

Excavation Summary - 2006

This brief summary is a very preliminary account of the work done in the Athenian Agora during the summer of 2006, with a team of forty-two student volunteers and five supervisors.

The year 2006 marked the 75th anniversary of the beginning of the excavations and the 50th anniversary of the reconstruction of the Stoa of Attalos, both occasions commemorated in a series of events held in the Stoa and at the ASCS on June 15th and 16th, during the first week of excavations. Events included a photographic exhibition of the history of the work - accompanied by a volume prepared by Craig Mauzy - a display of archaeological material from the new excavations, and a one-day symposium on the recent work of the School by various School staff and Agora scholars.

In the course of the past winter, three of the four modern buildings acquired in recent years were demolished, and the fourth is about ready to come down. Excavation in one of the new plots was begun this season as part of Section BH. Otherwise our efforts were concentrated on two areas excavated last year: north-west of the agora and in the old excavations at the southwest corner of the square.

SECTION GAMMA (Plan 1)

In this area south of the Tholos we continued to explore the remains of the building often identified as the *Strategeion*, or office of the generals. The discovery last year of a hoard of about 400 silver tetradrachms threw more doubt on that identification, already called into question by the discovery years ago of a pyre in the building. Fifty of the fifty-one known pyres are found in houses or commercial buildings, never in sanctuaries or public buildings, with this one possible exception. In addition, hiding 1600 drachmas in a public office, while conceivable, seems somewhat unlikely, and the hoard, like the pyre, perhaps points to a commercial function for the building.

The work here was supervised by Laura Gawlinski, assisted by Joanna Hobrantschk and Amanda Reiterman. Excavations this season were concentrated on the eastern half of the building and were very productive, especially in terms of architecture. The western half, explored last year, was cut into the base of the *Kolonos Agoraios* hill, leaving virtually no floor fills and only the slightest traces of interior walls. The eastern half, by contrast, had deep fills to be investigated, and considerable new information about the plan of the building emerged. Three new crosswalls were encountered, along with a stretch of the wall which separates the eastern rooms from the rest of the building. While the exterior walls are made of large ashlar blocks of poros, the interior walls are of small fieldstones, set in clay, some 0.40-0.45 m. wide, resting on shallow foundations some 0.60 m. wide. In addition, several terracotta drains were recovered; these carried water eastward through the east wall of the building to empty into the great drain. The mixed construction of the walls and the drains leading out of individual rooms are both paralleled in the commercial buildings being excavated behind the Painted Stoa in Sections BZ and BE and add their weight to the accumulating evidence that we should interpret the building as commercial, either public or private, rather than as an official public office building. In one of the northern rooms we encountered a patch of plaster floor and beneath that a thick layer composed of almost nothing but marble working chips, of the sort found overlying most of the 'State Prison', which also may be better understood as a commercial building.

Pottery found in the fill beneath the floor levels confirms a date in the first half of the 5th century BC for the original construction of the building. Deep in this fill we found the articulated, tightly-flexed skeleton of a mid-sized, arthritic dog (Fig. 1).

SECTION BZ

In this section Matt McCallum, assisted by Jen Poppel, was responsible for the north-south road and buildings to the west, while Marcie Handler, assisted by Chris Young, excavated the buildings along the east side of the road.

West of the road we excavated in various fills. Removing the bottom of a large round tile-floored cistern, we came down on a smaller one, immediately below. From the pottery, both seem to date to the 10th century AD and later. Further west, we excavated fills alongside a large water line associated with the bath in use in the area in the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD, and closer to the road we cleared more of a pebble mosaic floor which should be Hellenistic in date. Deep down to the north we uncovered what seems to be yet another pyre of early Hellenistic date.

Within the road itself, we cleared more of the late water channels, particularly at the north. A second full section of the lead pipe was exposed, measuring - like the first - 2.10 m. long. In addition, a second lead pipe, of smaller diameter, was found at a slightly lower level. The big late drain running along the east side of the road was also more fully exposed. It shows signs of repeated repairs, with a variety of materials used to cover the actual channel, including amphoras and wall-tiles. Some of the amphoras date to the 5th century AD, as do a pair of intact lamps, including one with a Christian cross (Fig. 2).

East of the road, we reached depths sufficient to bring to light earlier walls. Some of these seem to indicate that the Classical commercial building investigated to the south several years ago continued this far north. Within what should be one of the rooms of the building we recovered two more pyres buried beneath the floors of the building (Fig. 3). One, with a coin associated, seemed to date to the early 3rd century BC, while the other, found lower down seems only slightly earlier. They increase the number of pyres found in this building to ten, by far the largest single concentration from anywhere in the agora. Their purpose and meaning are still being studied by Susan Rotroff. Further north, where we cleared along a substantial wall of poros blocks we recovered two silver drachmas (Figs. 4, 5). Just to the south we exposed what looks very much like the upper part of a collapsed cistern; presumably Hellenistic in date, its full excavation will have to be undertaken next year. Behind the building we recovered a fair amount of Hellenistic pottery (Fig. 6) and from early Roman levels around the building we recovered many more fragments of terracotta figurines and masks. East of the building we also excavated archaic layers at elevations higher than floor levels within the Classical building, suggesting that it was set into a slightly rising slope.

