

Agora Excavations 2008 - Preliminary Summary

Excavations were carried out in the Athenian Agora from June 10th to August 1st, in the summer of 2008. A team of 62 individuals participated, about 50 employed in actual excavation, the rest as interns in conservation, architecture, and amphora studies. Twenty-three American colleges and universities were represented in the volunteer team, along with 7 foreign countries. It is a pleasant duty to record here some of the preliminary results, along our thanks and appreciation for the efforts of so many individuals. Excavation funding was provided by the Packard Humanities Institute, whose support is also gratefully acknowledged here. This report has been prepared without the benefit of a great deal of time or thought and should be regarded as preliminary in the extreme.

The excavation was divided into three distinct areas, or sections, two north of Hadrian Street and one in the old area, south of the Tholos.

SECTION BH (Supervisor: Anne McCabe)

In this section we went down below the middle Byzantine walls, excavating layers in, over, and behind the building identified as the Painted Stoa. Both the back wall of the building and the interior colonnade were explored and found to be well-preserved at this eastern end of the stoa. Though built largely of limestone, the workmanship on all the blocks of the superstructure is of the highest quality; this was one of the handsomest secular buildings of ancient Athens. The back wall has limestone foundations which project some 0.24 m. beyond the inner face of the toichobate. Above, three full toichobate blocks and part of a fourth remain in situ, measuring 1.205 m. long, by 0.935 m. wide, by 0.26 m. high. The tops are finished with a claw chisel and there are two pry-holes preserved. Resting on the toichobate are two blocks of the outer run of orthostates in situ (**Figs. 1 and 2**). The blocks measure 1.205 m. long by 0.325 m. thick, by 0.915 m. high and were originally joined with a double-T clamp, now missing. The tops are finished with a claw chisel. The backs are well dressed with a drove and there is a rebate along the bottom, 0.09 m. high and 0.01 m. deep. Each block also has a lifting boss preserved.

Evidence from both inside and outside the back wall is consistent with what has been noted towards the west end of the building in previous seasons. Behind the back wall a small but distinctive fragment of a large terra cotta pipe can be associated with the pipeline which was found in situ running behind the building further west, usually associated with a Kimonian aqueduct bringing water out to the Academy (Plutarch, *Life of Kimon* 13). The fragment was found in middle Byzantine fill, suggesting that at the east end of the building the aqueduct has been disturbed. Behind the stoa generally the fill explored was rubble of the Middle Byzantine and late Roman periods and we have not yet reached remains that are contemporary with the Stoa.

Within the line of the back wall inside the building there is a second heavy foundation of soft, partially decomposed poros limestone (**Fig. 2**). This foundation runs ca. 0.30-0.35 m. from the inner face of the foundations of the back wall and measures some 1.04 m. wide. The one block which can be measured is 0.85 m. long, while the height has not been fully exposed. This same run of poros was found in a similar situation at the west as well. The purpose was not clear then or there, and still is not, though there is reason now to believe that it runs most of the length of the back wall. The possibilities include:

- A. Some support for an inner bench or installation within the stoa.
- B. A pre-Persian version of the Stoa Peisianax, attested in a scholion to Aelius Aristeides: (Dindorf III, 531, 20-23: cf. DiCesare, *Annuario* 80, 2002, pp. 43 ff.). If so, then the better-preserved remains described above presumably represent a post-Persian rebuilding.
- C. A remnant of the archaic city wall of Athens, no trace of which has yet been identified.

Within the building we exposed parts of the two easternmost interior Ionic columns. The western of the two survives only in the form of the foundations, consisting of two poros blocks set side-by-side, their tops lying at ca. 52.17/52.21 m. The eastern one is better preserved, consisting of a square limestone base or plinth, measuring ca. 0.88 m. on a side (ca. 0.30 high, by calculation), supporting a large cylinder of marble, 0.18m. high and 0.79 m. in diameter (**Fig. 3**). On top of this is the unfluted limestone shaft of the column itself, 0.59 m. in diameter, preserved to a height of 0.50 m. There are a limited number of Ionic bases used by the Athenians in the first half of the 5th century BC and the canonical Attic/Ionic form was not standard at this period. The closest parallel for the simple marble cylinder as a base, with a limestone shaft, can best be paralleled in the peristyle columns of the late 5th century Pompeion at the Kerameikos (**Fig. 4**).

