

The Athenian

AGORA

a short guide to the excavations

THE ATHENIAN AGORA



A SHORT GUIDE

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Color Photographs by
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Figure 1. Plan of the Agora at the height of its development in ca. A.D. 150.

- Archaic
- Classical
- Hellenistic
- Roman
- Monument Numbers



Figure 2. Athenian silver tetradrachm, 5th century B.C., with the head of Athena on the obverse, and her sacred owl, an olive sprig, and the legend (ΑΘΕ) on the reverse.

INTRODUCTION

CLASSICAL ATHENS saw the rise of an achievement unparalleled in history. Perikles, Aeschylus, Sophokles, Plato, Demosthenes, Thucydides, and Praxiteles represent just a few of the statesmen and playwrights, historians and artists, philosophers and orators who flourished here during the 5th and 4th centuries B.C., when Athens was the foremost city-state in Greece. Collectively they were responsible for sowing the seeds of Western civilization. Even when her power waned, Athens remained the cultural and educational center of the Mediterranean until the 6th century A.C. Throughout antiquity Athens was adorned with great public buildings, financed first by its citizens, and later with gifts from Hellenistic kings and Roman emperors. Nowhere is the history of Athens so richly illustrated as in the Agora, the marketplace that was the focal point of public life.

A large open square, surrounded on all four sides by buildings, the Agora was in all respects the center of town (Fig. 1; see also the reconstruction drawing on pp. 24-25). The excavated buildings, monuments, and small objects (Fig. 2) illustrate the important role it played in all aspects of civic life. The council chamber (*Bouleuterion*), public office buildings (Royal Stoa, South Stoa I) and archives (*Metreon*) have all been explored. The lawcourts are represented by the discovery of bronze ballots and a water-clock used to time speeches. The use of the area as a marketplace is indicated by the numerous shops where potters, cobblers, bronzeworkers, and sculptors made and sold their wares. Long stoas (colonnades) provided shaded walkways for those wishing to meet friends to discuss business, politics, or philosophy, while statues and commemorative monuments reminded citizens of former triumphs. A library and concert hall (odeion) met cultural needs, and numerous small shrines and temples received regular worship. Here administrative, political, judicial, commercial, social, cultural, and religious activities all found a place together in the heart of ancient Athens.

[King Cyrus speaks]: "I have never feared men who have a place set apart in the middle of their city where they lie and deceive each other. If I keep my health, the Hellenes will have their own sufferings to worry about, not those of the Ionians." This threat he uttered against all Hellenes because they have agoras and buy and sell there; for the Persians themselves do not use agoras, nor do they have any."

Herodotos I. 153

HISTORY OF THE AGORA

THE EXCAVATIONS of the Athenian Agora have uncovered about thirty acres on the sloping ground northwest of the Acropolis (Fig. 3). Material of all periods from the Late Neolithic to modern times has been excavated, shedding light on 5,000 years of Athenian history. The area was occupied long before it became the civic center of Athens. During the Late Bronze Age it was used as a cemetery, and some 50 graves have been found, dating from 1600 to 1100 B.C. These are mostly chamber tombs, with multiple burials. It continued in use as a cemetery throughout the Iron Age (1100–700 B.C.) and over 80 graves, both burials and cremations, have been found. Several dozen wells reflect the position of houses and indicate that the area was given over to habitation as well.

A gradual change from private to public land seems to have occurred during the middle of the 6th century, and the first certain public buildings or monuments (Southeast Fountain House [15], Altar of the Twelve Gods [2]) were erected in the 520s, during the tyranny of the Peisistratids. The creation of the new democracy in 508/7 B.C. led to the construction of the Old Bouleuterion on the site of the later Metroon [8], the setting of boundary stones [10], and, perhaps, the construction of the Royal Stoa [27].

The Persian destruction of 480/79 left the city a shambles, but the buildings in the Agora were repaired and many more were added in the 5th and 4th centuries to accommodate the Athenian democracy at its height. The Stoa Poikile [28], Tholos [6], New Bouleuterion [7], Stoa of Zeus Eleutherios [3], South Stoa I [14], Mint [16], and Lawcourts [23] were all added to the periphery of the great square, as were fountain houses, temples, and shops.

The rise of Alexander of Macedon eclipsed Athens politically and the 3rd century B.C. saw Athens dominated by his successors. Recovery in the 2nd century was fueled by Athens' reputation as the cultural and educational center of the Mediterranean, and the philosophical schools founded by Plato, Aristotle, Zeno, and Epicurus flourished. Three large stoas were built in the Agora in the 2nd century (Middle Stoa [17], South Stoa II [19], and Stoa of Attalos [22]) and the archive building (Metroon [8]) was rebuilt with a colonnaded facade.



Figure 3. Panorama of the Agora viewed from the south, with the Hephaisteion (Theseion) at left and the restored Stoa of Attalos (museum) at right.

