

REPORT ON EXCAVATIONS IN THE ATHENIAN AGORA 1991

To: The David and Lucile Packard Foundation

It is a pleasure to report at this time concerning the archaeological excavations in the Athenian Agora conducted by the American School of Classical Studies at Athens during the period from December 1990 to December 1991. A major portion of these activities was made possible by grants from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, which provided approximately two thirds of the total funding for the archaeological field work. The season's excavations began on June 10, 1991 and continued for nine weeks to August 9, 1991, but some weeks of preparatory work preceded the beginning of the archaeological excavations.

At the beginning of April, the School was finally able to complete the purchase of the large warehouse on Hastings Street, City Block 1370/8, which was funded by Grant #89-1570 (see my report of April 9, 1991). The modern building on the site was demolished by heavy equipment at the beginning of June, in order to prepare the area for excavation, and the highest two meters of modern debris were cleared away at that time. The earth accumulated from the previous season in the temporary dump on the site was likewise trucked away by heavy earth-moving machinery in preparation for the 1991 season.

Archaeological Results: The excavations of 1991 continued the work of the previous season in the two areas that lie on the north side of modern Hadrian Street to the east and west of the large property explored in the early 1980s. These are the two lots marked 1370/26 and 1370/27 on the plan (Fig. 1). The third area of excavation in 1991 was on the large property 1370/8 lying to the north of the previously excavated site on modern Hastings Street.

The most important results of the season's field work concern the topography on the north side of the Agora. Here it was possible to explore for the first time a section of the Eridanos River which we now know to have traversed the northern edge of the market square, and to have affected the architectural development of the area in all periods. The Eridanos passes through the Agora in a great masonry channel running from northeast to southwest until it crosses the line of the Panathenaic Way, where it swings northwestwards and follows the processional route toward the Kerameikos Cemetery, some half kilometer distant (Fig. 1). The channel has an overall width of 4.55 m. and a depth of 1.55 m., and it was divided down the center by a median wall which thus forms two parallel channels. Both channels were found to be covered by large flat cover slabs resting on one side wall and on half of the median wall (Figs. 3, 4). A good number of the slabs remained in place, although a few had cracked and subsided into the mud filling of the channel, and many appeared to be

later replacements of original slabs. The walls of both channels are constructed of beautifully squared ashlar blocks of poros set in three courses. These originally rested on poros floor slabs, 0.20 m. thick, but now almost completely eroded away by centuries of continuously flowing water (Fig. 9).

The Stoa Poikile was laid out almost exactly parallel to the Eridanos channel, and barely 3.50 m. distant from its northern edge (Figs. 2, 3). It is now clear that the stoa took its peculiar orientation, northeast to southwest, from the pre-existing line of the natural watercourse. The close relation of the two structures, taken together with the fine masonry of the channel, suggests that the river was first canalized as early as the second quarter of the 5th century B.C., at the same time as the heavy foundations for the stoa were being laid. Whether or not the cover slabs of the channel were originally exposed to view is not clear, but by later antiquity the slabs came to be covered by several layers of hard road gravel forming the well-traveled street in front of the Painted Stoa. At least one of the layers of road metal in front of the stoa was composed of rounded cobble stones, and in the paved surface which they formed the passage of heavy wheeled traffic had worn deep ruts. The Eridanos channels were evidently kept clear of silt throughout much of antiquity so that the river could flow freely; for the layer of ancient silt at the bottom of the northern channel produced pottery exclusively of the 5th and 6th centuries after Christ. At that time the northern channel appears to have been filled in and abandoned, at least in this section of its length. The southern channel, on the other hand, although it produced nothing earlier than the late Roman period, also yielded numerous Byzantine sherds in the lower part of its fill. The channel was clearly still in use in Byzantine times. In fact, manholes of the early 19th century suggest that the Eridanos was still used as a source of water until after the Greek War of Independence, and the southern channel did not fill up entirely until it came to be used as a sewer during the latter part of the 19th century.

To the west of the Stoa Poikile work continued in the area of the early Roman temple added in the Augustan period to the Sanctuary of Aphrodite Ourania. The fill within the foundations of the temple was excavated to the northern limit of the section, but no trace of the original rear wall of the temple came to light. It is now plain, however, that the building was heavily rebuilt as late as the 5th or even 6th century after Christ, and in the digging occasioned by this late antique construction, all the fill within the temple foundations was drastically disturbed. No further information concerning the original early Roman temple is likely to be discovered until the next modern property to the north can be acquired.

