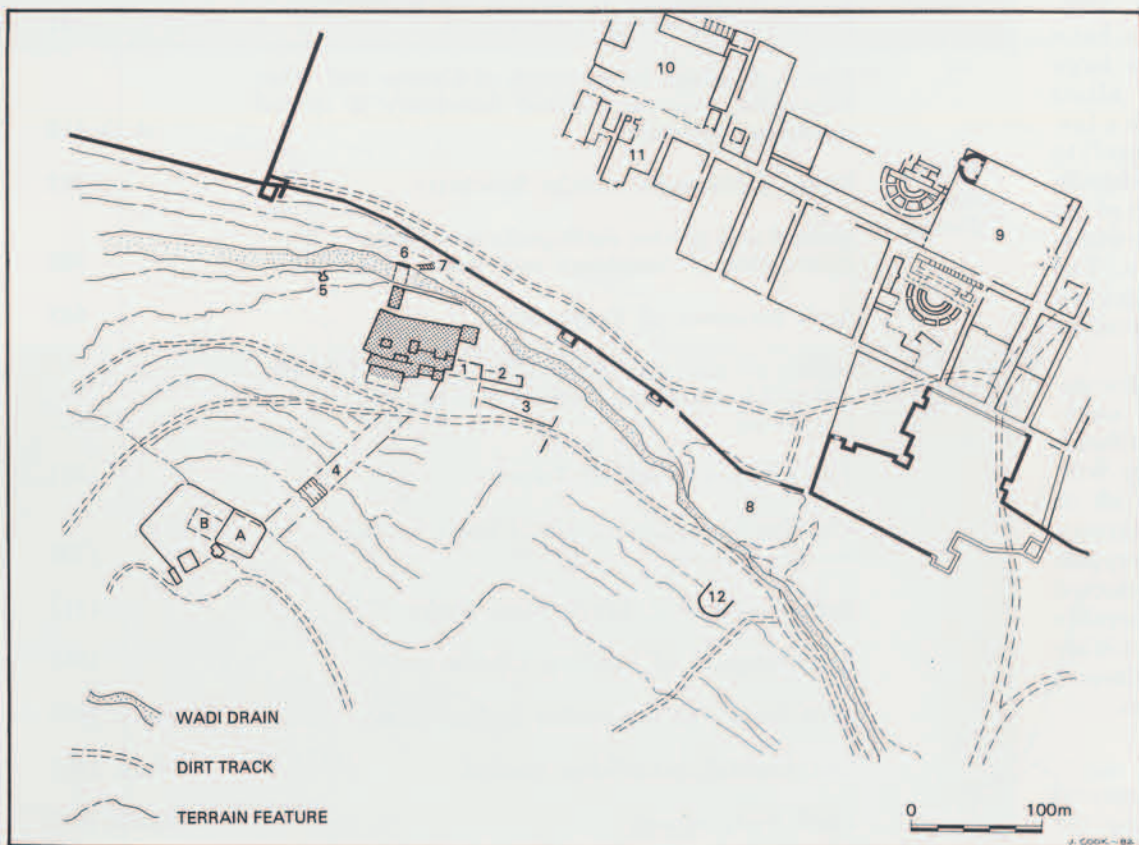


Figure 5. Map of southern edge of Cyrene showing the location of the city's Roman period forum (9) and Greek agora (10) that lie north of the Hellenistic defensive circuit wall. South of the walls and across the steep Wadi Bel Gadir lies the Extramural Sanctuary of Demeter and Persephone (in dark stippling), a set of monumental stairs (4), and further to the south, a still largely unexplored hilltop complex (A and B).

