Excavations in the Athenian Agora, 2024: Preliminary Report

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With Contributions by Ariadni Ilioglou, Gerasimos Trasanis, Angelica Caraballo-Santiago, and Katrina Kuxhausen-DeRose (excavation); James Herbst (architecture); John M. Marston and Ranran Zhang (archaeobotanical analysis and research); Adam DiBattista (faunal analysis); Brian Damiata (geophysics); Luís Rodríguez-Perez (photogrammetry); Mary Larkum (phytolith analysis); Fotini Kondyli, Nicholas Hudson, and Trevor Van Damme (pottery analysis)

Excavations were continued in the Athenian Agora from June 10 to August 2, 2024, marking the second excavation season in the area beneath the former building at 14 St. Philip Street (Agiou Philippou 14). The general area of the excavations is indicated in **Figure 1a**, with a detailed view in **Figure 1b**. The entire area beneath the building, which covers the central portion of the Stoa Poikile, was labelled section Beta Kappa (BK) and as in 2023, the area was divided into three trenches labeled BK North, BK South, and BK West.

(a)

(b)

Figure 1a) Aerial photograph of central Athens, showing the Acropolis, the Agora, including the Stoa of Attalos (left) and the Temple of Hephaistos (right), with the area of the current excavations outlined in red. Photo by Gerasimos Trasanis; b) detail of the same area, from west. Photo by John Papadopoulos.

In the 2024 season, our excavation team comprised 27 volunteers, four supervisors, and five assistant supervisors, in addition to our specialists.[1] In addition to excavating, volunteers learned through hands-on training and specialists' workshops about archaeobotany, faunal analysis, pottery and amphora studies, photogrammetry, and bioarchaeology, among other methodologies.

As usual, the excavations were supported primarily by the Packard Humanities Institute, and it is a pleasure here to record our appreciation for the ongoing support of the Institute and its President, David W. Packard. Additional support came from UCLA and several private donors, including Panos Kiayias and Sophia Teng, the Mellor Family, David Johnson, and Brook Manville. We would also like to thank Professor John Camp for his assistance, experience, and support throughout the project, and our colleagues at the Wiener Lab, especially Dr. Panagiotis Karkanas and Dr. Dimitris Michailidis for their collaboration.

[1] The demography of our excavation team this year included 20 graduate students, 12 undergraduate students, two post-baccalaureate students, and two others. Our international team included 19 U.S. citizens and 17 people who listed their citizenship as: Albania, Australia, Belgium, Canada (2), Chile, China (2), Georgia, Greece (3), Spain (2), Sweden, Turkey, and Ukraine, representing the following institutions: Arizona State University, Butler University, California State University, Sacramento, Case Western Reserve University, Dicle University (Turkey), Freie Universität Berlin (Germany), Georgetown University, Ghent University (Belgium), National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (Greece), New York University, Petro Mohyla Black Sea University (Ukraine), Tbilisi University (Georgia), Tirana University (Albania), Tufts University, University of Arizona, Universidad de Sevilla (Spain), University of Babes-Bolyai (Romania), University of California, Los Angeles, University of California, Santa Barbara, University of Cincinnati, University of Colorado at Boulder, University of Exeter (UK), University of Ioannina (Greece), University of Michigan, University of Pavia (Italy), University of Virginia, University of Waterloo (Canada), University of Western Ontario (Canada), and Uppsala University (Sweden).

Excavation Summary

The modern building that was located above Section BK measured somewhat more than 300 m^2 in area. Oriented east-west, it was built in 1860 and covered much of the central portion of the Stoa Poikile, as well as part of the Middle Byzantine neighborhood in this area. The various walls and other architectural features uncovered by the end of the 2024 season are indicated on **Figure 2**.

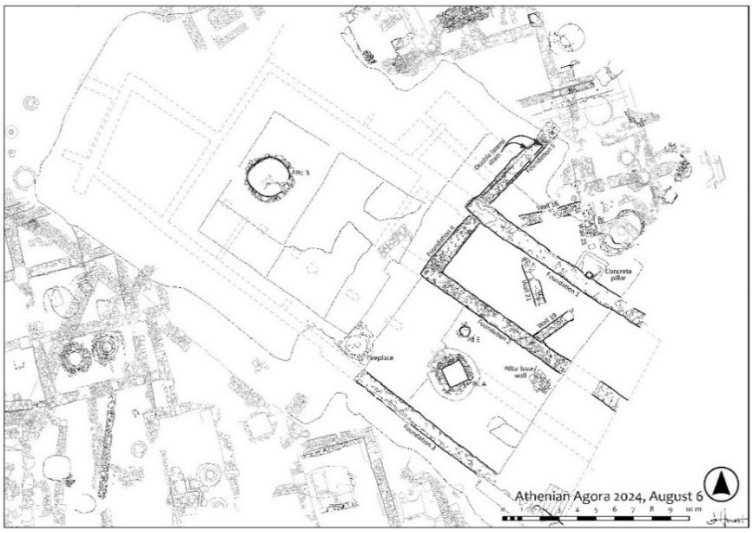

Figure 2. Section BK at the end of the 2024 season. Prepared by James Herbst.