Just south of the Sanctuary of Aphrodite Ourania at the edge of the Panathenaic Way, a small stone-built drain carrying water toward the Eridanos yielded two most welcome epigraphical finds. The stone drain, at first exposed to view as an open channel on the surface of the street, came later to be covered with two marble stelai placed end to end (Fig. 15). Both stelai are completely preserved and are inscribed with the full texts of two decrees passed by the Council and the Assembly of Athens, and subsequently published on stone to be erected in the Agora. One is a decree of the late 3rd century B.C. honoring the Councillors of one tribe for their excellent performance of their duties during the month of the year in which they had formed the Executive Committee of the Council. The second decree, dating to the middle years of the 2nd century B.C., honors the Athenian ephebic corps, the military cadets, and their instructors for the fine display of their military training during the previous year.

The third major area excavated during the season just past lies north of the Stoa Poikile. Here initial clearing of the large newly acquired property on Hastings Street revealed the Byzantine phases of a building just behind the stoa (Figs. 6, 7). This building, facing west along the street that ran northwards from the corner of the Agora, forms the first private commercial structure outside the public area of the market square in this direction, and its remains give evidence of the great longevity even of ordinary, private Athenian buildings. The walls of the Byzantine building follow precisely the orientation of the earlier classical building on the site, two rooms of which were excavated in 1982. Built originally in the 4th century B.C., the building consists of a row of one or two room suites opening directly on to the street, and probably functioning as individual shops. Excavation of the original classical shops in the early 1980s revealed a series of stratified earth floors extending from the 4th century until the 1st century after Christ. The walls of the old building were later raised to a higher level in the rubble and concrete construction of late antiquity. Although the fabric of the building was doubtless severely damaged in the course of the dark ages, enough survived so that it was afterwards rebuilt again along substantially the same lines during the Middle Byzantine occupation of the site between the 9th and 13th centuries after Christ.

Volunteer Program: Once again the actual process of excavation was entrusted to a carefully selected group of student volunteer excavators. The students were divided into two teams in the field, and each group was supervised by one of the senior archaeologists on the Agora staff. As in recent years, we have tried to include in the excavating program both experienced excavators who have worked previously at the Agora, or on other archaeological excavations, and also students of classical antiquity who have never soiled their hands in archaeological field work. Of the 33 students who joined the excavating staff in 1991, 14 were returning

veterans of previous seasons, and several of these have now worked with us for three consecutive years. Of the 18 students who worked at the Agora for the first time in 1991, seven had acquired the skills of archaeological excavation on other sites, while 11 members of the group had had no prior experience of field work. That nearly two thirds of the staff were trained excavators had a direct bearing on the quality of the archaeological results. On a site that has been occupied continuously for 5,000 years, the stratification is usually complicated and telescoped, but more than that, the layers are often heavily disturbed by later digging and pillaging. It is fair to say that much of our understanding of the archaeology of the site, and many of the details reported above are directly due to the skillful excavation and careful observation of the student volunteers.

It is gratifying to be able to report also that the volunteer excavating program continues to be highly competitive and to attract large numbers of well-qualified applicants. The excavators of the 1991 season were selected from a pool of 97 applicants representing 47 North American colleges and universities, as well as four institutions in foreign countries. The 33 students who joined the Agora excavating staff in 1991 came from 22 different institutions in the United States and Canada, and from one in England: Bryn Mawr, Cambridge, Cincinnati, Dartmouth, Duke, Florida State, Georgia, Harvard, Indiana, Kansas, McMaster, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, North Carolina, Princeton, Smith, Texas, Vassar, Wesleyan, Wilfrid Laurier, William and Mary. Many of these fine young people are headed for careers in archaeology and classical studies, and it is a source of particular pleasure to have been able to introduce them to the archaeology of Athens by way of the excavations in the Agora. Figures 8 to 15 show various of the student excavators at work in different parts of the excavation.

Expenditures: Grant #91-3097 in the amount of \$100,460 from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation provided the principal funding for the season's excavations, and approximately two thirds of the expenditures were allocable to this grant. Expenditures for the first half of the calendar year 1991, prior to the excavation season, were charged entirely to Grant #90-1846 in the amount of \$150,000. The total actual expenditures for all aspects of the Agora Excavations for the year ended September 30, 1991 were \$167,006.16. Of this total \$98,449.98 were expended prior to the beginning of the excavations and were charged against Grant #90-1846. This includes the cost of demolishing the large modern warehouse on the newly acquired property, City Block 1370/8, operations which were carried out at the beginning of June. Grant #90-1846 can now be regarded as fully expended for the purposes for which the funds were donated.

