

## Jari Pakkanen: A BLOCK FROM THE STARTING LINE OF THE TEGEAN STADION

### *The block*

In the sanctuary of Athena Alea at Tegea a marble block with two grooves on its top surface was documented in 1993: it was found ca. 8 m south of the eastern end of the temple entrance ramp foundations, and it is listed as Block **145** in the catalogue of building blocks (section **xix**, 000). Slightly later in the same season, without any knowledge of its previous discovery, it was recognized as a starting line block from a stadion, but not *in situ*. Even though the block is not mentioned in the French monograph on the temple, it was certainly visible at the beginning of the 20th century: it can be seen in the general views of the sanctuary published in 1909 by K.A. Rhomaios and in the French monograph on the temple from 1924.<sup>1</sup> It has now been brought into the local museum near the site and is exposed there, with inv. no. 5919.

The starting-line block was first mentioned in print by P. Aupert in 1980.<sup>2</sup> Subsequently, D.G. Romano described and illustrated the block in his unpublished 1981 dissertation; he has also later made a reference to it.<sup>3</sup> In this chapter a new drawing and a more detailed description of the block are presented, and the chronology of Romano's typology of the Greek starting-line blocks is questioned on the basis of archaeological comparanda from Olympia.

The identification of the block is possible because of the two parallel grooves on the top surface. (*Fig. 1*) The profiles of the two cuttings are similar: they both have a bevelled front and a vertical back face. The runner placed his toes in these grooves: the direction of the race is indicated by the arrow in *Fig. 2*.<sup>4</sup>

The distance between the vertical faces is 0.188 m. The depth of the block is 0.559, the height 0.131–0.157, and the preserved width 0.521 m. (*Fig. 2*) The width of the front groove is 0.060 and the depth 0.031 m; the corresponding measurements for the rear groove are 0.057 and 0.028 m. (*Fig. 3*) All the characteristics of the block – width and height of the block, profile and distance of the grooves – are suitable for a starting-line block.<sup>5</sup>

The top surface (B in *Fig. 2*) is almost completely covered by lichen and has no visible tool traces. The part of the top surface between the first groove and the front of the block is not aligned with the rest of the surface: it slopes slightly towards the front. The front of the block (A in *Fig. 2*) is smooth. It is not vertical, but is set at an obtuse angle to the top surface. The two distinct zones of different colours are due to the upper part being exposed since the beginning of the century and the growth of lichen. The preserved side surface (C in *Fig. 2*) has no anathyrosis, but there is a smooth band at the top and front edges, wide 0.03–0.035 m at the top and ca. 0.02 m at the front. The rest of the surface is worked with a point.

The bottom surface of the block (D in *Fig. 2*) has four distinct zones. The closest to the front was worked with a toothed chisel, and its width is 0.07–0.08 m. Close to the edge the surface is almost smooth, further away the tool marks get deeper. The next band is worked with a point (width 0.05–0.10 m) and it overlaps smoothly into the next zone where there are larger marks which are probably from the same tool. It continues all the way to the end of the bottom surface where the roughly cut, sloping surface begins. This sloping back of the block has a ca. 0.23 × 0.14 m large, naturally cracked part, where it is possible to distinguish the crystal structure of the marble (*Fig. 4*): this makes the identification of the stone as Dolianà marble fairly certain, because a similar crystallized structure is also visible on many temple blocks.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> K.A. Rhomaios, “Ἀνασκαφαὶ ἐν Τεγέᾳ,” *Prakt* 1909, pl. 5.1; Dugas *et al.*, *Tégée*, pl. 82.A (reproduced in section **i**, 15 *Fig. 4*).

<sup>2</sup> Aupert 1980, 315 n. 14.

<sup>3</sup> Romano 1981, 186–7, figs 147–149; *id.*, *Athletics and mathematics in Archaic Corinth: The origins of the Greek stadion*, Philadelphia 1993, 24 n. 48.

