

REPORT ON EXCAVATIONS IN THE ATHENIAN AGORA 1992

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 1991 to December 1992. 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 8, 1992 and continued for nine weeks to August 7, 1992.

Some weeks of preparatory work preceded the beginning of the archaeological excavations. The earth accumulated from the previous season in the temporary dump on the site was at that time trucked away by heavy earth-moving machinery in preparation for the 1992 season. The areas under investigation during the season were two in number: on the south side of Hastings Street beneath the modern property 1370/8, and along the north side of Hadrian Street beneath properties 1370/7 and 1370/27 (marked on the plan Fig. 1). In terms of the ancient topography the latter area lay at the northwest corner of the Agora, whereas the former area lay north of the market square along the street leading northwestwards out of the Agora.

Archaeological Results: At the northernmost end of the section, exploration of the highest preserved Byzantine levels brought to light a complex of two rooms bounded on the northeast and northwest by gravelled streets. A large rectangular room opened on to a courtyard toward the southwest by way of two wide openings, which were probably covered by arches (Fig. 2). The courtyard was provided with two successive floors cobbled with smooth river pebbles, of which the higher corresponded with the terracotta lid of a large storage jar set below the floor at the southern edge of the court. The adjacent room was evidently a storeroom for it was completely filled below floor level with three enormous pithoi, very substantially built of thick, hard lime mortar. The room is possibly to be understood as the storage space on the ground floor of a two story house, and living rooms on the floor above the storeroom might have been approached by a light wooden stairway rising from the neighboring courtyard. As elsewhere among the Middle Byzantine structures of this area, the stratigraphy suggested at least two phases in the use of the building. A group of pottery found in the central pithos of the storeroom (Fig. 2) shows that it was abandoned late in the 13th century A.D., whereas the pithos next to it on the northwest had gone out of use by the early 12th century. The third pithos, further to the south, produced the unusual number of 17 coins, of which preliminary analysis suggests that many date to the reign of Manuel I (A.D. 1143-1180), thus the pithos will have been filled in by the late 12th century.

At the edge of the street along the northeast wall of the building, there came to light a well that provided water for the neighborhood during two separate periods of use. The tile-lined well of the Roman period was first used in the 3rd century after Christ, and its original well-head of Hymettian marble was found in place. The shaft was partially cleaned out for re-use in Byzantine times, when its collar of rubble masonry was raised 0.90 m. The original marble puteal was found re-used upside down at the top of the collar (Fig. 2, upper left). The total depth of the well was 14.10 m. below the lip of the well-head, but only the lowest 0.85 m. of the shaft yielded undisturbed fill from the Roman period of use. This consisted of numerous micaceous water jars, mugs, two lamps, seven bone dice, a bronze jug, an iron knife with a wooden handle carved in the form of an eagle's head, and two dozen coins. From the very bottom of the well came also the single most notable find of the season, the small marble head of a herm preserved in pristine condition, and carved in the unmistakable style of the early classical period.

Higher in the well-shaft, and separated from the Roman filling by a layer of mud, was the fill of the Byzantine period of use. This was 6.00 m. deep and was almost solidly packed with literally dozens of coarse-ware water jars of various shapes, many of which emerged intact from the watery mud. The fill was so deep and the jars so numerous that it was possible to discern a clear development in their shapes from lowest to highest. Detailed analysis of the material should provide close dating for this sequence of development, because a group of 30 coins was found scattered at various levels through the period-of-use fill. Four of these coins, in excellent condition and readily identifiable, were in fact recovered in correct stratigraphic sequence. All proved to be folles of Anonymous Byzantine type, of which the lowest was datable to the period A.D. 976-1030, and the highest belongs to the period A.D. 1042-1055. By far the greatest part of the fill from the Byzantine period of use seems to have accumulated in the shaft during the last quarter of the 10th century and the first half of the 11th century. The highest 4.00 m. of the well-shaft contained debris that appeared to have been deliberately dumped in to close the well. Quantities of broken tiles and stones suggested the destruction of nearby buildings, and the pottery was broken into small fragments as is characteristic of dumped fills. Large amounts of green and brown painted ware and of fine sgraffito show that the well was closed and abandoned in the first half of the 12th century.