During the excavation season, certain specific expenditures were allocated to Grant #91-3097. These included the

costs of housing and meals for the 33 student volunteer excavators, a portion of the costs for the small Greek labor crew, and a part of the costs for photographic, conservation, and office supplies, all these items as listed on the grant budget. The total actual expenditures allocable to Grant #91-3097 came to \$68,556.18. As anticipated in the budget, about half of the amount for supplies and services is expected to be spent during the winter and spring months, as processing, conservation, and photography of the finds progress. It should be noted in addition, that the item of \$25,000 for removal of earth from the excavation site will not be spent until the late spring of 1992 when preparations go forward for the 1992 season of excavations.

With respect to the future plans for the excavations, it is a pleasure to be able to report that the new conservative government of Greece, now in office for just over a year and a half, has created a much more favorable climate for foreign archaeological work in the country. In order to take advantage of the new conditions, the American School has opened negotiations during the summer and fall with the Ministry of Culture and with the Ministry of the Environment in an effort to have the government declare the expropriation of the remaining seven properties covering the east half of Block 1370. These lots are marked 1370/1-6 and 28 on the plan Figure 1. Although the School would still be required to provide funds for the purchase of the properties, an expropriation decree would make it mandatory that the owners sell to the Greek state at prices set by the courts. This process would greatly expedite our acquisition of the real estate which still covers all but one end of the Stoa Poikile. We shall keep the Foundation apprised of any developments in our negotiations over the next few months.

On behalf of the American School of Classical Studies and of all members of the Agora Excavation Staff, I have the honor once again to express our deep gratitude to the Board of Directors of the David and Lucile Packard Foundation. Your generous support of new excavations in Athens continues to have an important impact on the field of classical archaeology as a whole. As a direct result of the field work that you have sponsored, our knowledge of ancient Athens is greater and more detailed than of any other city of classical Greece; and those of us who are privileged to conduct the excavations offer you our warmest thanks.