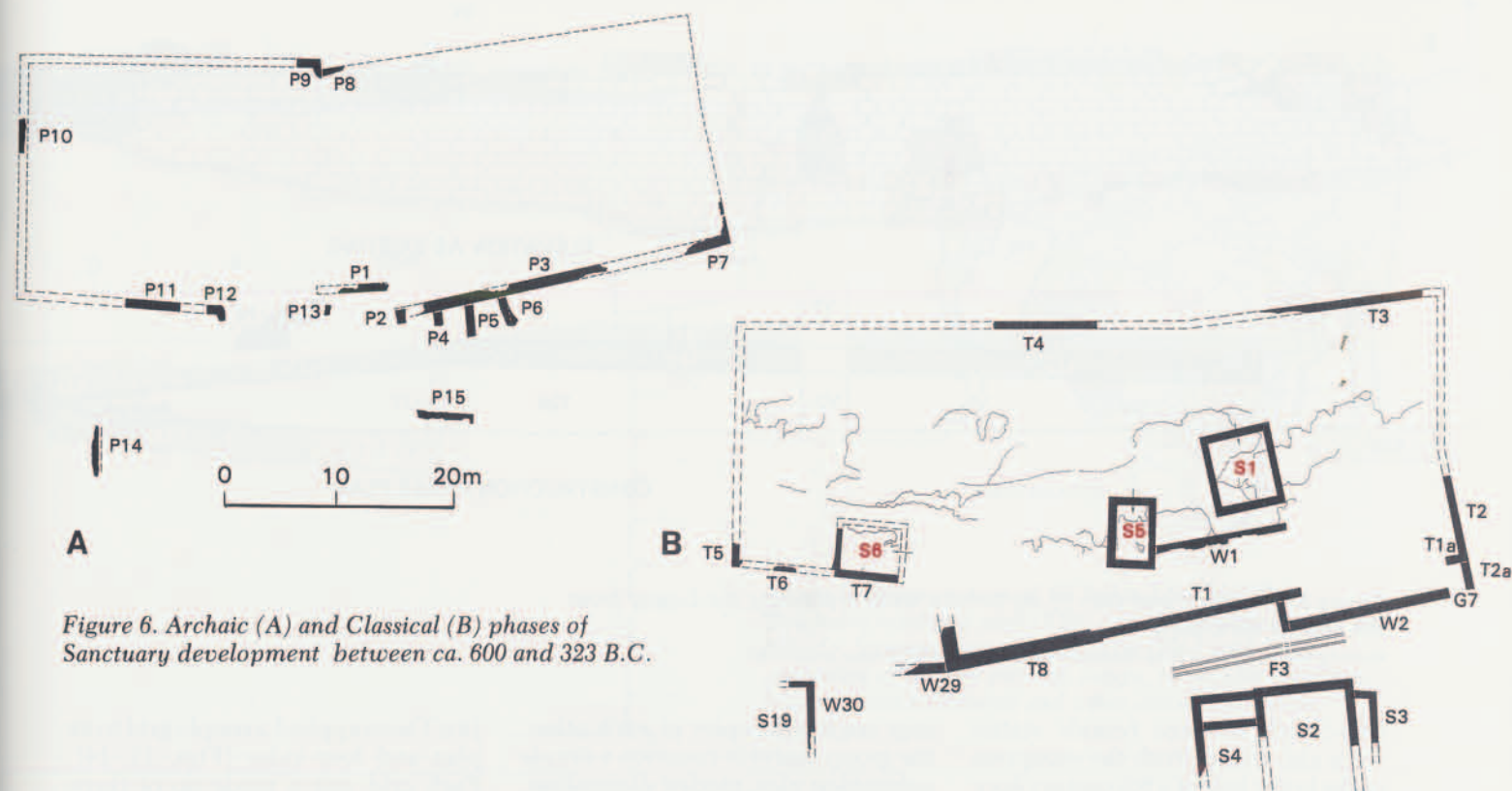


Figure 6. Archaic (A) and Classical (B) phases of Sanctuary development between ca. 600 and 323 B.C.

