

Excavation Summary - 2001

Excavations were carried out in the Athenian Agora from June 11 to August 3, 2001 with a team of about 45 students and supervisors. Work was concentrated at the northwest of the Agora, with a second group in the area of the Eleusinion. This brief and very preliminary account of the season's work has been prepared with thanks to all those who worked so well together as a team this summer.

Northwest Area

In *Section BZ* the excavations, supervised by Floris van den Eijnde, Marcie Handler, and Michael Laughy, continued to expose the Middle Byzantine settlement of the 11th century. For the most part we excavated through and under the lowest floor levels, digging into fill representing the abandonment of the area in the 7th to 9th centuries AD and exposing the upper parts of the late Roman walls beneath. The Byzantine house walls, built of irregular stones set in clay with a fair admixture of reused material (**figures 1 and 2**), were exposed to their full depth. A tile and stone-lined well was partially excavated; the lining had collapsed where it passes through Dark Age levels and final excavation will have to wait for next season. A fair amount of glazed and sgraffito pottery from the lining suggests either that the well is one of the later features to survive on the site, dating to the 12th or 13th century AD or, more probably, that a late attempt was made to reline the upper part of the well. A second feature uncovered this year was a stone-lined cess-pit, placed in the road just outside the house. It was well-preserved, with a cover slab in place, along with a drain leading into it from the adjacent house. It is the first such installation for household waste to have been uncovered or recognized in this neighborhood. In the southern area a large plaster-lined pit - perhaps the lower part of a cistern - produced pottery of the 12th and 13th centuries along with large chunks of roof tiles. At the extreme north end of Section BZ a serious and successful attempt to clear up the area of a modern basement was carried out. The churned-up fill included fragments of terracotta wheels and figurines of the sort found in large quantities in a shallow pit just a few meters to the east - evidence of coroplasts at work here in the Roman period (J 1: 1 - *Hesperia* 65, 1996, pp. 239-241, and pl. 69).

Section BZ continued to produce assorted fragments of herms (**figures 3 and 4**), adding to the corpus of such monuments recovered from the northwest corner of the Agora, which was known in antiquity as 'the Herms' because of the large number dedicated there. Herms were used to mark the entrances of houses and shrines all over Athens and they are concentrated in our area because we are excavating the principal entrance to the Agora, along the Panathenaic Way, and therefore a suitable location for the erection of public herms. To date, parts of 17 have been found in the area north of Hadrian Street. Also somewhere in this vicinity stood the Stoa of the Herms, referred to in ancient sources from the 5th to the 2nd century BC; thus far it is either unexcavated or unrecognized.

In *Section BE*, supervised by Dave Scahill, we continued work in the Classical shop building. In the southernmost room excavations beneath the floor produced yet another Hellenistic pyre deposit (J 3: 7, **figure 5**). These shallow pits, full of small-scale vases, traces of burning and a few bones, represent a ritual not attested to in the literature. They are found in houses and shops, almost never in public buildings or sanctuaries, so they seem to be an expression of private cult activity. The vases indicate that dining and drinking were part of the ceremony, while the invariable presence of a lamp perhaps suggests that the rite was nocturnal. The BE shop building has a higher concentration of these little deposits (seven) than anywhere else in the excavations. Deposit J 3: 7 contained about 20 pots and a lamp dating to ca. 350-275 BC.

Further work was done in both of the *Mycenaean chamber tombs*, partially excavated in previous seasons and dated to the 14th century BC. In the southernmost grave, enthusiastic pumping by the Metro company had lowered the water table sufficiently to allow us to clear the last of the bones scattered on the floor. The large number of additional bones may require a reassessment of the full complement of individuals buried in the tomb, presently estimated at two adult males, an adult female, and a child. In the northern tomb we removed the end of Roman wall C and finally exposed the entranceway or dromos into the tomb. The doorway, partially cut by the 5th century well excavated the past two seasons, was blocked with stones. The dromos itself approaches the tomb from the west, entering at the north end of the west side of the chamber. Set near the center of the dromos, some 2.50 m. from the blocked door, was the lower part of a large grey-ware Lesbian amphora, dating the the first half of the 5th century BC (**figure 6**). The top had been shaved

off in antiquity, at the same level as the preserved top of the dromos. Within the amphora was some charcoal and ash, together with a single large iron nail.

The northeast corner of a *third Mycenaean chamber tomb* was uncovered this season, just south of the dromos described above. It seems from its alignment to be somewhat earlier, perhaps 15th century BC. The cutting was full of large stones, several vases (**figures 7 and 8**), and a pile of bones. Much more work will have to be done on this tomb; like the others it is largely obscured by later walls and installations

Acropolis Slopes

In Section EΛ, supervised by Laura Gawlinski, we continued to dig in the area just south of and uphill from the Eleusinion, along the east face of the late Roman fortification wall. A handful of late Roman sherds found in the fill presumably reflects its construction in the years around AD 280. For the most part we encountered a thick layer filled with fragmentary pottery mostly of the late 3rd and early second centuries BC; included were numerous black-glazed kantharoi, mould-made bowls, bee-hives, and examples of West Slope ware. Also recovered were numerous fragments of worked bone, several dozen loomweights, many stamped amphora handles (most from the island of Rhodes and others from Knidos), the partial remains of two or three horses (skulls [**figure 9**], vertebrae, and leg bones, partially articulated), and fragments of terracotta figurines (**figure 10**). There is no obvious historical or archaeological event to account for this deposit, nor any certainty that it is in primary deposition here. Somewhat puzzling is the fact that this material lies directly over bedrock, leaving no sign of earlier activity in the area. In the final hours we uncovered the shaft of an unlined well cut through bedrock; the upper fill was Hellenistic. A few irregularly placed post-holes were encountered in the bedrock; when excavated lower down the hill they have usually been interpreted as sockets for anchoring wooden bleachers (*ikria*), set up for spectators watching parades or chariot races along the Panathenaic Way (*Athenaios* 4. 167f).

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August 2001



FIGURE 1



FIGURE 2



FIGURE 3



FIGURE 4



FIGURE 5



FIGURE 6



FIGURE 7



FIGURE 8



FIGURE 9



FIGURE 10