Respectfully submitted,

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

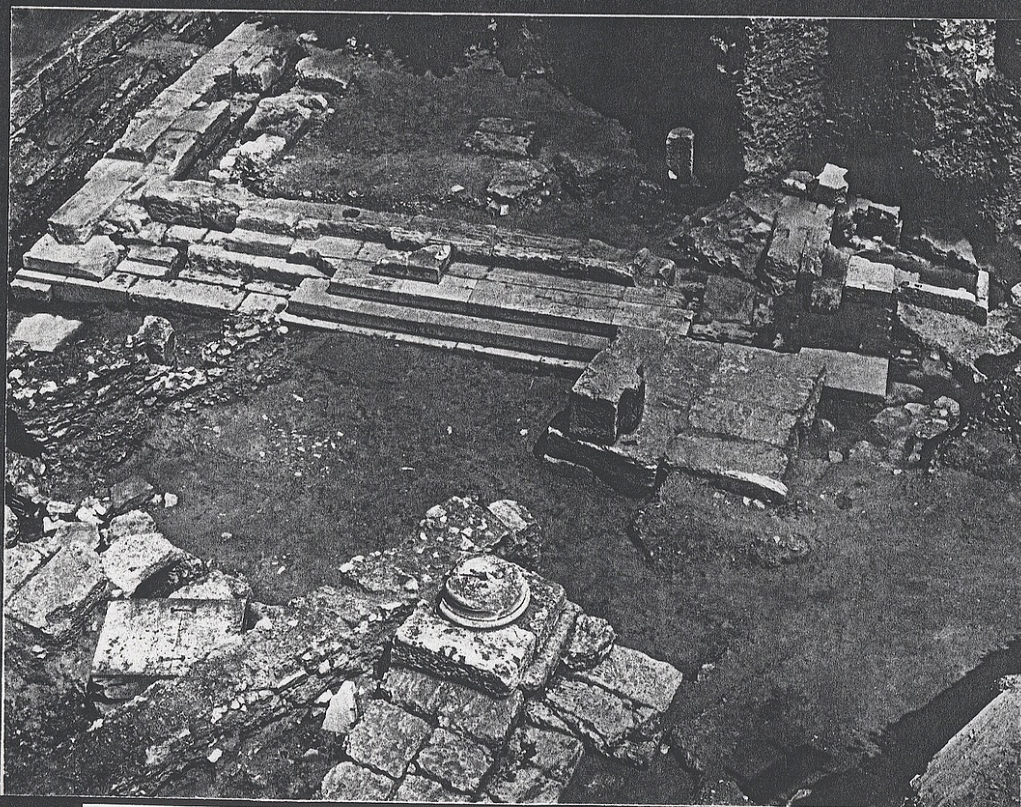


Fig. 2 West end of Stoa Poikile from southwest, showing preserved steps

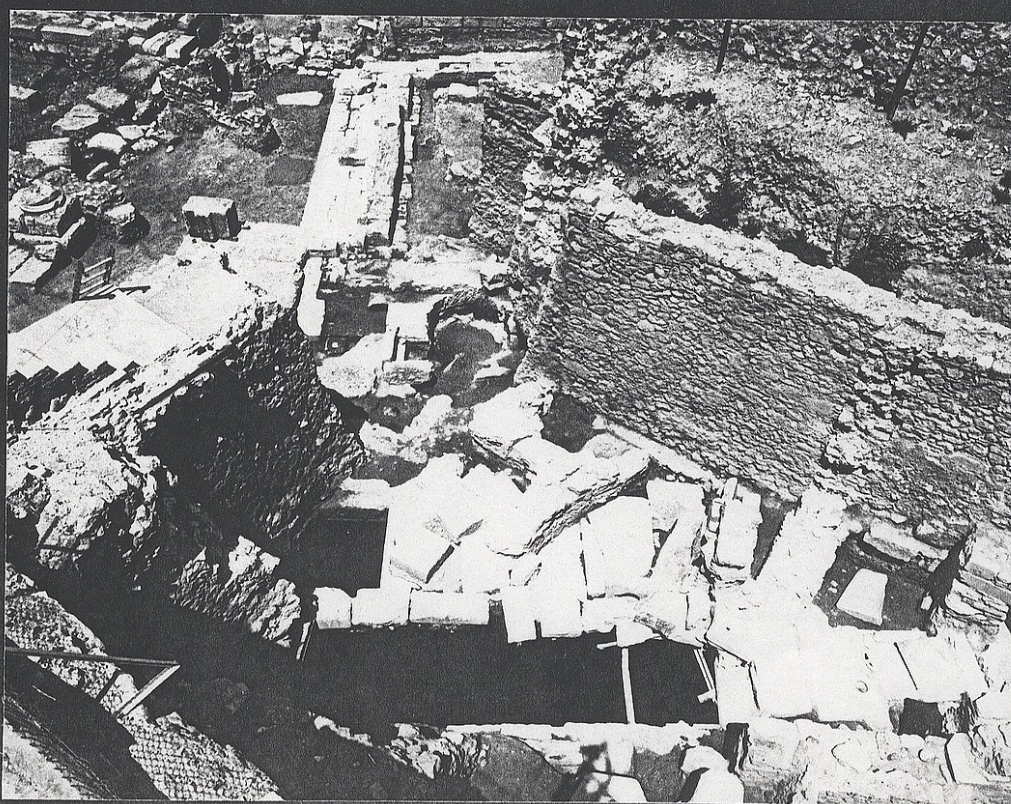


Fig. 3 The Eridanos Channel from the south, showing alignment with the Stoa Poikile behind



Fig. 4 The Eridanos Channel from above, showing double channel and some cover slabs in place



Fig. 5 Cobblestoned street before Stoa Poikile, showing monuments built against the first step



Fig. 6 Rooms of Middle Byzantine building from north, showing alignment with classical shops at top



Fig. 7 Highest floors of Middle Byzantine building from above



Fig. 8 Excavators at work clearing rooms of Middle Byzantine building



Fig. 9 Excavators clearing mud from the south channel of the Eridanos River



Fig. 10 An excavator uncovers worn floor slabs of the south channel of the river



Fig. 11 An excavator cleaning stratified earth floors of the Middle Byzantine rooms