BK North (Ariadni Ilioglou, assisted by Glauke Wylin)

Work in BK North this season was primarily focused on architectural features and deposits dated by pottery to the Middle Byzantine period (mid-12th to mid-13th centuries AD), some of which we have been able to connect with those that had been excavated in Section Beta Eta (BH) to the north (see **Figure 3**).

Figure 3. Plan of excavated features and proposed identification of spaces in BK North. Plan prepared by James Herbst and annotated by Ariadni Ilioglou and Glauke Wylin.

In the southeast corner of the trench, intersecting walls 19 and 20 formed a corner of room P. While Wall 20 is barely visible beneath a modern foundation, enough of wall 19 is visible to determine its basic construction, which included a variety of stones (including a reused triangular marble piece with visible tool marks), tiles, and white mortar. The destruction deposit in room P consisted primarily of rubble, pottery, and construction materials, including copious tiles.

More centrally located in the trench was wall 21, only a small section of which survives. This wall includes three large slabs of limestone and marble with multiple cavities that were likely used as pivots or settings for wooden poles supporting a double door. The variety of holes (four in the northwestern block alone) suggests frequent changes in the placement and orientation of the doors, reflecting the continuous use of these blocks throughout the Middle Byzantine period. Wall 21 may have functioned as an entrance for room M, bounded at the north by walls 15 and 16. Room M contained evidence for industrial activities, notably metallurgy and glass production, indicated by the presence of glass, copper alloy, and iron slag, including at least one hearth bottom, along with evidence for heavy burning in the form of charcoal and vitrified pottery sherds.

Additional features excavated in BK North include an Ottoman-period pit (Pit D), as well as the southern half of a pithos first identified in BH. In this area was evidence of a water channel that may have directed water into the pithos from an adjacent slope. Notable finds include the torso of a marble female figure dated to the Roman period (**Figure 4**) and a body sherd of a Kerch-style red-figure closed vessel.

Figure 4. Torso of marble female figure of Roman date. Photo by Craig Mauzy.

BK South (Gerasimos Trasanis, assisted by Matthew Titzler)

Work in BK South this season was primarily focused on a modern pit (Pit A), two Middle Byzantine features, and mixed deposits containing copious waste from dye production processes. At the end of the season, a pit containing primarily Late Roman material was identified in BK South; we will continue exploring it next season.

A pillar or portion of a wall showing at least two construction phases was identified in the northeast corner of BK South. Although we do not yet have a firm date for this wall, it may belong to the Middle Byzantine period. Mixed deposits around this feature included a localized dump of murex shells. Rena Veropoulidou, an archaeo-malacologist, confirmed the association of these shells with dye production, noting the abundance of mono-species murex, likely from the Saronic Gulf. According to Dr. Veropoulidou, the size of the recovered shells indicates deep-water collection at an industrial scale. A similar dump of murex shells was identified in the opposite corner of the trench, and, in general, mixed deposits from BK South contained significant quantities of this material.

The most notable feature in BK South is a square, stone-lined pit (Pit A), which was first identified in the 2023 season. The fill inside the pit was highly mixed but included a deep layer of iron production waste and much modern material, such as plastic, fabric, and stamped bricks from multiple early 20th century

workshops. At least ten square cavities, in pairs in the centers of opposing walls, have been identified at regular intervals along the stone lining of the pit (**Figure 5**). These cavities, which appear to have been plastered, may have been used to support wooden beams of a climbing or scaffolding structure inside the pit. A break in the stone lining and a different construction technique beneath it suggests at least two phases in the construction of this pit. In 2024, we excavated to a depth of 1.80 m and have not yet reached the bottom.