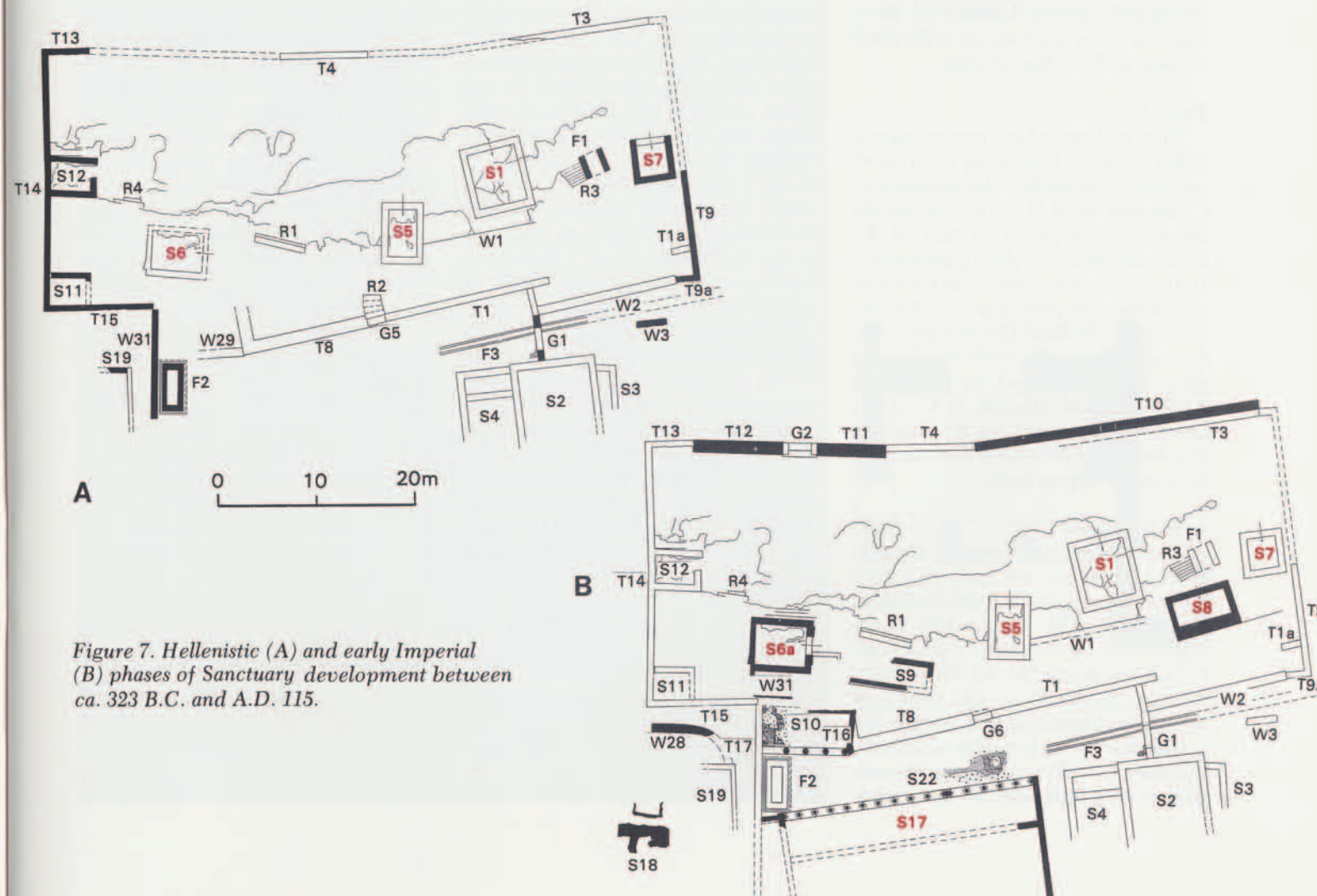


Figure 7. Hellenistic (A) and early Imperial (B) phases of Sanctuary development between ca. 323 B.C. and A.D. 115.

