

Agora 2016 - Summary Report

Excavations were carried out in the Athenian Agora from June 13th to August 5th, 2016. A team of 55 student volunteers, primarily from US universities participated, supplemented by students from Greece, Italy, England, and Ethiopia. The work was supported primarily by the Packard Humanities Institute, along with the Stavros Niarchos Foundation, Randolph-Macon College, the Behrakis Family Foundation, the Desnick family, and other individuals. It is a pleasant duty to acknowledge here their collaboration and to offer thanks for their participation.

As in recent years, most of the work was focused at the northwest corner of the agora square (Sections BΘ and BZ), in and around the classical building we identify as the Painted (Poikile) Stoa. Some additional work was done also near the southwest corner of the agora square (Section OO), just north of an area known to us as the 'Industrial District'. **Plans 1, 2, 3 & Fig. 10**

In *Beta Theta East* (Nick Seetin, supervisor), we dug deep deposits of fill dating from the period of abandonment of this area between the 5th and 9th centuries AD (**Figs. 1 & 10, Plan 1**). In several places we encountered large deposits of broken roof tiles which seem to have been brought from elsewhere and discarded here, outside the city walls at this time. In this same late Roman fill overlying the Eridanos river, we recovered a marble portrait head of a woman (**Fig. 2**). The face is somewhat worn, but her elaborate hairdo is well preserved at the back. It consists of two thick braids coiled around the head, the ends hanging vertically down the middle. Wavy hair lies in front of the coiled braids and covers her ears. Largely on the basis of the hairstyle, Sheila Dillon has noted similarities with portraits of Sabina, the wife of Hadrian, and suggested a date for the head in the first half of the 2nd century AD. The marble seems to be Pentelic.

In Byzantine levels further west we uncovered the mouths of two more pithoi side by side. Together, these match others found in the area and represent the third or fourth instance where these storage bins were paired within a single room.

In *Beta Theta West* (Daniele Pirisino, supervisor) we continued the exploration of floor levels in various rooms (**Figs. 3 & 10, Plan 1**). In one, we had a collection of assorted cooking pots and amphoras broken in situ. In the corner of another room, we had the remains of a long thin hearth, filled with traces of ash and burning. In almost every room in this western area we have found a hearth, a small deposit of coarse ware pottery, or pithoi, all of which suggest that we are in a primarily domestic context.

In *Beta Zeta* (**Plan 2**. Brian Martens, Marcie Handler, supervisors) we dug a layer that seems to be largely of the late 6th/early 5th BC, of the sort usually associated with the Persian sack of 480/479 or the cleanup thereafter. Fragments of high quality black-figured pieces, the head of a female terracotta figurine, and several fragmentary ostraka make up the assemblage. Nearby we also recovered a bronze arrowhead of triangular type.

To the east we dug one of three wells identified in the past two years. Seams of water in this area near the Eridanos river usually make the unlined wells unstable, with the possibility of the collapse of the bedrock from the sides. This season Craig Mauzy constructed something we have been hoping to try for years: a steel cage which was lowered into the shaft and within which the diggers could work safely (**Figs. 4 & 5**). It worked beautifully and the well was dug to its fully preserved depth of ca. 3.30 m. It dated to the years around 400 BC and was largely full of marble and poros working chips, suggesting the debris from a nearby masons' yard or workshop (**Fig. 6**).

Also in Beta Zeta north, we explored a large cutting which has the look of another collapsed Mycenaean tomb, the fourth or fifth in this area. Adjacent to this cutting/collapse, in Room 6 of the Classical Commercial Building, we exposed more of a good stretch of polygonal wall, running east-west, which may be the northern limit of the original building, a possibility suggested by the relatively substantial construction of the wall itself, as well as the location of a stone gutter, which presumably ran through an area open to the sky, set along its northern face. Just to the north and at a lower level, we excavated a layer full of late Geometric pottery, some with figures of horses and a frieze of painted birds. It is not clear if this represents a disturbed Geometric grave or pyre, or some later activity at the dromos of one of the adjacent Mycenaean chamber tombs.

