

The Sanctuary of Athena Alea at Tegea: Recent Excavations in the Northern Area. Results and Problems

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The excavations in the northern area of the sanctuary of Athena Alea at Tegea, organized by the Norwegian Institute at Athens during the period 1990-94, investigated the area directly in front of the 'ramp' emerging from the northern flank of the classical temple and identified a long stratigraphical sequence, from the modern occupation back to the early archaic period. This area was probably always used as an open courtyard, with few and small structures with the only exception of a big mud-brick wall in east-west direction, probably the northern limit of the sanctuary area in the 6th century B.C. The evidence recovered gives indications about the presence of early archaic and Geometric layers, which should be investigated by future excavations.

The discovery of the sanctuary and the first excavations

The site of ancient Tegea was identified at the beginning of the 19th century,¹ and during the second half of the same century the first excavations were started by German archaeologists, followed by French and Greek archaeologists. All focused in particular on the recovery of the classical temple and its surroundings; in the northern area the only excavations were related to a monumental fountain and two monument bases, identified and excavated at the beginning of the 20th century.²

In 1976-77 the Greek ephorate of antiquities, under the direction of G.

1. E. Dodwell, *A Classical and Topographical Tour through Greece during the Years 1801, 1805 and 1806*, vol. II, London 1819, 418.

2. G. Mendel, "Fouilles de Tégée," *BCH* 25, 1910, 241-81; K.A. Rhomaios, "Ἐργασίαι ἐν Τεγέῃ," *Prakt* 1909, 300-23; Ch. Dugas, "Le sanctuaire d'Aléa Athéna à Tégée avant le IVE siècle," *BCH* 45, 1921, 335-435; Ch. Dugas *et al.*, *Le sanctuaire d'Athéna Alea à Tégée au IVE siècle*, Paris 1924.

Steinhauer, conducted excavations in the northern area in a few square trenches of 5 x 5 m., one of these (in square D6) down to virgin soil.

Finally, we have the research program organized from 1990 to 1994 by the Norwegian Institute at Athens and directed by professor Erik Østby. (Fig. 1) I am glad to present here, before the final publication,³ some results of that work.

The purpose of these excavations was to investigate the stratigraphical situation preserved inside the cella of the classical temple⁴ and in the area north of the temple, considered to be particularly important in the life of the sanctuary because of the presence of the fountain, the two bases, and the ramp or platform, not easily interpreted, projecting from the middle of the northern flank of the temple peristasis.

The northern area is included between the northern flank of the temple and the modern road that crosses the northern area of the sanctuary. The limits of the excavation area are to the north the modern road, to the south and east the earth banks from the old excavations, and to the west a line approximately corresponding to the foundation projecting from the northern flank of the temple.

In this area the excavation was carried out in the sectors identified as C6, C7, C9, C10, D5, D7, D8, D9, D10, E5, E6 and E7. Here I present the general results from the sectors C6 and C7, directed by dr. J.-M. Luce from the university of Toulouse, and from the sectors D5, D7, E6 and E7, where the excavation was directed by myself. (Fig. 2)

After an initial clearing of the area with an earth-mover, the excavation was at first focused on the sectors D6, where the sections of the trench from dr. Steinhauer's excavations were cleaned to the bottom, and D7. Later, it was extended to the other sectors mentioned above.

A stratigraphical sequence could be established at least back to the Geometric period, the most ancient phase that was identified during the excavation.

Geometric and orientalizing periods

In the sector D7, where we decided to carry the excavation deeper, it was possible to identify and partially excavate a layer formed by debris carrying clear traces of fire. (Fig. 3) This debris includes a lot of chunks of burnt clay, many of

3. In preparation for the series "Monographs from the Norwegian Institute at Athens". I publish there the excavation of the ancient layers in the northern sector, and some bronze objects.