The influence of Rome becomes clear in Athens in 86 B.C., when Sulla besieged the city after it sided with Mithradates of Pontus. Despite this poor choice, the city flourished, thanks again to her reputation for education and culture. Temples were built in the Agora to accommodate worship of the imperial family [25], and a great Odeion [24] or concert hall was set down in the middle of the square late in the 1st century B.C. Athens prospered through the 2nd century under the emperor Hadrian (A.D. 117–138) and is described in detail by the traveler Pausanias in the years around A.D. 150.

Hard times began in the 3rd century, when the city was destroyed by northern invaders, the Herulians, in A.D. 267. When the city was rebuilt, the old Agora was not even within the new fortified circuit [20]. The area was given over to a variety of large villas in the 4th and 5th centuries A.C. The buildings show the effects of further barbarian incursions: Visigoths under Alaric in A.D. 395, the Vandals in the 470s, and the Slavs in 582/3. The area was abandoned in the 7th century and only recovered with the growth of the city in the 10th century A.C.



Figure 4. Model of the Agora and northwest Athens in the 2nd century A.C., looking along the entire course of the Panathenaic Way from the Dipylon Gate (bottom) to the Acropolis (top); view from the northwest.



Figure 5. Limestone channel with water basins along the Panathenaic Way.

NUMEROUS ROADS led in and out of the Agora square. By far the most important, however, was the broad street known as the Dromos or Panathenaic Way, the principal thoroughfare of the city (Fig. 4). It led from the main city gate, the Dipylon, up to the Acropolis, a distance of just over a kilometer, and served as the processional way for the great parade that was a highlight of the Panathenaic festival. Halfway along, it enters the Agora at its northwest corner and passes through the square on a diagonal, exiting at the southeast corner.

The street is unpaved except to the south, as it begins the steep ascent to the Acropolis, where it was paved with large stone slabs in the Roman period. Elsewhere it is made up of layers of packed gravel; at the north, some sixty-six superimposed layers were excavated, reflecting a thousand years of use of the thoroughfare, from the 6th century B.C. until the 6th century A.C.

The line of the street was defined in the Hellenistic and Roman periods by successive open stone gutters along its south side (Fig.5). Basins in the line of the channel caught sediment and helped keep the channel clean; those off to the side presumably provided water for draft animals.

The street was used not only for the procession, but also for chariot races (the *apobates*) during the Panathenaic festival (Fig. 6). It seems also to have served as the running track for foot races before a proper stadium was built, and as the training ground for the young recruits of the Athenian cavalry.



Figure 6. Sculpted base for a monument celebrating a victory in the apobates at the Panathenaic Games, 4th century B.C. As the race made its way along the Panathenaic Way, the armed passenger was expected to jump on and off the moving chariot.

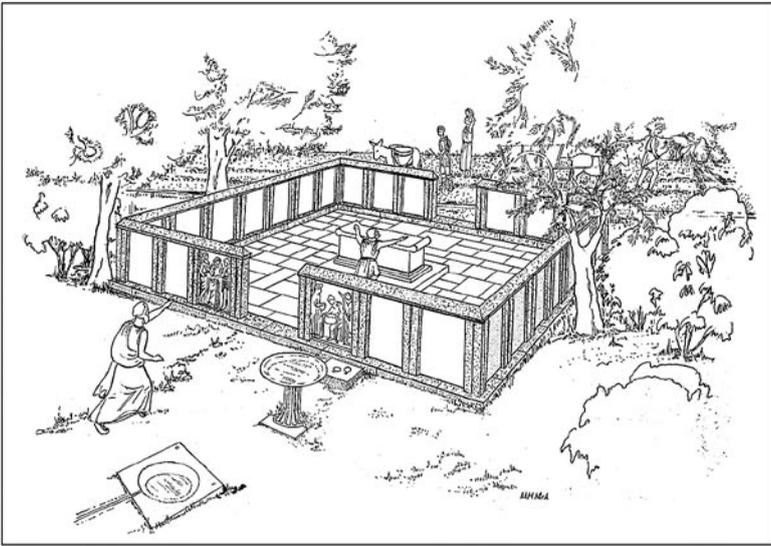


Figure 7. Altar of the Twelve Gods, originally dated 522/1 B.C., with later rebuildings. One corner of the sill only is visible, just south of the modern Athens–Piraeus railway.

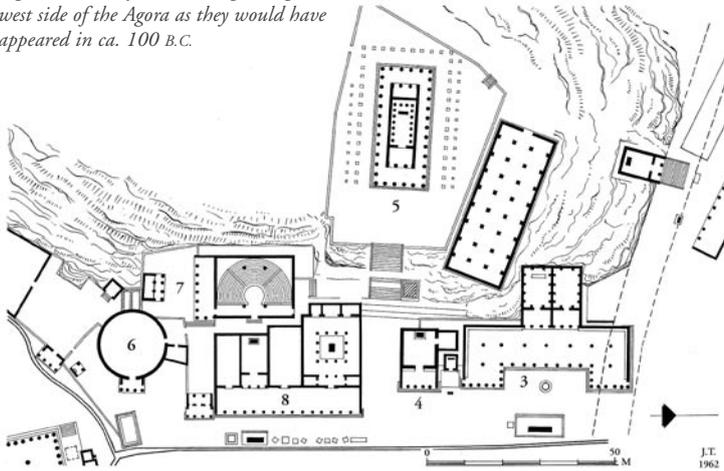
“Amongst those of the Peisistratids who held the annual magistracy at Athens was Peisistratos, son of Hippias the tyrant (named after his grandfather), who during his archonship set up the Altar of the Twelve Gods in the Agora and the Altar of Apollo in the shrine of Apollo Pythios. On the altar in the Agora the Athenians later rendered the inscription invisible by adding to the length of the structure.”