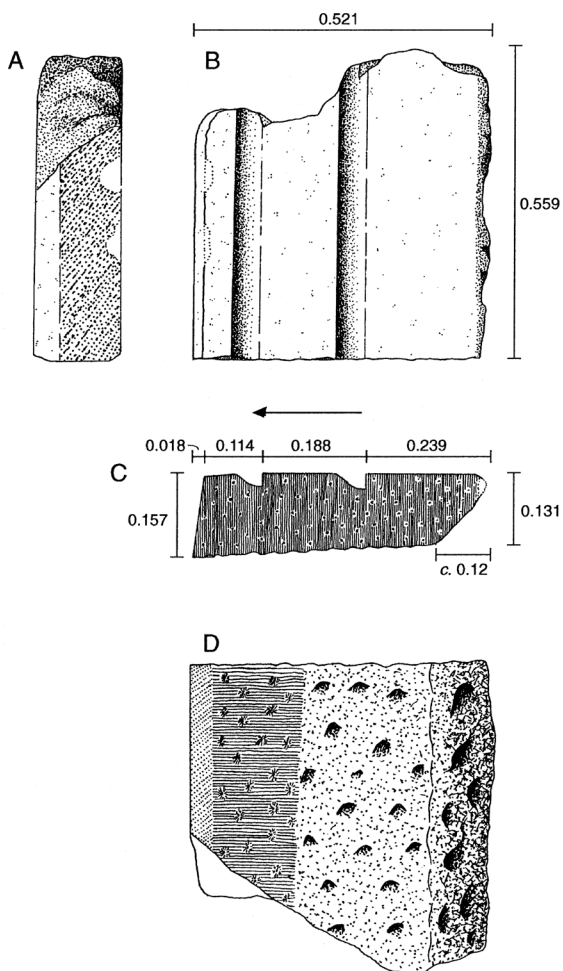
<sup>4</sup> H.A. Harris, “Stadia and starting grooves,” *Greece & Rome* 7, 1960, 29–30; for reconstructions of the stance of the runner based on the *in situ* starting line at Nemea, see M. Goethals, “The stadium,” in S.G. Miller (ed.), *Nemea. A guide to the site and museum*, Berkeley and Los Angeles 1990, fig. 64; *id.*, *Excavations at Nemea II: The Early Hellenistic stadium*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London 2001, 45–61.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Romano 1981, 186.

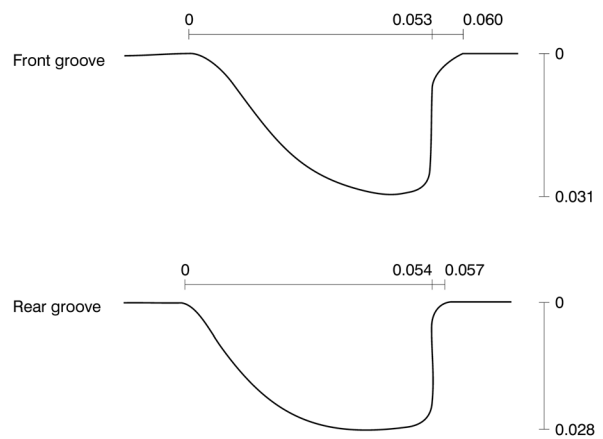
<sup>6</sup> On the origin of the marble for the temple, see section **xvii** (Pakkanen), 359 note 49.



**Figure 1.** Block 145: top surface of the starting line block from the stadion at Tegea, with two parallel grooves. (Photo: Pakkanen)



**Figure 2.** Block 145, from the starting line of the stadion at Tegea. (Drawing: A. Klynne)



**Figure 3.** Block 145, section drawing of the grooves on the top surface. (Drawing: Pakkanen)



Figure 4. Block 145: the bottom surface, showing the tooling and the natural cracking. (Photo: Pakkanen)

The block was probably originally part of a complex starting mechanism comprising the starting line, *balbis*, and a barrier, *hysplex*, though no trace of a socket for a vertical post associated with a *hysplex* is preserved on the Tegean block.<sup>7</sup> This is most likely due to the short stretch which remains of the *balbis*.