4. Excavations directed by Prof. G.C. Nordquist of the Uppsala university. See for a preliminary account *ead.*, "Evidence for Iron Age Cult Activity below Athena Alea's Temple at Tegea," in R. Hägg (ed.), *Peloponnesian Sanctuaries and Cults, SkrAth 4°*, Stockholm 2002, 149-58.

them with impressions of organic material and some with plaster coating, much charcoal, and many fragments of small votive objects: bronze and iron pins, bronze rings, small bronze votive sheets, fragments of bronze bowl rims, bone objects, one fragment of gold sheet, and many fragments of fine pottery.

All the material from this layer can be dated back to the 7th century B.C., but the surface was used as an open area between the end of the 7th and the beginning of the 6th century.

The rubble that constitutes this layer can be connected with a building made of light material, like mud-brick or wattle-and-daub, but carefully constructed, as indicated by the plaster preserved on several clay fragments.

The fragments found mixed with the rubble may suggest that this building was intended for sheltering precious objects, possibly votives. Based on the results of the excavations inside the classical temple, we may suggest, as a hypothesis, that this site was used to discard the debris of a building, probably a cult building, which had been used during the 7th century, was then destroyed by a fire, and was replaced at the end of the 7th century by the more impressive archaic temple.

The excavation was not carried beyond this layer, which was excavated only in part. In the section visible from a late, Byzantine large pit and from the Steinhauer trench in D6 it was possible to recognize some structures under this layer, probably parts of small walls. Only a small sondage was made, and for the moment a date for these structures in the Geometric period, between the 9th and 8th centuries, may only be suggested.

Late archaic period

In the late archaic period, corresponding to the life of the archaic temple, the northern area was certainly used continuously, as shown by elements like some walking surfaces, an important mud brick wall, at least one small round structure, and a more compact pebble floor.

On one of this surfaces we found a great quantity of stone and rough pieces of marble, resting directly on the surface without any foundation trench. We can interpret it as remains of a wall.

On a clayey, compact soil (datable, by scarce diagnostic fragments, to the middle of the 6th century) a mud brick wall was built. It is approximately 60 cm wide and was certainly longer than 5 m, since it crosses the entire E6 sector and is interrupted to the east by a modern trench and to the west by dr. Steinhauer's trench. (Fig. 4) This wall was built with mud-bricks posed directly on the soil, without any stone foundation, and it is preserved only in the lowest course of mud-bricks, of yellow clay and approximately rectangular shape.

The surface which the wall was built upon is also the floor connected with its life: after a short time the wall was dismantled and its destroyed surface was englobed in the later walking surface, to be dated in the second half or the end of the 6th century. Because of its position and the certainly important dimensions it is possible that this wall had a function as a *temenos* wall or some kind of monumental fence for the sanctuary.

Above the mud-brick wall there is a sequence of two floors, both datable to the end of the 6th or the beginning of the 5th century. They are made of compact soil rich in clay, with fragments of bone, some charcoal, and fragments of fine and common pottery. The great quantity of clay and the fast rise of the surface in the area (about 20 cm in less than 50 years) can be explained by the occurrence of perhaps two different floodings that might have interested the area, probably connected with the Sarandapotamos river. After each flooding a new walking surface was created.

Very important is also the presence of many small post holes, preserved only in their lowest part, as the posts were probably intentionally moved after a short time. Some of them, with the same stratigraphical position and placed at the same level (no more than 5 cm difference), join to an oval shape that may represent the outline of a small structure, 2.5 m in diameter – very light, perhaps temporary, built perhaps for some special situation in the life of the sanctuary, such as a festival. (Fig. 5) We can compare it with the small ‘stands’ that are today every year made in front of the Episkopì church at Tegea for the Panaghia festival, in mid-August.

A pebble floor that we found all over the area, is also datable to the end of the archaic or the beginning of the classical period. It is a regular floor, made with small pebbles and stones. The area was open, and two regular, rectangular cavities (with straight walls and flat bottom) dug in the eastern part (sectors E6 and E7) might have held small structures like bases for statues or similar. In this open area, perhaps at some special occasion, at least one small structure like the one fitting the post holes of the layer underneath was built.