ALTAR OF THE TWELVE GODS 2

NEAR THE MIDDLE of the open square, somewhat to the north, lay the Altar of the Twelve Gods (Fig. 7), today largely hidden under the Athens–Piraeus railway (1891). A corner of the enclosure wall survives, along with the inscribed marble base for a bronze statue that reads “Leagros, the son of Glaukon, dedicated this to the twelve gods.” Thucydides tells us the younger Peisistratos, grandson of the tyrant, established the altar in the Agora during his archonship (522/1 B.C.). The upper surface of the present sill (4th century B.C.) preserves traces of the stone fence that would have defined the sacred area around the altar, now missing.

The altar was one of the few monuments permitted within the open square and it served as the zero milestone or center of the city. Herodotos (2.7), when giving a distance in Egypt, tells us that it is as far from Heliopolis to the sea as it is from the Altar of the Twelve Gods in Athens to Olympia. On a milestone dating to ca. 400 B.C. we read: “The city set me up, a truthful monument to show all mortals the measure of their journeying: the distance to the altar of the twelve gods from the harbor is forty-five stades” (*IG II² 2640*). Physically, we are at the heart of the city.

Figure 8. Plan of the buildings along the west side of the Agora as they would have appeared in ca. 100 B.C.



WEST SIDE

STOA OF ZEUS ELEUTHERIOS 3

LYING JUST SOUTH of the railroad tracks, along the west side, are the remains of the Stoa of Zeus Eleutherios (Freedom) (Figs. 8, 9). This cult of Zeus was established after the battle of Plataia in 479 B.C., when the Greeks drove the Persians out of Greece.

Though dedicated to a god, the building takes the form commonly used for a civic building: a stoa (colonnade or portico), with two projecting wings. Built of marble and limestone in the years around 425 B.C., the stoa had Doric columns on the exterior and Ionic columns within. According to Pausanias it was decorated with paintings done by Euphranor, a famous 4th-century artist, and the shields of those who died fighting for the freedom of Athens were displayed on the building. Rooms were added to the back of the stoa in the Early Roman period and may have housed a cult of the Roman emperors.

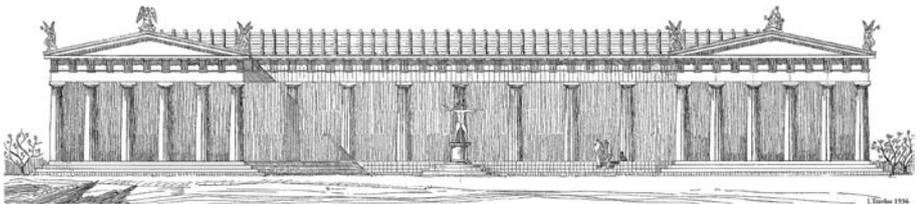


Figure 9. Reconstruction of the Doric Stoa of Zeus Eleutherios, ca. 430–420 B.C.

NEXT TO the Stoa of Zeus at the south are the remains of a small temple of Apollo Patroos (Fatherly), so-called because he was the father of Ion, founder of the Ionian Greeks, a tribe that included the Athenians (Fig. 10). Dated to the second half of the 4th century B.C., the temple had Ionic columns only across the front (probably six, though four is possible). A monumental marble statue found in the ruins seems to be the cult statue by Euphranor mentioned by Pausanias (Fig. 11).

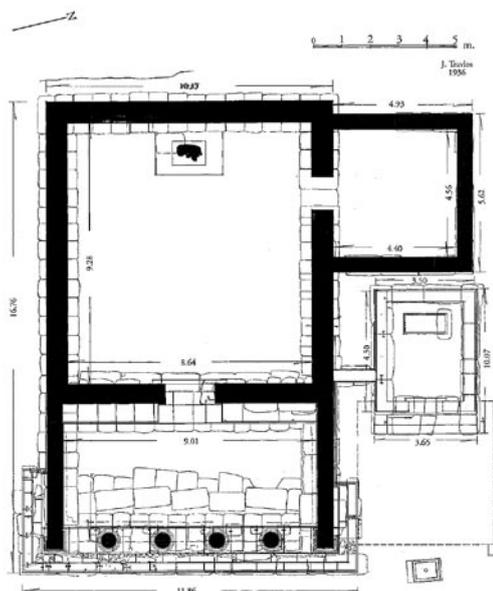


Figure 10. Reconstructed plan of the Temple of Apollo Patroos, dating from the second half of the 4th century B.C.

