

REPORT ON EXCAVATIONS IN THE ATHENIAN AGORA 1990

To: The David and Lucile Packard Foundation

It is a pleasure to take this opportunity to report on the archaeological field work conducted in the Athenian Agora by the American School of Classical Studies at Athens during the period from December 1989 to December 1990. All of the activities covered by this report were once again made possible by grants from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation. The School conducted a full season of excavations for nine weeks from June 4 to August 3, 1990, and the actual season of field work was preceded by eight weeks of preparatory operations on the newly acquired property, City Block 1370/27. These operations included the removal of earth excavated in 1989 from the temporary dump on the site, the demolition of the modern building on Block 1370/27, and the excavation with heavy earth-moving machinery of the uppermost two meters of disturbed modern fill.

Archaeological Results: The excavations of 1990 were carried out on two properties along the north side of Hadrian Street, lying immediately east and west of the area explored in the excavations of 1980-82. Chronologically the season's work exposed the remains of buildings ranging in date from the early 1st century to the late 19th century after Christ.

In the eastern section, Block 1370/27, half of the available property was occupied by a deep modern basement approached from Hadrian Street by a heavily built stone stairway, supported by a masonry arch (Fig. 5). A Greek coin of 1894 was found between the two floors of the basement, and its whole depth to the modern street level was filled in early in the 20th century. Just below the basement floor the excavators uncovered one corner of a small church the floor of which had evidently been destroyed by the builders of the late 19th century. Everywhere within the walls of the church, stone-lined cists honeycombed the interior space. These structures had served as ossuary deposits and were found packed with masses of neatly arranged human bones (Fig. 4). The church was apparently a victim of the Greek War of Independence, and an iron cannon ball found beside the north wall may well have been the agent of its destruction. The cannon ball was probably fired from the Acropolis during the siege of 1827; moreover, Stauffert's survey of Athens in 1834 shows a ruined church at the western corner of Hadrian Street and St. Philip's Square. The same church is labeled Aghios Nikolaos on Schaubert's project for the new capital which was drawn a year or so later. No evidence for the original date of construction of the church has yet come to light, but its small size and type of plan seem most similar to other churches built in Athens during the late 16th and early 17th centuries.

In the western section of the excavations, Block 1370/26, the latest surviving remains belonged to Byzantine houses of the 9th to 13th centuries. The walls of several such struc-

tures had been revealed during the season of 1989, but removal of these foundations last summer enabled the excavators to examine in detail the various phases of the buildings. The newly excavated rooms combined with others found in 1980-81 to form the complete floor plans of two houses and part of a third. The southern house consisted of several small rooms ranged on all four sides of a central open courtyard. The earliest phase of the house could be dated by coins of Leo VI (A.D. 886-912) which came from one of the lower stratified floors of the courtyard, and from a room to the west. The house was heavily rebuilt and many of its interior walls were realigned in the third quarter of the 10th century, as is indicated by coins found under the floor which covered the foundations of the first phase. The floor of the third phase was raised nearly a meter, and a group of large terracotta storage jars was set down into it in the southwest corner of the room. A coin of Guillaume de Villehardouin (A.D. 1245-1278) from one of the storage jars shows that the house continued to be used for some time after the Frankish occupation of Athens.

The neighboring house to the north had rooms on two sides of a large open court in its southwest corner. This house bordered a street to the east, as did its southern neighbor, and a narrower street on its north side, from which a wide doorway gave access to the interior. The principal feature of this house was a well in the courtyard, which was covered by a large stone well-head and a molded marble puteal, obviously re-used from an earlier Roman well (Figs. 10, 12). The well produced 20 whole pots to be associated with the period of use of the house (Fig. 11), and 60 tins of broken fragments from the time of its destruction. A coin datable to the period A.D. 1030-1042 was found in the loose destruction debris at the top of the well and must have been deposited after the well had ceased to be used. The life of the house in this form was somewhat less than a century, as is shown by a coin of Constantine VII (ca. 950-959) which provides the terminus post quem for its construction. A second phase of the house had its floor a meter higher than the first. The walls showed signs of rebuilding; some doorways were blocked; and part of the courtyard was walled in to form another room. Coins of Nikephoros III, found under the raised floor, date the rebuilding in the last quarter of the 11th century.

