

## AGORA EXCAVATIONS

### 1998 summary

Excavations were carried out in the Athenian Agora from June 6 to July 31, 1998 with a team of some 40 American students representing 25 universities and colleges. This brief preliminary summary is the result of their hard work and good will, along with that of the four supervisors: Kevin Daly, Lee Ann Riccardi, David Scahill, and Geoffrey Schmalz, together with their assistants, Mark Alonge, Karen Donohue, Laura Gawlinski, and Anne McCabe. Primary funding for this work was provided by the David and Lucile Packard Foundation. All digging this year was confined to the area of recent excavations, outside the northwest corner of the Agora square, in Sections BE and BZ.

Most of the effort this season went into the upper levels at the extreme northwest, where the modern building on city plot 1370/9 was demolished late last summer. This has opened up a new area for exploration some 280 square meters in area (plate 1). Most of the work was confined to the upper, late strata which were preserved to a satisfactorily high level under the modern building, the basement of which was confined to the northernmost quarter of the trench. Just south of the basement, stratified levels of the *Ottoman, Venetian, Frankish, and Byzantine levels* were explored. The principal feature uncovered was the north-south road which runs through the area, preserved here to a level almost a meter higher than encountered anywhere else thus far. The uppermost surfaces were defined by late walls, made of large reused blocks, indicating that the street is some 2.60 meters wide as it passes through the area. The highest road surface was characterized by an open stone-built drain which runs down the middle of the street. The sides were built of reused blocks, several of marble, all showing signs of wear from considerable foot traffic. Only the uppermost levels were uncovered this season, but it seems clear that in future seasons we will be in a position to explore some two thousand years of stratified road deposits dating from ca. AD 1500 to 500 BC.

At either end of the trench the tops of the walls and the mouths of large storage jars (pithoi) of the Middle Byzantine settlement, dating to the 10th and 11th centuries, were uncovered.

One of the attractions of this new area is that it allows us to link up the recently excavated material lying to the east and south with a small building plot lying immediately to the west. This plot was excavated by Eugene Vanderpool and John Travlos in 1958, before a modern 5-storey building was constructed over the site. (Plate 1 is taken from the roof of this building). It contained the northern continuation of our street, along with medieval house remains and the curving walls of a large Late Roman bath, all of which can be expected to appear in our new area of excavation as well.

We also continued exploring the area of the Classical commercial building behind the Painted Stoa. In the street outside the southernmost shop we cleared the contemporary road levels of the late 5th century BC. In one layer we recovered an *ostrakon of the Athenian general Nikias*, son of Nikeratos (plate 3), who was a candidate in 417 BC. He escaped exile by agreeing with his main adversary, Alcibiades, to have their supporters unite to vote against the hapless Hyperbolos, who was duly exiled. This result was such an obvious perversion of the system that the Athenians abandoned the procedure of ostracism and never used it again. Ostraka from this final ostracism are extremely rare and this is only the second known example carrying the name of Nikias to have been found in the Agora excavations.

Behind the Classical building we encountered another deposit of pottery dating to the years just after the Persian destruction of the city, the third such group to have been found in the area.

Excavating within the building itself, we explored levels deep under the floor of Room 2. Here a large cutting in sterile fill soon proved to be a *Mycenaean chamber tomb* (J/K 2: 2, plate 2). The scattered and shattered bones along the north side represent the remains of at least two individuals. They were accompanied by at least 9 pots, most with painted decoration (plate 4), found more or less *in situ* where they had been smashed when the roof collapsed. Prominent among them were a ewer decorated with linked clusters of spirals, a jug with cut-away neck decorated with curving stripes, two squat alabaster, and a cup. Also recovered from the tomb were a

bronze spear-point with a heavy central ridge and a bronze dagger with gilded rivets (plate 5). The date of the tomb would seem to be LH IIIA (14th century BC), the same date as the vast majority of chamber tombs known from Athens and somewhat earlier than the floruit of so many of the Argolid sites in LH IIIB. This is the first substantial Mycenaean deposit to be excavated in the Agora in over thirty years.

