

AGORA VOLUNTEER REPORT - 2017

As always, this report is written in haste as the dust is still settling on the site, in order for the excavators to have some record to take home of the results of their work this summer. It is therefore to be regarded as wildly preliminary and subject to considerable emendation or refinement. Nonetheless, it demonstrates the range of material and periods we encountered this season, shedding light on Athens from the 14th century BC to the 12th century AD.

The outdoor work was supported primarily by the Packard Humanities Institute; other contributors include the Stavros Niarchos Foundation and Randolph-Macon College, the George and Judy Marcus Family Foundation, The Behrakis Family Foundation, and several individuals. We are indebted to all of them for making our work in the field possible. As always, our colleagues from the 1st Ephoreia, Kleio Tsoga and Maria Liaska, have been most supportive of our work, a collaboration we especially value.

In **Section B0 (Figs. 1, 2)**, we worked in later levels over the Stoa Poikile and the area in front of it (Nick Seetin: east; Daniele Pirisino, Miltos Kyliandreas, and Allene Seet: west). To the west, we continued to explore the remains of the middle Byzantine settlement (11-12th AD) which was built over the Stoa after several centuries of the abandonment of the area. We returned to Room 3, at the extreme northern end of the trench, and excavated more in the area of Deposit K 3: 2, where previously we had found several crushed cooking pots and the like. We continued to find large masses of debris, mostly broken tiles and bricks, but also an unusually large number of bronze coins.

To the east, we excavated in deeper levels, in the abandonment fill itself, which consisted of loose, undifferentiated earth, usually containing significant amounts of broken tile, apparently discarded. What we do not yet see in any of the fills to the south of the façade of the stoa, is any trace of hard-packed gravel road metal, and if, as seems likely, a road ran along the front of the stoa, it too will have been abandoned in the 5th/6th century AD, like the stoa itself. In this period, of course, we are some 200 meters outside the line of the post-Herulian fortification wall.

Heavy, soaking rains on June 18th and one of our largest diggers, Jackson Vaughn, caused a collapse of the fill over the Eridanos river on June 19th. While much of the channel is still covered with large stone slabs, in places they are missing. Built into the northwest side of the channel were several large Doric column drums of poros limestone, their flutes measuring ca. 0.14 m., suggesting a diameter of ca. 0.90 m. (**Fig. 3**). These are presumably part of the series of 32 drums discovered and reported by Ross and Forchhammer near St. Philip's church when they explored the river channel in 1832 (L. Ross, *Archaeologische Aufsätze* I, Leipzig 1855, B. Schmidt, *Die Thorfrage in der Topographie Athens*, Freiburg 1876, pp. 36-37; T. L. Shear Jr., *Hesperia* 53, 1984, p. 7, note 5, and 66, 1997, p. 521). Assorted other large square blocks and slabs were used as well, now heavily eroded by the flow of the river.

In addition to these column drums, a survey of the Byzantine walls in both parts of Section BΘ showed that numerous candidates for other pieces from the superstructure of the Poikile Stoa were built into the later walls. They include primarily euthynteria blocks, step blocks, and orthostates, recognizable by the characteristic yellowish-tan poros limestone, their dimensions, the neatly-cut and beveled rebates, and the claw chisel work on most of the visible surfaces.

Working down the river, Nick Seetin determined that we were in the south channel, so we returned to the northwest and began digging over the adjacent northern channel, the cover slabs of which lie at a somewhat lower level than the southern. They also consist of large marble blocks, one of which proved to be decorated with a large hoplite shield with offset rim, carved in relief (**Fig. 4**). Sculpted shields of this sort are often found decorating monuments, statue bases, and occasionally buildings, especially in the Hellenistic period (cf. Markle, *Hesperia* 1999, pp. 219-254. esp. pp. 238-242, and the *bouleuteria* of Miletos and Herakleia in Asia Minor). Actual shields, of course, were on display at the nearby Stoa Poikile (Pausanias 1. 15. 5) and at Elis (Pausanias 6. 23. 5), and a sculpted marble statue base featuring shields was found about 3 meters away from this part of the river (*Hesperia* 2015, pp. 499-507). The shield decorates the upper part of a large marble slab, at least 1.80 m. in height. The lower, undecorated part is set off from the shield by a projecting ovolo moulding, below which are three lines of a worn inscription: ΠΥΡΡΑΛΕΥΣ/ΠΥΡΡΟΥ/ΓΑΡΓΗΤΤΙΟΣ (name, patronymic, deme), which might indicate that the monument was funerary rather than dedicatory, at least in one phase of its use.