SECTION BH (Plan 2)

This section was excavated under the supervision of Anne McCabe, assisted by Matt Baumann. The section was expanded to the east, following the demolition of the modern building at the corner of St. Philip's and Hastings Street this past winter, and we began at a level beneath the modern basement floor. In a relatively small area we had an abundance of features: walls, pithoi, pits, a burial, and two wells. Generally what we recovered seemed to date to the period familiar to us from the adjacent areas: the coarse-ware pottery and brown-glazed pieces are hard to date precisely, but most of the material should date to the years around 1,000 AD. For the most part we excavated beneath the floor levels of the buildings, presumably houses. Large pithoi were encountered, both stone-lined and mortared pits and large ceramic vessels, set with their mouths at floor level. In the corner of one room we had a coarse-ware cooking pot with the skeletal remains of a fetus of about 32 weeks, also buried beneath the floor (Fig. 7). This is the second such internment found in the Byzantine settlement north of the river, and may be the accepted manner of disposing of such remains in this period. Two wells were excavated to a depth of 2.00-3.00 meters. Both are lined in the upper part with stones, and with proper well-tiles lower down. Both seem to have been used in the Byzantine period, and it is not yet clear if either was in use at an earlier time. A large stone-lined pit was excavated down to a very hard-packed surface which seems to have served as its floor. In its northwest quadrant, the pit incorporated a poros block which rests on this same surface. From the orientation and elevation it seems entirely possible that the block and perhaps the surface can be associated with the eastern part of the Stoa Poikile, just within its north wall, though far more excavation will be necessary before this hypothesis can be confirmed.

PLAN 1



Agora Excavations Athens
"STRATEGEION" AREA
Plan at End of 2006 Season

1/200

300mE

320mE

PLAN 2

1:50

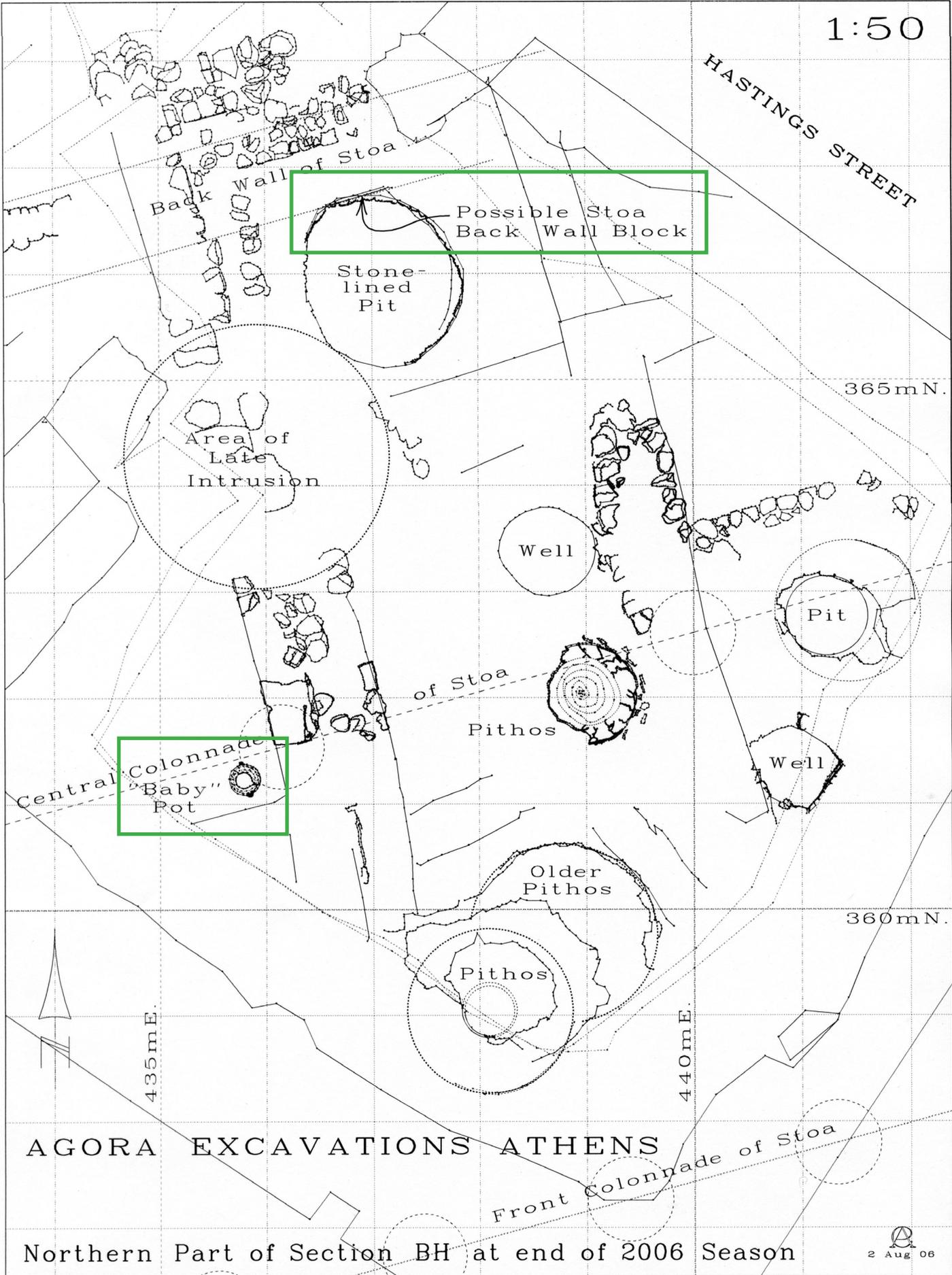




Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4 - (ca. 1.47 cm. diameter)



Fig. 5 - (ca. 1.5 cm. diameter)



Fig. 6



Fig. 7