

Agora Excavations  
Preliminary Report - 2003

Excavations in the Athenian Agora were carried out in June and July of 2003, with a team of 45 students and supervisors, representing over two dozen universities and colleges. As in the past few seasons, the work was concentrated largely in the northwest corner of the Agora, known locally as Section BZ. The area was divided into two parts: the north-south road and areas to the west, supervised by Mike Laughy, and east of the road, under the supervision of Marcie Handler, assisted by Bruce Hartzler.

After several years of exploring the Byzantine houses of the 10th century AD which overlay the area, we began this season to strip away their foundations and made substantial progress into the underlying Roman remains. Much of what was exposed dated from the 3rd to the 6th centuries AD, a period when Athens both flourished because of her philosophical schools and was severely challenged by barbarian incursions (Late Antiquity: AD 267-700, Agora XXIV, 1988, by Alison Frantz). A drawing of the area in Late Roman times is included (Fig. 1); at this early stage the full plan, the chronological phases, and the probable functions of the Roman buildings are uncertain.

The main topographical feature was the north-south street which divided the area into two parts (Fig. 2). The late Roman walls on both sides of the street are recognizable from the use of the hard white lime mortar used to bond the fieldstones and assorted ancient blocks with which these rubble walls were constructed. Three threshold blocks, one west of the road and two to the east, give the approximate ground level in use at the time, some .50 m. lower than the floors of the overlying Byzantine houses. Where the Roman walls rose above this level their exterior surfaces were also plastered with lime mortar. Individual features encountered include a rectangular water basin to the west, and a well, terracotta water channel, and settling basin to the east; drains and waterlines began to appear in the street during the final week. A seat block for a latrine suggests the possible use of at least one of the hydraulic installations in the area (Fig. 3). More work will be needed before the various periods can be sorted out, but excavation in previous seasons of the adjacent areas to both north and south give some idea of the use and history of this part of Athens in late Roman times. There is evidence that three successive invasions left their mark on the area.

West of the road, just to the south, we have the excavated remains of a bath built in the 3rd century AD. Dozens of tegulae mammatae, the wall tiles with breast-like protrusions designed to allow the free circulation of heated air, were found this season and almost certainly come from this bath (Fig. 4). Pottery found in the subterranean service passages to the south (I-J/2-3: 1) suggests that the bath went out of use when Alaric and his Visigoths attacked Athens in AD 396. A hoard of 431 bronze coins found just above, at J/1-2/17, indicates that the area was further threatened and/or damaged when the Vandals attacked Athens in the 470's AD. Final abandonment in the

Roman period will have come as a result of the Slavic invasion of 582/3 AD.

East of the road, a well (K 1: 2) of the 3rd century AD excavated several years ago, seems to have occupied an open area and to have provided water for more than one building, including the one exposed this season. As it produced 24 coins and 6 bone dice, unusual finds for a well, it may be that one the buildings was a tavern or some other recreational center. Evidence of occupation of the area during the 4th century was excavated this year at the extreme north, where a shallow, unlined well (K 1: 4) produced abundant material of the mid 4th century AD (Figs. 5, 6). It appears as though this well, like the western bath, also went out of use as a result of Alaric's visit in AD 396.

Previous work nearby had produced indirect evidence of activity by coroplasts, makers of terracotta figurines, from the 1st to the 4th centuries AD (Deposits J 1: 1 and J 1: 5). The evidence consists of figurines, rejects, and moulds, though in limited concentrations and with no evidence thus far of any kilns. The pattern was continued this season with the discovery of several terracotta pieces, one a plaque with a helmeted female deity, presumably Athena, though she is uncharacteristically burdened with, wings, a cornucopia, and a quiver. Also noteworthy is a large figurine of a snub-nosed, pot-bellied Silenos (Fig. 6).