Further to the southeast along the street which at all times defined the topography of this area was a small two-room structure of Middle Byzantine date, whose builders made use of pre-existing walls built in the rubble and concrete fabric of late antiquity. The plan consists of two adjacent rooms of equal width (3.30 m.), of which the eastern was deeper than the western although not so well preserved. A tile pavement was partly preserved in the western room, and beneath this

floor the discovery of three tile-lined burial cists indicated the identity of the building as a small chapel, of which the western room was the narthex. Two of the cists were cut through the tile floor of the narthex and contained a variety of human bones representing several individuals, including children. The third cist, considerably deeper than the others, contained a single extended burial placed with the head toward the west. The east room of the chapel also contained a burial cist that had been greatly disturbed in later times. Traces of plaster on the rubble face of the foundation separating the narthex from the east room give evidence of a vaulted cist 1.15 m. wide and 1.15 m. deep, but only the burials on the floor of the cist chanced to survive at all. Here was found a mass of human bones much broken and disturbed, and preserved in very brittle and friable condition. The east end of the chapel was terribly mutilated by late disturbances, but it was possible to recognize a small segment of foundation for a single polygonal apse which would have formed the eastern termination of the little building.

In the extreme southeast corner of the excavated area, the season's work began with further investigation of the church of Aghios Nikolaos, prior to removal of its badly preserved foundations (Fig. 3). It is now plain that the church had a long life beset with many vicissitudes. Although several phases in its history can now be distinguished, the architectural remains are so exiguous that a detailed reconstruction of the building in any period must remain highly conjectural. The original construction of the church seems to have been Middle Byzantine, but the only remains of this period are the foundations for a central polygonal apse (Fig. 3, upper right) and for a western narthex. The north side has been completely obliterated by later digging in the Eridanos Channel, and the south side must lie beneath Hadrian Street. In its original form the church was built on a site previously occupied by domestic architecture of the 9th and 10th centuries, of which several walls and at least one pithos were found under the remains of the church. The earliest burial at the west end of the building was a single tile-lined cist, dug in 1991, and the green and brown painted and sgraffito sherds found here provide a terminus ante quem in the first half of the 12th century for the first period of the church. Since the burial lay directly beneath the west wall of the narthex, that structure must necessarily have been an addition to the original church. It is to be noted that the six burial cists in the west half of the nave, as well as its north foundation uncovered in 1990 and 1991, all share an orientation a few degrees north of east, whereas the earliest foundations were oriented exactly with the compass points. These remains should belong to a third phase and major rebuilding of the church. The new orientation had been adopted, and at least one of the burial cists was in use by the end of the 13th or the beginning of the 14th century, for the easternmost cist produced two fragmentary bowls of that date, which were apparently used to burn incense at the time of interment.

The great double channel of the Eridanos River was the third principal focus of the season's field work (Figs. 6-7). The north channel of the masonry canal, barely tested in 1991, was explored for a length of about 6.00 m. where its cover slabs had not been preserved, at the point where the river passes under the scarp of Hadrian Street. The north wall of the channel proved to be of even finer construction than the south and median walls that were partly exposed last year. It consisted of ashlar blocks of poros laid in four regular courses with carefully spaced joints (Fig. 4). The lowest course projected 0.12 m. forward from the face of the wall and rested on poros pavement slabs laid with equal care, and clearly of uniform construction with the north wall (Fig. 5). In the limited area opened this season, this original pavement was found to be everywhere intact, and it formed an overall depth of the north channel of 2.08 m. At both ends of the excavated part of the channel, poros floor slabs forming a later secondary floor were preserved at a level 0.44 m. higher than the original pavement (Fig. 5). A layer of silt and gravel, which had gathered between the two sets of paving slabs, produced pottery of the last quarter of the 5th century B.C., by which date the raised floor of the channel should have been installed.