In addition to the starting-line block, there are other blocks in the sanctuary which could possibly be connected with the stadion. Two joining blocks from a water channel are listed in the catalogue as Blocks 623 and 624; they are illustrated in Figs 5–6. They have bottom and sides roughly worked with a point, but the contact surfaces at the ends are smooth. The channel is worked with a point, but tool marks are less visible than on the side and bottom surfaces. The starting-line block and the water channel are both slightly irregularly shaped, but since most of the blocks would have been covered, these details would not have attracted any attention. Also, the treatment of the bottom surfaces with a large point is consistent on both blocks. A water basin, Block 148 (Fig. 7), may belong to the same installation for the water supply to the stadion.<sup>8</sup>

### The date

The earliest possible mentions of the games at Tegea are on two Late Archaic inscriptions: the first is a dedication of an athlete from the last quarter of the 6th century,<sup>9</sup> and the second honours the *proedra* at the

games from the first quarter of the 5th century.<sup>10</sup> After this, there is relatively continuous epigraphical and textual evidence for the games, τὰ Ἀλεαῖα,<sup>11</sup> but it cannot be used to provide a date for the construction of a monumental stadion linked with our starting-line block. On the basis of the passage in Pausanias, the *terminus ante quem* for the stadion can be determined as the 2nd century A.D.<sup>12</sup> In the following I will try to determine whether a more precise date can be given by the starting line block itself.

Romano dates the first starting blocks with double grooves to the Hellenistic period, and their use was continued through the Roman period.<sup>13</sup> However, it is possible to argue that the remains at Olympia provide earlier evidence for the use of such starting blocks. Four double-grooved blocks were discovered in 1941 built into a drainage channel which starts at the south-west corner of the racing track in Stadion III at Olympia. All the blocks have grooves with one bevelled and one vertical face, as the block from the Tegean stadion. Two of these had already been reused as *balbis* blocks because they have the parallel grooves on two opposite sides.<sup>14</sup> A. Mallwitz has demonstrated that the channel must be earlier than the retaining wall and the water channels of the III B phase of the stadion, so the reuse of the blocks should date to the phase III A.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, the starting-line blocks must have been in use in Stadion II, as the original excavators suggested.<sup>16</sup> Since the construction of the Olympia III B stadion can now be connected with the building of the Echo colonnade during the second half

<sup>7</sup> For a full study of the terminology, comparative archaeological material and reconstructions, see P. Valavanis, *Hysplex. The starting mechanism in ancient stadia. A contribution to ancient Greek technology* (University of California publications: Classical Studies 36), Berkeley, Los Angeles and London 1999.

<sup>8</sup> All the Peloponnesian stadia except the one at Halieis had water facilities; Romano 1981, 17–8, 42, 63–4, 80–3, 125–6. See Mallwitz 1967, 40–1, for similar installations at the stadion in Olympia.

<sup>9</sup> IG V.2, 75 = SEG XI, 1065 = SEG XXVI, 472; see also K.A. Rhomaios, “Τεγεατικὰ ἐπιγραφὰί,” BCH 36, 1912, 353–6.

<sup>10</sup> IG V.2, 113; on the inscription, see L.H. Jeffery, *The local scripts of Archaic Greece*, Oxford 1961, 211.

<sup>11</sup> Also Pindar (*Ol.* 7.153) mentions the games. For a general account on the evidence for the games, see Jost, *Sanctuaires*, 369 (esp. n. 2), 374.

<sup>12</sup> Paus. 8.47.4.

<sup>13</sup> Romano 1981, 209.

<sup>14</sup> Kunze 1956, 15–7, fig. 4.

<sup>15</sup> Mallwitz 1967, 46–7, 51–2.

<sup>16</sup> Kunze 1956, 16.