Above this pebble floor we found the layers related to the construction of the classical temple.

The construction of the classical temple

On top of the pebble floor there is a layer very rich in archaic votive objects, especially small bronze sheets and pins, but also many fine fragments of archaic pottery and some fragments of small female lead figurines of orientaling style. They are all mixed with late classical materials, especially black-glazed pottery fragments of the second half of the 4th century.

This layer is present in all sectors and can be explained as a layer created with the soil removed during the excavation of the trenches for the classical temple foundations. These trenches were cut through ancient layers and also early deposits of votive objects, and all this material was discarded in the northern area for filling and levelling purposes, together with pottery contemporary with these works.

On top of this layer there is another one characterized by a great quantity of marble chips, of the same white Dolianà marble used for the classical temple; we found this layer too all over the excavation area and under the two monument bases in the southern part of the area, with small changes in thickness. All the sherds from this layer are datable no further back than the end of the 4th century, and it is thus possible to explain the marble material as coming from the final work on the marble blocks used for the construction of the classical temple, for example from the carving of the column flutes. It is supposed that all the chips and marble fragments were discarded in the northern area in order to level and reduce the natural, quite steep slope that was originally descending from south to north and from west to east.

After this filling, the only structures placed in this open area were the two monument bases found by Dugas.⁵ The double-T shape of the metal dowels dates them to the classical period, and their position on top of the marble chips layer indicates that they were set up at the end of the construction. The evidence we found in our excavations does not help to explain the platform projecting from the classical temple as a structure in any way related with other elements of the northern area.

The use of the sanctuary after the construction of the classical temple

The surface of this marble chips layer does not appear as a clear and solid floor; it is always very irregular and not compact. Some of the rare fragments from this surface are of late Hellenistic and Roman periods, suggesting a prolonged use of this area until the Roman period, but during this long time no real floor was built and no traces of activity were left.

It is difficult to explain this situation. It is possible that this open area was periodically cleaned up, involving the removal of any trace related to its use; more simply, it may have been a part of the sanctuary that was not normally used, as the absence of any structure, with the only exception of the two monument bases, seems to indicate.

The following layer, also recognizable all over the excavated area, is chara-

5. Dugas *et al.*, *supra* n. 2, 71-2.

cterized, as the previous one, by a great quantity of marble chips; but they are not quite as many, and create an irregular, not a compact surface. This layer was created some time between the end of the Hellenistic period and the Roman imperial time: the scarceness of available material does not allow a more exact dating.

We know that Pausanias visited the sanctuary in the 2nd century A.D. and that it was then still used.⁶ But for this long time span we have not found clearly defined surfaces that can be related with such a long and intensive use of the sanctuary.

The destruction of the classical temple

After these layers connected with the life of the sanctuary the northern area shows evidence of some activity that made use of the blocks of the temple, that had by this moment certainly collapsed. Some blocks were used for quarrying smaller pieces, more easily utilized for construction purposes: still today, many old houses in the village of Tegea include pieces of marble blocks from the temple. The layer connected with this activity is also characterized by a great quantity of small marble chips, but it contains only a few diagnostic pottery fragments: these seem to suggest a period between the 3rd and 6th century A.D.

Alluvion layers

The layers from the late antique and early Byzantine periods were 'sealed' by a sequence of alluvion layers: in all sectors we found up to five layers of alternate silt and sand, almost sterile. They represent evidence of several floodings of the area, perhaps very close in time, and probably connected with the Sarandapotos river. The number of layers that have been preserved depends on the natural slope of the area, decreasing from west to east. In the sector C6 it was possible to recognize some footprints of people and cattle impressed in the silt.