In Section OO (Laura Gawlinski, supervisor) we continued to pursue the plans and functions of buildings lying just across the street and to the north of the 'prison' (**Plan 3**). Here, as elsewhere in the area, we get traces of modest houses/workshops with small installations: pots/basins set into floors, areas of waterproof flooring, traces of material suggesting industrial activity (signs of burning, pieces of pumice, traces of slag and other waste material). In a pit partially excavated by our predecessors we found several mold fragments made of terracotta, used for casting a bronze statue and dating no later than the 5th century BC (**Fig. 7**). Elsewhere industrial debris seems to indicate ironworking and the manufacture of terracotta figurines (**Fig. 8**). A fragmentary shallow bowl or plate in a 'west-slope' style of decoration, has an unusual creature (bear, monkey, lion?) depicted on it (**Fig. 9**).

In short, a busy and productive season, with material dating from the 8th century BC to the 12th AD. In addition to the student volunteers and supervisors, it is also appropriate to acknowledge here the efforts of the indoor staff: Craig Mauzy (deputy director, photographer), Sylvie Dumont (registrar), Bruce Hartzler (IT specialist), Maria Tziotziou (conservation), James Herbst (architect), Pia Kvarnstrom (assistant registrar), and Ing-Marie Raptis (housekeeping) all of whom worked hard in the Stoa to help ensure a successful season.

John Camp

August 2016



Fig. 1 BΘ East - Area of tile dump in foreground.



Fig. 3 BΘ West - Deposit of coarse ware pottery.

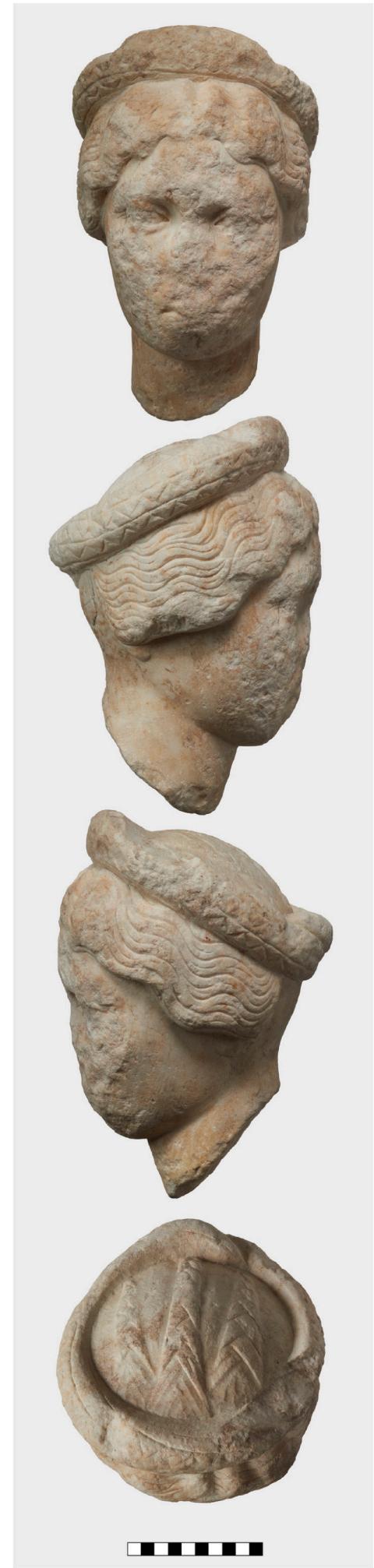


Fig. 2 Marble portrait head of woman.



Fig. 4 Craig Mauzy finishing construction of the steel cage used for digging the well.



Fig. 5 Negasi Nega excavating in the well.



Fig. 6 Marble chips from well.



Fig. 7 Bronze casting molds found in Section OO.