During the late Roman period much of the northern area of the section was occupied by part of an enormous bathing establishment, other parts of which have been encountered in earlier excavations, by the Greek Archaeological Service, on property 20 m. to the north, and as much as 50 m. to the west. The newly excavated part of this complex consists of massive concrete foundations for a great semicircular hall some 10 m. in diameter. The semicircle was filled with a solid concrete podium composed of re-used poros blocks, rubble, and mortar. A deep, narrow channel described the circumference of the semicircle, and at intervals tributary channels branched

toward the center of the hall and northward to other parts of the building (Fig. 9). These channels are likely to have been ducts for the circulation of hot air to provide heating for this room of the bath. From the semicircular channel came a mass of broken pottery in a variety of shapes, including amphoras, basins, cooking pots, plates with stamped decoration, lamps, and numerous large fragments of glass vessels. The date of the pottery, late in the 4th century after Christ, suggests that the building may have been destroyed at the hands of Alaric and the Visigoths in A.D. 396. The building was certainly being pillaged as a ruin by the third quarter of the 5th century, for a hoard of 431 bronze coins, found at the top of the semicircular channel (Fig. 16), was probably contained in a purse of perishable material dropped by some scavenger. The latest coins date to the 470s in the reign of Leo I, that is to say, at least 80 years later than the broken pottery from the destruction debris of the building.

Some of the most interesting results of last season's excavations concern the early Roman temple associated in some way with the earlier sanctuary and altar of Aphrodite Ourania. One corner of the temple podium, preserving parts of two steps, had come to light in 1981 (Fig. 7), but it was plain that its east flank beyond the prostyle porch had been completely rebuilt in late antiquity. The new excavations revealed the full width of the prostyle porch preserved at foundation level, and the well-worked poros blocks of the foundation for the western flank were also completely preserved (Figs. 1, 6). The temple is now seen to be closely similar in plan to other early Roman temples in the Agora, with a wide prostyle porch projecting beyond the flank walls of the cella. It faced southeastwards directly up the line of the Panathenaic Way toward the Acropolis, and it was so sited that the archaic marble altar of Aphrodite stood precisely on its axis (Figs. 1-2), although a poros platform for the later Roman altar raised the level of the altar by more than a meter to the newly established Roman ground level.

Recovery of the original dimensions of the prostyle porch now makes it possible to recognize and assign to the temple two pieces of marble architecture for its exterior columnar order. The top part of an Ionic shaft is decorated with an exact reproduction of the anthemion pattern on the columns of the north porch of the Erechtheum. An Ionic base faithfully reflects the profile of the Erechtheum bases, although the guilloche pattern has been omitted from the upper torus (Fig. 8). The dimensions of both blocks suggest that they are deliberate copies at roughly three quarters the size of the original. Now that the width of the stylobate for the prostyle porch can be calculated with accuracy, it is intriguing to observe that it also is about three quarters the width of the north porch of the Erechtheum, although in all cases the actual dimensions are closer to 77% than to 75% of the original. The newly explored temple can now take its place among Athenian monuments of the Augustan period. Built as the associated

pottery indicates about the turn of the millennium, it was the younger contemporary of the Temple of Roma and Augustus on the Acropolis, the Ionic order of which was also closely modeled on the Erechtheum. Both Roman temples reflect directly the extensive contemporary repairs to the Erechtheum itself, which renewed the venerable temple from the damage of Sulla's legions, and which were executed in a manner so extraordinarily faithful to the original details of decoration.

Volunteer Program: As in recent seasons, all of the archaeological field work was once again carried out by a group of student volunteer excavators who participated in all aspects of the excavation. In the field, the students were divided into three teams, each of which was supervised by one of the senior archaeologists on the Agora staff. By now many of the students have become quite expert at the intricacies of excavating complicated, and often confused and disturbed, stratification; for nearly one third of the group had worked at the Agora during the previous season of 1989. A number of the students who joined the Agora program for the first time had also had previous experience in archaeological excavations on other sites. While it is true that our selection process gave considerable priority to returning veterans and to seasoned diggers, for otherwise it would not be possible to carry out the field work properly, nevertheless a definite effort was made to include students who brought to the program more interest and enthusiasm than experience. In the event, about a third of the group was participating in archaeological excavations for the first time; but experience has shown that enthusiastic college students learn the necessary skills rapidly from their more knowledgeable peers. This was certainly true of the 1990 season, for by the end of the excavation we found ourselves working with a group of astonishingly skillful excavators. Indeed, many of the archaeological details reported above resulted directly from their skill at digging and from their accuracy at observing. Something of the quality of their work may possibly be seen in Figs. 10-17, but the photographs show nothing if not their dedication, hard work, and good cheer.