The Late Byzantine period

We have evidence for later use of the area datable approximately between the 11th and the 14th century A.D. We found part of a floor of compact soil, preserved only in a small piece in sector E6, and some wall segments made with stone and rough marble pieces bound with earth. In one such segment a statue of the Hellenistic period had been re-used as building material. Only small and rare sherds come from these structures, so their exact dating is uncertain.

After this period, when there was probably a residential usage, the area was

6. Paus. 8.45.4-47.4.

used as a cemetery, perhaps to be connected with a monastic complex of the Byzantine period that was found between the temple and the classical altar but destroyed without any documentation during the first archaeological excavations.⁷ We excavated nine simple graves; in all of them the skeletons were only partially preserved, since they had been disturbed by later agricultural use of the area. (Fig. 6) Personal objects are very rare; in two cases one iron nail provides evidence for a wooden coffin. At least one tomb (C7.02) seems to have been reused, with secondary deposition of the bones of the first body and later deposition of another one in the same grave. Awaiting the results of the skeleton analysis, we do not have exact elements for dating these graves, but they seem datable between the late Byzantine time and the Turkish domination.

Modern occupation

Finally, at the time of the first excavations of the classical temple, the entire area of the sanctuary was covered by the houses of the modern village. The structures and the surfaces we dug at the beginning of our excavations, are connected with this situation: walls in rough stone material including marble pieces, probably dividing courtyards, in some cases built reusing also big blocks from the temple; a small pit; some wells. The walking surface is related with agricultural use of the courtyards; and this use is responsible for the partial mixing of the lower stratigraphy at different levels.

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7. A. Milchhöfer, "Untersuchungsausgrabungen in Tegea," *AM* 5, 1880, 56, Taf. II; Mendel, *supra* n. 2, 244; Rhomaïos, *supra* n. 2, 307.