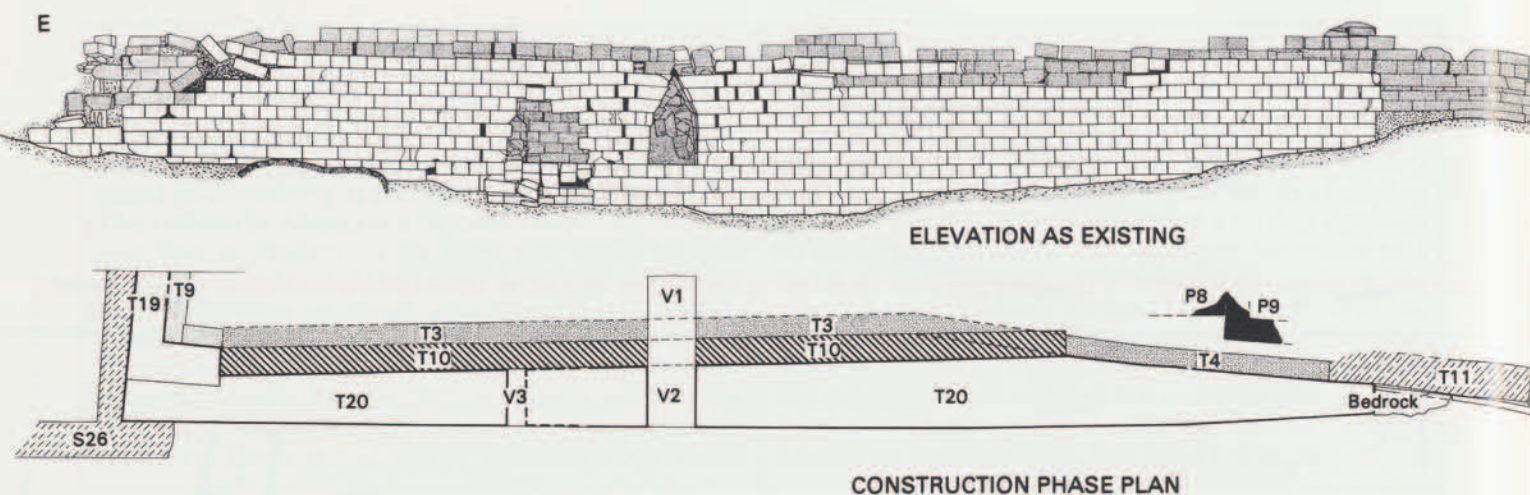


Figure 8. Elevation and plan of the terrace walls separating the Lower from the Middle Sanctuary.

Drawn by Alan Cook from a photo-rectification survey carried out by Graydon Wood in 1977

two-thirds life-size female statue were also found. With the exception of the lower half of a 6th century *kore* (female figure), the statues appear to be mainly post-Classical in date. More will be said about individual objects in the other articles.

Propylaeum

The colonnaded propylaeum (S20), erected following the Jewish rebellion that rocked the province of Cyrenaica in A.D. 115, still awaits restoration on paper as part of the final volume of the site's publication. In the meantime, based on the close similarity of its plan (Fig. 11), decorative order (hybrid Corinthian), and overall dimensions with the Roman propylaeum restored by the Italian Archaeological Mission in Cyrene's nearby Sanctuary of Apollo (Fig. 10), one has little difficulty in imagining its general appearance.

Sacred Houses

This leaves the sacred houses, which is what we call the five independently sited shrine buildings distributed over the Middle Sanctuary slope (see Preface, Fig. 3; Figs. 6, 7). The earliest (S1, S5, S6) seem to belong to the first 125 years of Sanctuary development, while the remaining two are additions of the Hellenistic (S7) and early Roman period (S8). Although no two build-

ings are exact copies of each other, the group shares in common a simple columnless plan, modest dimensions, and single entrance. Four of the houses opened north, down the slope toward the city, but the fifth (S6) faced east. S5 and S6 opened at their short ends; S1, the earliest in the series, and S7 were virtually squares, while S8, the latest, was entered through one of its long sides. No doubt coincidentally, S1's interior length was nearly precisely double the interior width of S8. At least two of the buildings (S5, S7) had stone benches across their back walls as well as painted plaster interiors.

A closer look at the S7 Sacred House will serve to illustrate the type. It was a simple 4.2 m square single room structure, opening north with, as already said, a low stone bench stretched across its rear wall (Fig. 13). Panels with linear geometric designs covered the inner surfaces of its back and side walls. The outer walls were built from ashlar blocks of an excellent grade of local limestone, free of obvious shell inclusions and capable of taking a crisp finish.