As in the previous season, the volunteer excavating program at the Agora aroused considerable interest among students of classical studies and archaeology around the country. The excavators for the 1990 season were chosen from a pool of 105 applicants who represented 49 North American colleges and universities. The 34 students invited to participate in the excavations came from 17 different institutions: Brown, California at Berkeley, California at Los Angeles, Cincinnati, Dartmouth, George Washington, Harvard, Hollins, Montana, New York University, North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Princeton, Rutgers, St. Benedict, St. Mary's, Texas at Austin, William and Mary. It is particularly gratifying to be able to report that 11 students out of the 28 who had worked at the Agora during the 1989 season returned for a second season in 1990. These return-

ing two-year veterans formed in every way the core of the group.

Expenditures: Grant #90-1846 in the amount of \$150,000 from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation provided the funding for the season's excavations. All the expenses arising directly from the archaeological field work were applied against this grant, and in addition such supplies and services as were necessary for the proper processing, conserving, photographing, and recording of the archaeological finds, work best carried out when the excavation is not in progress during the spring and autumn months. The total actual expenditures for all aspects of the Agora Excavations for the year ended September 30, 1990 were \$119,697.97.

It should be noted, however, that expenses for the first half of the calendar year 1990 were charged against the grant of March 16, 1989 in the amount of \$78,100. In addition, \$20,000 had been retained from the grant of March 24, 1988 in the amount \$108,000. These funds were specifically allocated for the demolition of the modern building on the property of Block 1370/27 and were fully expended during April and May 1990. The two grants of 1988 and 1989 can now be regarded as entirely expended for the purposes for which they were donated. Grant #90-1846 will continue, as budgeted, to cover the expenses of the excavations through June 30, 1991.

One other aspect of the expenditures calls for comment at this time; that is the present status of Grant #89-1570 in the amount of up to \$250,000 for the purchase of the next piece of real estate adjacent to the excavated area, Block 1370/8. The American School's efforts to acquire this property from the National Bank of Greece, the present owner, had been completely stalled during the fall and winter of 1989-90 by the continuing political crisis in Greece, which brought most departments of government to a standstill. The election of a new and more stable government in April 1990 appeared to resolve our problem with the National Bank, and we had expected to close on the purchase of Block 1370/8 within a few weeks. For that reason a payment of \$232,000 from Grant #89-1570 was requested from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation and duly received. In the course of the routine title search preparatory to closing, the School's lawyer discovered that the Mortgage Bank laid claim to ownership of the property on the ground that the National Bank had posted the property as collateral for certain loans from the Mortgage Bank. This unforeseen development has led to eight months of frustrating three-sided negotiations between the School's lawyer and the two banks, of which the only outcome thus far appears to be total bureaucratic inertia, despite assurances almost every week that the matter would be resolved in the next few days. The School has instructed its lawyer to move as aggressively as possible to complete the purchase in the shortest possible time. At this moment, however, we can do no more than beg for the Foundation's continued patience with our administra-

tion of its grant. As soon as there are further developments, we shall report them at once.

On behalf of the American School of Classical Studies and of everyone associated with the Agora Excavations, I wish to express once again our deepest appreciation to the Board of Directors of the David and Lucile Packard Foundation for its continued generosity. Your enlightened investment in the advancement of archaeological knowledge through new excavations has won the heartfelt gratitude both of the many scholars whose studies you have made possible, and of the many students whose decision to make their careers in archaeology was sparked by the work that you have supported.