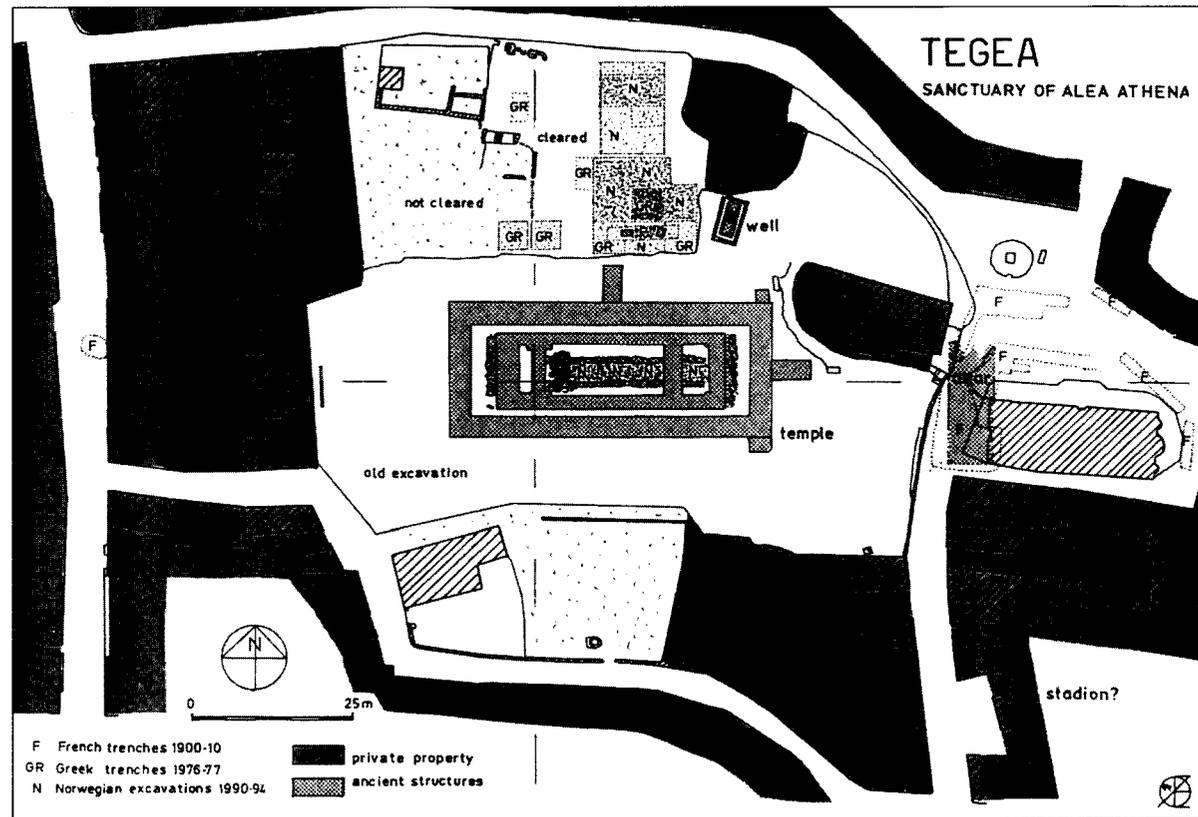


Fig. 1. The area of the sanctuary with the indications of the excavation area. (Drawing: E. Østby.)