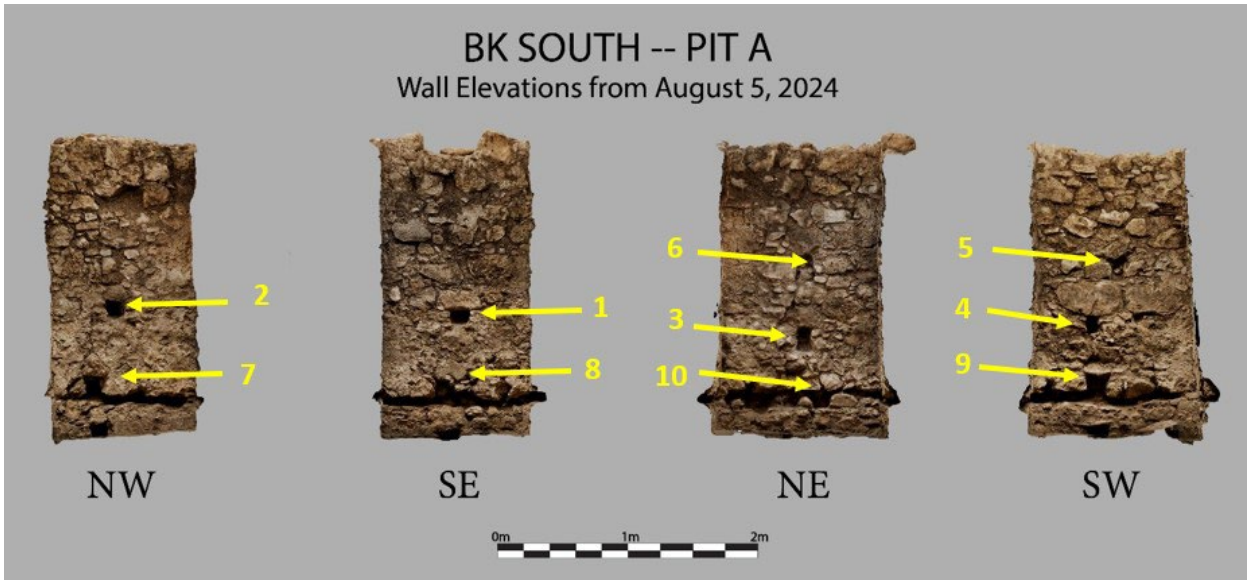

Figure 5. The wall elevation of Pit A, photogrammetric model showing cavities and breaks on the lowest part of the wall. Model prepared by Luís Rodríguez-Perez and Gerasimos Trasanis.

Other features in BK South included a small cylindrical storage pit (ca. 0.60 m diameter and 0.35 m depth) likely dating to the Middle Byzantine period. At the end of the season, we opened a rectangular pit in the southeastern corner of the trench. The material in this gravely pit is dated to the Late Roman period; future exploration will help us determine its full extent and function.

BK West (Angelica Caraballo-Santiago and Katrina Kuxhausen-DeRose, assisted by Allyson Blanck and Ramón Díaz de Mayorga Arias)

Work in BK West this season was primarily aimed at removing mixed modern fill that covered the area, which had begun at a higher elevation than the other two trenches when the area was first opened in 2023. The most notable feature in BK West is a large circular pit (Pit B), which had been integrated into the basement of the modern building that was removed in 2022.

The large circular pit (ca. 2.6 m diameter) contained largely mixed deposits with much modern material, including plastic. The pit is partially lined by fieldstones with no obvious mortar or plaster. This lining extends to a depth of approximately 2 m, but no bottom or floor was identified at this level: the pit, rather continued deeper with no apparent lining or even easily discernible cut in the sidewalls. Dug into the southern side of the pit, within the stone lining, is a roughly horizontal channel that extends for at least two meters. This tunnel-like extension is unstable, and its excavation will proceed from above in future seasons. In its last stage, the pit was used for refuse, but its initial construction purpose remains undetermined. The excavation of a similar pit in BH to the north only confuses matters more.

The eastern half of BK West contained a variety of deposits and possible features, including a pit of undetermined date, a dump of equine legs and a ceramic pot, and a stub of a stone wall that may date to the Ottoman period (wall 6) (**Figure 6**).

