

office

Excavation Summary

Section 00

1968

ROMAN BATH EAST OF POROS BUILDING

The major part of the Roman bath east of the Poros Building was excavated in three earlier seasons. Discovered in 1947, the main excavation was conducted in 1948, and a supplementary investigation was made in 1957 in an effort to clarify the plan (cf. Excavation Summaries, 00 1947, 1948, ff 1957 and a brief mention in Hesperia XX (1951), p. 284). Some fill remained undug, however, and many aspects of both plan and chronology remained obscure; in order therefore to prepare the building for final publication, excavation was resumed for six weeks in the summer of 1968. Although the excavation of 1968 solved many outstanding problems, it raised others which, at the close of the season are still being investigated. The present report will therefore present this year's results only in broad outline.

Hellenistic Period (A)

One of the most important results of this season's campaign was the discovery of the existence of a bath in the area from at least the 2nd century B.C. Two large conglomerate blocks set at an angle suggesting a large circle proved to be part of the foundations of a circular building set down in a fill of the 3rd or 2nd century B.C. Some cuttings in bedrock forming a square to the south and southwest of the circle are

probably to be associated with it, and a marble bathtub (ST 334) found in the vicinity in 1939 may well have been part of the establishment. The outer limits of the enclosure were traced with some degree of certainty, and a handful of sherds from a wall trench indicated a date contemporary with the circular building. With some small exceptions, the limits of the Hellenistic enclosure were kept in all the subsequent periods of the bath, following the natural limits of the retaining wall of the ancient street along the Areopagus, the south side of the main East-West road bordering the Agora (Piraeus Street) and the high ground to the east from the low-lying area to the west. The entrance to the original bath complex is preserved in a threshold flanked by two large conglomerate blocks, and led from Piraeus Street to a hard-packed floor off the NW quadrant of the Circular Building.

Since the main objective of this season's work was the study of the bath in the Late Roman period, a time-consuming excavation of the Hellenistic complex could not be attempted. From the evidence uncovered this season it seems probable that much more could be learned, even though the whole plan may never be recovered.

Early Roman Period (B)

The Circular Building was remodeled, probably in the 1st century A.D. At this time the interior walls were faced with a brick lining from 0.25 to 0.45 m. thick, which gave the wall a minimum thickness of 1 meter - sufficient to support a concrete dome; many chunks of masonry of both dome and walls were

found in the later destruction fill overlying the floor. The floor was paved with terracotta tiles ca. 0.49 m. square, well bedded in solid mortar. The long late wall which runs N-S across the middle of the room prevented complete investigation, but the two bottom tiles of two hypocaust columns, 0.25 m. square, are just visible under the wall, in the SW quadrant. Also in the SW quadrant, just before the wall encroaches, can be seen a brick pier, built into the wall at an obtuse angle, preserved to a height of 0.60 m. Its visible face is 0.47 m. wide. This may indicate an entrance from a fire chamber outside the SE quadrant and suggests that at least some of the other rooms of the Hellenistic bath may have been re-used at this time. The outside ground level is preserved in a small patch of tile mosaic floor immediately south of the building. Some indications that the complex dominated by the circular room extended also to the west are found under the apsidal room of the next period, but it was not possible to follow these further this season.

The Circular Building was destroyed by fire, probably in the early 2nd century.

Intermediate Period (C)

Between the disappearance of the Circular Building and the construction of the large Late Roman complex, the NE section of the bath area was paved with a marble-chip mosaic floor which this year was found to be later than the second phase of the Circular Building. Some apparently earlier remains in a hypocaust room to the south, which features largely in the 2nd

century building, may perhaps be associated with this period.

Late Roman Periods (D & E)

I (D). The intermediate period was of short duration and was followed by a rebuilding of the bath on a much larger scale. Much of the mosaic-covered area was turned into hypocaust rooms, their columns built directly on the floor. This part had been completely excavated in previous campaigns and attention this year was concentrated on the areas to the south and west.

Two major discoveries this season contributed greatly to the filling out of the plan: an apsidal hypocaust room to the west of and replacing the Circular Building and a latrine in the northwest corner of the whole complex.

a. Apsidal hypocaust room. The north wall of this room ran across the middle of the Circular Building, using some of the destruction debris of its dome and walls as underpinning. Two brick piers marked the transition from the rectangular east section to the apse on the west. Two small flues were placed symmetrically at the beginning of the curve. The west wall, incorporating the apse, is covered by a wall of the next period, but we are probably safe in restoring an opening in the middle of the curve and a connecting fire chamber to the west.

The hypocaust room south of the mosaic floor, which has a nebulous history in the intermediate ^{period} and was only partially excavated in previous campaigns, was thoroughly excavated, along with its fire chamber, and their dimensions fixed.

b. Latrine. The latrine in the northwest corner of the complex in all probability dates from this period. Well constructed brick trenches on the north and east sides, heavily encrusted with a use deposit, indicate that the seats (probably about a dozen) were confined to these two sides. Waste from both trenches flowed down to the west where it was carried off by one of the main bath drains running northward along the west side of the latrine.

II (E). Like everything else in the Agora area, the bath suffered heavily from the Herulian invasion and lay in ruins until some time after the middle of the 4th century. It was then put back into use as a bath, although with considerable modification. The hypocaust areas were confined to the northeast corner; pools were added at the northwest corner and all hydraulic installations were removed from the southern part. A new entrance was constructed from Areopagus Street, leading through the east wall of the southernmost hypocaust room, which now becomes a broad entrance passage. The large hall along the west side (which may have been smaller in the preceding period) received a paving of marble chip mosaic, differentiated from the mosaic of the earlier periods by the appearance of a considerable number of pieces of green marble among the white. A large exhedra, with the same mosaic paving, was built out over the high ground to the west.

Most of the rooms in the southern area were now fitted with benches and the clear differentiation between the two aspects of the building, together with their close relation to each other, suggests that in the 4th-5th century the whole

complex served, like its neighbors to the east, as one of the philosophical schools of Athens.

The Seventh Century (F)

The bath suffered final destruction in the Slavic invasions of the 580's. The area was later reinhabited, still within the same limits, but with different orientations of buildings and much higher ground levels. The substantial construction of the walls and the care with which floors were laid suggests that this was a building, or series of buildings, of some consequence, but not enough remains to make possible a reconstruction of the plan or to identify its purpose.