

Agora Excavations: 2005

Excavations were carried out in the Athenian Agora in the summer of 2005 by the American School of Classical Studies at Athens, in cooperation with the 1st Ephoreia of the Ministry of Culture and with the collaboration and support of the Packard Humanities Institute. The season ran from June 13 to August 5, with a team of forty-two students and supervisors, drawn from twenty-five universities. This report was finished just as the season ended, so many of the conclusions presented are very preliminary and subject to revision. Much of this account is based on observations made by the field supervisors, whose exemplary work is gratefully acknowledged here.

Section BZ - Northwest of the Stoa Poikile

Section BZ was supervised by Mike Laughey (south) and Marcie Handler (north). For the most part we worked in Roman levels, dating from the 1st to 5th centuries AD. Much more of the north-south street was excavated, revealing a series of hydraulic installations (Fig. 1). These included a closed round terracotta pipeline (4/5th AD) and a 3-meter stretch of lead pipe, both presumably designed to carry fresh water. Along the east side of the street we exposed more of the large, late, deep drain known from excavations further south. Used for a long time, it was repaired repeatedly and was covered with a bewildering array of disparate material: amphoras, large wall or floor tiles, and canonical curved cover tiles. One rare find came from the fill over the southern part of the drain: a small statuette of Aphrodite carved from elephant ivory (Fig. 2). She is missing her right hand and both feet but is otherwise well-preserved, measuring 0.085 m. high. In her left hand she is holding a large lock of hair away from her head, apparently to dry it. This type was very popular in antiquity and is often referred to as the Aphrodite Anadyomene, based on a famous painting by the 4th century painter Apelles, showing Aphrodite emerging from the sea, wringing water and sea-foam from her hair. Examples are known in marble, bronze, terracotta, and bone, and she is depicted on coins, gemstones, and gold jewelry. Over seventy-five examples are illustrated in *LIMC* (see also: *Studien zur Ikonographie und Gesellschaftlichen Funktion Hellenistischer Aphrodite-Statuen*, W. Neumer-Pfau, Bonn 1982). Similar Aphrodite figurines of this type have been found in the area. As they now span four centuries (1st-4th AD) and two materials (ivory and terracotta) it seems increasingly unlikely that they are all the product of a single workshop in the area, but rather of a single sanctuary; they may therefore perhaps be used as further evidence that the altar and later remains found just to the south are indeed dedicated to Aphrodite Ourania.

A large rubble wall overlying the drain was partially removed and proved to date to the 6th century AD, providing a useful terminus ante quem for the drain and the latest Roman phase of the eastern street wall and a marble threshold block of unusual type (Fig. 3). The threshold does not have the usual raised doorstep all along the length of the block. Rather it has a long slot, into which a series of boards could be slid, one after another, with a locking device necessary only for the final board; in effect, a sort of horizontal shutter for the doorway. Two things are noteworthy about such a door. First, it is rare in Greece, the other examples coming from the Library of Pantainos, also in the Agora; most other examples are found in Italy, in large numbers, at Ostia and Pompeii (G. P. Stevens in *Hesperia* 18, 1949, pp. 269-274). Second, securing and opening a doorway in this manner is appropriate for wide doors and ones intended to stay open; that is, for shops, as in the case of those in the Library of Pantainos. This threshold might therefore serve to bolster our tentative conclusion that the building along the east side of the street housed a series of shops in the Roman period.

West of the street we continued excavating in mixed Roman fills. The upper ones seem to date to the early 5th century AD and are perhaps to be associated with cleaning up the area after Alaric

and the Visigoths attacked the city in 395 AD. The lower fills produced numerous examples of the cone-shaped projections characteristic of *tegulae mammatae* (Fig. 4), used in the heating systems of Roman baths (Pliny, NH 35. 159 and Vitruvius 7. 4. 2). These seem to come from a Roman bath in the immediate vicinity which was remodelled in the early 3rd century AD and went out of use at the end of the 4th century. The fact that we found great numbers of the corners with their cones or just the cones alone suggests that they were deliberately knocked off and discarded so the rest of the tile could be used elsewhere as building material.