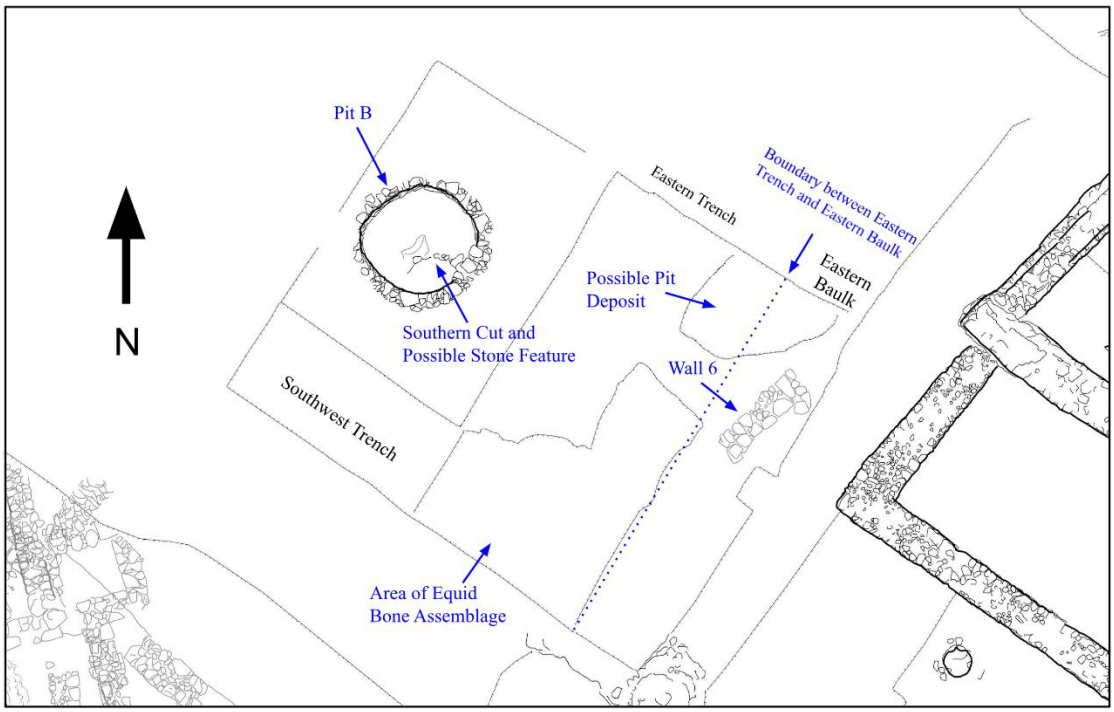

Figure 6. Plan of BK West showing primary features and deposits excavated. Plan prepared by James Herbst and annotated by Angelica Caraballo-Santiago and Katrina Kuxhausen-DeRose.

Notable finds include a Latin Bottony crucifix and a terracotta figurine head with preserved paint possibly dated to the Roman period (**Figure 7**). Finally, a human skull was block-lifted by Maria Tziotziou and excavated in the lab by Maria Liston; a badly corroded coin that may date to the Frankish period was found beneath the skull, though its relationship with the skull, if any, is undetermined at this time.

Figure 7. Terracotta figurine head, possibly dated to the Roman period. Photo by Craig Mauzy.

Collection Strategies and Team Organization

As in 2023, we dry sieved 100% of excavated fill and took flotation and phytolith samples for each basket. Flotation, heavy fraction sorting, and light fraction collecting were overseen by Dr. John (Mac) Marson (Boston University), with the assistance of Ranran (Angela) Zhang and Phoebe Wilcox. Dr. Mary Larkum (Washington University, St. Louis) processed and began analyzing phytolith samples using the facilities at the Wiener Laboratory and this season she also embarked on collecting, processing, and analyzing starch samples. Preliminary results are available upon request.

Pottery was sorted, read, and recorded by Dr. Fotini Kondyli (University of Virginia), Dr. Nicholas Hudson (University of North Carolina, Wilmington), and Dr. Trevor Van Damme (University of Warwick), assisted

by Hannah Borotsik. Tile for all baskets was weighed and counted, and a representative sample kept. Animal bone and shell collection strategies were established by Dr. Flint Dibble (ASCSA) and Dr. Adam DiBattista (NSF). Luís Rodríguez-Perez (UCLA) oversaw the production of photogrammetric models, while James Herbst (Corinth Excavations) and Gerasimos Trasanis (University of Athens) performed aerial photography. The excavations were greatly aided by the permanent staff of the Agora, Craig Mauzy (Deputy Director and Photographer), Eirini Dimitriadou (Assistant to the Director), Maria Tziotziou (Conservator), Aspasia Efstathiou (Associate Registrar), Pia Kvarnström (Database Manager), and Emy Patagia (Housekeeper).

The collaboration initiated in 2023 with Harvard University and the Max Planck Institute to study the ancient DNA of selected Late Bronze and Early Iron Age burials from the Athenian Agora was continued in 2024. To this end, Trudi Frost and Kim Callan (Harvard University) collected 133 samples from Mycenaean and Early Iron Age burials, comprising samples from crania, including petrous bones, as well as various long bones. The sampling was carried out in the Wiener Lab under fully sterile conditions. These are currently being analyzed at Harvard by Professor David Reich, Dr. Iosif Lazaridis, and their collaborators, and the preliminary accounts suggest that the samples will provide robust results.