To the east, under the supervision of Anne McCabe, excavations were carried out under #3 Astingos (Hastings) Street, which was demolished in March 2003. The basement floor of this modest structure consisted of 0.90 m. of solid concrete with reinforcing rods. Almost immediately beneath, we began to get the tops of medieval walls of rubble construction, following the northwest/southeast orientation set very early on by the line of the Eridanos River. As usual, they are of fieldstones, tiles, and reused ancient material set in clay and presumably are of private houses, similar to those which have been encountered all over the sections to the southwest. Toward the west, heavy layers of ash and fragments of slag suggested that some industrial activity was carried out nearby. The uppermost fill had fragments of pottery of the 11th and 12th centuries (brown-and-green painted ware and sgraffito wares) and perhaps somewhat later. It is still too early to tell the dates of the walls. From this upper fill we also recovered a battered votive relief showing a mounted horseman, probably dating to the 4th century BC (Fig. 7).

Our work in the Eleusinion under Laura Gawlinski was completed this season with the excavation of two wells. One, started last year, dates to the years around 500-480 BC and proved to be 12 m. deep, some 3.00 m. deeper than the average for the period. Near the bottom we recovered the staves of a wooden bucket but almost no period of use fill, suggesting that the well may have not been a success in producing water, a situation not unparalleled on the Acropolis slopes, where the subterranean water tends to follow well-defined seams.

Close by we excavated a second well, of the Roman period. This was also

unlined, though collapsed tiles and stones suggest that the upper part of the shaft, where it passed through fill rather than bedrock, may have been lined originally. The well was some 6 m. deep and a distinct period-of-use fill was encountered at the bottom, consisting of about a dozen largely intact jugs and mugs, many with wheel-ridging and gouged decoration (Fig. 8), along with large fragments of several micaceous water jars. The closest parallels, from Robinson's Groups L and M (Pottery of the Roman Period: Chronology, Agora V, H. S. Robinson, 1958), suggest that the well was in use in the latter half of the 4th century AD. As it lies just within the protection of the late Roman fortification wall it is not clear whether or not its abandonment was the result of Alaric's attack in 396 AD.

Also from the lower levels of the well came a small somewhat battered marble head of a sleeping infant or child (Fig. 9). Eyes closed, he lies with his head tilted to his left; his left cheek bulges out and the entire right side is far more carefully finished than the (largely concealed) left. The basic scene and pose are very familiar as a figure of a sleeping Eros. Almost 400 examples are known, both in stone and terracotta (M. Soldner, *Untersuchungen zu liegenden Erosen in der hellenistischen und römischen Kunst*, Frankfurt 1986). Unusual is the fact that our head is carved separately from the rest of the figure; normally the head rests on the child's hand, a pillow, or some drapery, carved from the same piece of marble. Here, the head is finished in the round and there is a small round dowel-hole under the left side of the chin. Also surprising is the large hole, filled with lead and traces of some iron attachment, in the top of the head. A possible original location for this piece is the sanctuary of Eros and Aphrodite, excavated by Oscar Broneer in the 1930's on the north slope of the Acropolis, some 250 meters to the southeast.

From the lining of the well we recovered a fragmentary inscription of the 4th century BC (Fig. 10). Parts of 10 lines of text are preserved, with no more than 8 letters surviving on any one line. Because the letters are vertically aligned, however, and much of the language is formulaic, it is possible to restore a line length of 21 letters per line. Preserved is the upper part of a stele containing the preamble of a decree of the year when Nikophemos was eponymous archon, that is, 361/0 BC. The formulae are identical to IG II2 116, passed in the same year, and the decree may have to do with a treaty between Athens and the Thessalians.