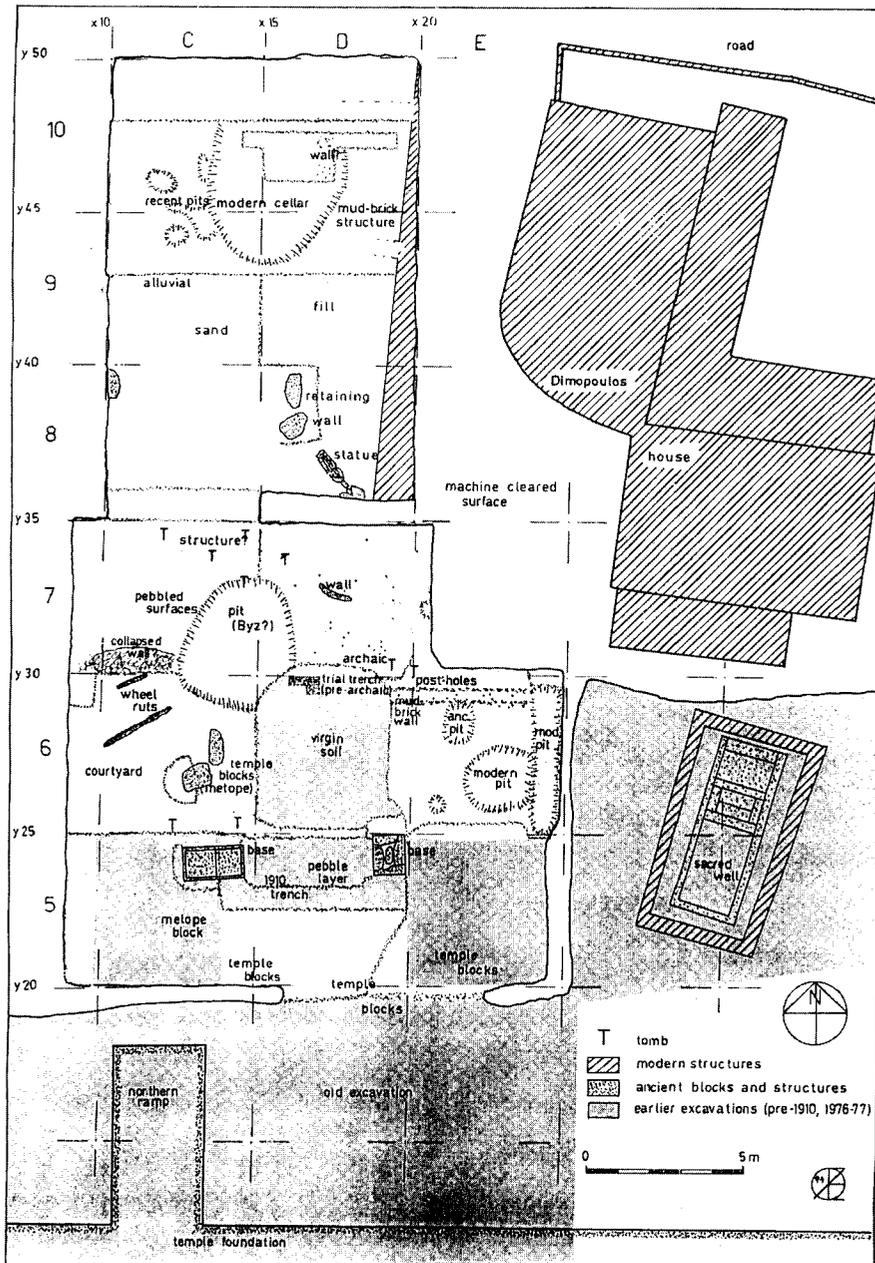


Fig. 2. Plan of the excavations in the northern area. (Drawing: E. Østby.)



Fig. 3. Surface of the early archaic layer in sector D7. (Photo: author.)

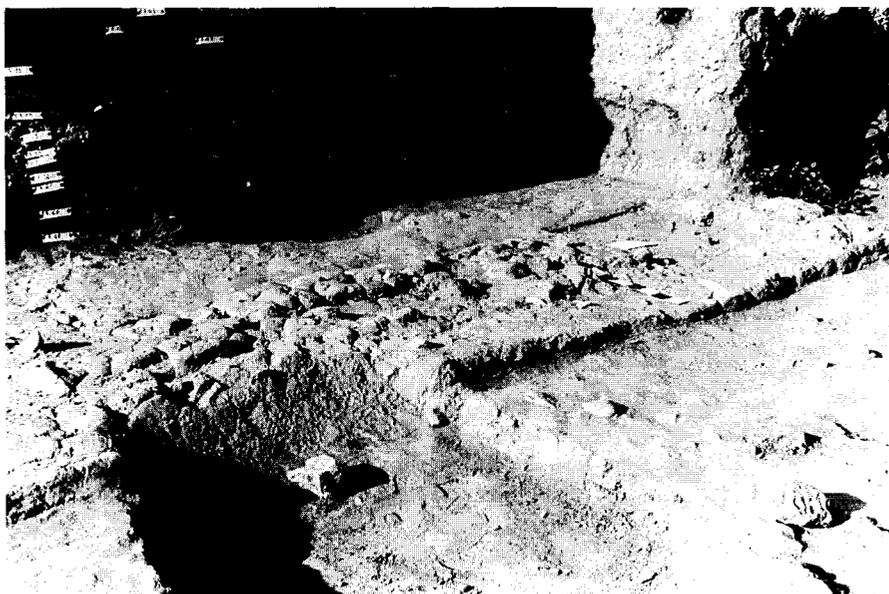


Fig. 4. Mud-brick wall in sector E6. (Photo: author.)

