

REPORT ON THE AGORA EXCAVATIONS

May, 1947 - April, 1948

Professor Oscar Broneer, Acting Director
American School of Classical Studies
Athens

Dear Professor Broneer:

I have the honor to submit herewith a report on the excavations in the Athenian Agora for the period from May, 1947 to April, 1948.

The Twelfth Campaign, the beginning of which was recorded in the Sixty-Sixth Annual Report of the School (pp.36 f.), commenced on March 10, 1947 and continued to November 1, 1947 with a recess of one month in the late summer. The staff was as follows: John Travlos, architect; Eugene Vanderpool, Rodney Young, Margaret Crosby and Roger Edwards in charge of excavation areas; Lucy Talcott, records and museum; G.A.Stamires, epigraphy. Miss Alison Frantz once more met our photographic needs on a voluntary basis. The services of Miss Margaret Thomson were loaned for three months by the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto. Much valuable volunteer help was received from several persons temporarily resident in Athens, among whom may be mentioned Mrs. James George and Mrs. Clayton Whipple. Mr. Eugene Vanderpool assumed charge during my absence in America at the beginning and end of the year.

Mr. Sophokles Lekkas continued to serve as chief foreman, and under him our experienced staff of sub-foremen and Greek technical assistants. A maximum of one hundred Greek workmen was employed.

In accordance with the present policy of the Greek Archaeological Service our efforts were concentrated on completing the exploration of areas that had already been opened up before the War and in clearing a site for the permanent Agora museum. Work was confined, therefore, to three areas: the southwest corner of the market square, the north slope of the Areopagus and the "Museum site", i.e. the large area to the west of the Areopagus.

In the first of these three areas, the west end of the great Middle Stoa was cleared and there were brought to light the foundations of a three-roomed building which may be identified as civic offices, an interesting addition to the physical equipment of the civic centre.

On the north slope of the Areopagus appeared two more chamber tombs of the fourteenth century B.C. The larger of the new tombs, close alongside the two discovered in 1939, was richly furnished (16 vases, a pair of bronze swords, a bronze cleaver and bowl, many gold and stone ornaments), a circumstance which increases the probability that we have to do with the burial place of the royal family of Athens of the Mycenaean period. Lower down on the same slope was found another grave of the early Geometric Period containing 18 vases of good quality. Wells and cisterns provided abundant evidence for habitation on the slope throughout Greek and Roman times.

More early burials came to light in the exploration of the deeper levels to the west of the Areopagus: a Mycenaean chamber tomb, and scattered graves of the Geometric, archaic and Hellenistic periods. Although this area lay well outside the market square proper it contained one structure that would seem from its size and substantial construction to have served some public purpose. It is a trapezoidal enclosure (ca. 17 x 38 m.) set close in at the west foot of the Areopagus and to be dated in the second half of the fifth century B.C. A very tentative identification as a dikasterion is suggested.

The area to the west of the Areopagus was primarily, however, a district of private houses and workshops. Of the houses of the Greek period, from the fifth century onward, the plans are gradually being recovered, while the dwellings of the Roman period are remarkably well preserved, with painted walls and mosaic floors. Among the foundations of the houses and shops has been found abundant evidence of the working of marble, bronze and clay. Hence the excavation of this area has afforded a most illuminating glimpse into the private life that impinged so closely on the public square. It has also revealed long stretches of roads and drains, thus adding substantially to our knowledge of the plan of the ancient city.

In respect of "finds", the twelfth season proved one of the most fruitful to date. Outstanding was the sculpture, which included a late archaic head of Herakles, a torso of Athena of the third quarter of the fifth century, a head of Nike from the Nike Temple Parapet, the gilded marble head of a goddess of the fourth century and several good portrait studies of the Roman period.

The yield of pottery was, as usual, overwhelming. In addition to the vases from the tombs may be mentioned an important closed group from the middle of the sixth century B.C. and another of the Hellenistic period.