Respectfully submitted,

T. Leslie Shear Jr.

T. Leslie Shear, Jr.
Field Director, Agora Excavations

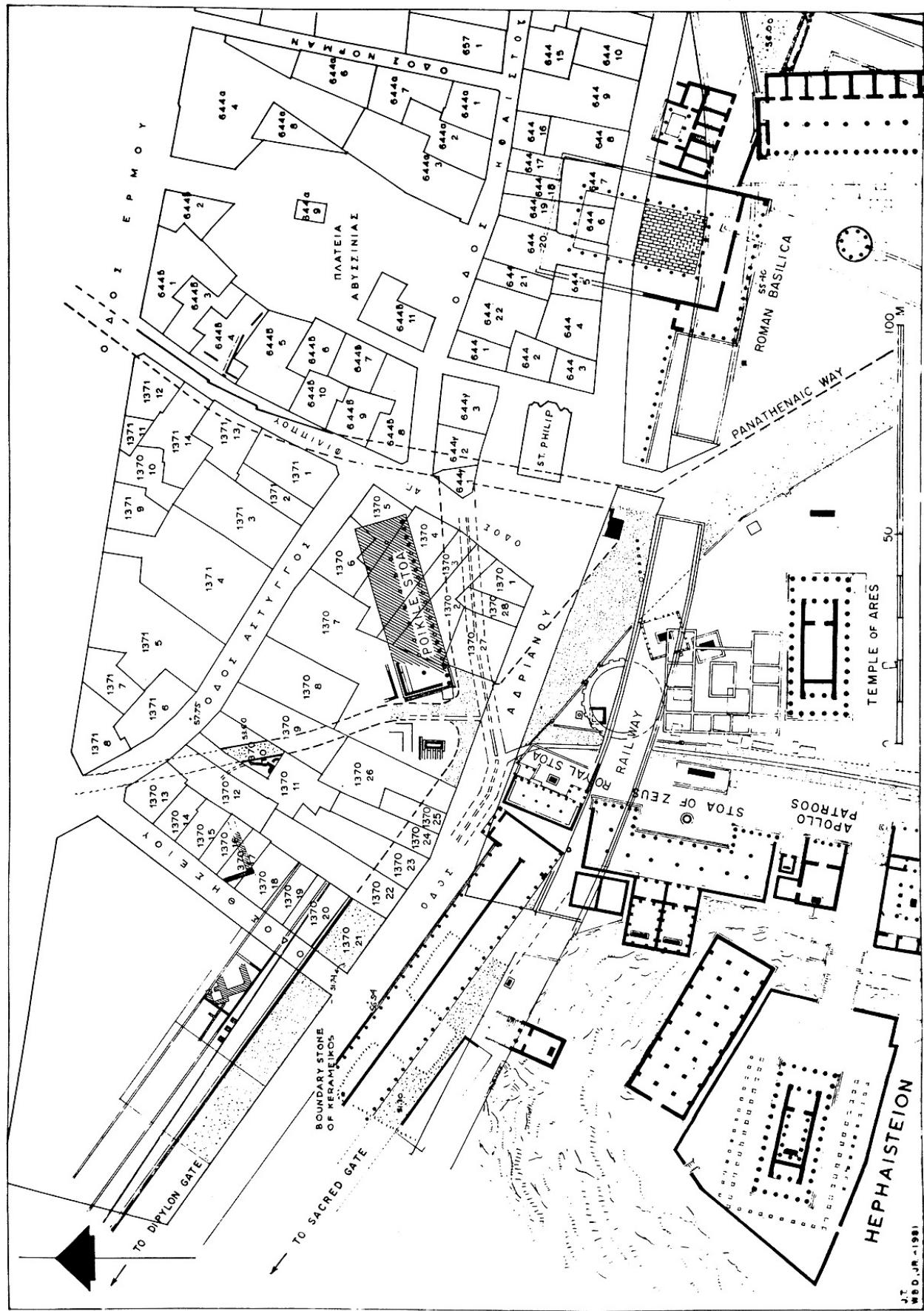




Fig. 1 Foundations of Early Roman Temple from south, with archaic Altar of Aphrodite Ourania in the foreground, on the axis of the temple

