

AGORA EXCAVATIONS - SEASON SUMMARY 2015

Excavations were carried out from June 8th to July 31st in the Athenian Agora with a team that varied between 60 and 70 volunteers. This very preliminary report is written for them, with thanks for their participation. We worked in three areas: in Byzantine levels over the Painted Stoa, at the north end and beneath the Classical Commercial Building, and in Section OO in the old excavations. As always, the work was made possible primarily by the Packard Humanities Institute, with additional support from Randolph-Macon College, the Stavros Niarchos Foundation, the Behrakis Family Foundation, the Dana Foundation, the Desnick family, and several individual donors. It is a pleasant duty to acknowledge here their contributions to the excavation.

STOA POIKILE (Section Beta Theta)

Section Beta Theta overlies the Painted Stoa and was excavated under the supervision of Daniele Pirisino (west) and Nick Seetin (east). We continued to explore the Byzantine settlement, which is largely dated to the 11th century AD: walls, floors, several built pithoi, and other storage facilities (**Plan 1, Figs. 1, 2**). More pieces of the superstructure of the Painted Stoa have been found built into these later walls, along with a variety of other material, such as gravestones and architectural elements. One pithos (West; no. 3) provided a welcome and encouraging preview of what lies below. Incorporated into its northern side, just above its floor, are two courses of well-worked squared limestone blocks (**Figs. 3, 4**). By measurement it is clear that they are the foundations still *in situ* for the third interior Ionic column from the west of the Painted Stoa (**Plan 2**).

CLASSICAL COMMERCIAL BUILDING (Section Beta Zeta)

Excavations continued here under the supervision of Marcie Handler and Brian Martens. North of the building, we finished clearing the collapsed Mycenaean chamber tomb uncovered last season, with material dating to the 14th century BC. To the west, we cleared the *stomion* (doorway) which was blocked in the usual fashion with a rubble wall (**Fig. 5, Plan 3**). Further west, just outside the doorway, in the area where a steeply sloping *dromos* (entrance) was cut through bedrock, we also found a round shaft which seems to have been a *well of the early archaic period* (J 1: 12), largely cut through bedrock, with a diameter of ca. 1.25 m. Water was encountered within the first meter or so below the *dromos* floor. The upper fill consisted of a fair amount of clay along with considerable fragmentary pottery of the late 8th and 7th centuries BC, including numerous Phaleron cups. Lower down, at a depth of over 2.50 meters, we recovered several fragments of cups which seem to date to the end of the 7th century BC (E. Brann, *Agora VIII, Late Geometric and Protoattic Pottery*, nos. 147, 148). Given the logistical problems of setting up a windlass over the mouth of the well, we have left its final exploration for another season.

To the south we encountered deep deposits of Classical fill, the exact nature of which is not entirely clear. Cut into them was a round unlined shaft ca. 0.75 m. in diameter, with broken roof tiles and pottery of the late 5th/ early 4th century BC (J 1: 14). At a depth of about 1.50 meters it produced large amounts of marble chips. Some were as large as a hand, often with finished, tooled surfaces, as though broken off a finished block; numerous others were smaller chips of the sort which might indicate actual marble-working. Largely missing, however, was the marble dust which is usually associated with marble-working establishments. In all some four *zembilia* of chips were recovered in the lower fill. This shaft also was left only partially excavated for reasons of both time and logistics.

To the west of J 1: 14, we followed deep fill down as a large and ill-defined pit (J 1:15). The water and depth suggest a well of some sort. Most of the fill was late archaic in date with some very high-quality though fragmentary red-figured material, along with ostraka of the 480's including Xanthippos, the father of Perikles, who was ostracised in 484/3 BC. A few pottery fragments of the third quarter of the 5th century suggest the material was deposited as much as 50 years later, perhaps as part of a belated post-Persian cleanup.