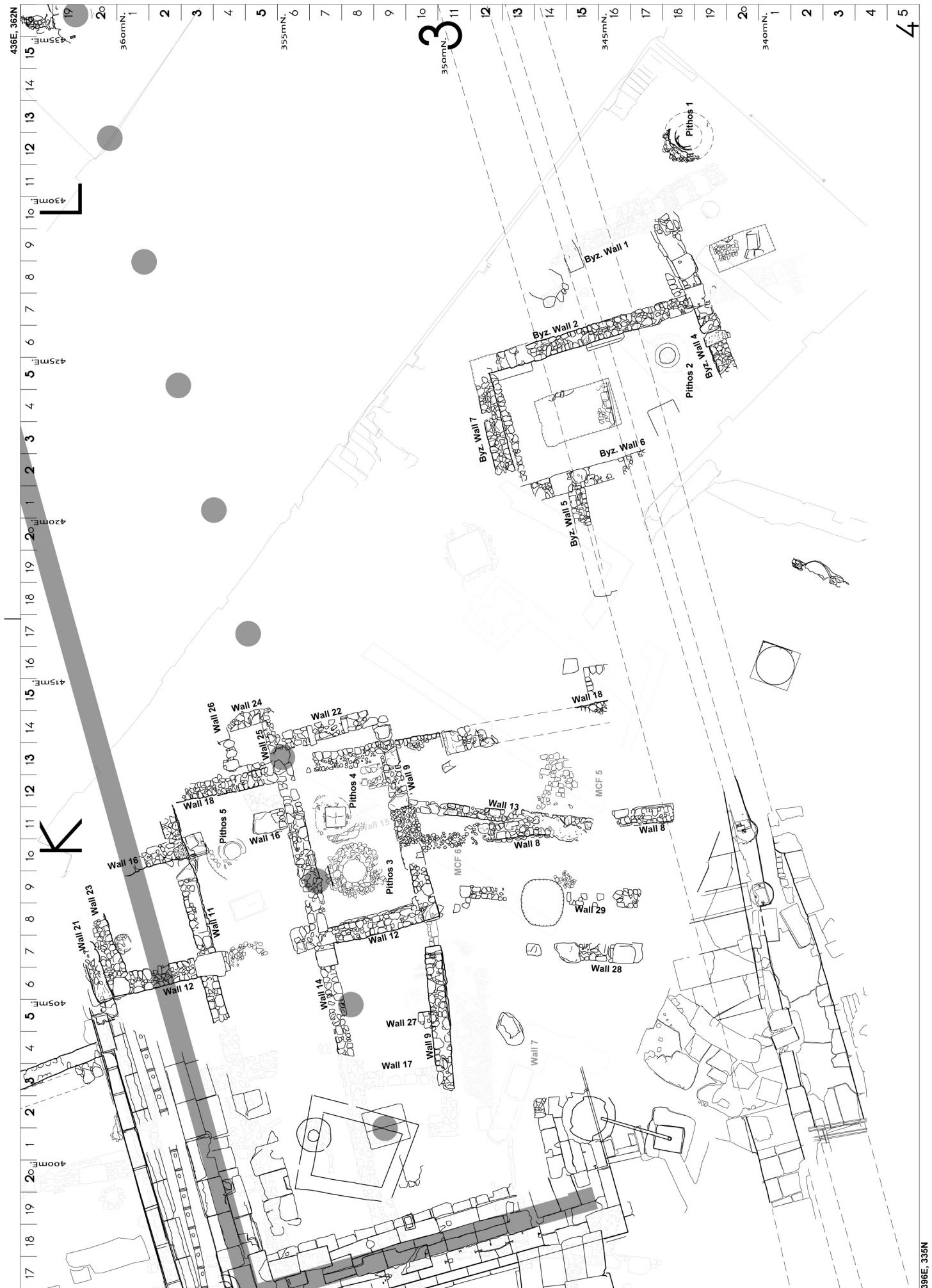
Fig. 8 Mold of a terracotta figurine.



