

Agora Excavations 1995 Preliminary Report

Excavations in the Athenian Agora were carried out from June 12 to August 4, 1995. The work represented a continuation of the exploration of areas investigated in 1994: The Panathenaic Way, west of the Poikile Stoa, and in and around the Classical commercial building north of the Poikile Stoa.

In the Panathenaic Way we continued the exploration of the Classical levels of the road. The composition of the road fills changes dramatically over time. In the 4th century levels we had standard road metal with packed gravel making up an occasionally rough but well-worn surface. In the second half of the fifth century, however, the road fills were far more carefully prepared. The earth was evidently screened to remove almost all stones larger than 0.03-0.05 m. across and the resultant fill was laid smooth and then packed hard. Some 15 of these especially prepared surfaces were investigated representing only a half meter or so of depth, and all apparently dating to the second half of the 5th century BC. It is not entirely clear why such pains were taken to produce such a fine series of surfaces at this period, though a race track seems one possibility. Below were three or four more hard gravelly road surfaces and beneath that a very deep, loose fill of sand and gravel deposited in the 2nd quarter of the 5th century. This deep fill would seem to represent a major rearrangement following the Persian sack of Athens in 479 BC. The fill contained several bronze arrowheads, a few broken bits of early architecture, and signs of burning. Time and a high water table prevented us from getting below this heavy fill to see if the road followed the same course in the archaic period. It seems possible that it did not and once took a more southerly route across the Agora. In none of the road surfaces did we encounter ruts or any sign that wheeled traffic used the road in the Classical period.

North of Hadrian street, we continued our exploration of the levels overlying the Classical commercial building which lined the east side of the street leading northward from the Agora between the Stoa Poikile and the sanctuary of Aphrodite. More of both the western and eastern walls of the

third room from the south were found, along with the remnants of a handsome cement-lined basin built into its northeast corner. The building was in use from the early 4th century BC until the first century AD. Each shop has its own stratigraphic sequence reflecting the history of that particular unit, and this season we did not excavate any undisturbed floor levels from the period of use of the building. In the fill overlying the floors of Room 3 and the area to the north, several outstanding terra-cotta pieces were found: a tiny relief figure of a gilded dancing maenad (Fig. 1); an unusually well modelled head of a horse (Fig. 2), reminiscent of those on the Parthenon frieze; and a piece showing in relief a satyr moving right in a pose and style which comes very close to the figures on the Lysikrates monument of the 4th century BC (Fig. 3). The suggestion that at least one of the shops produced and sold terra-cotta figurines is further borne out by a small deposit (J 1:1) from behind the building to the northeast. Here a shallow pit was found, full of fragmentary pottery, pieces of terracotta figurines, and several moulds. The date of the pottery, coins, and lamps found with the terracottas was second half of the 1st century and early 2nd century AD. One lamp, showing two gladiators and a Latin inscription, was clearly an import and similar examples have been found as far away as Southern Gaul (Fig. 4). Several of the pieces of pottery were also imported. The terracottas include a head of Pan, the head of a grotesque (Fig. 5), and fragments of arms, legs, and drapery of assorted hollow figurines, many of them made from very worn moulds. There are also several fragments of 4-spoked wheels, presumably for attachment to toy horses and the like. The mould for making these wheels, of the appropriate diameter, was recovered from the same pit, along with the front and back moulds for an armed figure, and the front mould for a boar (Figs. 6-8). This new deposit should be of some significance as it partially fills a gap in our knowledge of the active Athenian figurine industry. Numerous deposits allow us to trace the history and development of the workshops and their products from the 4th to 1st centuries BC and again in the 3rd and 4th centuries AD, but hitherto the 1st and 2nd centuries AD have been poorly represented.

After the abandonment of the Classical commercial building in the 1st century AD, the area was next used in the Late Roman period. Only small patches of stratified fills and tiled or mortared floors of the 4th and 5th centuries AD - together with small stretches of walls which form no coherent

plan - survived the extensive habitation and use of the area in the 10th and 11th centuries AD. The large drain in the street immediately to the west shows a long history with numerous renovations, also in the Late Roman period. It had big U-shaped tiles at the bottom, with side walls built of flat tiles, and shallow curving cover tiles. Coins and lamps found in the silt which eventually choked the drain suggest that it went out of use in the 6th century AD, as did a shallow well (J 2:6) found just to the east. This abandonment in the 6th century is presumably to be associated with the Slavic invasion of the 580's, evidence for which was encountered last season further to the north. There are indications of more substantial Late Roman remains west of the north-south street, and it may be this eastern area saw only secondary and peripheral use.