Within the Classical Commercial Building, we explored the lower floor levels of the northern rooms. In Room 4 we came across yet another 'pyre' (J 2: 30), a collection of pots buried with some signs of burning and a few bones, buried underneath the clay floor of the room (**Figs. 6, 7, 8, Plan 2**). Numerous similar deposits have been found in workshops or private houses around the Agora. The Classical Commercial Building has produced a great number already: thirteen within the building and 5 in its vicinity. So this is the 14th pyre to be found in the building itself, the largest concentration anywhere in the Agora (S. Rotroff. *Industrial Religion, Hesperia Supplement* 14, 2013, pp. 11, 102-119, and *passim*). The assemblage looks much like other pyres, with small-scale cooking pots (*chytra* and *lopadion*), saucers and dishes, a lamp, and drinking cups. Altogether more than a dozen pots were found, along with relatively heavy deposits of charcoal and carbon, suggesting that this pyre was burned *in situ*. The pots suggest that the deposit should be dated to the first half of the 4th century BC, not far from 375 BC, making it one of the earliest to have been found in the northern rooms of the Classical Commercial Building (Rotroff, p. 102). Particularly noteworthy is a red-figured stemless cup with looping handles, the decoration close to the Group of Vienna 116 (see M. Moore, *Agora XXX, Attic Red-Figured and White-Ground Pottery*, 1997, nos. 1353, 1396, and 1397). Poorly-painted, heavily draped figures adorn both the tondo and the outside, and ivy tendrils with berries in added white decorate the inside of the lip (see especially Moore, no. 1353). Red-figured vases do not usually make up part of the assemblage of pyres and the use of a stemless cup is also unparalleled in these contexts.

In the next room to the north (Room 5), we encountered Geometric fill below the floor levels of the Classical Commercial Building. Beneath this early fill was a substantial oval pit, measuring ca. 1.80 m. by 1.06 m., originally covered with two large, flat slabs, the eastern one of which had fallen into the pit (**Figs. 9, 10, Plan 2**). Pottery recovered (including two squat aryballooi, one intact) indicates that it is a *Mycenaean tomb* (J 1: 13). Along with the two vases, five beads were recovered. Pit graves of this sort are common in the agora, making up about a third of all Late Bronze Age tombs. They are generally smaller than chamber tombs, have no dromos leading into them, and usually contain a single burial (S. Immerwahr, *The Athenian Agora*,

Volume XIII: The Neolithic and Bronze Ages, pp. 103-104, Plates 87-89). Though the lower part of the chamber was under the present water table, the individual burial in this tomb seems to have been placed in a largely extended position with its head at the west. A preliminary examination of the bones by Maria Liston suggests that the individual buried was a male, about 12 to 15 years old. The pottery indicates a date at the transition from LH II to LH III, that is, not far from 1400 BC.