Several pieces of large-scale fragmentary marble statuary came out in the dismantling of Byzantine Wall 4 at the east end of the section. Most impressive was the muscular left thigh and back of a slightly over life-sized male figure, nude except for a skin/pelt draped over his left shoulder. If the animal skin is a lion, then a figure of Herakles is probably the preferred identity. Also recovered was part of a round altar decorated with a Doric frieze, preserving part of a triglyph and the adjacent metope with a carved garlanded boukranion (**Fig. 5**). It joins a round altar (S 2525; 2010 guide, p. 94, fig. 58), found *in situ* in 1973 along the south side of the Panathenaic Way, some 50 meters to the southwest. Also recovered was a fragmentary inscription preserving parts of ten lines of text. (**Fig. 6**) The letter-forms suggest a late Hellenistic/Early Roman date, perhaps around 100 BC, and the text seems to be a list of names of Athenians, with patronymics; two of the individuals, apparently brothers, appear also on an inscription from the island of Delos, an Athenian possession from 166 to 88 BC.

Southeast of the river and running roughly parallel to it and the façade of the Stoa, we uncovered a partially preserved run of four limestone blocks in a row, with their tops lying as high as 0.75 m. above the southeastern cover slab over the river. As preserved, they run for a distance of ca. 5.20 m., and the tops of two of them show signs of heavy foot wear, as though they were walked on repeatedly while still *in situ* and largely buried. Their low level vis-à-vis the river suggests that they are of some antiquity. The blocks are only 0.30 – 0.38 m. wide, seemingly too narrow for a structural wall, and perhaps they are best understood as a boundary wall of some sort, designed to define the limits of a temenos or enclosure.

From the northern area, **Section BZ (Fig. 7)** (Brian Martens) continued to produce a scatter of ostraka in the late archaic levels. One of the handsomest, scratched on a glazed rooftile, was cast against Habron of the deme of Marathon (**Fig. 8**) (HABPON| MAPAΘONIO|). The son of Patrokles, Habron is otherwise unknown, except for the ostraka; this is the 12th known ostrakon to be cast against him, probably in the 480's BC (M. Lang, *The Athenian Agora, Vol. XXV, Ostraka*, Princeton 1990, pp. 45/46, figs. 6 and 7), though Prof. Jim Sickinger reports that more unpublished examples of Habron have been found in this area.

In similar fills of the first half of the 5th century BC we recovered a rare sample of organic material; in this case a stretch of 5 or 6 reeds (**Fig. 9**) set side by side, perhaps part of a mat or roofing of some sort. There are no obvious means of attachment of the reeds to one another, which might be at either missing end, unless the pieces were glued together or occur naturally in this arrangement. Consultation with a palaeobotanical friend of our conservator Maria Tziotziou suggests that the material is indeed reeds, identified as *Arundo donax*.

Also found in one of the later walls in section BZ was a small lion-head's spout of marble (**Fig. 10**), presumably from a fountainhouse, or a sima at the edge of a roof. Foundations to the south have been tentatively assigned to a fountainhouse, just where the Panathenaic Way enters the agora square, and the entrances at the southeast and southwest corners of the square were both provided with substantial fountains. Other hydraulic installations such as a Roman bath and latrine were also located in this northwest area. On the other hand, the lack of lime deposit within perhaps favors a position where the water passing through the spout was not constant.

We also returned this year to a collapsed Mycenaean chamber tomb (J 1:10) partially excavated in 2013 (**Fig. 11**). Removing a later wall which ran through the tomb, we were able to excavate more of the fill over the collapse, consisting of a good deal of fragmentary but high quality pottery of the late 6th and early 5th centuries BC. Below, in the tomb fill proper, we had scattered bones, two pitchers, a small piriform jar similar to others found in nearby tombs (e.g. *Hesperia* 2003, pp. 264-265), and an unusual piriform rhyton or funnel decorated with painted spirals (**Fig. 12**). The pottery suggests a date for the tomb in the 14th century BC (LH IIIA). In all, ten pots and 3 stone spindle whorls have now been recovered, along with two bronze blades and what seems to be a pair of tweezers.