East of the street we excavated areas in line with the northern continuation of the commercial building to the south. Thus far it is not clear how far north those shops extend, but the stratigraphy thus far suggests that our area followed the same sequence and is likely to be related. For the most part we recovered fills of the 1st century AD, with very large numbers of fragments of very poor quality terracotta figurines. At the far north end of the trench we recovered a deposit of several amphoras, broken but in situ. Two of them are similar and unusual in the Agora (Fig. 5); they have ring feet and can stand on their own, as opposed to the pointed toes of almost all our other hundreds of examples. The rim is broad and flat on top, while short handles are attached halfway up a tall neck. These combined characteristics are best paralleled in amphora type Gauloise 5, from Southern France, dating to the late 1st/2nd AD, so these jars have had a long journey (*La Production des Amphores en Gaule Narbonnaise sous le haut-empire*, F. Laubenheimer, Paris 1985, figs. 154-157) and *Amphores: Comment les Identifier?*, M. Sciallono and P. Sibella, Aix 1994).

Other finds of interest include a small marble head of a bearded male, perhaps from a herm (Fig. 6), found in surface fill, and a small piece of worked bone carved with a palmette at one end, apparently a stamp for decorating pottery (Fig. 7).

In short, along the east side of the road it looks as though the Classical commercial building may have extended to the north, going out of use in the 1st century AD and replaced by other shops which functioned throughout much of the late Roman period. Various straws in the wind perhaps indicate that the neighborhood was frequented and/or the shops run by Italians: the Gallic wine jars, the unusual threshold block, and the use of a lead pipe (rather than terracotta) to deliver water are suggestive, as is the lamp with two gladiators named in Latin, found a few meters to the east in 1995 (*Hesperia* 1996, p. 241, no. 19).

Section BH

Section BH was excavated under the supervision of Anne McCabe. Here, we finished clearing the Byzantine levels, down to the bottoms of the walls; that is, well below floor level (Fig 8). For the most part we seem to be entirely in the 10th century AD, with brown-glazed and white ware pottery, and with no sgraffito or green-and-brown painted wares of the 11th and 12th centuries. The walls were of rubble: field stones and reused ancient blocks set in clay. The area is so small that no plan of any building could be recovered, and even what seem to be individual rooms rarely have four respectable walls. The fill alongside these walls has proved remarkably deep and undifferentiated, especially to the east, and there is little stratigraphic evidence of extended use of the area, though two or more periods could be identified in the junctures and relative depths of some of the walls. Though one drain, one pithos, and some areas of deep ash or carbon were encountered, there seem to be far fewer of the installations and evidence for storage (especially pithoi), which were outstanding and common features of the contemporary buildings to the west. Also unusual, in comparison to Sections BE and BZ to the west, is the fact that none of the walls in Section BH rest on Late Roman predecessors.

Section Γ

Laura Gawlinski was responsible for excavating in Section Γ, just southwest of the Tholos. Here we returned to investigate a large building of the mid-5th century BC, which has been tentatively identified in the past as the *Strategeion*, headquarters of the 10 generals (*strategoí*). The building is trapezoidal in shape, measuring ca. 20 by 25 meters. It is poorly preserved, with only a few squared blocks of poros remaining of the exterior walls, with traces of interior walls of rubble or polygonal masonry. The plan is restored as several rooms grouped around a central courtyard.

The identification as the *Strategeion* has been based on several factors, primarily the location and large size of the building, along with a handful of relevant inscriptions found in the general vicinity. Other interpretations are possible, however, one of them being that it served as a commercial building. We returned in order to clarify the plan and also in the hopes of finding evidence which would tip the balance in favor of either a public use (inscriptions or public antiquities such as tokens) or a commercial one ('pyres'). Several dozen shallow pits, containing anywhere from three to thirty-five pots, have been uncovered in the Agora excavations; usually accompanied by signs of burning and a few animal or bird bones, they are known to us as 'pyres'. They presumably represent some private cult ritual about which the literary sources are silent. Of the fifty or so recovered, all have been found in either houses or shops, none in public buildings or sanctuaries, and their presence (or absence) would therefore help with understanding the possible identification of the building. A single pyre was found in this building in the original excavations; though we have a good deal more to excavate, no additional pyres were found in 2005.