Figure 11. Monumental cult statue of Apollo Patroos by Euphranor.



“Euphranor also made the Apollo called Patroos in the temple nearby. In front of the temple one Apollo was made by Leochares, the other—whom they call Alexikakos (avertor of evil)—by Kalamis. They say the god received this name because by an oracle from Delphi he stopped the plague which was afflicting them at the same time as the Peloponnesian War.”

Pausanias 1.3.4

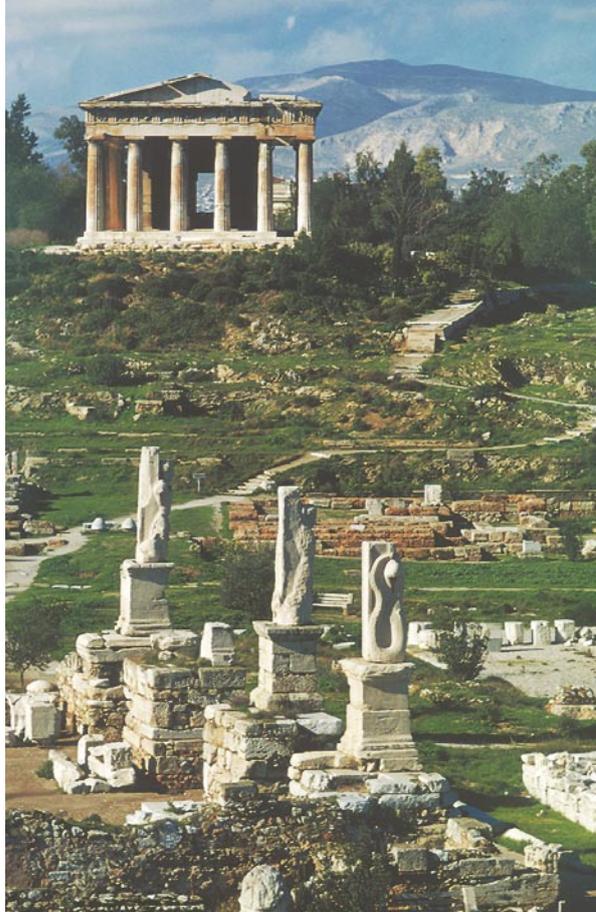


Figure 12. The Hephaisteion (“Theseion”), seen from across the Agora, ca. 460–415 B.C.

HEPHAISTEION 5

OVERLOOKING THE AGORA from the hill to the west (Kolonos Agoraios), is the Hephaisteion, the best preserved example of a Doric temple in mainland Greece (Fig. 12). It was dedicated jointly to Hephaistos (god of the forge, the Roman Vulcan) and Athena (goddess of arts and crafts), and dates to the second half of the 5th century B.C. It is built largely of Pentelic marble and carries a lavish amount of sculptural decoration. The Labors of Herakles occupy the east facade, while the labors of Theseus adorn short sections of the long north and south sides. The Theseus scenes gave rise to the popular name of the temple, the “Theseion,” which survives in the name of the district of the modern city and the nearby Metro stop. Battle scenes surmount the east and west porches, with a lively centauromachy at the west. The two bronze cult statues, done by Alkamenes and described by Pausanias, disappeared long ago. Traces of a garden planted around the temple in the 3rd century B.C. were found in the excavations.

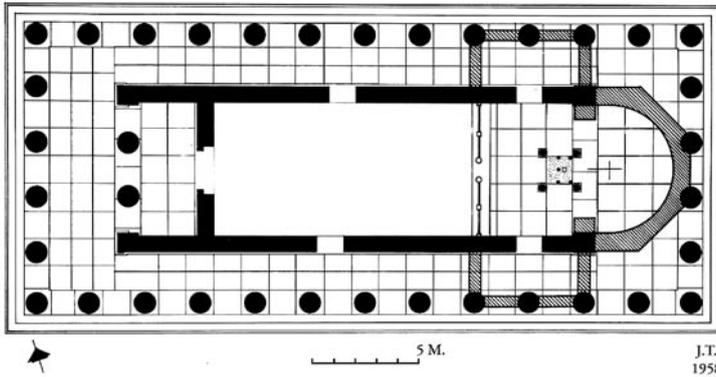


Figure 13. Plan of the Hephaisteion, showing also the conversion of the temple into the Church of St. George, 7th century A.C.

The building owes its remarkable state of preservation to two factors: Athens is not in a major earthquake zone, and the temple was converted into a Christian church in the 7th century A.C. (Fig. 13), saving it from later quarrying for building material, though deep depressions in the steps show where the lead used to seal metal clamps was gouged out. Conversion to a church led to the deliberate mutilation of the sculptures, except for the minotaur at the southeast corner who has retained his head. In the early 19th century the church was used as the Protestant cemetery, and many European philhellenes who died in the War of Independence were buried here.