Further west in **Section BZ** (Marcie Handler) we explored more of the upper levels of the north-south road lined in most periods with shops along its eastern side. The main feature, a large brick and tile drain, runs along the east side of the road, collecting waste water from rooms on both sides of the street. Another of these feeder drains cutting across the street was found this season at the extreme north end of the excavation area. It was cut through the hard-packed road surfaces and the casual arrangement in which it was covered in its final phase with reused rooftile fragments suggest that it was laid and used in the later Roman period (4th/5th AD). The road itself, dating to the middle Roman period (2nd/3rd AD), consisted of the usual surfaces of very hard-packed gravel.

In **Section OO (Fig. 13)** (Laura Gawlinski) investigation of the architectural remains of houses and/or industrial establishments continued. Towards the south, we have two successive mosaic floors, a lower one of small beach pebbles set in mortar, the upper, later one of marble chips. Neither is representational and they look more like the sort of waterproofing of floors found in industrial establishments where significant amounts of water were to be used.

Further north, we continued to explore a pit we partially excavated last year. It produced large fragments of moulds for a bronze statue (**Fig. 14**). Some pieces seemed to be from a nude figure, though at least one fragment may also preserve the traces of drapery. The fragments are larger than usually encountered and the date seems to be early Classical. The pit itself is where the moulds were actually used and then left. The stand for the casting of the final piece was found *in situ*. The pit was lined with substantial and well-preserved mudbricks, of various sizes, largely baked by the heat of the casting process. (For other examples of metal-working in the agora, see C. Mattusch in *Hesperia* 1977, pp. 340-379 and Agora picture-book No. 20, 1982)

Among the interesting finds from Section OO was a common enough object in a largely unparalleled form. It is a bone die, but instead of 6 faces on a cubical form, this one has six faces, each of which takes the form of a rhomboid or elongated diamond (**Fig. 15**). The six faces are marked like a canonical cubical die: 1 opposite 6, 2:5, and 3:4, and when thrown there is more or less the same probability that any side will land face up. With minor variations, each face measures 0.02 m. long by ca. 0.009 m. wide. The overall length is 0.025 m. The piece came out while cleaning a scarp, so the date is not known, though it seems to be ancient.

The closest parallel was first located by Vassia Dimitrakopoulou, in the British Museum (1912,0516.6); it is dated 1st century BC and came from the Villa at Boscoreale, on the slopes of Mt. Vesuvius. It has two rhomboidal sides opposite each other, while the four remaining faces are rectangular. Prof. E. Torrence, a mathematician visiting from R-MC, informs me that the ten-dollar term for this shape is trigonal trapezohedron; the five-dollar term is rhombic hexahedron. She has since managed to find two examples of this unusual shape being used for dice.

In addition to permanent staff in the Stoa, the excavation team was made up of about 60 student volunteers, forty from US universities and twenty from Greece and other European countries. About half were with us for their second year, or more. This is the appropriate place to thank everyone, including the supervisors and those in the Stoa, for the hard work, all contributed to the success of this season.

John McK. Camp II
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Fig 1.



Fig. 2



Fig. 3 Doric Column Drums lining the Eridanos River.



Fig. 4 Sculpted Hoplite Shield reused over the Eridanos River.



Fig. 5 A marble fragment (above) with a boukranion that joins the round altar (right) found *in situ* along the south side of the Panathenaic Way.



Fig. 6 Fragmentary Late Hellenistic Inscription.