Both plan and elevation appear to have been based on modular increments of a local variation of the "Alexandrian foot" (a measure of length associated with Ptolemaic Egypt), here measuring 35 cm. To restore the building, staff architect

Jim Thorn applied a simple grid to its plan and four sides (Figs. 13, 14). Each grid unit is made up of three local ancient feet (1.05 m). Thus the width of the north facade above stylobate (pavement) level equals 4 units, the total height 6 units, the pediment width 5 units, and the pediment height 1 unit. The constituent parts of the decorative entablature and door are restored from actually surviving fragments, whose dimensions also appear to be fractions of the same grid unit broken down into a half-foot or single foot. The pan tiles covering its roof measure 1 by 1.5 ancient feet.

This then is the model for the type of building that dominates the Middle Sanctuary. Its presence, *mutatis mutandis*, can be readily traced in other Demeter sanctuaries throughout the Greek world, although perhaps nowhere else is it known to appear with such deliberate insistence as here. These buildings are still mysterious, their functions kept deliberately obscure by the rules for secrecy governing the administration of Demeter's cult throughout antiquity. However, they may have fulfilled such roles as the facilitating of sacrifice and other set forms of ritual, the display and storage of votives, the reenactment of sacred myth, the commemoration of the dead (whose temple-tombs, reliefs with pedi-