Further cleaning of the walls and floor of the south channel helped to corroborate the evidence of the north. It is now clear that the ashlar masonry of the south and median walls is not so carefully constructed as that of the north wall. Although the poros floor slabs of the south channel were thought last year to have been completely eroded away by the running water, sections of its pavement have now been uncovered in a few places, while in the rest of the channel the natural bedrock of the river bed has been exposed (Figs. 6-7). In the south channel, however, the poros pavement was found to lie 0.28 m. higher than the raised secondary floor of the north channel, which in turn was exactly level with the natural bedrock to the south. These circumstances suggest that what survives of the original canalization of the river are the north wall and the earlier, lower pavement adjacent to it. By the late 5th century B.C., the river channel was greatly increased, perhaps nearly doubled, in width. The median wall was inserted to reduce the huge span required of the cover slabs, and the floor levels of the two channels, thus formed, were brought into closer conformity.

The disturbed cover slabs were also removed from the easternmost exposed portion of the south channel, and this shed light on an interesting episode in the history of the Eridanos (Fig. 7). The early German archaeologist Ludwig Ross explored the south channel of the river in 1832 and has left a vivid account of his adventure. Having descended 7.00 m. in a manhole near the Metropolis Cathedral, Ross traversed the canal beneath Pandrosos and Hephaistos Streets until he was forced by a collapse to surface near St. Philip's Church

(Fig. 1). Another manhole further west in the vicinity of the "Theseion Gardens" enabled him to reach the river again and thence to move eastwards. At a point which he specified as under the first houses west of St. Philip's, Ross described seeing a row of some twenty poros column drums of Doric order set vertically in the north wall of the channel, about 1.50 m. apart. The excavations of this season exposed the first columns of this series: one drum, evidently dislodged by later digging in the 19th century, was removed from the channel; two others are visible exactly as Ross described them at the eastern end of the exposed channel (Fig. 7 top); two more were seen and recorded in place by intrepid excavators who crawled like Ross beyond the limit of the excavations. The Doric drums are of appropriate stone, dimensions, and workmanship to have come from the Stoa Poikile, and they were undoubtedly lifted from the stylobate of the stoa, not 3.00 m. distant, and re-used in late antiquity to support the median wall of the Eridanos Canal.

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 had no previous training in archaeological field work. Of the 33 students who joined the excavating staff in 1992, nine were returning veterans of previous seasons. Of the 24 students who worked at the Agora for the first time in 1992, nine had acquired the skills of archaeological excavation on other sites, while 15 members of the group had had no prior experience of field work.

It is gratifying to be able to report once again that the volunteer excavating program continues to be highly competitive and to attract large numbers of well-qualified applicants. The excavators of the 1992 season were chosen from a pool of 84 applicants who were degree candidates at no fewer than 60 North American colleges and universities, as well as three institutions in foreign countries. The 33 students who joined the Agora excavating staff in 1992 were enrolled at 23 different institutions in the United States and Canada, and at one in England: Boston, British Columbia, Bryn Mawr, Cambridge, Cincinnati, Concordia, Dartmouth, Harvard, Indiana, Kansas, Loyola Marymount, Maryland, Missouri, New York University, North Carolina, Pomona, Princeton, Rice, Smith, Trinity, Tufts, Tulane, and Virginia. 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.

Expenditures: Grant #92-4163 in the amount of \$101,705 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. Certain expenditures incurred during the first half of the calendar year 1992, prior to the excavation season, were allocable to Grant #91-3097 in the amount of \$100,460. The total actual expenditures for all aspects of the Agora Excavations for the year ended September 30, 1992 were \$153,875.52. Of this total \$31,903.82 were expended prior to the beginning of the excavations and were charged against Grant #91-3097, which 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 #92-4163. 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 #92-4163 came to \$65,772.75. 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 \$18,000 for removal of earth from the excavation site will not be spent until the late spring of 1993 when preparations go forward for the next season of excavations.