Other evidence recovered perhaps favors a public function for the building. First, it is worth noting that the entire western side of the building is cut out of the steep bedrock slope of the southeastern foot of Kolonos Agoraios, and that the central part is made up of a surprisingly deep fill consisting largely of the bedrock dug out of the western half. In places this fill is over two and a half meters deep below the original floor level. The bedrock of the hill is cut back some 9 meters along the entire length of the building, to a depth at the west of as much as 2.50 meters. In quarrying back the hillside the builders seem to have disturbed an early burial. The skull and assorted bones of a female skeleton in a flexed position were recovered in the central fill, along with a fair number of Geometric sherds (in this connection it is perhaps worth noting that a Geometric/Early Archaic cemetery was found between this building and the Tholos). The special effort that went into siting and constructing the building in this particular spot should perhaps be regarded as evidence that it was intended to serve a public function and that both its large size and a location close to other major public buildings were regarded as necessary.

Also part of the story was the discovery of a large hoard of Athenian silver tetradrachms, buried in a sack under the lowest floor in the eastern part of the building. In all, 46 coins were removed separately, and the rest were lifted in a concreted mass weighing 6,280 grams (Fig. 9). Allowing for about 17 grams per coin, the whole hoard should consist of 400-420 coins, weighing ca. 7,062 grams (about 15.5 lbs). All the coins seen so far are standard Athenian tetradrachms with the helmeted head of Athena on the obverse, with the owl, olive sprig, and legend ΑΘΕ on the reverse. They date to the 2nd half of the 4th century BC and are of the 'pi' or 'bracket' type, taking their name from the relief decoration on Athena's helmet. Other indications of date are the treatment of Athena's ear and the number of relief dots used to decorate the owl. Hoards of this type and size found in controlled excavations are extremely rare, largely without parallel within the walls of Athens. The closest is a hoard of 292 coins (282 of them similar Athenian silver tetradrachms) found in a pot in the Belgian excavations at the deme-site of Thorikos, in southeastern Attika (J. Bingen, "Le Tresor Monetaire Thorikos 1969", in H. Mussche et. al. eds., *Thorikos* 1969, Brussels 1973, pp. 1-59). Much more

work will be needed by the conservators and numismatist before questions of the date of deposition can be answered, but there are numerous occasions in the late 4th and early 3rd centuries when troubles for Athens might have led someone to conceal these coins. It remains also to be seen if the date, wear, and possible die-links give any indication as to how this hoard may have been assembled. Leaving the date aside, the discovery of these coins invites speculation as to who buried them and what information that might carry for the identification of the building. The first observation might be that the hoard represents a considerable amount of money, 1,600 drachmas when the drachma was about a daily wage, so about five years' income. A second observation is that they all seem to be Attic tetradrachms; if this hoard were assembled by a merchant, one might expect more of a mix of denominations. On balance, it looks as though the hoard were concealed by someone with access to public funds. If the building itself is indeed public, the two likeliest candidates on the basis of size and location are the Strategeion and Poleterion; the new hoard may favor the latter identification. The Poletai worked closely with the boule and were responsible for the administration of large amounts of public money, including the payments for leases of the silver mines.

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1. View of Roman levels of north-south street, Section BE, with various hydraulic installations; looking north. Note thresholds on both street walls, to left and right.



2. Ivory statuette of Aphrodite, 3rd/4th AD.



3. Marble threshold block in eastern street wall.



4. A selection of tegulae mammatae tiles from the Roman bath in Section BZ south.



5. Amphorae from southern Gaul (?) from north end of Section BZ north: late 1st/2nd AD.

6. Small-scale Herm head from Section BZ north.



7. Bone implement carved with palmette, for decorating pottery.



8. Section BH under excavation



9. Hoard of silver Attic tetradrachms, 2nd half 4th BC