A *second chamber tomb* soon came to light some 10 meters to the north (K 2: 5, plate 2). It also contained scattered bones and fragments of Mycenaean painted pottery, mending up to some eight vessels, along with an intact small bowl with a high-swung handle (plate 6). Two painted clay figurines were also recovered, one a standing lady with ponytail, the other a female figure seated in a three-legged throne (plate 7). Bronze objects included two daggers and a knife blade. The bronzes from this tomb suggest that it is among the richest of the burials in this period from the Agora excavations. The water sieve also produced hundreds of small beads in various materials: shell, stone, faience, and carnelian (plates 8, 10). Amongst them, and apparently part of this necklace, was a small carnelian scarab (plate 9). The tiny beads, the faience, and the scarab all suggest some Egyptian influence, though there is no reason at this stage to suppose the necklace is an import rather than a local imitation. Foreign imports to Athens at this period are rare. The particular significance of these two moderately rich new tombs is that they are by far the earliest graves yet known in the area north of the Eridanos river, and extend the life (?) of the cemetery there back by some 300 years.

We also spent the summer developing a more active use of computers for the excavation and archives (record-keeping, a web-site, videos and quick-time movies on the site). A demonstration CD is nearing completion and will be available in the winter of 1999. The illustrations for this report are the result of experiments with digital cameras, scanners, and printers.

Next season we plan to excavate in the same areas, exposing more of the Medieval and late Roman remains as well as the Bronze Age cemetery. Supplementary digging is also planned for one or two Classical houses on the slopes of the Areopagos.