John McK. Camp II  
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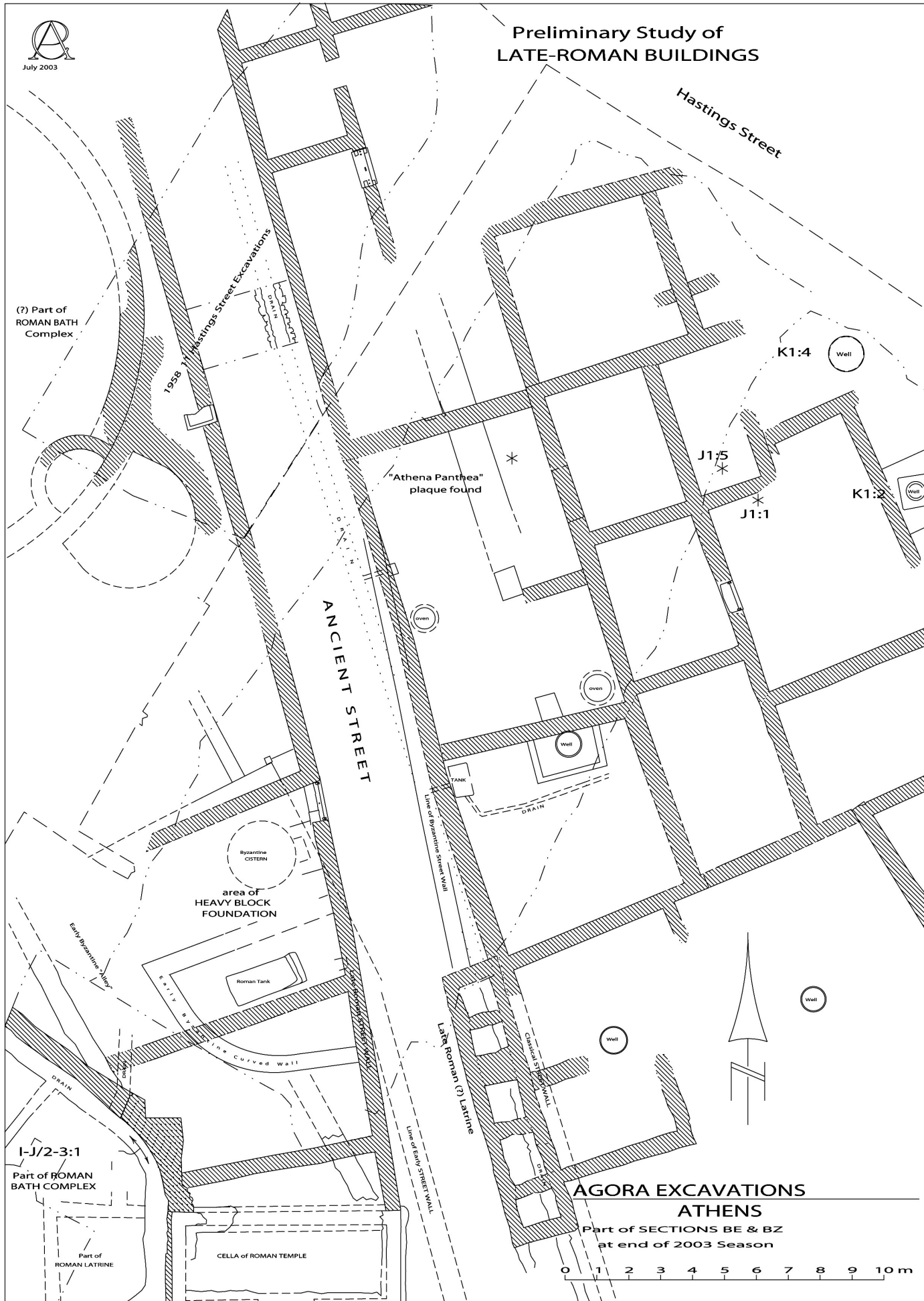


Figure 1





**Fig. 2 - General View of north-south street**



**Fig. 3 - A seat block for a latrine**



**Fig. 4 *tegulae mammatae***





Fig. 5 - Well K 1: 4 4th century AD Roman Pottery





Figure 6. Terracotta Figurines





Fig. 7 4th century B.C. Relief



Fig. 8 Jugs and Mugs - 4th century A.D.





Fig. 9



Fig. 10