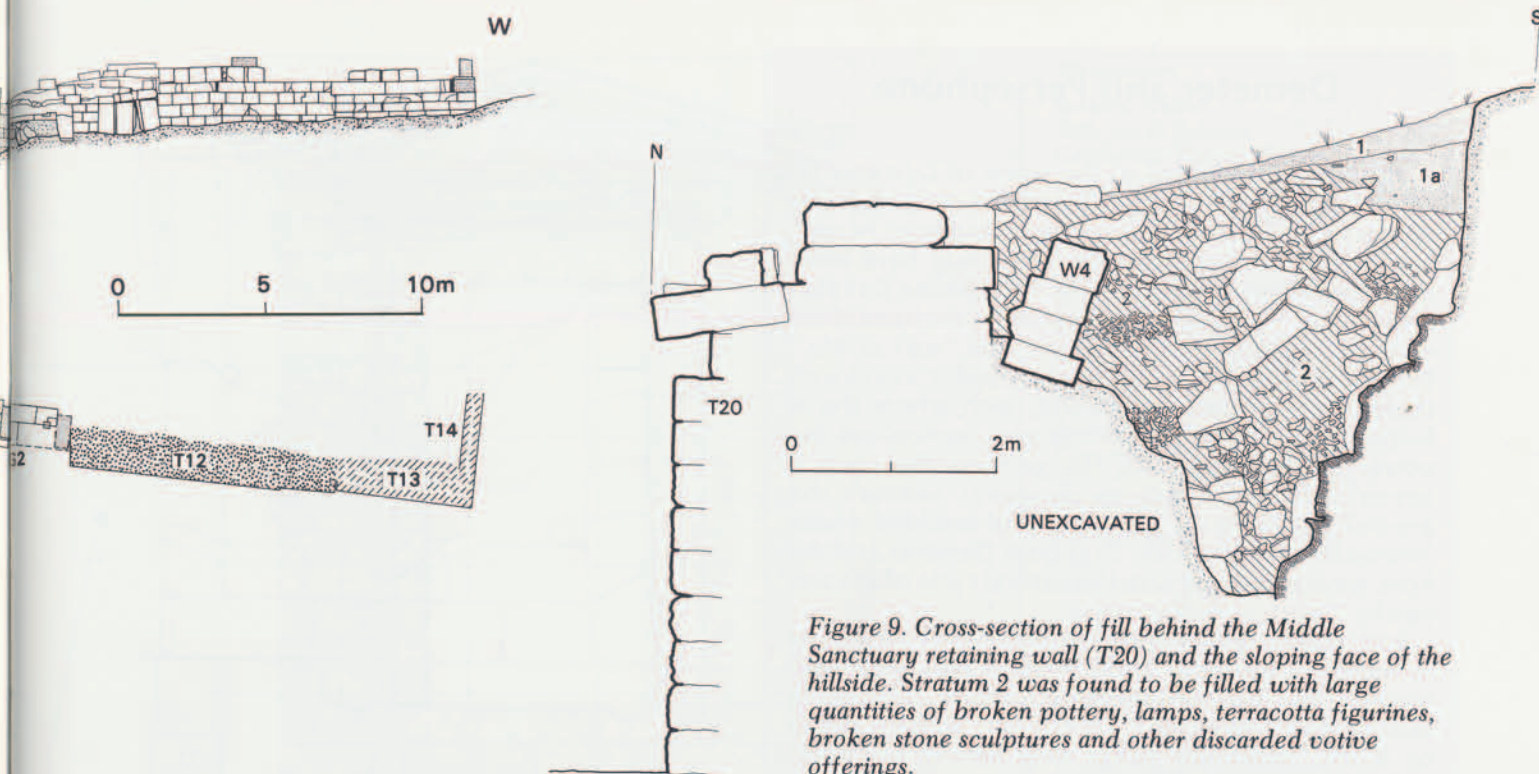


Figure 9. Cross-section of fill behind the Middle Sanctuary retaining wall (T20) and the sloping face of the hillside. Stratum 2 was found to be filled with large quantities of broken pottery, lamps, terracotta figurines, broken stone sculptures and other discarded votive offerings.

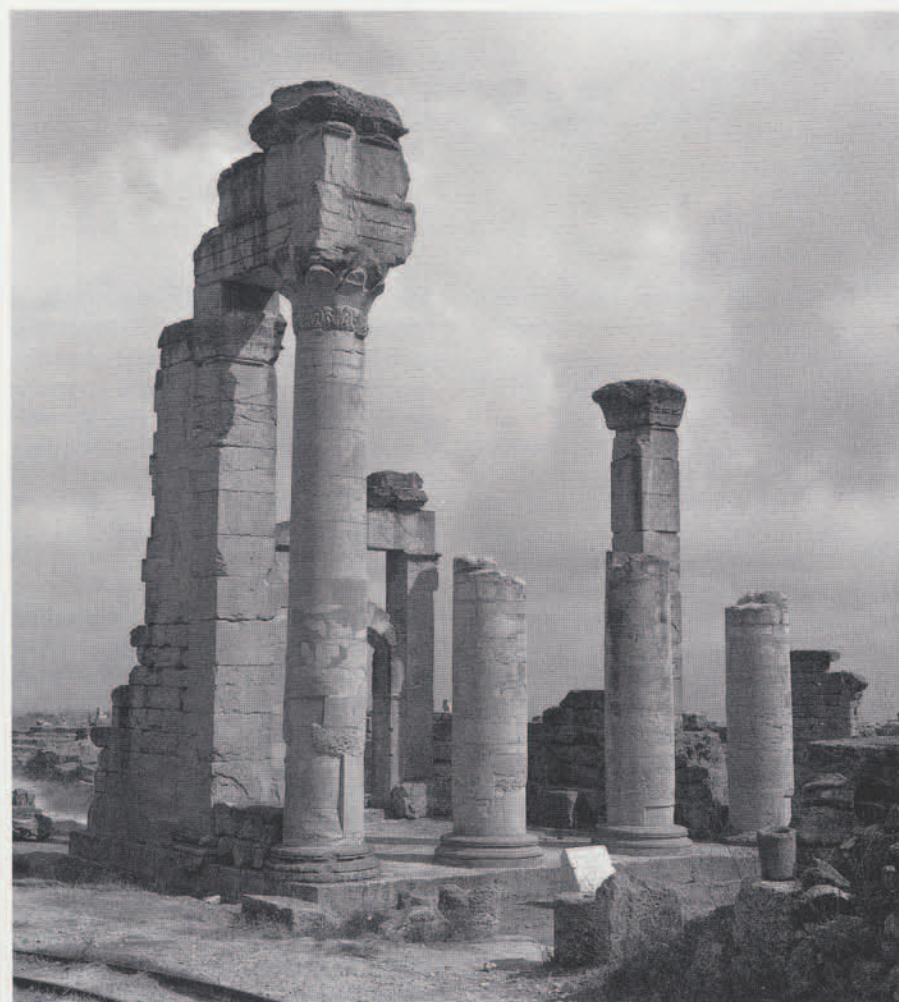


Figure 10. The restored Roman gateway in the Sanctuary of Apollo, seen from the south.

