

## A BRIEF OUTLINE OF THE RESTORATION OF THE SOUTH THEATRE AT JERASH.

(Plates X and XI)

In 1953 it was decided to restore the South Theatre at Jerash as part of a larger plan to improve facilities and encourage the tourist trade of Jordan. The plan for Jerash was the reconstruction of the theatre, as far as was practicable, with a view to establishing an annual Jerash Festival of Drama and Music; similar to that held at Ba'albek in the Lebanon. In addition, the house belonging to the Department of Antiquities which stands in the fore-court of the Temple of Artemis was to be converted into a modern Resthouse with bedrooms. The whole scheme was to be financed by the American Aid Commission through the medium of the Tourist Department of the Jordan Government.

The late Mr. Theo Canaan, well-known Jerusalem architect, of the firm of Rais and Canaan of Beirut, and the son of Dr. and Mrs. Tawfik Canaan, was appointed to be in charge of the work at Jerash. The writer was made responsible for carrying out Mr. Canaan's instructions during his unavoidable absences in the Lebanon. During the initial two months they worked together, but from then onwards he was only able to visit Jerash for a few days every two or three weeks. Hasan Awad Qutshan of the Department of Antiquities was made the writer's permanent assistant for the whole period of the work.

In 1953 £ 1,900 was allotted for the theatre. The first two months were spent in identifying, counting, measuring and sketching the stones belonging to each architectural feature of the theatre, while the few Circassians then employed sorted the great stones lying in confusion in the *cavea*, into types; and turned over the heaped masses lying outside the theatre for inspection.

The work of reconstructing the ground floor of the *scaena* was considerably lightened by the fact that one section, complete to the architrave and containing an entire niche as far as its combined architrave and frieze, stood intact at the west end. In addition, the Department of Antiquities possessed two old photographs taken towards the end of the last century, soon after the Circassians had been settled in Jerash. These photographs were invaluable. One showed the central and western part of the *scaena*, with the door lintel in place and part of the frieze on it, and half the western niche pediment *in situ*. The other showed the interior exits of the western vaults. The arch leading on the stage was intact, the tooth outlining its sides and top being clearly visible. As there was not a single stone standing of either of the two side stage entrances when the work started and all the component stones had been muddled up and removed to different parts of the fields outside, this last is a feature that might well have been missed without the photographs. The vault into the *cavea* was shown, as regards the arch, in the same state as in 1953 lacking most of its voussoirs; but above it, *in situ*, were three large stones bearing raised margins surrounding an uninscribed plaque. Above this, one stone of the "middle" cornice was visible. From this photograph the component parts were eventually found and re-erected in their places.

Theo Canaan decided to reconstruct the whole of the ground floor of the *scaena* with the full main entablature as far as there were columns to support it. He then planned to build up a part of the first floor, beginning over the side stage vault and continuing round to

the main *scaena* and across one door. This would have given an example of a side niche, a main niche, the arch over the door and the top entablature with pediment. He chose the east side for this, and had three intact columns removed from the west end to provide the necessary support for the entablature. The gaps thus left at the west end were to be filled by building up broken columns which would not have to bear any weight.

The work was carried out by one builder with three assistants, all Circassian. A full-time carpenter, also Circassian, was responsible for all the scaffolding, making wooden arch supports and accurate profiles of carved stones, as well as many other jobs requiring a high degree of accuracy. There were about six stone masons, and some twelve to fifteen labourers for the heavy work of moving stones to the winches, and excavating a path on which to lay the railway.

During the first season's work it was only possible to clear the passage behind the *scaena* as far as the east door, and for this reason the stones had to be manhandled to the winches which was slow work. It had been decided that building must have the top priority so that definite and visible progress could be shown at the end of the first season. Work began at the east end, at the arch leading from the entrance vault into the *cavea*, and on the balustrade leading up to the box. By the end of the season four months later, both the eastern arches, the box and balustrade were built, and the *scaena* had been dismantled and rebuilt as far as the central stage door to entablature height, and including the two niches with their pediments. The east stage door had not been built but the two sections of the *scaena* wall graded down to it, and the lintel was in position propped on wooden supports. At this stage not only did the money run out, but the American Aid Commission changed its Director and its policy and Jerash was dropped.