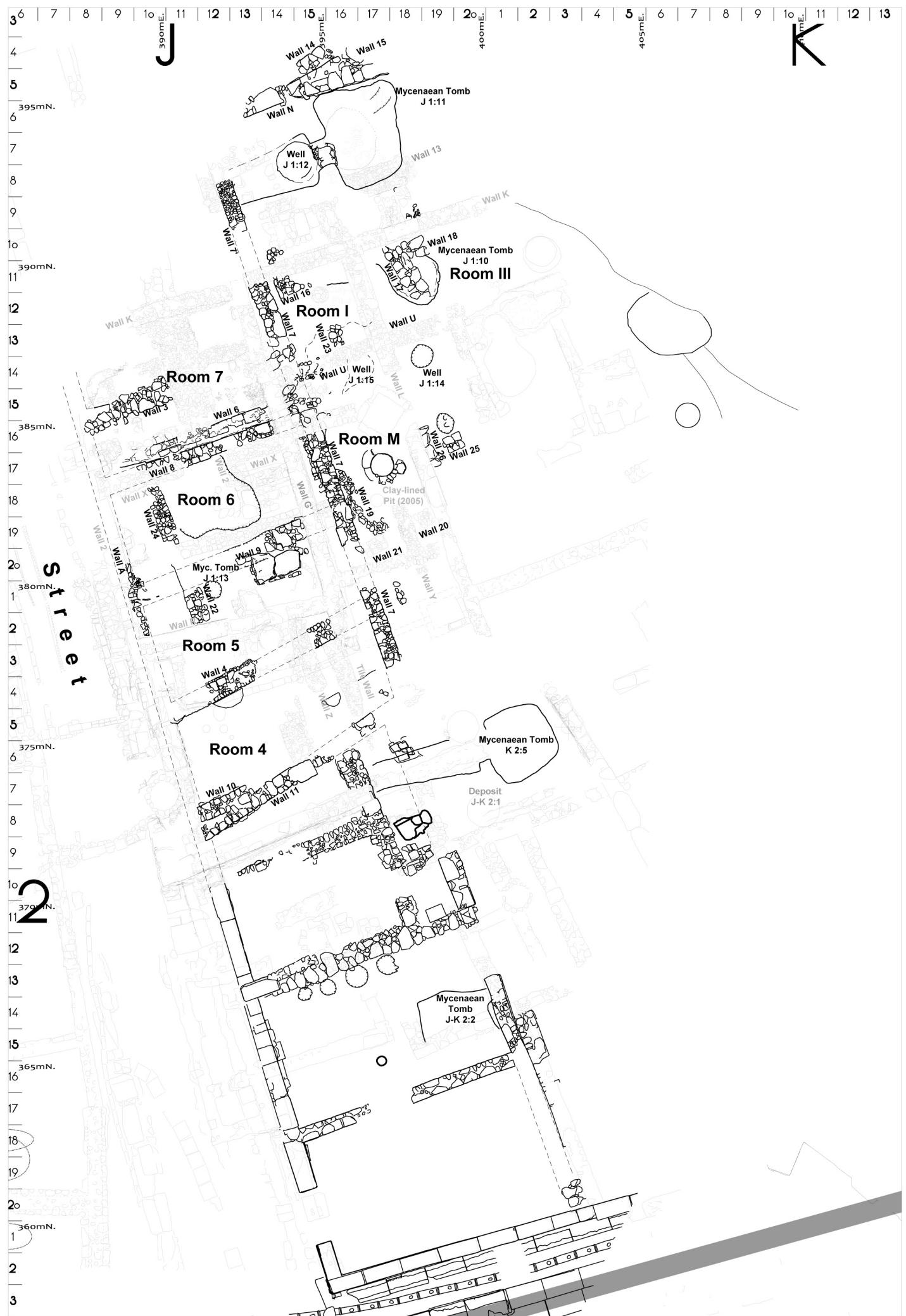
Fig. 9 Fragment of a polychrome plate illustrating a monkey? bear? lion?