John McK. Camp II  
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PLATE 3



PLATE 4



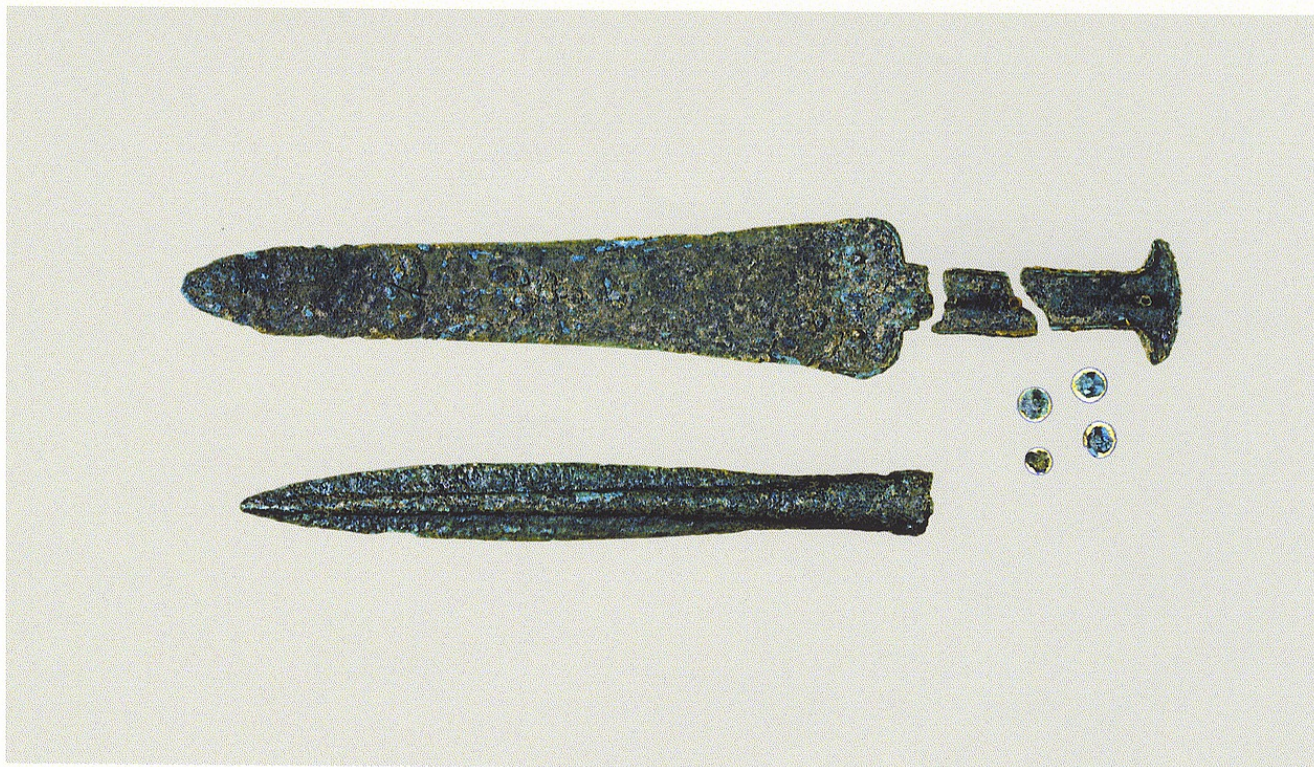


PLATE 5



PLATE 6





PLATE 7



PLATE 8



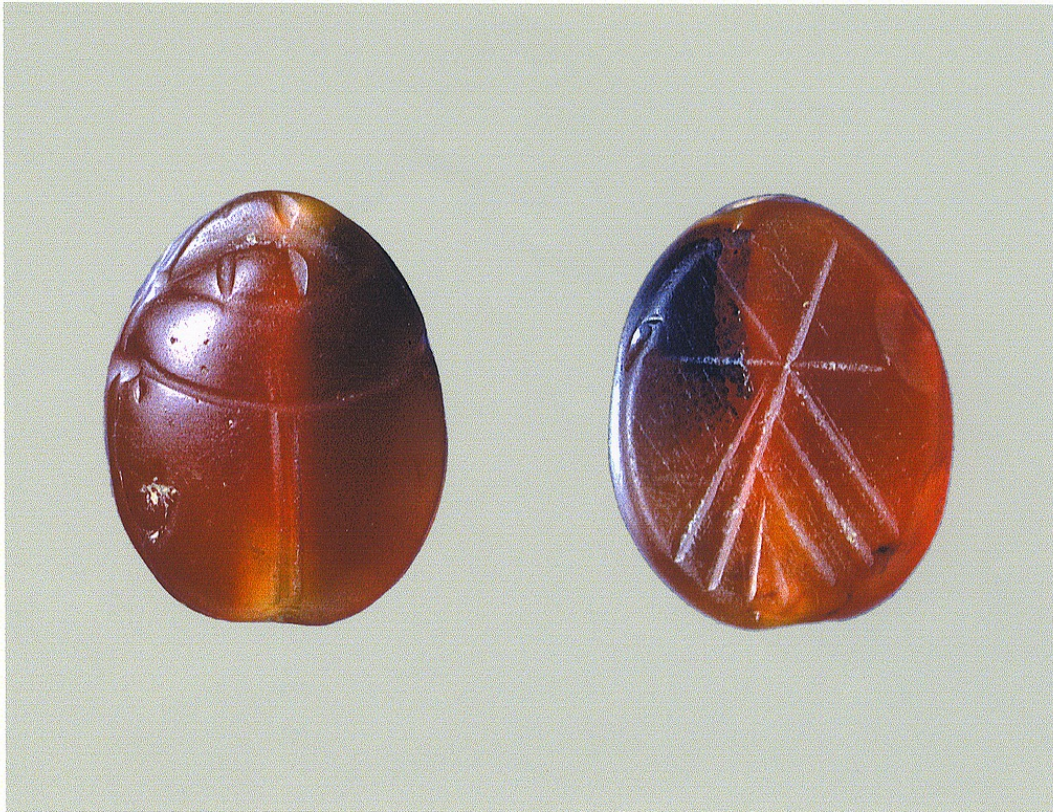


PLATE 9



PLATE 10