In 1954 the former Director of Antiquities, Mr. Lankester Harding, persuaded the Jordan Government to shoulder the expense of the reconstruction of the theatre, and the plan for the Resthouse was shelved. A grant of £ 2,500 was received through the Department of Antiquities. The first two months were spent in excavating the wide corridor behind the *scaena*, and laying the railway line so that every part of the fields outside, where most of the stones were lying, the inside of the theatre and the corridor behind were all served by the line. This excavation will be the subject of a separate report, but it should be mentioned that the theatre in decay was inhabited during Ommayyad times. The corridors were divided into small rooms on both storeys, and the final destruction was by fire and earthquake. The fill in the corridor for the western half was over 6 metres deep, full of stones, all of which had to be removed to the fields outside.

Building began with the lintel of the east stage door. This was found badly broken, and with a part completely missing, so that as reconstructed it consisted of three stones, the centre one inserted as a keystone. A part of the backs of these stones were cut out and a reinforced concrete beam cast both inside and behind the lintel. This operation was supervised by Theo Canaan as it was the first of its kind in this work. At least half the stones belonging to the pediments of the three stage doors were either smashed to pieces or completely missing, so it became necessary to cut new ones with the essentials blocked out simply. The pediment of the east door was just started when Theo Canaan came on his last visit. He slipped when about to take a measurement and fell in the unfinished doorway, dying from his injuries almost immediately. After this tragedy the work was continued without a permanent architect.

During that season the *scaena* was dismantled and rebuilt as far as the west door, including the east and central stage doors to entablature height in addition to the excavation of the corridor.

In 1955 the Government again allotted £ 2,500 for the work. Work started on the eastern balustrade, the arches to *cavea* and stage, and the box, and finally to and including the west stage door at entablature height. The extant part of the west end which carries the architrave and niche was found to be in such a bad state that a fully qualified architect and construction engineer would be required, but the money could not be raised during that season. For this reason that part of the *scaena* was left untouched, and only a small part adjacent to the west stage door and extending as far as, but not including the right pilaster of the west niche was dismantled and rebuilt. The soft limestone wall which forms the inner skin of the *scaena* and wall of the corridor was also rebuilt, but in neither case are the rebuilt portions bonded to the untouched part. It must be stressed most strongly that if any future campaign of restoration is contemplated at the theatre, this section of the wall must receive priority treatment. In addition to the building, a start was made on reconstructing the stage front, and on clearing all the stones from the orchestra except those needed for the main entablature, and broken columns for building up. The scaffolding was also taken down and stored in preparation for regrouping the following season.

It was hoped that excavation would not be necessary during this season, but this was not to be. The western entrance vault has two entrances, the main and open one facing north, and a second facing west. This last entrance was completely blocked with stones, seats and all manner of architectural fragments that had fallen from above. During the winter a large number of these stones had fallen into the vault itself. Many others had slipped down to block the arch again. As this was both dangerous and bad for the vault all stones and debris were cleared from outside and on top of the vault which was cleaned and patched, and a drainage system complete with guttering to throw rain water well clear of the feet of the walls was also installed. Similar treatment is also urgently needed over the east vault.

In 1956 £1,000 was allotted, not enough for reseating the columns and erecting the entablature and stage, but sufficient to finish the stage, clear the orchestra and put up a small sample of entablature to break the straight line of the wall, in short enough money to make the theatre usable. Unfortunately permission to start work was withheld, and the theatre has remained ever since unfinished and not quite usable.

This report is simply a brief outline of the course of the work, and it is hoped to publish a full architectural report at a later date. This, however is made difficult at the present time owing to the tragic death of Theo Canaan while engaged on the work. His field notebook contains sketches, with measurements, and the numbers found, of the different architectural features; while these were perfectly adequate for the recognition and typing of the various stones in the field, they are not, and were never intended to be finished architectural drawings. A scale elevation of the main, or lower storey of the *scaena* which he had started remains unfinished. It is hoped that these deficiencies will be made good in the near future.