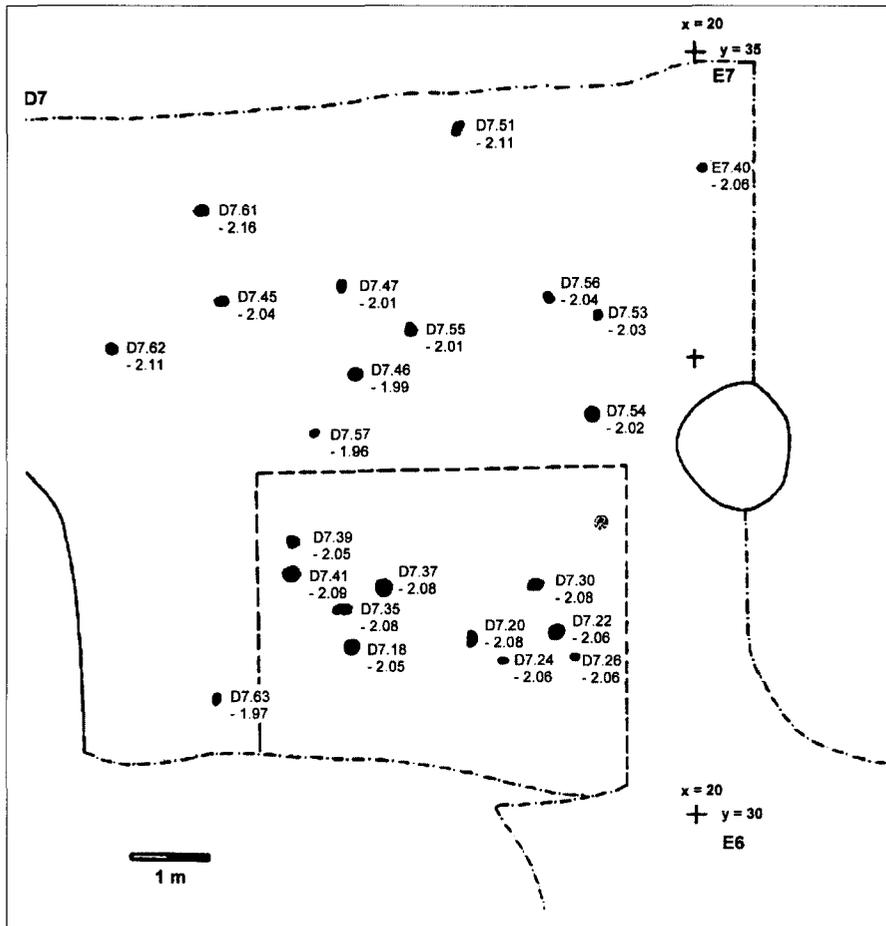


Fig. 5. Some of the post-holes in sector D7. (Drawing: author.)

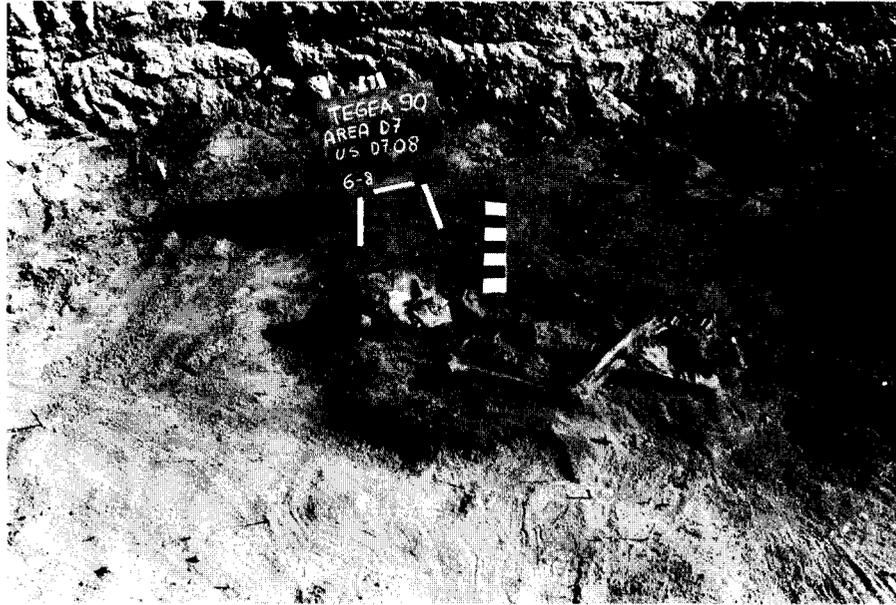


Fig. 6. Skeleton in sector D7. (Photo: author.)