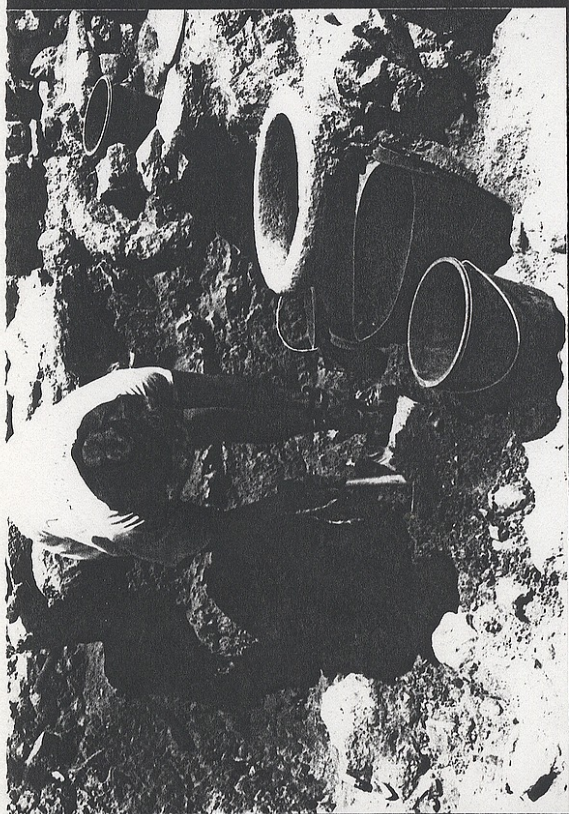


Fig. 12 An excavator digging fill around the mouth of a terracotta storage jar in a Byzantine room



Fig. 13 An excavator scrapes off an earth floor



Fig. 14 Excavators cleaning a skeleton of a Byzantine grave outside the church of Aghios Nikolaos

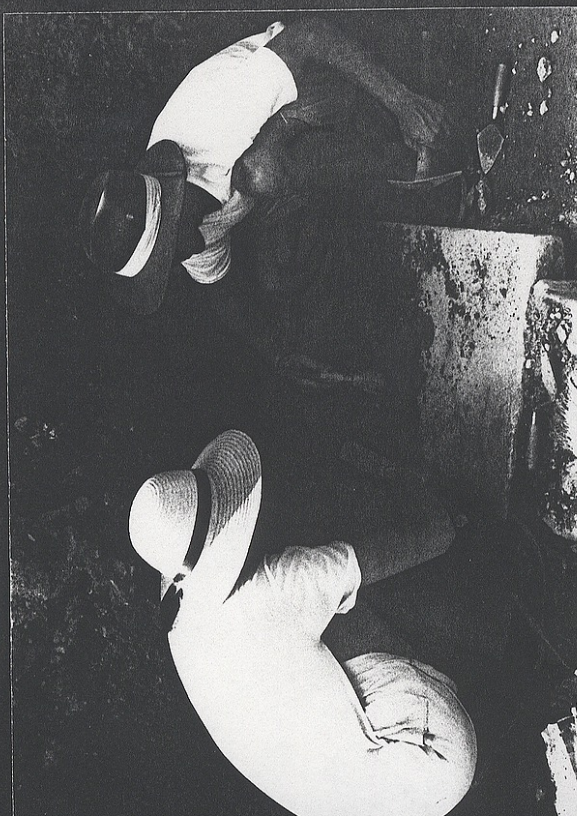


Fig. 15 Excavators cleaning earth from the two inscribed marble stelai re-used as cover slabs for a drainage channel

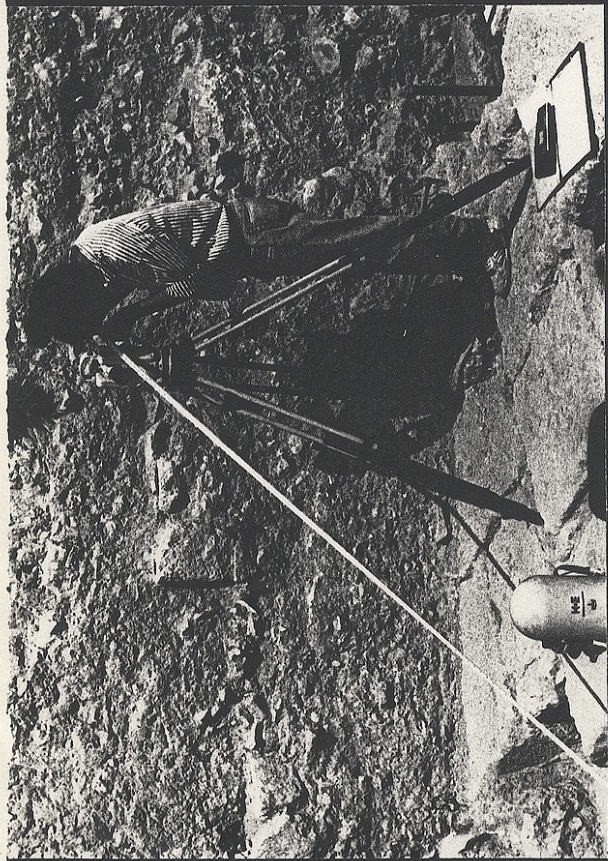


Fig. 14 An architect surveys the foundations of the Roman platform



Fig. 15 An excavator scrapes the blocks of the Roman foundations



Fig. 16 Fine tools help excavators to find hundreds of Roman coins in a hoard



Fig. 17 An excavator digs through destruction debris of the late Roman bath