The theatre was originally built, and so restored, with four different kinds of stone. The side walls, side arches, and balustrades were constructed with a hard white limestone. The *scaena*, door lintels, niches, and niche architraves were of a beautiful hard, pink limestone while the columns, entablatures and all pediments were of the white. The backing of the

*scaena* wall, the corridor behind with its vaults, the small rooms on each side, and the main outside wall together with its architectural features were all composed of a very soft white local limestone. In addition, the ties in the *scaena* wall, very long stones laid at intervals to bond the front and back skins, were of a very hard, white crystalline limestone.

Many stones with mouldings, voussoirs, cornices and so on, were completely missing, the largest gaps being elements for the east side of the theatre. This is significant, as the east end is that nearest the modern village and it is highly likely that the missing pieces may be found embellishing the houses there. A few houses were demolished at the beginning of 1955 to allow for widening a road. The resultant harvest of architectural features, though not necessarily from the theatre, and even good, plain dressed stones which were brought back to the "Antiquities Area" was truly astounding. A piece that received a particularly glad welcome was one of the miniature niches from the front of the stage.

There was also an almost complete lack of pieces of the small columns which supported the niche pediments. In all, only two of these could be built up again, with the elements for a possible third in reserve; for this reason four new small columns had to be cut at a stone factory in Amman. This dearth of small column fragments is probably because they make excellent roof rollers, being neither too large nor too heavy for modern mud roofs.

Where architectural elements were missing, or very badly broken, new ones were cut; and in dismantling and rebuilding, stones with detectable open or interior cracks were replaced, but with few exceptions — mostly above the east stage arch — none of the plain, building stones were re-faced. The variety in colour is accounted for by the degree of weathering to which any stone had been subjected, whether it had fallen face down or not, and if it had been subsequently buried or left exposed. On the other hand the soft back skin of the *scaena* was largely re-faced, this was necessitated by the extreme softness of the stone, the surfaces of the weathered blocks were not only flaking badly, but full of cracks, and would have offered an easy roothold for plants and even trees. Where possible stones excavated from the corridor were put back without refacing. The whole of this wall should mellow in colour quickly because of the softness of the stone.

Originally the *scaena* was composed of two storeys, each with entablature alternately coming forward on to columns, and returning to run with the wall over the four niches which are set in it. The return to the wall at the doors is curved gently in an arc. The main entablature, and its supporting columns are larger than those above, while the higher entablature is not only smaller, but has triangular pediments above the east and west stage doors, and a broken pediment over the central door. Conversely, the niches and niche heads from the higher were larger and heavier than those from the lower. The stage front is composed of four different features divided from each other and from the steps that lead down into the *cavea* from the stage by five broad piers each of which project about 10 cm. from the wall. These five piers each carry in high relief the Shield of Artemis or "Amazon's Shield". Three of these shield stones, one of them broken, were found in the neighbourhood of the theatre, a fourth which was also inscribed, was brought from the Museum and re-erected in its former position on the central pier, in the exact centre of the stage. This stone has been published, (1), (2); and its Museum Number is 13. The dedication is that of the theatre pavement in the reign of Domitian. The search for the fifth shield stone covered the whole of the "Antiquities Area" and it was eventually found behind the west columns at the junction of the Forum

with the *cardo*. The four panels thus divided by the piers contained centrally placed miniature niches, two with triangular pediments and two shell niches, between these niches and the piers are small pilasters, two on each side, which originally had capitals of bronze or other metal, long since robbed.

Two of the miniature niches, one of each kind were found in the *cavea*, while a third of exactly the required dimensions and with a triangular pediment was returned from a demolished house in the village. The fourth niche, a shell one is still missing, but none of its fragments have been found near the site nor built into any other ancient building, it therefore seems reasonable to hope that it too will one day be found in the modern village and returned to its true place. For the moment then the South Theatre at Jerash remains in an unfinished state, and it is greatly to be hoped that in the not too distant future at least the stage may be finished, the *cavea* cleared, and columns built up and re-erected even if no further work on the unfinished *scaena* is contemplated.

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