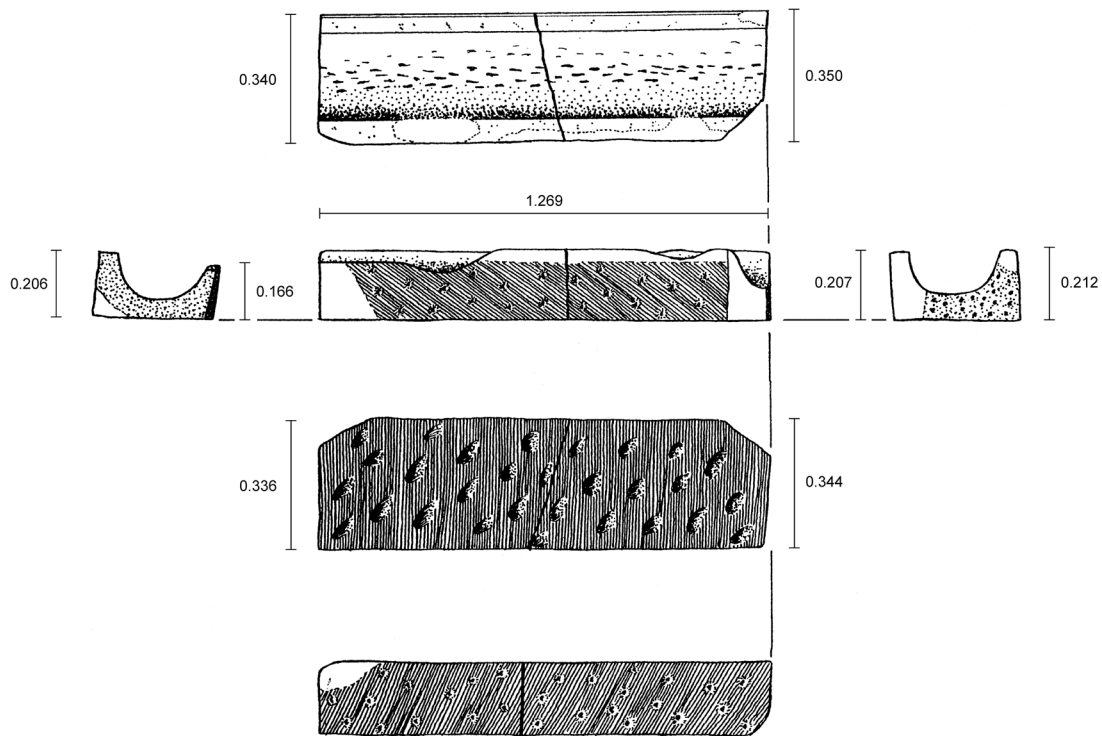


Figure 5. Block 624, from a water channel probably connected with the stadion. (Drawing: A. Klynne)



Figure 6. The blocks 623 and 624, from a water channel. (Photo: E. Østby)

of the 4th century B.C., phase III A must be earlier than this.<sup>17</sup> The excavations have provided no clear date for the phase, but W. Koenigs has recently argued that the construction of Stadion III A could be linked with the reorganization of the western part of the Altis about 400 B.C.<sup>18</sup> Even if we accept that the colonnade and Stadion III B were built towards the very end of the defined range 350–300 B.C., it is impossible to envisage that two of the starting line blocks could have been used twice in Stadion II and then reused in the construction of the drainage channel of Stadion III A in the first few decades of the Hellenistic period. Therefore, the blocks must be at least Late Classical in date, and the first use of the double-grooved starting line must almost certainly go back well into the 5th century B.C. As a consequence, the block at Tegea cannot be dated on typological grounds any more accurately than sometime in the Classical, Hellenistic or Roman period.

#### *Location of the stadion*

Even though the location of the Tegean stadion has not been discovered, some conclusions may be drawn on the

<sup>17</sup> Koenigs 1981, 366–9.

<sup>18</sup> Koenigs 1981, 366–7.