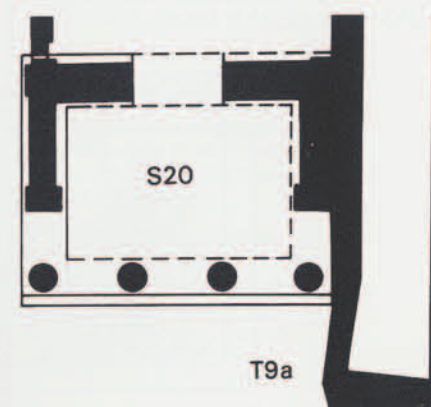


Figure 11. Plan of the Sanctuary's propylaeum (S20), which closely resembles in both plan and size the Roman period gateway in Cyrene's nearby Apollo Sanctuary (see Fig. 10).

Demeter and Persephone

The last two syllables of the name of Demeter (in Latin, Ceres) mean "mother." At some early stage she appears to have cast off a younger double of herself, the 'Virgin' or 'Kore,' whose father may have been Zeus. The Kore's proper name is Persephone (in Latin, Proserpina). The older goddess governs the fruits of the earth, especially the bread grains, the "staff of life." The younger goddess, through her mythic union with Hades, lord of the Underworld, with whom she is forced to live some part of the year, symbolizes the power of the grain. Like the goddess the grain is annually renewed only to disappear beneath the ground, just as do the generations of mankind whose inescapable fate is death. Thus both Demeter and the Kore are intertwined with the natural cycle of life and death.

Both goddesses are normally depicted in ancient art as majestic, beautiful adult women equipped with scepters and ears of wheat or torches. Demeter is usually shown seated (Fig. 12). Her hair, which is said to be blond, frequently hangs long behind her neck, while the Kore's is more apt to be upswept, at least in later depictions, but it is often difficult to distinguish the two. Persephone is frequently shown in relief sculpture, painting, and mosaic in the act of being forcibly abducted by Hades driving a four-horse chariot. She is more often invoked in ancient literature and on inscriptions by her euphemistic title of Kore than by her true name of Persephone, which carries associations of death and retribution.

Both goddesses may be accompanied in painting and sculpture by piglets, which carry a complex range of symbolic associations ranging from purification to the fecundity of the earth. Piglets are either eaten or sacrificed in the course of various Demeter rites and festivals, in particular during the celebration of the Thesmophoria (see Kane's article and her Fig. 7, and Uhlenbrock, this issue).



Figure 12. Drawing of a marble relief depicting the seated figure of a mature Demeter with long flowing hair, flanked by a standing younger Kore with upswept hair and traditional torch. Excavated in the Cyrene Sanctuary during the 1974 season.

Drawing by Jane Cook

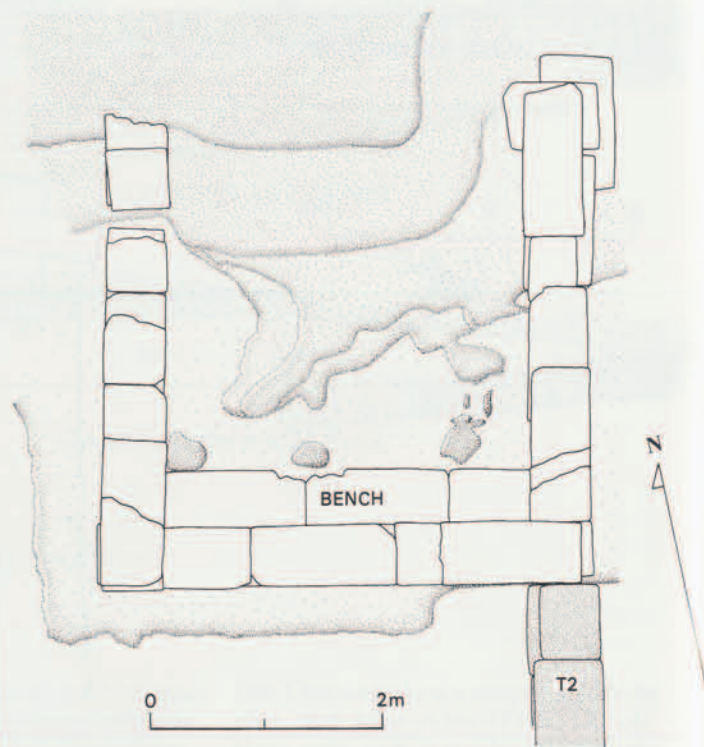


Figure 13. Unrestored ground plan of the S7 Sacred House.

mented tops, and funereal heroons or shrines painted on vases echo the same basic house form), and perhaps even the supply of fixed stations along the processional routes prescribed for the conduct of festivals.