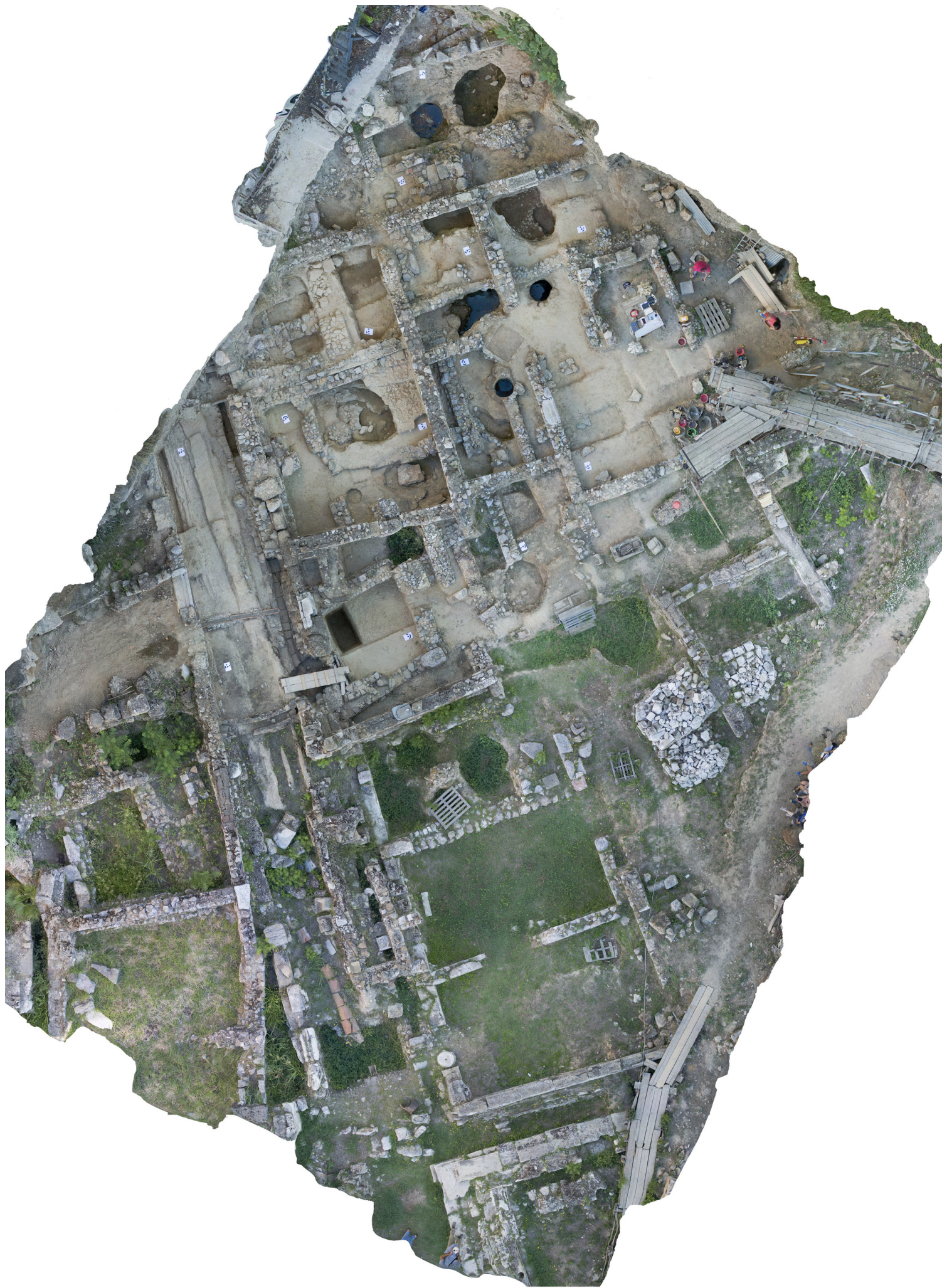


Fig. 7 Aerial View of Section BZ.

Fig. 8 Ostrakon - with the inscribed name, HABPON MAPAGONIO.



Fig. 9 Reeds found in 5th century BC context. (top photo - in situ, bottom after cleaning)



Fig. 10 Three views of the Lion's Head water spout.



Fig. 11 Skeletal remains and pots from the Mycenaean Tomb, J 1:10.



Fig. 12 A selection of pots from the Mycenaean tomb. (not to scale)



Fig. 13 Aerial View of Section OO.



Fig. 14 Bronze-casting pit (above) in Section OO and detail of mould (below).



Fig. 15 Bone Die - the six faces of a trigonal trapezohedron.