SECTION OO

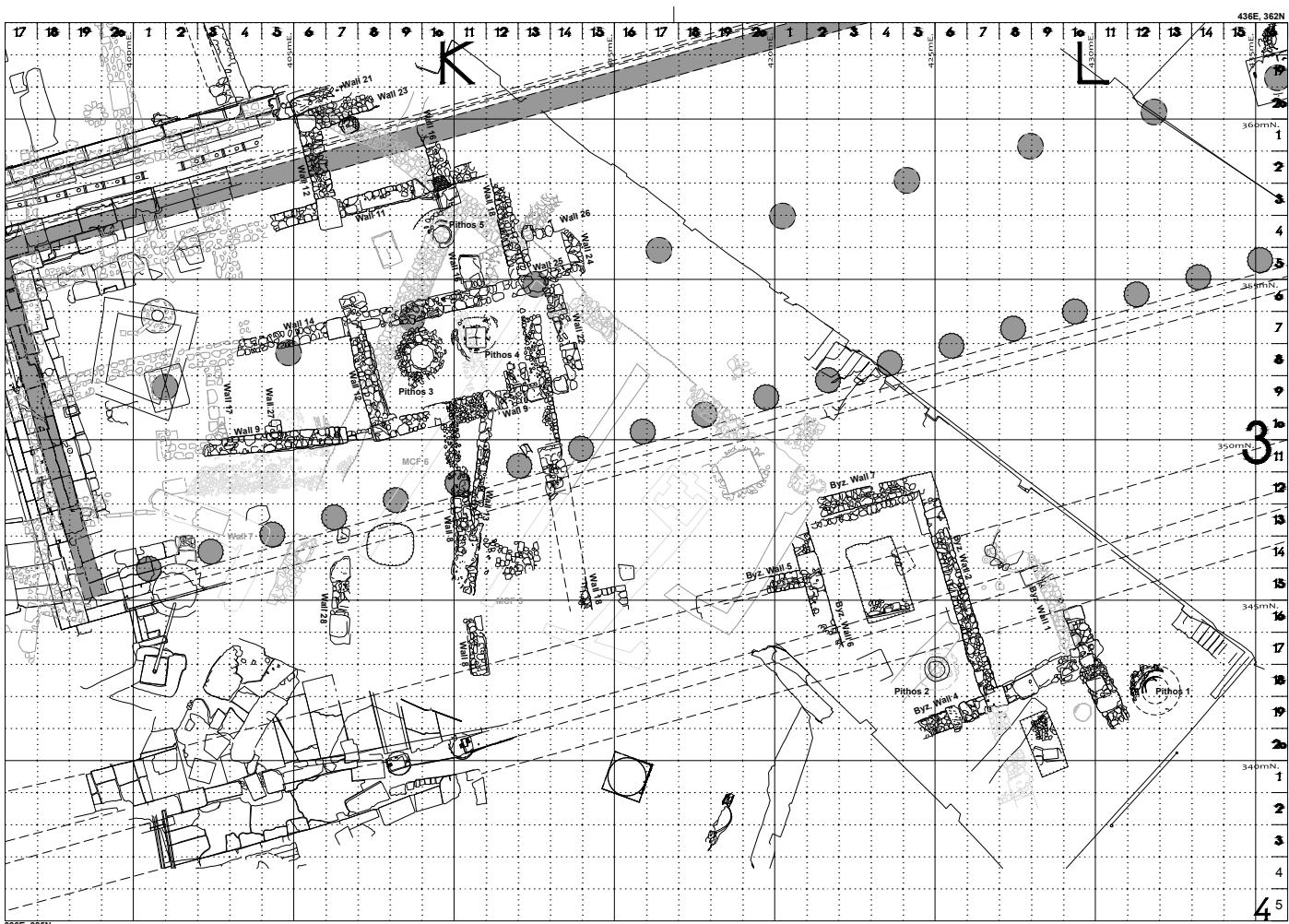
In the old excavations to the southwest, Laura Gawlinski cleared an area just north of the building sometimes identified as the State Prison, across an ancient street running east-west. When first excavated, this area produced a number of Geometric burials and traces of archaic and 4th century BC houses which do not show up on most of the site plans (**Plan 4**). Traces of pebble mosaic floors, embedded basins, and a stone water channel flowing west towards the Great Drain suggest that this area, like much of that to the south, may have been filled with various small industrial establishments, some of them in private houses.

A *pit* at the extreme south, near the road, produced a collection of numerous black-glazed vessels of the 4th century BC (**Fig. 11**). See L. Talcott and B. Sparkes, *Agora XII, Black and Plain Pottery* and S. Rotroff, *Agora XXIX. 1: Hellenistic Pottery*). The most common shapes were rolled-rim plates with rouletting and stamped palmettes (*Agora XII*, nos. 1046-1060 and *Agora XXIX*, 631-650), 'echinos' bowls, also stamped, with the characteristic inturned rims (*Agora XII*, nos. 825-842; *Agora XXIX*, nos. 965-992), and fish-plates with a central depression and outturned rim (*Agora XII*, nos. 1061-1076 and *Agora XXIX*, nos. 1061-1976). The sides of the pit are somewhat amorphous, and we did not reach the bottom, so its original form and function are not yet clear.

It was, in short, a varied and productive season with material dating from the 14th century BC to the 12th century AD. As usual the indoor staff provided considerable logistical support of all sorts: archival (Sylvie Dumont, Pia Kvarnstrom and intern Christianna Asprouli), electronic (Bruce Hartzler, Matt Baumann, and George Vardikos), practical (Craig Mauzy, Ing-Marie Raptis), and in Conservation (Maria Tziotziou and two Kress interns, Janelle Batkin-Hall and Lindsay Decker). Once again, our thanks go out to all the participants and supporters who made the season such a success.

John McK. Camp II

July 2015



Plan 1. Plan of Section BΘ East and West illustrating Byzantine walls and the Painted Stoa beneath.



