

AGORA EXCAVATIONS - 2004

Excavations were carried out for six weeks from June 7th to July 16th in the Athenian Agora during the summer of 2004, with a team of 37 students and five supervisors. This is a very preliminary report on the results of the work this season. All the work this year was concentrated at the northwest corner of the Agora, north of the Panathenaic Way (Plan). The material is presented in stratigraphic order, from latest to earliest.

SECTION BH

Here, we continued to expose the Byzantine remains which lie behind the Painted Stoa. As usual, these consisted of rubble walls of field stone set in mud. Assorted walls were exposed, representing several buildings and phases, though the area is too small to have allowed us to recover the full plan of any one building. The unglazed, very coarse pottery indicates that the main period of habitation is similar to that found to the west, that is, around 1000 AD and slightly later. A single pithos was found, containing a fair amount of fragmentary pottery and several coins. The fact that it was the only one found, however, perhaps suggests that the character of the remains in this area is somewhat different from that found farther west. That area, with its numerous pithoi in almost every room, has a distinctive domestic feel to it, with provisions for considerable storage, whereas the BH remains, with signs of extensive burning, chunks of slag, and a crudely fashioned water channel, seem more industrial. Further work will be needed to determine if this is a real distinction in the use of the two areas or simply an illusion.

For other traces of the people who may have lived and worked in the area at this time, Anne McCabe has pointed out that many of the funerary inscriptions carved on the columns of the nearby Theseion, converted to a church of St. George, date to the 11th century AD (Archimandrite Antoninos, *The Early Christian Inscriptions in Athens*, [in Russian] St. Petersburg 1874).

SECTION BZ - NORTH

Here, having already stripped off most of the Byzantine fills, we took off the last of the Byzantine foundation walls. Very often they follow - and are occasionally built right on top of - the lines of late Roman walls. It would appear as though the area, lying outside the line of the post-Herulian fortification wall, was largely abandoned after the attack by the Slavs in 582/3 AD and was left in ruins and neglected in the succeeding two or three centuries. When the area was reoccupied, the builders could apparently see the stumps of earlier walls still exposed and in many cases simply reused them. That the earlier remains were visible and available for reuse is also suggested by the fact that three late Roman wells and at least one pithos in the area were cleaned out and reused, with new raised well-heads or mouths added to function at the upper, Byzantine floor levels.

Several threshold blocks give the approximate floor levels of the late Roman remains, though here, too, the plan of the building is incomplete and its function unclear. A series of as many as four drains was found, each cut through the long western street wall, conducting water out of the building and into the street itself or, more probably, into a deep street drain not yet uncovered. The numerous drains, operating independently, perhaps suggest that several of the rooms functioned as independent units, each with direct access to the street.

The late Roman walls are themselves set into earlier fill which seemed to be predominantly early Roman in date, mostly 1st centuries BC/AD. Finds from this Roman fill included the usual array of terracotta figurines and moulds similar to others found earlier in this area (Figs. 1 and 2). Also recovered was a gold pendant in the form of an elongated wishbone, decorated with three 6-petalled rosettes and two triangles of gold grains (Fig. 3). The technique, style, and somewhat worn appearance of the piece (petals broken and possibly enamel missing from the rosettes) suggest that the pendant may predate its archaeological context by a couple of centuries (Greek Gold, D. Williams and J. Ogden, London 1994, nos. 22, 81, 85, 87, 93, 94, and 106).

SECTION BZ - SOUTH

Here we continued to work in the north-south street and in the buildings along its west side. In the street, we stripped away assorted layers of the late Roman period, many of them dating to the 5th and 6th centuries AD. Among the finds at these levels was a bronze beam from a steelyard or scale (Fig. 4); cleaning revealed a series of incised markings to indicate different weights (cf. *Corinth Volume XII, The Minor Objects*, G. Weinberg, Princeton 1952, pp. 207-208, nos. 1661-1666 [pp. 214-216], and plate 98). Along the eastern side of the street the surfaces were not well preserved, dissolving into a series of almost contiguous pits. These disturbances can probably be accounted for by the extensive reuse and rebuilding of the late Roman street walls along the east side of the street in the Byzantine period (11th AD), and/or repairs to a large, deep, late Roman drain which is known from earlier excavations to the south, and which probably continued northward under the east side of the street in this area, though we did not reach it this season. Two terracotta drains leading from the buildings at the west cross the full width of the street to its eastern side; presumably they will eventually be found to be heading for this large, deep, hypothetical drain. The street surfaces were better preserved in the middle and along the west side of the road. Along the west side a round, terracotta pipeline for fresh water, broken by several later pits, was traced for much of the length of the excavated street.