Evolving Nature of the Cult

At the outset the cult drew its support from the colonial agriculturalists who found themselves transplanted from a relatively stable natural setting to an unfamiliar environment in an alien continent, protected from the desert by only a narrow sliver of plateau and surrounded by an unpredictable native Libyan population. It is little wonder that Cyrene's people felt almost preternaturally dependent on Demeter, the goddess of vegetation and

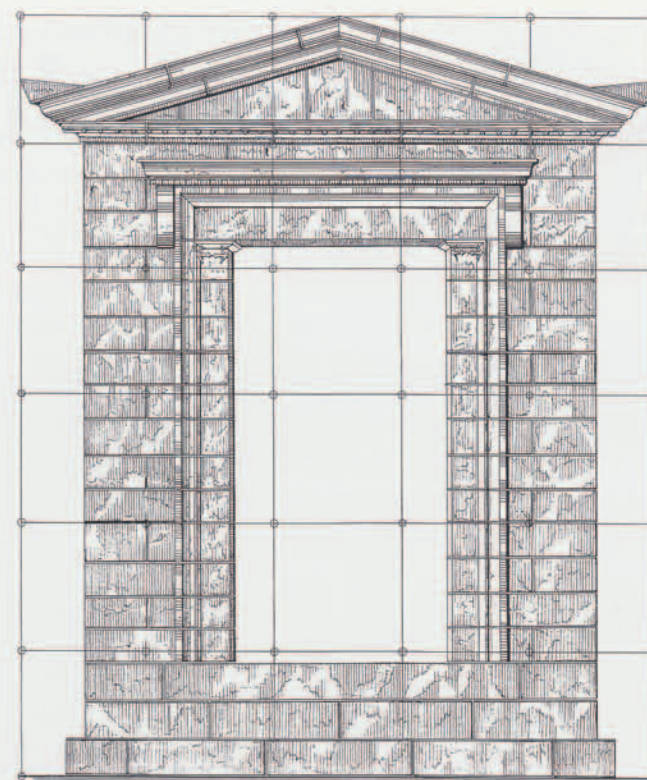


Figure 14. Restoration of the north facade of the S7 Sacred House. The house's dimensions appear to have been based on multiples or fractions of an ancient Cyrenean foot measuring 0.35 m.

Drawing by James Thorn

fertility, for the survival of their community (see box on Demeter and Persephone). This sense of dependency was physically expressed in the endless stream of anonymous gifts brought to the Sanctuary during the 6th and early 5th century. As time went on, people's interests turned inward, and their traditional concern for communal prosperity blended with more private considerations of death and the immortality of each individual's soul (see Warden, this issue). This is most eloquently reflected in the personal inscriptions, cultic reliefs, and stone statues of private individuals that tend to dominate the votive offerings of the Sanctuary's Hellenistic and Roman phases (323 B.C.-A.D. 262).

What became of the Sanctuary following its final destruction? More than 15 centuries elapsed between the A.D. 365 earthquake and Italy's military occupation of Libya shortly

before WWI, leaving scarcely a trace in the archaeological record. Broken wine bottles, spent rifle cartridges, and the odd regimental graffito cut into a fallen block of marble were found mingled with the tops of fallen statues and scattered Greek and Roman potsherds in the surface stratum when the site was first opened. We know that Cyrene's Christianized Greek population sought protection inside the reduced circuit of the old city walls until the Arab invasions of A.D. 643. Some form of urbanized existence may have lingered on within the shell of the old city until the arrival of true nomadism toward the middle of the 11th century. The discovery of two 7th century Byzantine coins and a single 8th century Arab coin (see Buttrey, this issue) does little to shed light on the veil of otherwise total darkness that descends on the site after the mid 4th century.

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