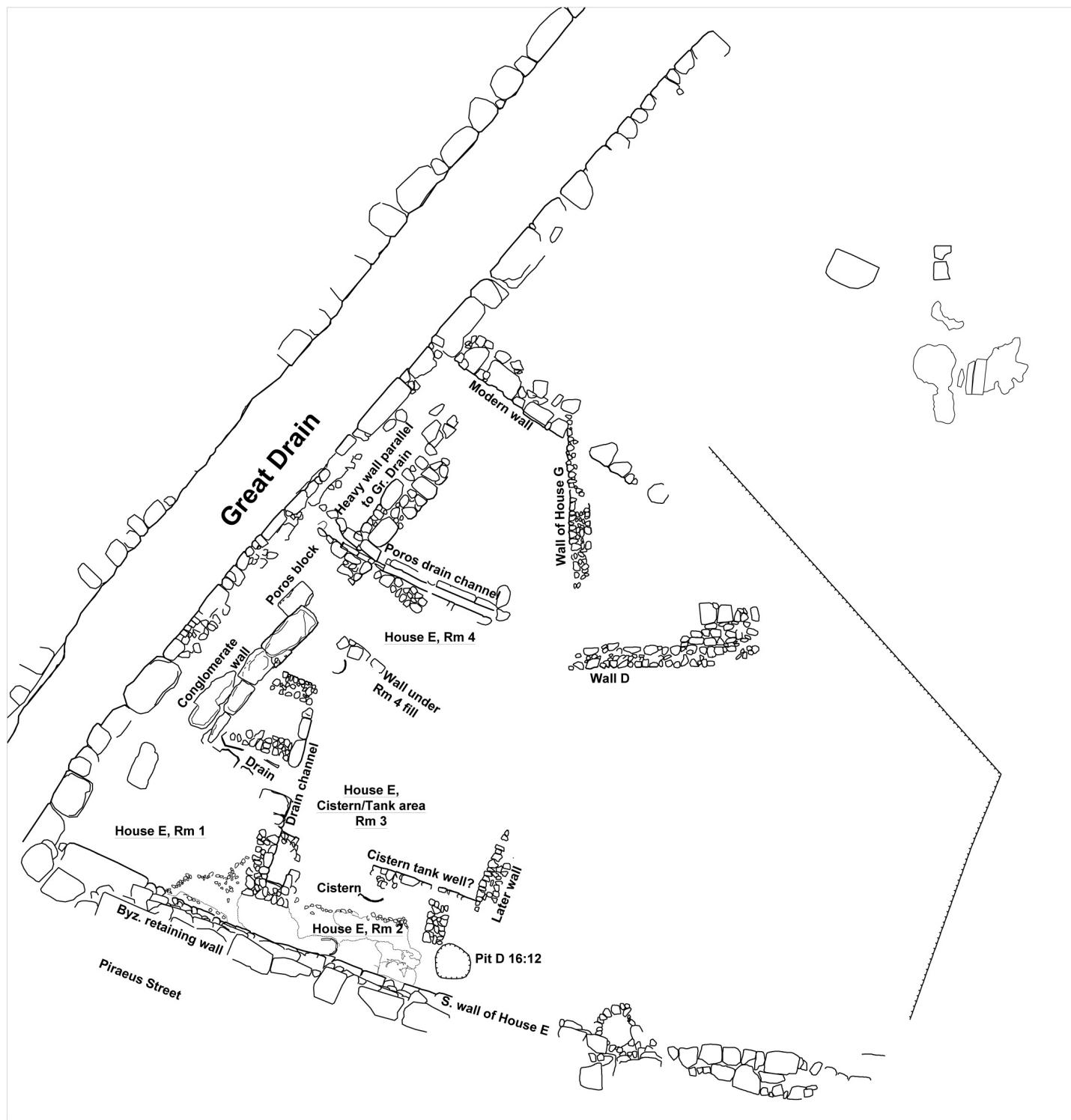
Fig. 10 Aerial photo mosaic of BΘ East & West (many images stitched together by software)



Plan 1 BO East & West



Plan 2 BZ North & South



0 1 5 10 m

Section OO: 24 August 2015

James A. Herbst