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.
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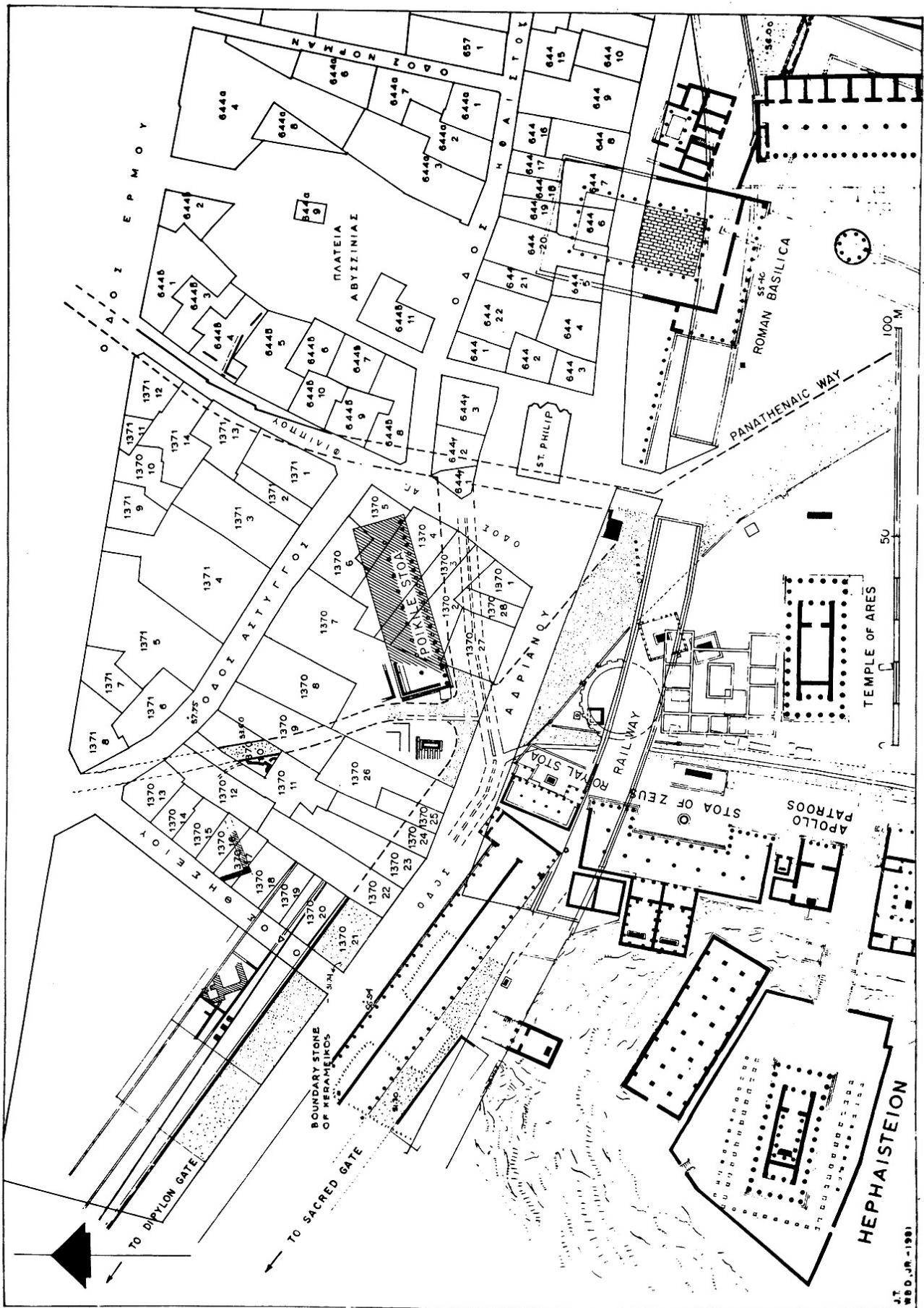




Fig. 2 Middle Byzantine house from west, showing storeroom with three pithoi (center) and courtyard with storage jar (right). The public well is at upper left



Fig. 3 Foundations of the Church of Aghios Nikolaos from south



Fig. 4 Eridanos River Channel, detail of masonry of north wall



Fig. 5 North Channel from east, showing original and raised pavements



Fig. 7 Eridanos River Channel from west. Two Doric column drums in place in median wall are at top center



Fig. 6 Eridanos River Channel from east, showing cover slabs of north channel in place (lower right)