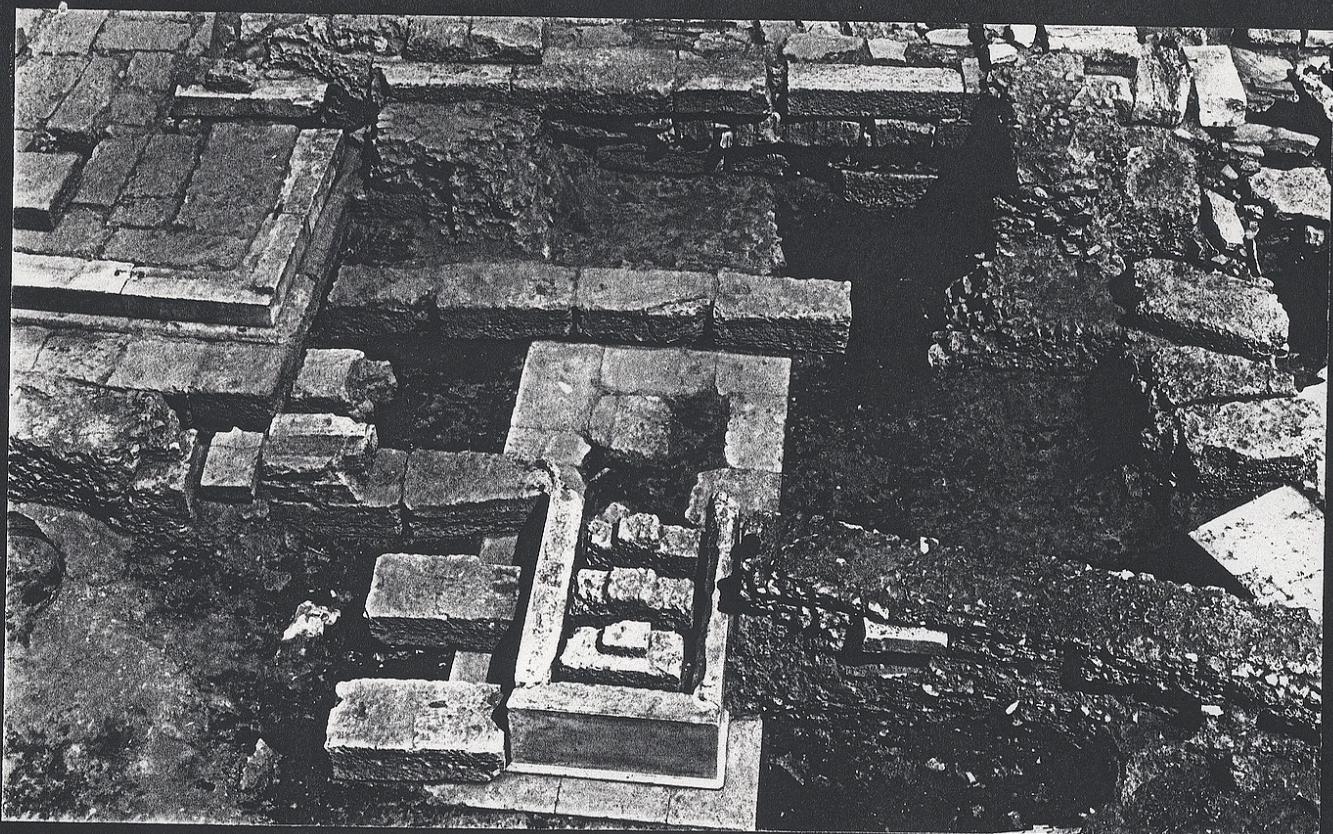


Fig. 2 Archaic altar, showing foundations for Roman altar platform

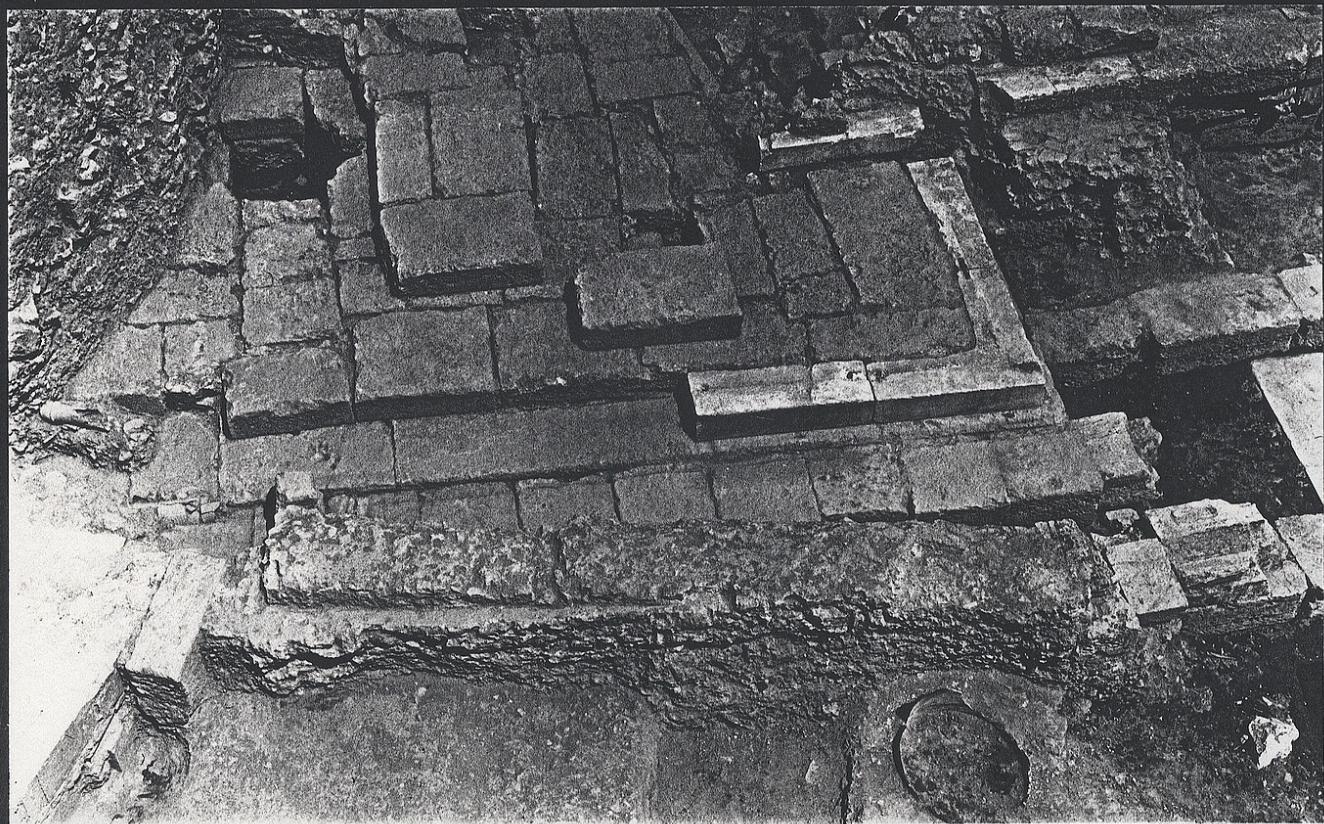


Fig. 3 Marble-stepped platform of poros blocks built against southwest corner of temple



Fig. 4 Ossuary cist beneath floor of Church of Aghios Nikolaos



Fig. 5 Church of Aghios Nikolaos, north wall beneath 19th century basement floor.
Basement steps in lower right corner. Cover slabs of Eridanos River channel at upper left