Further clearing in the buildings west of the street did little to clarify the situation, though the chronology is now better understood. Still enigmatic are the two courses of extensive conglomerate foundations supporting several handsome limestone blocks. An anta block with narrow steps showing heavy footwear, found built into a late wall nearby, may also be associated. It would appear that we have some good Classical architectural blocks reused on an early Roman foundation, though the function of the structure is unclear.

To the south, more of a layer of rubble and debris found last year was cleared and in its midst was recovered a gold solidus of Leo I (457-474 AD: Fig. 5). This coin, the debris itself, and a hoard of some 431 bronze coins of the same date found less than ten meters away should perhaps be associated with an attack on Athens by the Vandals in the 460's-470's AD (Vandals at Athens: A. Frantz, *The Athenian Agora XXIV, Late Antiquity A.D. 267-700*, Princeton 1988, pp. 78-79; bronze coin hoard: *Hesperia* 66, 1997, pp. 511-512; gold coin, obverse: portrait of the emperor with inscription: DNLEOPE RPETAUC, reverse: winged Victory standing, holding a tall cross, with inscription: VICTORI AAUCCCB, with CONOB in exergue [=Constantinople mint]. P. Grierson and M. Mays, *Catalogue of Late Roman Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and the Whittemore Collection*, Washington 1992, pp. 161-165, and plate 20).

SECTION BE

Final clearing of Rooms 1 and 2 of the Classical Commercial Building was completed at last. Under the original floor in the northwest corner of Room 1 two handsome red-figured stemless cups were recovered in a small deposit of pottery dating to the 5th century BC (Figs. 7 and 8). We also took advantage of the drying out of the whole area as a result of the continuous pumping of the Eridanos River by the Metro in Monasteraki square. The general lowering of the water table allowed us to excavate more deeply than ever before into the lower levels of the road which passes by the west end of the Painted Stoa. Here, in a trial trench, we encountered several very hard-packed cobbled road surfaces of the Classical period. Beneath them, we hit a layer of densely compacted pottery of the 6th century BC, with many pieces clearly smashed in situ into tiny fragments. There were fragments of cups and kraters and several black-figured pieces, including a handsome cup tondo of a man on horseback (Fig. 6). Beneath this layer was another very hard, very worn cobbled road surface, clearly indicating that the road is one of the earliest and more important features of the urban landscape in this area, before it was developed monumentally with the construction of the altar of Aphrodite (ca. 500 BC) and the Painted Stoa (ca. 470 BC). Why the road is so heavily travelled and what, if anything, it tells us about the elusive early fortification walls of Athens are

questions which remain to be answered. With Iron Age graves to the west of it and Bronze Age graves to the east, it may be supposed that the line of the road is very early, but if so it must have been simple track as we encountered bedrock immediately beneath the cobbled surface.

Further excavations in Sections BH and BZ are planned for 2005, as well as the extension of work in Section BH with the removal of several modern houses overlying the area.

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Director, Agora Excavations

August 2004

Notes, Summer 2004

Gold Pendant

Gold pendant, probably from a necklace. In the form of an elongated wishbone; parallels with more curved legs and a shorter stem referred to as crescents or horseshoes.

Thinner than other pieces, but otherwise common decoration of 6-petalled rosettes (3) and triangles of gold grains (2, one at each end). Found in context of 2nd/1st BC; technique and signs of a long life suggest it may be somewhat older: petals of rosettes missing, as is the original blue enamel in the petals, traces of which can be made out.

Greek Gold, D. Williams and J. Ogden, BM London 1994: 6-petalled flowers, passim, eg. #106, p. 168; use of pastel blue enamel: #22, #81, #85, #87, and #94; triangle/pyramid of grains: #93

W. Rudolph, Berry Collection, Indian Press: Horseshoe pendant: #35A.4 and crescent pendant: #81.

Cf. Stefanelli, *Oro dei Romani*: #162, fig. 173, p. 248, #126.

TC fig. of Pan playing his pipe.

Small TC fig of Aphrodite drying her hair (3rd from area).

Bronze bar from a steelyard, finials at either end: in the road, levels of the 6th AD

Gold solidus of Leo I: 457-474 AD.

