

YH-a

AGORA EXCAVATIONS : 1948

Fifth and Sixth Weeks : April 5 - April 17

Area of the Fountain House. The ancient road that ran south from the southwest corner of the Agora has been explored during the past fortnight in its course along the west side of the early Fountain House. Here as elsewhere the road now appears as a great dike built up of successive layers of gravel, some laid down in the course of repairs, others deposited by freshets. The inevitable drain beneath the middle of the road here consists of a well built channel with sides, floor and cover of massive stone work; among the cover slabs was an inscribed stele (see below).

The west foundations of the Fountain House are now being cleared and for the first time made available for study. Several more step and wall blocks from the Fountain House have come to light in disturbed contexts in the area: they are of hard creamy limestone and are worked in the manner of the late archaic period.

Area West of the Areopagus. The chief item of topographical interest in this section has been the fixing of the line of the principal east-to-west thoroughfare throughout the whole area. This is the ancient road that started from the Panathenaic Way in the far east, ran along the north slope of the Areopagus and thence proceeded westward to issue, no doubt, through the Peiraeus Gate. Of particular interest is the way in which the road was supported above the Great Drain in the valley between the Areopagus and the Hill of the Nymphs. Of interest too, though well nigh the rule in this area, is the fact that the ancient road was directly overlaid by a modern street, viz. Observatory Street.

Steady progress has been made in exploring the large porous peribolos at the west foot of the Areopagus, the private houses of both the Greek and Roman periods, and the bath on the west slope of the Areopagus. One small cistern of the 4th century B.C. has been cleared and three wells of the Roman period are being dug.

The systematic clearing of bedrock has yielded gratifying returns during the fortnight. At the very foot of the Hill of the Nymphs and close by the Mycenaean chamber tomb found last season appeared a burial of the Third Late Helladic Period, a small cist grave into which had been folded the bodies of two children accompanied by a single offering, viz. a large one-handed mug. The shape of the vase would suggest a date a little later than that of the chamber tomb. This grave was barely overlaid by the floor of a house of the 5th

century B.C. Beneath the floor level of the same house a little farther to the east, and perhaps within its courtyard, another burial had been made toward the end of the fifth century, i.e. during the period of occupancy of the house. This was a cremation burial; the offerings, comprising one red-figured and one black-glazed pyxis, a skyphos and a stemless kylix, would be appropriate to a woman, though the small scale of the pyre which would seem to have been made on the spot might rather suggest a child.

Immediately to the east of the Great Drain, at the northwest foot of the Areopagus, Byzantine intruders had miraculously spared a burial of ca. 900 B.C. This again was the cremation burial of a woman. Her charred bones had been gathered into a large, sombre amphora together with a small knife of iron, a pair of heavy bronze fibulae, some three large cloak pins with round knobs and discs of bronze, a bone bead and a pair of electrum earrings. The urn was set down in a small pit in the bedrock, its mouth was closed by means of a deep, lidded pyxis and the whole was overlaid by a stone slab. Above the level of this slab a shallow rectangular basin had been scooped in the bedrock for the reception of the other remnants from the pyre: ashes, carbonized figs and chicken bones deriving no doubt from the funeral feast, nine oinochoai, one pointed and one deep pyxis, six goblets, one small cooking pot, one melon-shaped clay bead and two pairs of miniature boots in terracotta, intended, we may assume, for the long hard journey to the other world. The shoes, of half-calf height, with moccasin soles, lace holes above and slashed panel below on the front are among the most informative documents known for the dress of that early period. The date is precisely the turning point between the Protogeometric and the Geometric periods which lends the greater importance to this exceptionally rich and varied group of material.

Inscriptions. Mr. Eugene Vanderpool contributes the following note on the stele which was found where re-used as a cover slab on a drain at the northwest corner of the Fountain House (Section K):

"The stele had unfortunately been placed face down, so that the letters in the mid part are badly worn. The letters at the top and bottom, however, are well preserved. Mr. G.A. Stamires, who has undertaken the difficult task of reading this stone has established the following facts. The decree was passed in the archonship of Pytharatos when Isegoros son of Isokrates of Kephale was secretary and it honors the sitonai (grain commissioners) of the archonship of Lysitheides. Pytharatos has hitherto been unanimously dated in the year 271/270 B.C. on literary evidence, but his secretary, now known for the first time, does not fit into the cycle as now arranged. The relationship with Lysitheides is also new. Lysitheides has usually been placed later than Pytharatos, sometimes considerably later, but the new stele shows that his archonship preceded that of Pytharatos by a year or two."

Miscellaneous Finds. Exploration among the early house foundations in the valley to the west of the Areopagus brings to light a good many pieces of fine red-figure. Mention may be made of a fragmentary kylix showing on the exterior a komos - four youths dancers and flautists - on each side, and within a pair of dancers. The cup is fairly careful work of the later part of the third quarter of the fifth century. Its interest lies in the fillet worn by all but one of the preserved figures: a broad band wrapped one and a half times around the head, with a high loop and a hanging end to either side, a head-dress more commonly associated with Dionysos himself.