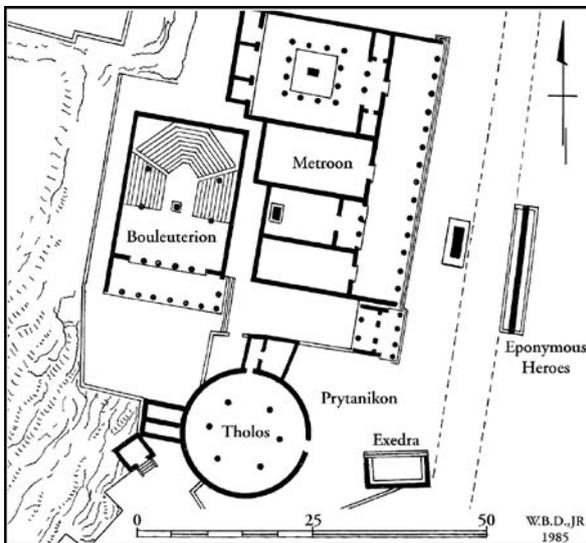


Figure 14. Plan of the administrative buildings at the south end of the west side of the Agora.

ADMINISTRATIVE CENTER

THE SOUTH HALF of the west side was given over to the major administrative buildings used to run the Athenian democracy (Fig. 14). The buildings are poorly preserved, but the identifications are secure thanks to the account of the traveler Pausanias, who visited Athens in the years around A.D. 150.

THOLOS 6

THE THOLOS, recognizable by its round shape, served as the headquarters of the *prytaneis* (executive committee) of the *boule* (senate of 500), according to Aristotle (*Ath. Pol.* 43.3). Here the fifty senators were fed at public expense, and at least seventeen spent the night in the building, available to deal with any emergency, whatever the hour. In a sense, then, the Tholos represents the heart of the Athenian democracy, where citizens serving as senators could be found on duty twenty-four hours a day.

Built around 470 B.C., the building was an unadorned drum, with six interior columns supporting a conical roof of large diamond-shape terracotta roof tiles (Fig. 15). The round form of the building is ill-suited for its primary function as a dining-hall and it may be that the usual Greek practice of reclining on couches during meals was abandoned here in favor of sitting on a simple bench. Wine jars and cups labeled as public property were found around the building (Fig. 16).

Figure 15. Model of the Tholos, ca. 470 B.C.; dining hall and the headquarters of the *prytaneis* (executive committee of the senate).

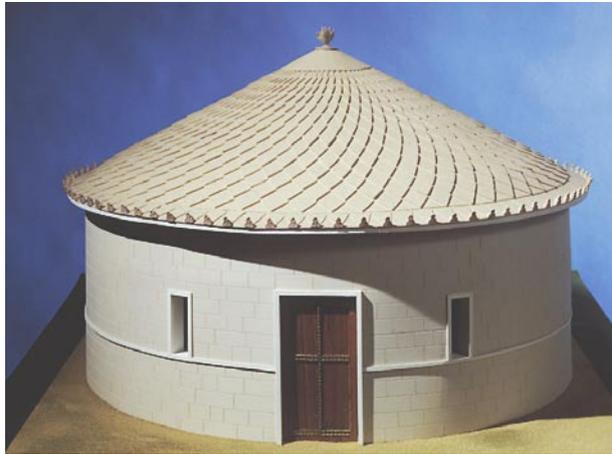


Figure 16. Public dining ware found near the Tholos, 5th century B.C. The ligature delta/epsilon stands for *demosion* (public).

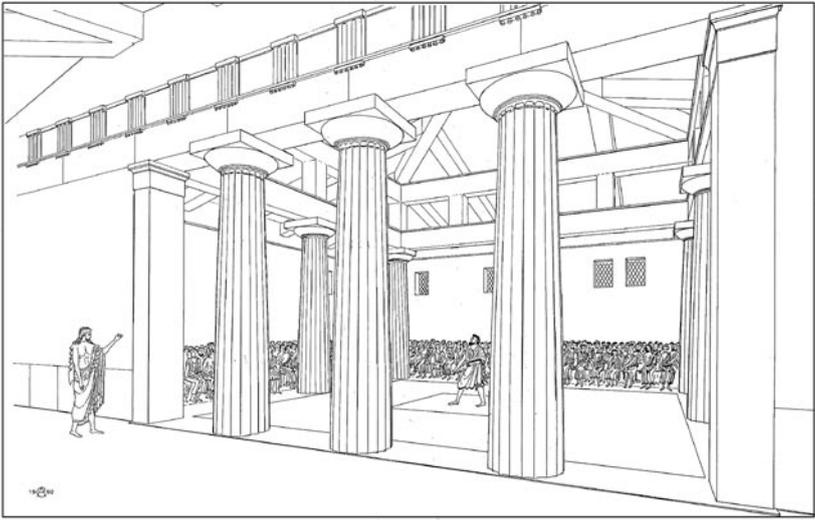


Figure 17. Restored perspective view of the interior of the Old Bouleuterion, ca. 500 B.C.