Fig 1. Aerial photograph (ortho mosaic) of Section BΘ East and West showing Byzantine walls with Painted Stoa (inset above) Matt Baumann (left) and James Herbst (right) pilot and co-pilot of drone.



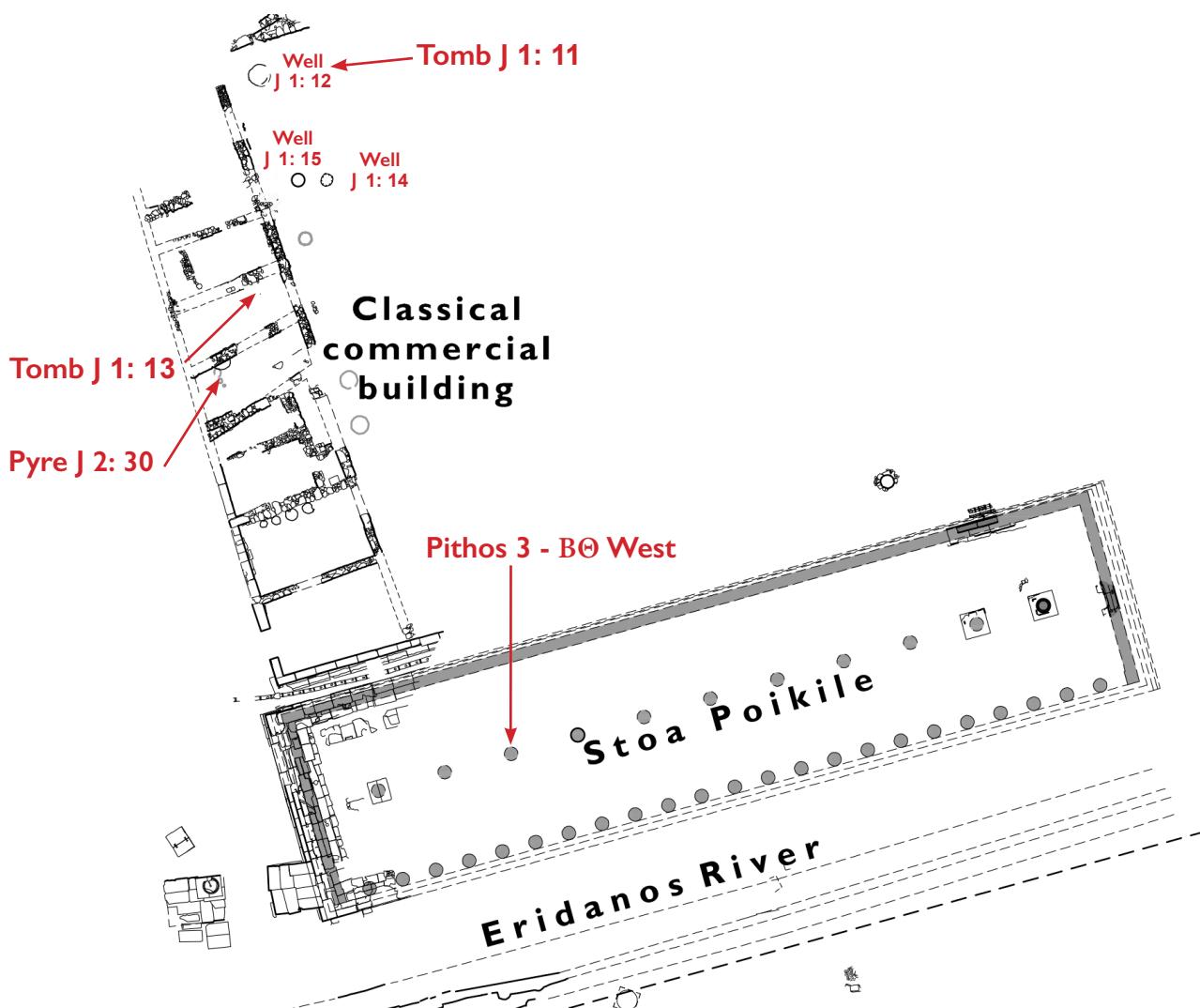
Fig 2. Explorations in BΘ East.