A rubble wall was found running southwest from the easternmost column, 0.60 m. thick and preserved to a height of 0.60 m. It rests at about the level of the original stoa floor and may well represent a late blocking of the interior colonnade. Such closings of stoa colonnades in the late Roman period are relatively common. Legislation concerning them appears in both the Theodosian Code (XV) and the Codex Justinianus (I and VIII) [Cf. H. Saradi, *The Byzantine City in the Sixth Century*, Athens 2006, pp. 186-208]. Examples in the Agora can still be seen west of the Royal Stoa and were also found in the northern stoa of the Library of Pantainos.

SECTION BETA THETA (Supervisor: Kevin Daly)

Much of the work this season concentrated in a new section, created by the demolition of two buildings along St. Philip's street. For the most part we dug late fill down some 0.75 m. below the surface left at demolition. At the east we reached the tops of rubble walls of the Byzantine period. Further west, the foundations of the modern building are more extensive, leaving strips of undug fill between them. Here they cut into a late pit/bothros. In another area we came upon the remains of a horse. The skeleton was only partially articulated, and cut-marks on some of the bones suggested that the animal had been cut into large pieces before being deposited.

In several parts of the trench we encountered large worked blocks. They were carefully tooled, with anathyrosis and double-T clamps, some of limestone, some of marble, suggesting that they come from more than one substantial Classical building. It is too early to tell for sure, but a few of them seem to be reused in a position appropriate for late walls blocking the colonnades, as described above.

There were a limited number of small finds. Built into one of the Byzantine walls at the east

was the lower part of a marble relief of the Mother of the Gods, showing the goddess in her usual pose, seated on a throne (**Fig. 5**). And the terracotta head of a horse (**Fig. 6**) matches others found in the area, reminding us that this northwest corner of the Agora was the center of the Athenian cavalry in the Classical and Hellenistic periods.

SECTION GAMMA (Supervisor: Laura Gawlinski)

Here, we excavated in the old area, where there is a cluster of small buildings of the Classical period which were put out of use in the Hellenistic period by the shifting of the course of a road. These buildings lie immediately south of the Tholos, that is, very close to the civic center of the city. To the east is the shop of Simon the cobbler (D. B. Thompson, *Archaeology* 13, 1960, pp. 234-240), and to the west is the so-called 'Strategeion'.

The aim here is to try to determine if these buildings - small, crowded, and irregular in their plans - were public or private and, if private, whether they had a commercial function (Cf. Agora XIV, p. 74, and note 204). It is still too early to say, but the discovery of a tile-lined well, partially excavated this season, may well shed some light on the situation. Its location should confirm the interpretation of the area as an open courtyard, while the finds will help determine if the surrounding buildings were commercial, domestic, or public, or some combination of the three. A black-glazed lamp from the upper levels suggests that the well went out of use sometime close to the 2nd quarter of the 4th century BC (**Fig.7**).

Elsewhere we dug various floor levels and pits, most of them also dating to the 4th century BC. Two fractional silver coins (**Fig. 8, a and b**) and a large fragment of an amphora with a graffito (**Fig. 9**) are among the more interesting finds. In many instances the fill contained numerous sherds of the 8th and 7th centuries BC, perhaps indicative of earlier houses or, more probably, disturbed burials.

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Fig. 1: Detail of the back of the orthostate of the Painted Stoa



Fig. 2: Back wall of the Painted Stoa from inside, toichobate and orthostate at rear, earlier foundation in foreground.



Fig. 3: Interior Ionic column of the Painted Stoa



Fig. 4: Peristyle of the Pompeion in the Kerameikos



Fig. 5: Marble relief of the Mother of the Gods



Fig. 6: Terracotta figurine of a horse.



Fig. 7: Black-glazed lamp of the first half of the 4th century BC from the well.



Fig. 8: Two fractional silver coins from Section Gamma



Fig. 9: Amphora fragment with graffito.



Fig. 10: Lead and clay tokens from mixed fill