Fig. 6 Steps of temple, from west

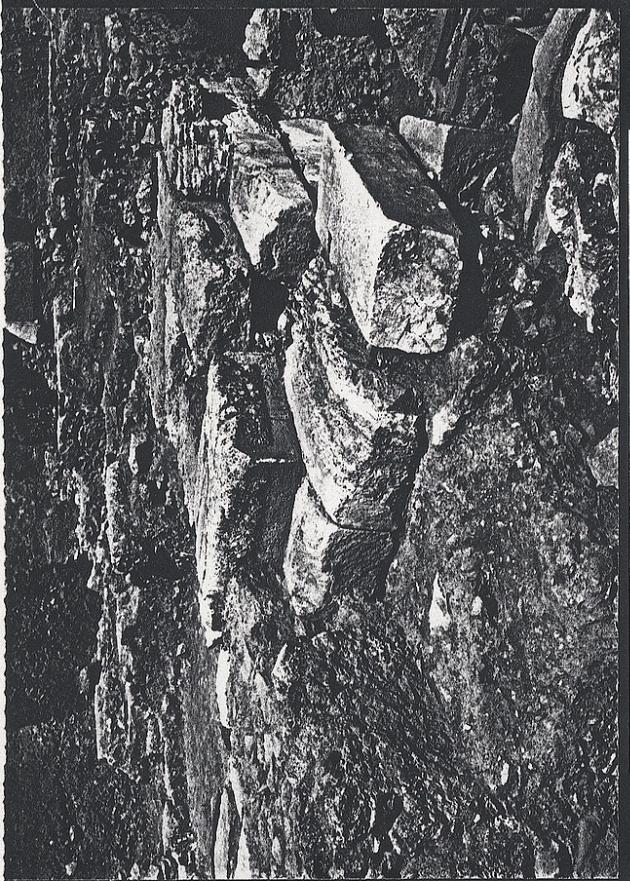


Fig. 7 Two steps of temple in situ at southeast corner



Fig. 8 Marble Ionic column base of temple



Fig. 9 Late Roman Bath, heating flue of apsidal hall

Fig. 12 An excavator sweeps the floor of a Byzantine room

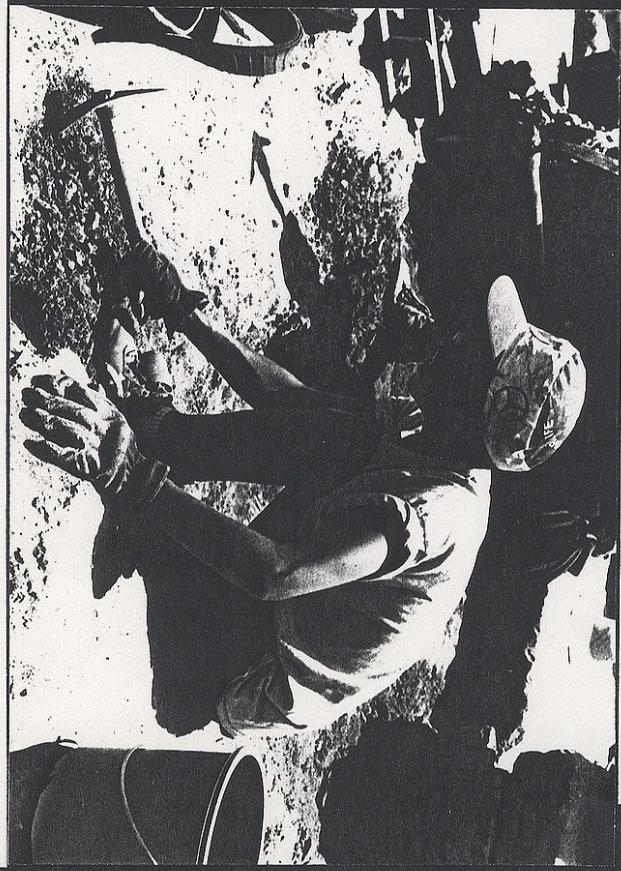


Fig. 13 An excavator digs through the floor after it was cleaned and recorded

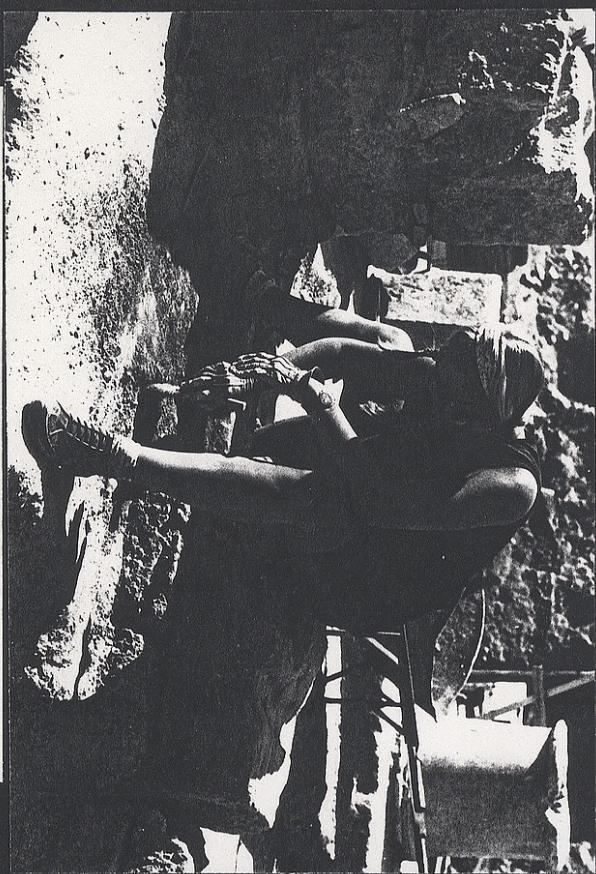


Fig. 10 A bucket of mud emerges from the Byzantine courtyard well



Fig. 11 Household pots as found in good condition in the well