BOULEUTERION 7

JUST UPHILL from the Tholos was the Bouleuterion, meeting place of the *boule*, or senate. Five hundred Athenian citizens were chosen by lot to serve for a year, and met in this building every day except during festivals to prepare legislation for the meetings of the *ekklesia* (assembly of all citizens), which met at the Phyx every ten days.

The remains are in a miserable state of preservation, with only the outlines of walls discernible in trenches sunk into bedrock. The building dates to the last quarter of the 5th century B.C., replacing an earlier version dating to ca. 500 B.C. (Figs. 17, 18) that lies under the Metroon.

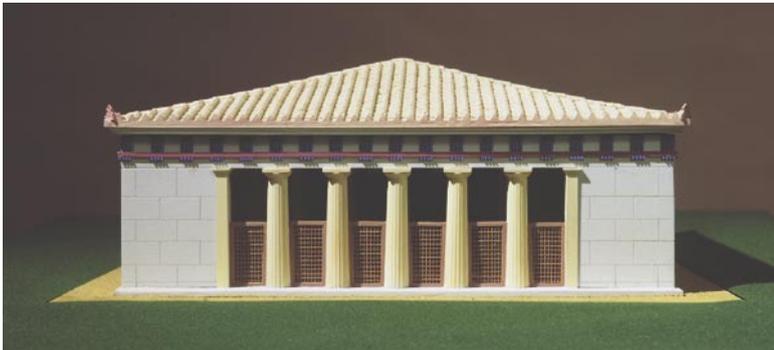


Figure 18. Model of the Old Bouleuterion.

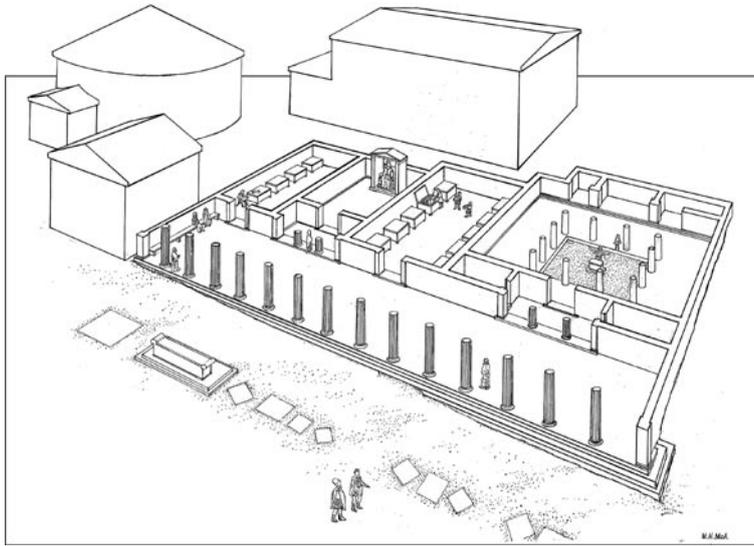


Figure 19. Cutaway view of the Metroon in the late 2nd century B.C.; the building housed both a cult of the Mother of the Gods and the State Archives.

METROON (ARCHIVES) 8

THE METROON served two functions; it was both a sanctuary of the Mother of the Gods and the archive building of the city, a repository of official records (Fig. 19). The present remains date to the mid-2nd century B.C. and overlie traces of earlier public buildings, including the Old Bouleuterion. The Hellenistic building had four rooms set side-by-side, united by a facade of fourteen Ionic columns. Except for a small stretch of steps at the south, all that remains are the reddish conglomerate foundations below the floor level of the building; the exact disposition of the records and the location of the statue of the Mother by the sculptor Agorakritos (cf. Fig. 20), seen by Pausanias, are unclear.



Figure 20. A dedicatory relief of the Mother of the Gods, 4th century B.C.; one of several dozen copies found in the Agora.



Figure 21. The Monument of the Eponymous Heroes, second half of the 4th century B.C.

“Higher up stand statues of heroes, from whom the tribes at Athens later took their names. Who fixed the number of tribes at ten instead of four and gave them new names instead of the old ones—all this is related by Herodotos. Amongst the Eponymoi—for that is what they call them—are Hippothoon, son of Poseidon and. . . .”

Pausanias 1.5

MONUMENT OF THE EPONYMOUS HEROES 9

ACROSS THE STREET from the Metroon lie the remains of the Monument of the Eponymous Heroes (Fig. 21). When Kleisthenes created the democracy in 508/7 B.C., he assigned all the Athenians to ten newly-formed tribes; he then sent 100 names of Athenian heroes to Delphi, where Apollo’s oracle picked ten, after whom the tribes were named. Citizenship depended on membership in a tribe, the army was arranged in tribal contingents, one served in the *boule* as a member of one’s tribe, and festivals were held in honor of one’s tribal hero; the tribal system was the foundation on which the new Athenian democracy was built.

The monument took the form of a long base for the ten bronze statues representing the ten eponymous heroes of the tribes (Fig. 22). It served as a public notice board and announcements concerning citizens would be hung on the face of the high base beneath the appropriate tribal statue. Military conscription, public honors, upcoming legal events, and proposed legislation would all be displayed. In the days before radio, television, newspapers, and the telephone, the monument was essential for the dissemination of official information.