West of the Stoa Poikile, we completed the clearing of the Late Archaic well, first begun in 1994. Collapsing bedrock made it necessary to shore up the top two meters of the shaft, which below the collapse was cut through bedrock and lined with stones. The interior diameter of the well was 0.92m. and the depth 5.80m. The lowest 0.75 contained the period of use fill, numerous coarse-ware amphoras, kadoi, and pitchers which were dropped or broken as water was drawn from the well. Above that was a layer ca 0.75m thick full of pottery of a different character: along with coarse wares, there were numerous pieces of black-glazed pottery and about a dozen figured pieces (Figs. 9, 10). Much of the pottery was recovered intact or mended up to whole shapes and it seems clear that it was all deliberately discarded. The range of shapes and quality suggests that it represents all the pottery one might expect to find in a single Athenian household. The date of the material range from 510 to 480 BC. The figured pieces are of high quality, almost all of them appropriate for the symposium. There were 6 red-figured cups or kylikes. Three show young men in various poses and are close in style to the cup painters in the Epeleios group and Skythes (Figs. 11-13). Though perhaps painted by different individuals, these three pieces are very close in shape and size and may well form a set, bought all together from a single workshop. The fourth cup has an owl, the fifth an unusual wheel motif, and the sixth may have been bought for the young heir of the house: it is much smaller and has scenes of youths duelling without weapons, painted in an almost cartoon style. There is also a very large black-figured skyphos, big enough to

have served as a small krater, decorated with banqueters, musicians, and birds (Fig. 14). To pour and keep the wine there was a red-figured pelike and a black-figured trefoil oinochoe. The pelike, perhaps painted by the Nikoxenos painter, was decorated with two single figures: on one side is a strolling musician carrying his lyre, perhaps on the way to a party; on the other side a youth recovers from the party by sticking his fingers down his throat (Figs. 15-16). The oinochoe, close in style to the Athena painter, shows a seated armed Athena being approached by Herakles leading up a bull, watched by Hermes (Fig. 9, top). A small black-figured amphoriskos has a Dionysiac assembly. An unusual piece is the handsome phiale decorated within with six spotted bulls done in added white or red, with no incision, apparently in imitation of a metal prototype (Fig. 10, center). Similar phialai are known from the Athenian Acropolis, but they are not common. This phiale and a terracotta relief protome of a goddess are the only pieces with possible cult associations; even though the well is less than ten meters north of the altar of Aphrodite, the vast majority of the material is appropriate for regular domestic use. Above this mass of pottery there was a deep layer of stones, apparently from the collapse of the lining in the upper part of the shaft, and above that a layer of broken bedrock. Together these two layers would seem to represent the deliberate destruction and filling of the well, presumably at the hands of the Persians in 479 BC. At the top was an additional fill, dug last year, with more fragmentary pottery which seems to represent cleaning-up operations when the Athenians returned; the wall of an early Classical house was then built partially over the mouth of the old abandoned well. The group is of interest as it provides one of our most complete pictures of the range of coarse, fine, and figured pottery to be found in an Athenian household of 510-480 BC. The well also adds to our picture of the area north of the Eridanos river where public buildings, sanctuaries, and private houses crowded close in together at the northwest corner of the Agora square.

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1. Gilded terra-cotta appliqué figure of a dancing maenad, ca 330-300 BC.
The piece is one inch high.



2. Terra-cotta head of a horse - 4th century BC.



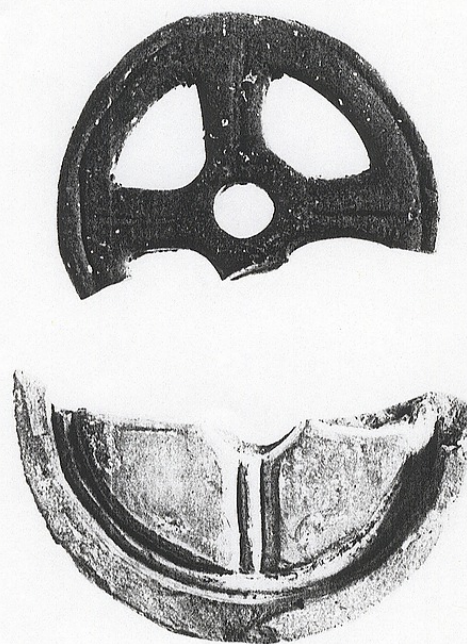
3. Terra-cotta relief of a dancing satyr, 4th century BC.
The pose, found also on the Lysikrates monument, became a popular one. The detail suggests that this is adapted or even an impression taken from metal-work.



4. Lamp showing two gladiators and a referee.
The combatants are named in the Latin inscription below: Sabinus and Popillius. These same two are known from other lamps found as far away as Switzerland. Dated ca 70-100 AD.