A late Roman context at the west foot of the Areopagus yielded an interesting little hoard of old jewelry: a gold earring, a ruby drop from an earring or necklace, a cluster of seed pearls, a glass bead and three seal stones of which the most interesting shows a bearded human face supported on bird's legs and capped with a horse's head that holds a wreath in its mouth; in the field in front is a dolphin and palm branch, in the field behind a ram's head with two heads of barley in its mouth, a wing and a cornucopia. An almost identical stone is in the Berlin Museum.

Homer A. Thompson
Field Director
Agora Excavations

THE AGORA EXCAVATIONS : 1948

Between March 8th and April 29th the American School of Classical Studies carried out another season's work in the Agora of ancient Athens. With the support of some fifth American universities that make regular contributions to its upkeep and with the generous assistance of both Mr. John D. Rockefeller and the Rockefeller Foundation, the School began work on this site in 1931, worked steadily on it through 1940, and resumed operations in 1946; this year's campaign, therefore, is the thirteenth that has been devoted to the site.

The aim of the project has been to clear the Agora, i.e. the public square that lay to the north of the Acropolis and the Areopagus and served for over 1000 years (from the early 6th century B.C. into the 5th century A.D.) as the civic and commercial centre of the city. The outlines of the square have now been traced and the principal buildings exposed. A vast amount of work remains to be done, however, in the exploration of the deeper levels and in the preparation of a site for the permanent museum that must be built to house the finds from the excavation.

At a time when its own staff and resources are so depleted as to compel the Greek Archaeological Service to restrict excavations in general to a minimum, the special position of the Agora has been recognized by the Greek Government and work on an adequate scale has been permitted. Only with the completion of excavation can the ancient buildings be properly conserved and only by the construction of an adequate museum can the 50,000 finds be safely housed.

The field staff for the past season was as follows:

Professor Homer A. Thompson	Institute for Advanced Study Princeton, N. J.	Field Director
Mr. John Travlos	Athens	Architect
Mr. Eugene Vanderpool	Morristown, N.J.	} Supervising Excavators
Mr. Rodney Young	Newark, N. J.	
Miss Margaret Crosby	Minneapolis, Minn.	
Miss Mabel Lang	Bryn Mawr College	
Miss Lucy Talcott	Farmington, Conn.	Records
Miss Alison Frantz	Princeton, N. J.	Photography
Mr. G. A. Stamires	Athens	Epigraphy

Seventy-five Greek workmen were employed under the direction of the Greek chief foreman, Mr. Sophokles Lekkas.

During this season work was concentrated in two areas, the first of these was the ancient road that leads south out of the southwest corner of the square past the ancient Fountain House, the Enneakrounos, the most famous of all the fountains of Athens. Much

was learned about the course and the history of the road and about the design of the fountain house. The second area of excavation lay to the west of the Areopagus where it had long been hoped that the permanent Agora Museum might be erected. Throughout antiquity this was primarily a region of private houses and workshops, the foundations for many of which have come to light. Particularly interesting among those cleared this year has been a row of houses of the 5th century B.C. (the best preserved dwellings of that period thus far known in Athens), and a large house of the Roman period that was destroyed by northern barbarians in A.D. 267, its furnishings sealed under by the fallen roofs and walls. A large structure of the 5th century B.C. that has been only partially cleared may prove to be an ancient law-court. A bathing establishment of the Roman period has come to light complete with its furnaces and the hypocaust or false-floor arrangement by which its warm rooms were heated.

In view of the number and importance of the ancient remains that have appeared in the area to the west of the Areopagus, it may prove necessary to reconsider the question of the museum site. A possible alternative to erecting a new building to the west of the Areopagus would be to reconstruct the Stoa of Attalos to house the finds. This great building of the second century B.C. closed off the market square toward the east; its reconstruction, in addition to providing ample museum space, would make intelligible to the visitor a first-rate example of Greek civic architecture which in beauty and interest would rival the Panathenaic Stadium as rebuilt fifty years ago.

The following may be noted as among the outstanding individual finds of the season:

1. A grave of the Mycenaean period (13th century B.C.) containing the skeletons of two children aged about 5 and 8 years accompanied by a large mug. This grave, together with two other tombs of approximately the same period found last season, apparently comprised a small family burial plot at the north-east foot of the Hill of the Nymphs.
2. A woman's cremation burial of about 900 B.C., accompanied by some 20 terracotta vases, two pairs of terracotta shoes, jewelry of bronze, iron and electrum, and remnants of the funeral feast, including a number of figs. This is one of the richest graves of the period ever found in Athens and is most important for the study of the funeral customs, the art and the dress of the time.

3. A marble torso of a youth, a first rate original work of the third quarter of the 5th century B.C.
4. Marble portrait heads of the first and third centuries A.D.
5. A group of kitchen equipment, including pots, pans, lamps, drinking glasses, etc. found where buried beneath the ruins of one of the houses destroyed in A.D. 267.

The careful, systematic exploration of the deeper levels is thus yielding a rich harvest of information, especially for the earliest and hitherto least known periods of Athenian history; next season it is hoped to continue such work.

Homer A. Thompson
Field Director
Agora Excavations

Athens
May 4, 1948