Minted in Constantinople. On obverse: portrait of the emperor with inscription: DNLEOPE

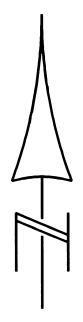
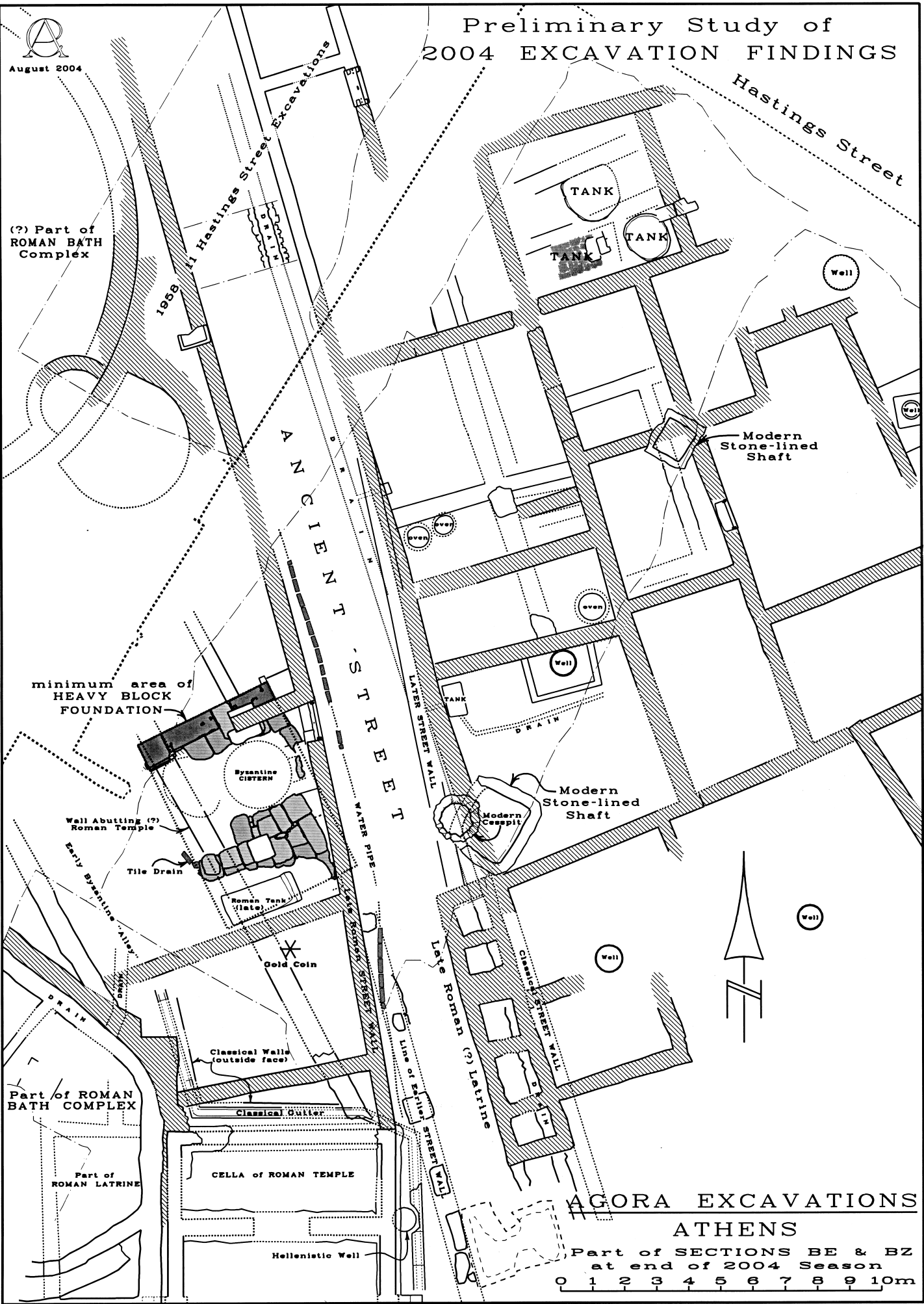
RPETAUC, reverse: winged Victory standing, holding a tall cross, with inscription: VICTORI AUCCC, with CONOB in exergue. Class 1.

P. Grierson and M. Mays, *Catalogue of Late Roman Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and the Whittemore Collection*, Washington 1992, pp. 161-165, and plate 20.



August 2004

Preliminary Study of 2004 EXCAVATION FINDINGS



Well

Well

AGORA EXCAVATIONS ATHENS

Part of SECTIONS BE & BZ
at end of 2004 Season

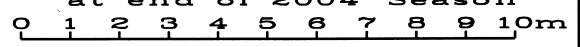




Fig. 1 



Fig. 2 



Fig. 3 



 Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Fig. 8