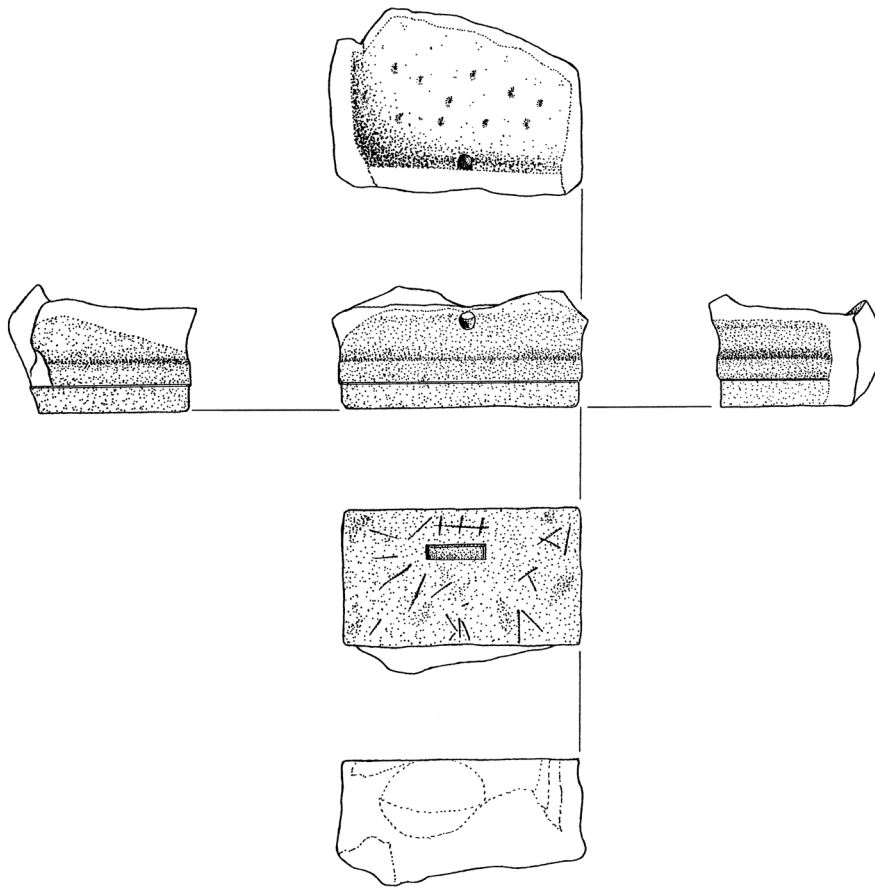


Figure 7. Block 148, water basin possibly connected with the stadion. (Drawing: A. Klynne)

basis of the discovered starting-line block and Pausanias' passage:

Not far from temple is a stadium formed by a mound of earth, where they celebrate games, one festival called Aleaea after Athena, the other Halotia (*Capture Festival*), because they captured the greater part of Lacedaemonians alive in the battle. To the north of the temple is a fountain, and at this fountain they say that Auge was outraged by Heracles, therein differing from the account of Auge in Hecataeus. Some three stades away from the fountain is a temple of Hermes Aepytus.<sup>19</sup>

As is obvious from the passage, the stadion must have been located close to the temple and to the altar. E. Østby has suggested that the construction lies under the modern village,<sup>20</sup> and this is supported by the discovery of the starting line next to the temple foundations. The most

likely explanation for its current location in the sanctuary is that it was reused in some later structure,<sup>21</sup> and taking into consideration the abundance of recyclable material provided by the temple itself, it is unlikely to have been brought from far away.

#### Literature:

Aupert 1980 = P. Aupert, "Athletica I. Épigraphie archaïque et morphologie des stades anciens," *BCH* 104, 1980, 309–15.

Romano 1981 = D.G. Romano, *The stadia of the Peloponnesos* (PhD diss. University of Pennsylvania 1981), Ann Arbor 1981.

Koenigs 1981 = W. Koenigs, "Stadion III und Echohalle," *OIBer* 10, 1981, 353–69.

Kunze 1956 = E. Kunze, "Das Stadion," *OIBer* 5, 1956, 10–34.

Mallwitz 1967 = A. Mallwitz, "Das Stadion," *OIBer* 8, 1967, 16–82.

<sup>19</sup> Paus. 8.47.4; translation by W.H.S. Jones (Loeb edition).

<sup>20</sup> E. Østby, "Recent excavations in the sanctuary of Athena Alea at Tegea (1990–93)," in K.A. Sheedy (ed.), *Archaeology in the Peloponnese, New excavations and research*, Oxford 1994, 53–4; and *id.* in section i, 20. See also Aupert 1980, 315 n. 14; Romano 1981, 1 and 86. Voyatzis, *Sanctuary*, 14–5 gives a synopsis of the earlier discussion.

<sup>21</sup> *E.g.* the starting line block from an early stadion at Nemea was reused as a threshold of the *xenon* in the Hellenistic period; see D.G. Romano, "An early stadion at Nemea," *Hesperia* 46, 1977, 27–9.