Only parts of the stone sill and the surrounding fence survive, along with five limestone blocks from the base itself and two marble blocks from the crown. Literary references indicate that the Eponymoi were erected as early as 425 B.C., though the remains here go back no earlier than ca. 330 B.C. Cuttings in the sill show that the monument was refurbished on several occasions thereafter and these adjustments may well match changes in the tribal system itself. New tribes were created and new heroes added from time to time in order to flatter powerful rulers in the Hellenistic and Roman periods; the number of tribes—and therefore heroes—fluctuated between ten and thirteen.

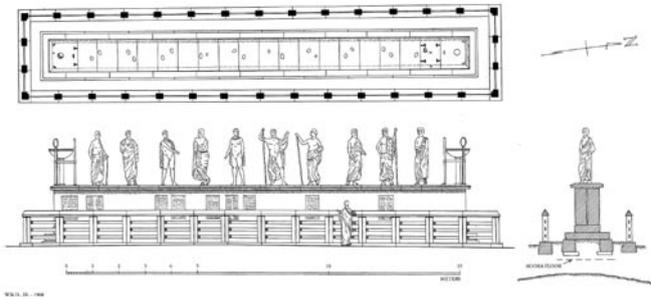
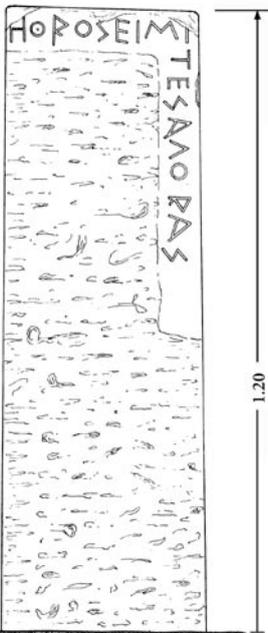


Figure 22. Restored drawings of the Eponymous Heroes, second half of the 4th century B.C.

BOUNDARY STONES 10 AND HOUSE OF SIMON THE COBBLER

INSCRIBED MARBLE POSTS were used to mark the entrances to the Agora wherever a street led into the open square. Two have been found *in situ*, inscribed with the simple text “I am the boundary of the Agora,” in letters that should date somewhere around 500 B.C. (Figs. 23, 24). The limits of the square had to be well marked for two reasons. First, people who were underage or who had been convicted of certain crimes (e.g., mistreatment of parents, failure to show up for military duty, impiety) were not allowed into the Agora. Second, markers were needed to define what was public land, to prevent encroachment by private buildings.

Figure 23. Agora boundary stone found east of the Tholos, ca. 500 B.C.



1-

Figure 24. Agora boundary stone found deep under the Middle Stoa. Text, letter-forms, and tooling all indicate it is part of the same series as that in Figure 23, except all the letters and words run backward (retrograde), from right to left.

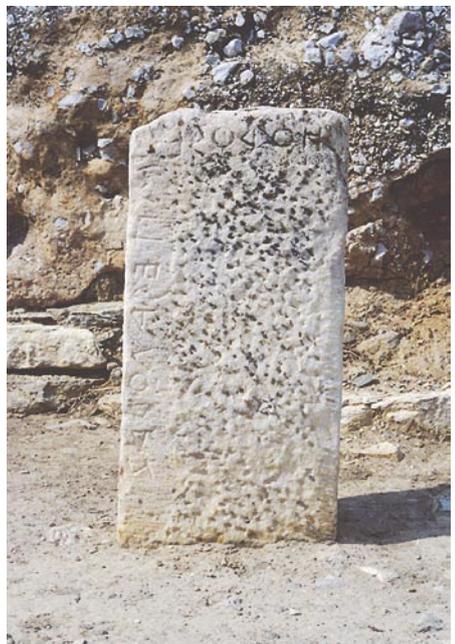




Figure 25. The remains of the house of Simon the cobbler, 5th century B.C., built against the Agora boundary stone (bottom left).



Figure 26. Material found at the house of Simon the cobbler: bone eyelets, iron hobnails, and the base of a cup inscribed with Simon's name.

One such building, found just behind the northern boundary stone (*horos*, in Greek), produced bone eyelets and iron hobnails, suggesting that a cobbler worked here in the 5th century B.C., while a fragmentary drinking cup found nearby preserved the incised name of Simon (Figs. 25, 26). Diogenes Laertius records that Sokrates, when he wished to meet with those pupils too young to enter the Agora, would meet them at the shop of Simon the cobbler, which lay near the square. The evidence is circumstantial, but we may well have here the remains of one of Sokrates' informal classrooms.

SOUTHWEST AREA 11 — INDUSTRY AND HOUSES

LEAVING THE AREA of the boundary stone, one can head southwest up a valley leading toward the Pnyx, meeting place of the Athenian assembly. Here are the complex remains of a residential and commercial area, used for hundreds of years (Fig. 27). Excavation of the houses has shown that metalworkers, makers of terracotta figurines, and sculptors worked in the area. These Athenian private houses were small, turning their blank faces to the street and deriving light and fresh air from an interior courtyard. Walls were of sun-dried mudbrick on stone foundations, with tiled roofs; most floors were of beaten clay with only occasional mosaics.