The collection of marble inscriptions was increased by 120 and the number of ostraka was doubled, the total standing at 1089 by the end of the season. Valuable additions were also made to the collections of terracottas, stamped amphora handles and coins.

During the autumn and winter of 1947 Miss Margaret Crosby, Mr. Rodney Young and I spent some time in America. At the Christmas meeting of the Archaeological Institute, Mr. Young spoke on "Burials within the Walls at Athens", while I discussed the results of the past season's work and presented a paper by Mr. John Travlos on the "Topography of Eleusis". In Athens Mr. Eugene Vanderpool carried on with his study of the ostraka and during your absence in America assumed responsibility for the administration of the School. In the Excavation House Miss Lucy Talcott succeeded in bringing up to date our records and the arrangement of our material in museum and store-rooms, an activity which is likely to show little at a distance but which is absolutely essential in order to keep our vast and heterogeneous masses of finds currently available both to members of our own staff and to an increasing number of visiting scholars, and which will enormously simplify the preparation of our definitive publications.

Miss Margaret Thompson, who rejoined the Agora staff as of October 1, 1947, to resume the study of Agora coins, devoted the autumn and winter to publicity work for the School. At the moment of writing she is once again working on Agora coins with the help of the card catalogue which was sent over and set up partly in the American Numismatic Society's rooms, partly in the Institute at Princeton.

The Agora files and records built up by the late Dr. Shear in Princeton have now been transferred to the Institute for Advanced Study and put in excellent shape by Mrs. Shear.

The Thirteenth Campaign of excavation began on March 8, 1948, and will continue through April. The scientific staff remains as it was in 1947 excepting that the place of Mr. Roger Edwards has been taken by Miss Mabel Lang. The number of workmen employed will not exceed 75.

Work is being concentrated on two objectives: first the clearance of the ancient road that ran southward from the southwest corner of the Agora past the west ends of Middle Stoa and of Fountain House; second, the complete exploration of the area to the west of the Areopagus designated as a site for the permanent museum. In both these areas the topographical and architectural results have been not spectacular but highly satisfactory inasmuch as they have consolidated our knowledge of both the layout and the history of this district of the ancient city.

Among the individual "finds" made up to the time of writing may be mentioned a marble torso of a youth of the style and technical quality of the third quarter of the fifth century; two interesting Roman portrait heads; and a cremation burial of ca. 900 B.C. This grave yielded some twenty vases of the style transitional between Protogeometric and Geometric, a number of bronze pins and fibulae, a pair of electrum earrings and two pair of miniature terracotta boots, intended, no doubt, for the journey to the other world; all in all one of the most interesting and valuable groups of evidence for the study of this intriguing epoch in the history of culture.

A disconcerting result of the present season's work has been the realization that the ancient remains exposed to the west of the Areopagus are of such importance as to necessitate reopening the question of the site for the permanent museum. The alternative site long advocated by the Greeks, viz. the Theseum garden, would have the fault of divorcing the finds from the site and would also involve the School in another major excavation. Another and in many ways a preferable alternative would be to re-build the Stoa of Attalos and instal in it the museum, workrooms and offices. Enough of the ancient building remains to permit of an accurate reconstruction. The site would be extremely convenient for the completion of the study of the old Agora and equally convenient for the eventual exploration of the Roman market-place to the east. The stoa rebuilt would close in the east side of the square, restoring much of its ancient unity. And such a restoration, if worthily and faithfully carried out would make intelligible to scholar and layman alike one of the great civic buildings of ancient Greece, which would thus supplement most happily the Temple of Hephaistos that rises above the west side of the Square, a magnificent example of temple architecture. In this combination of utility, beauty and popular appeal the Stoa of Attalos would then rank with the Panathenaic Stadium and would be not only an ornament to the Agora but a drawing card for the whole of Athens.

Yours respectfully

Homer A. Thompson
Field Director
Agora Excavations

Athens
April 21, 1948