5. Terra-cotta heads of a grotesque (left) and Pan (right). Hellenistic (2nd - 1st BC?)



6. Terra-cotta wheel and a mould for making such a wheel. For attachment to a toy horse. Second half of 1st century AD.



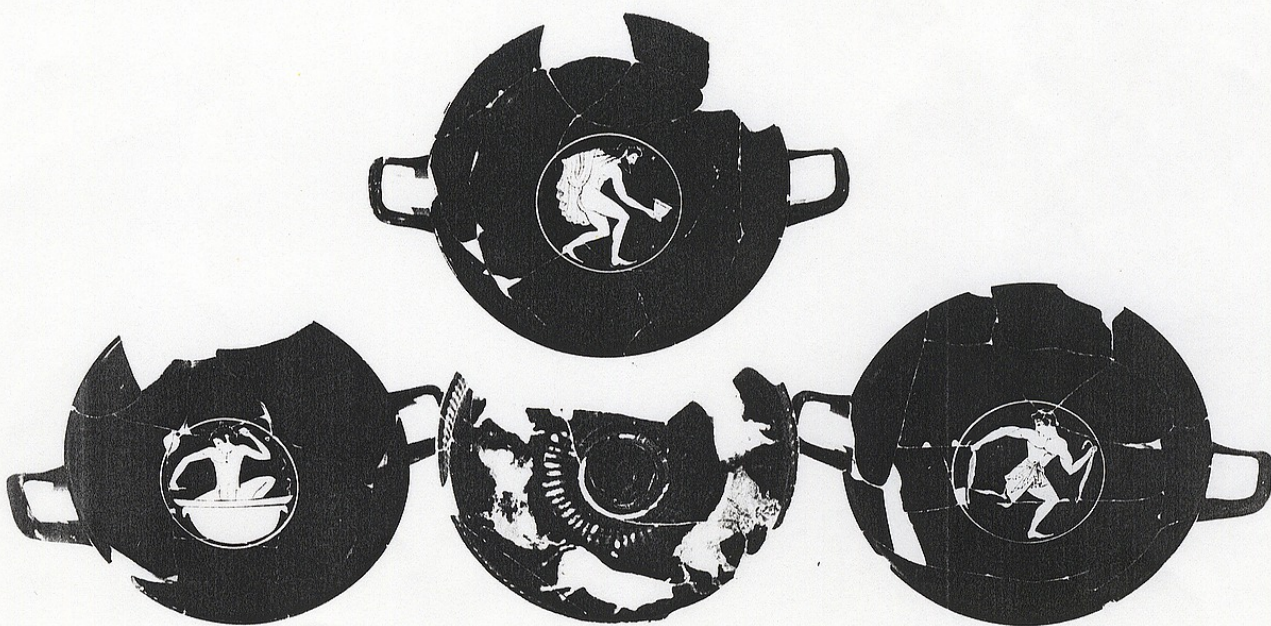
7. Casts taken from moulds of late 1st century AD: a boar and the front and back of a youthful warrior.



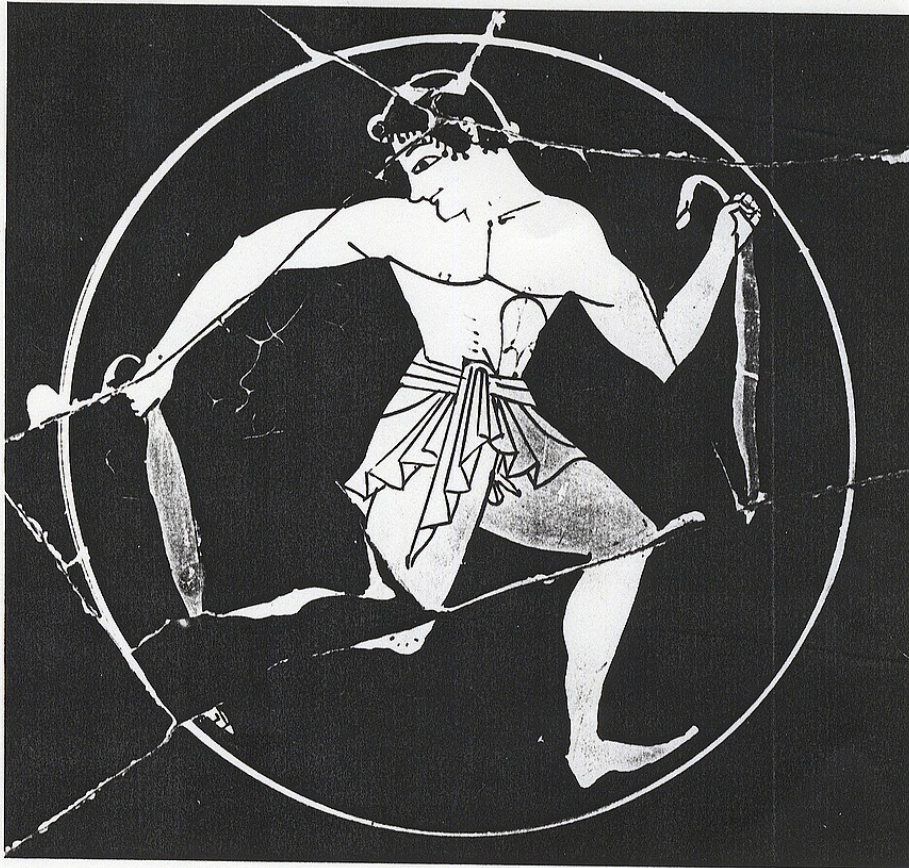
8. Mould for a terra-cotta figurine of a warrior - 1st century AD.



