

SECTION AA
1937
EXCAVATION SUMMARY

SECTION AA

Report for Season of 1937

The excavation of Section AA revealed that the original contour of Kolonos Agoraios had been much more sharp than showed in modern times. It fell away abruptly toward the west and the north where the rock was scarped in ancient times for the sanctuary of Demos and the Graces. The fall is clear in the difference in levels: at the Hephaisteion stylobate 69.026, at the top of AA 61.33, and on the surface of the ancient road in MM, 51.55, making a descent of over 17.00 metres.

GREEK PERIOD

No traces of early graves were found in the area, but bedrock was too much disturbed to make this absence significant. Only in the lower fillings along the railroad appears pottery even so early as of the sixth century.

The first signs of habitation are a few deposits in crannies or cuttings in bedrock just around the northwestern corner of the Hellenistic Building. Here red-figured sherds of the last half of the fifth century and one amphora of about 440-430 B.C. were found in what may have been metal-working pits. In connection with these a drain was run east-west from the shoulder of rock along an artificial strip three metres wide that seems to have been a road. Along this road lay other metal-working establishments for which complicated systems of water-storage were devised. One of these shafts was filled up with pottery of the late fifth

or very early fourth century and another pit, lined with cement, went into disuse at the same period. It seems probable, therefore, that at the time of the building of the Temple of Hephaistos, the metal-workers spread their colony down over the north slope of Kolonos.

In this region, the best preserved material belongs to the fourth century. The drain that ran from the north-west corner of the precinct of Hephaistos flowed at right angles into the older drain just mentioned, thus giving us the line of the street up past the temple. The area was probably covered with houses, of which five establishments have survived. In one a small incineration burial underlay the floor, filled with miniature unglazed vases of a kind characteristic of about the mid fourth century. Ample provision was made for the water necessary in working metal: a double cistern stored it, the mouths set down in a fine concrete floor. Nearby were placed a tub with a settling basin and a shallow cement trough. To the west of the cisterns, probably in the yard, were two casting pits, one undisturbed, preserving the ashes and debris of the fire, and the bottom of a clay mould. Considerable quantities of metal waste and ore came from this house.

Just to the east of this small establishment lay another, much larger and more ambitious. It measures 15.00 x 10.50 metres, and includes three rooms. Its central room (or court) was floored with waterproof cement. Its walls, 0.80 or more wide, though made of the crudest brick, were plastered with fine red stucco moulded in incrustation style.

*a court with
such stucco ?*

At the west, traces of a circular pit beside abundant burning and a heap of iron slag may credibly be interpreted as a furnace. Another earlier furnace underlay the floor of the easternmost room. It yielded abundant burning and metal waste and pottery probably of the early fourth century. Its plan, with stoking-hole and door, was somewhat effaced. Along the north side of this house lay a complicated water-system. Small shafts collected the water at the corners of the house and led them by passages into a spacious cistern (dug to 6.35 metres and unfinished). Three very large blind galleries enlarged its capacity. This system has been too much disturbed for its original plan to be detected. *recovered entirely.*

Other metallurgists' houses to the west were less well preserved, but showed the same cisterns, concrete floors and basins, and yielded masses of metal waste. The size of the house, the fine stucco of the walls, and the care given to the water systems all imply that the Athenian craftsman lived prosperously.

In the early third century B.C., to judge from the pottery overlying the floors, the easternmost houses went out of use, probably when the Hellenistic Building, discovered in KK, was built. Numerous Pentelic, Hymettian and poros working chips and a stone-mason's chisel found in the filling over the floors of the largest establishment suggest that the workmen did their stone-cutting in or over the abandoned metal-worker's house. Metallurgy must have continued, however, at least down to the end of Hellenistic

times elsewhere on the slope.

EARLY ROMAN PERIOD

Over much of the area and in several cisterns, lay a heavy deposit of the latest Hellenistic pottery. In places it is purely Hellenistic, but in others Arretine and terra nigra wares are found with it. Just north of the Hellenistic Building the filling consisted of masses of very large sherds, amphorae and coarse wares presumably chosen deliberately in order to raise the level and smooth the contour of the hill. The occasion for this filling is presumably the general building activity of that period observed elsewhere, for example in the erection of the Stoa Annex, the reconstruction of the Hellenistic Building, and the construction of the buildings flanking the ancient road, in MM. The only construction in AA assignable to this period (for that the evidence is still to be studied), is a great stair that led up from the east-west road in MM over the brow of the hill to the road running north-south along the west end of the Hellenistic Building. This stair measures about eight metres in width; its present height is 3.20 metres. It is composed of three parallel rows of breccia blocks bracing a heavy packing of stones that are supported in turn by two or more cross rows of blocks. No steps have been identified. In size, in character, and probably in date, it resembles the monumental stair that led up from the Agora to the Hephaisteion between the Temple of Apollo and the Metroon.