Fig. 3 Daniele Pirisino supervising the removal of the marble slab covering the opening of Pithos 3 of Section BΘ West.



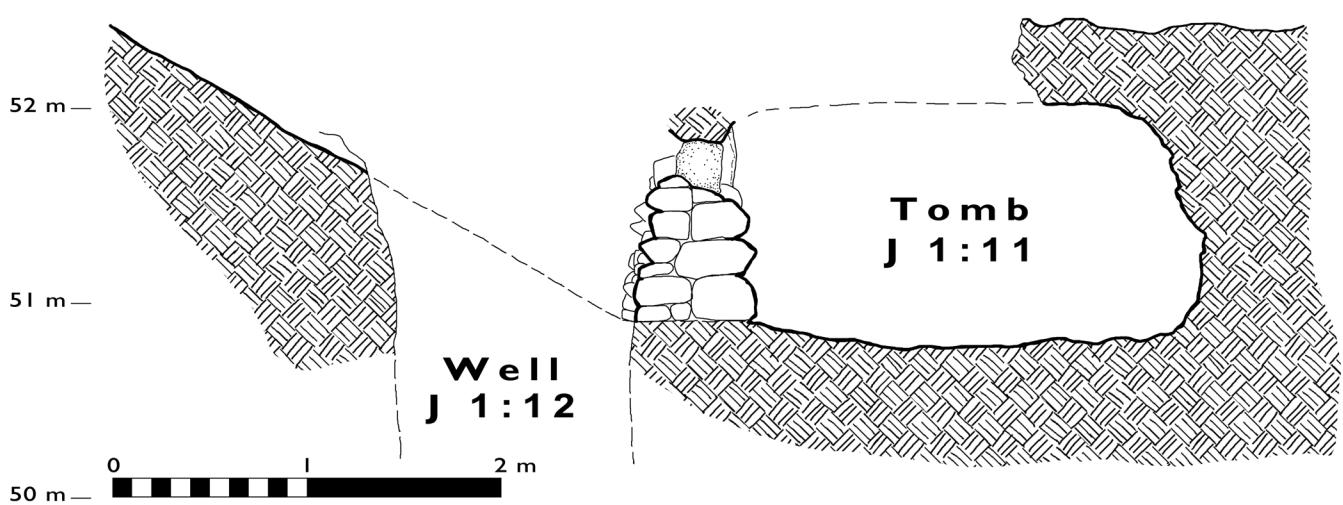
Fig. 4 Two courses of well-worked squared limestone blocks, foundations for the third interior Ionic column, from the west, of the Painted Stoa, still in situ.



Plan 2. Drawing showing locations of Pithos 3 of section BΘ West, Pyre J 2: 30 of Section BZ and Tomb J 1: 11 and Tomb J 1: 13 of Section BZ.



Fig 5. General view of Mycenaean Tomb J 1: 11; looking west. Collapsed portion of tomb in foreground, rubble wall doorway in center, just behind is the top of Well J 1:12 dated to the early archaic period, in background the steeply sloping *dromos* (entrance) to the tomb.



Plan 3. Cross-Section of Tomb J 1: 11 and Well J 1: 12 of BZ.



Fig. 6 In Room 4 of the Classical Commercial Building 'pyre' J 2: 30 was discovered, the 14th pyre to be found in the building itself, the largest concentration anywhere in the Agora.



Fig. 7 Pyre J 2: 30 conserved and then photographed in the studio, the assemblage looks much like other pyres, with small-scale cooking pots (chytra and lopadion), saucers and dishes, a lamp, and drinking cups.



Fig 8. A red-figured stemless cup from Pyre J 2: 30 with looping handles, the decoration close to the Group of Vienna 116. (top & bottom view)



Fig. 9 Mycenaean Tomb J 1: 13 discovered beneath the floor of Room 5 of the Classical Commercial Building.



Fig 10. Two squat aryballooi (bottom one intact) discovered in Mycenaean Tomb J 1: 13. (profile, top and bottom views)



Plan 4. Plan of Section OO. Excavations were carried out in the section, last explored in the late 1940s.



Fig 11. A collection of a half-dozen or so black-glazed rolled-rim plates of the 4th century BC was discovered at the extreme south, near the road.