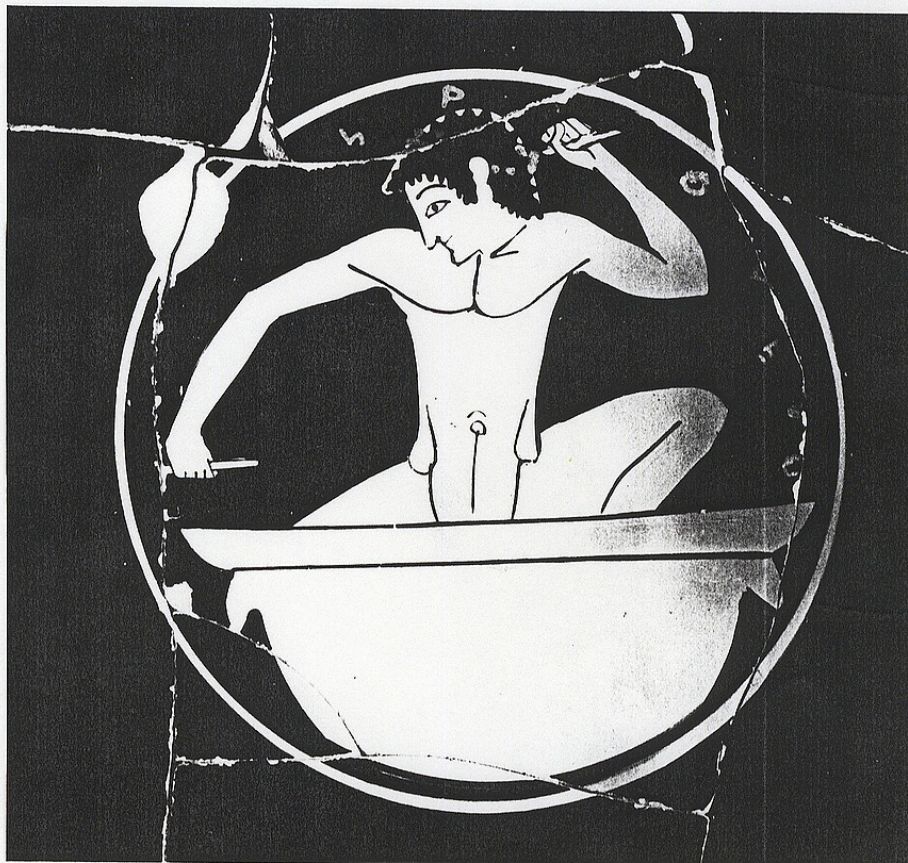
9. A selection of black-and red-figured vases from the late archaic well: 510-480 BC.



10. Three red-figured kylikes (drinking cups) and a phiale (for pouring ritual libations) from the late archaic well (510-480 BC).



11. Detail of red-figured cup: slave boy bringing strips of meat.
Style close to the painter Skythes: 510-480 BC.



12. Detail of red-figured cup: youth bathing. Epeleios group:
510-480 BC.



13. Detail of red-figured cup: bearded man on his way to the party with his skyphos (drinking cup): 510-480 BC.



14. Black-figured skyphos: banqueters and a musician, with birds; an unusual scene in Greek art. The birds, standing on tree-stumps, suggest the scene takes place outside; also unusual are the headdresses (bulls' heads?) worn by the banqueters. Perhaps a scene of ritual or from the theater. Ca 510-480 BC.



15. Red-figured Pelike.
A lyre-player on his
way to the party.
Nikoxenos painter:
510-480 BC.



16. Reverse of no. 15.
A youth recovering
from the party.