LATE ROMAN PERIOD

Except for the filling of the main drain from the Hephaisteion in its lower part at least, in the second century A.D., no other evidence is at hand for the history of this area during most of the Roman period. Certain deep scarps in the face of the hill were probably made for Roman houses, but it is impossible to trace their history. In the late fourth century, however, the area suffered much damage; heavy deposits of Type XXVIII lamps and fourth century coins and pottery overlying rock and houses, and filling in cisterns and wells bear witness to a general devastation. In this and in a brief revival in the fifth century characterized by the building of houses with concrete walls, the history of section AA resembles that of MM. Here also these concrete buildings were covered by a thick debris of destruction, full of Vandal coins and pottery of the sixth century A.D. The surface of this debris was trodden into a slope or ramp leading up the hill. In one place, the rehabilitation of a bit of concrete wall in rubble on exactly the same line suggests that habitation did not entirely cease in the region. A few wells may have been kept open also during this period.

BYZANTINE PERIOD

In the Byzantine period blocks of houses were set over the whole area, usually to bedrock. The walls were carelessly set wherever they were needed. There is no authentic instance of the cutting of bedrock for any Byzantine construction.

On the upper part of AA, only a few scraps of these walls survive; in the deeper northwestern part, entire house plans could be retrieved. The chronology of this Byzantine settlement is naturally that previously discovered in the adjacent sections, KK and MM. In the deeper area, however, early walls and floors belonging to the earliest Brown Glaze period, were fairly well preserved and may provide better evidence for the study of that time than was derived elsewhere. Two coins found in one of these floors, date in the late eighth and early ninth century. The pottery was fragmentary and glazed pieces extremely rare. For the main period of the settlement, coins, pottery, levels and analogies with the main settlement in MM all indicate a floruit from the late eleventh or early twelfth to the early thirteenth century. As in MM, the destruction of this settlement was sudden and violent, to judge by the covered pits, the tumbled walls, and the immediate rebuilding over or through the debris. But as in the central block of MM, no layer of ash or burning was general; only in isolated places and in the debris of cisterns was it observed. One cistern in particular offered an excellent stratified selection of pottery of just this time, its main layer showing marked traces of fire. The condition of one room which had been built up high with stone walls that tumbled in helter-skelter all over the floors, suggests that an earthquake, itself producing fires, was possibly the cause of the destruction. Post-destruction walls and floors were poor and ill-preserved. Associated with them were late sgraffito and incised wares and coins

of the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries.

The details of this Byzantine settlement, when combined with those of MM and KK, should present interesting material for the study of mediaeval Athens. It is possible to trace the course of continuous walls running along streets for considerable distance, amounting to as much as 76.00 metres in places. Three blocks, probably each including four houses are traceable. The streets between were roughly cobbled on the slope. The houses, chiefly of the twelfth century, do not follow a rigid plan, but in general have a width of about 3.00 metres and a length of about 16.00 metres. The rooms are three to three and a half metres wide. The walls vary slightly in the different periods, growing wider in time, and shifting the orientation. The walls of the first period are built of two rows of sizable field stones 0.50 metres wide, often set merely on firm earth. Those of the main period are usually bedded in rock or on a very low hard level and regularly include large blocks usually at the corners, but squared, not erected as uprights as has appeared to be the custom in the late Byzantine houses of Sections H and P. Well-cut thresholds, a stair leading to an upper storey, and the fallen bricks of the upper part of the walls contribute information for the study of the period. The house-plan usually includes a main door from the street leading into the kitchen, in which a hearth and several pithoi were set. Drainage was carried out into the street by tile or stone channels, covered. A bathroom or latrine, sometimes a paved court, and always an inner

room without pithoi, which may be called the bedroom, make up the complex. The pithoi were usually empty, the pottery imperfect, and were it not for the fine deposits in the one cistern and in KK, one would conceive of the Athens of the twelfth century as a wretched period. As it is, much material may be put together for the clarification of its history.

The lower parts of numerous sizable pithoi; usually built of stones, tiles, and mortar and coated within by a layer of pink cement, which clearly intrude into the twelfth century levels attest the existence of a post-destruction settlement. Only a few scraps of walls can be associated with them. The ground level indicated by these fragmentary pithoi was evidently cut away by a road that later passed over the settlement in a direction slightly north of east. It was about 6.00 metres wide and was composed of successive layers of hard gravel filling with a stony surface, often much worn. From three to six layers could be traced. The lowest yielded the latest Byzantine pottery, chiefly degenerate sgraffito. The two chief upper layers were definitely Turkish, the middle containing blue and white sixteenth to seventeenth century wares, green-glazed and aubergine bowls, and, in the upper Canakale ware of the late seventeenth to the early eighteenth century. No Turkish pipes were discovered in the entire course excavated, amounting to 40.00 metres. This road appears on prints and drawings of the Turkish period, skirting the shoulder of Kolonos on a line only slightly different from that of the modern railway.

The road must have been deserted at least when the Turkish fortification of 1775 cut across it.

Over the Turkish road heavy dark vegetation deposits speak of cultivation here until about 1870, when an aqueduct was built to a large cistern that watered the "Theseion Garden." This, in turn, was broken off by the construction of the railroad in 1890 and by the subsequent filling of the area to a maximum depth of six metres in order to raise the level to that of the bridges carrying modern traffic over the railroad line up the hill slope.