One larger structure, the so-called Poros Building, has a long corridor flanked by square rooms, with a courtyard at the rear (Fig. 28). It has been suggested that this might be the State Prison (*desmoterion*), where Sokrates and others convicted of political crimes were executed. The date, location, and plan are all appropriate, though the building may equally well have served some commercial function.

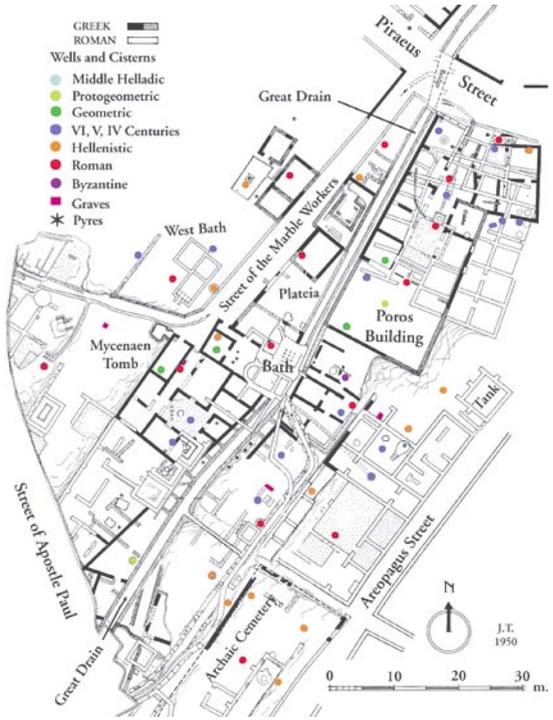


Figure 27. The “Industrial District,” southwest of the Agora. The Poros Building at the top (north) has been tentatively identified as the State Prison. The other walls and wells represent private houses dating from the 5th century B.C. to the Byzantine period.

Figure 28. The Poros Building, possibly the State Prison, seen from the north, 5th century B.C.



SOUTH SIDE

CLOSER TO the agora proper a row of five public buildings lined the south side of the square in the Classical period (Fig. 29, 36). They comprise several important monuments, though their state of preservation is poor. They are slightly more comprehensible if viewed from the ancient road that ran above them to the south.

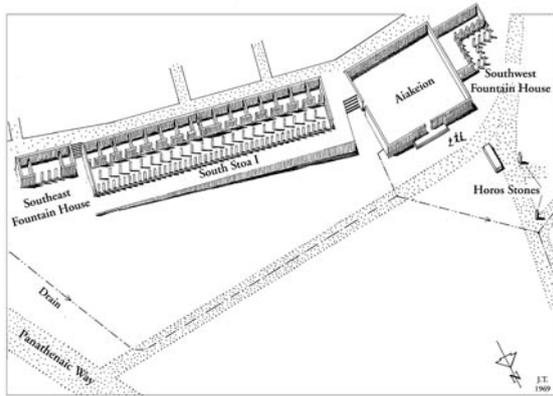


Figure 29. Cutaway view of the Archaic and Classical buildings along the south side of the Agora.

SOUTHWEST FOUNTAIN HOUSE 12

THE WESTERNMOST building takes the form of the letter L (Fig. 30). A colonnade on two sides gave access to a large reservoir, the terminus of a long stone aqueduct that approached the building from the east, running under the south street. Low parapets set between columns allowed access to the water, delivered to the fountain by means of channels set within the thickness of the walls. One of the largest fountains of the city, the building is dated on the basis of pottery to the years around 350–325 B.C.

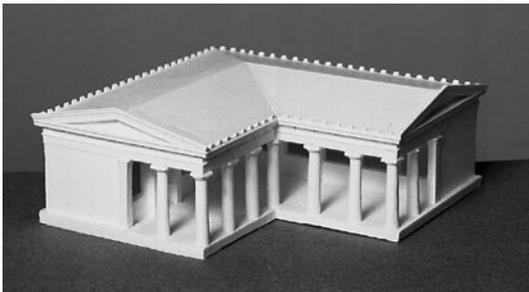


Figure 30. Model of the Southwest Fountain House, one of the largest in Athens, ca. 350–325 B.C.

IMMEDIATELY TO the east are the poor remains of a large square enclosure, open to the sky and measuring about 30 meters on a side. Built in the early 5th century, at the command of the oracle of Apollo at Delphi, it was dedicated to Aiakos, a hero of the island of Aegina. By the early 4th century it was used for the storage and distribution of substantial amounts of grain. Aiakos was one of the judges of the underworld and the results of judgments handed down in Athens were displayed on the walls of the building.

SOUTH STOA I 14

MEASURING SOME 80 meters long, South Stoa I takes up much of the south side; its eastern end is the better preserved (Figs. 31, 32). It had a double colonnade, with sixteen rooms behind. It dates to ca. 430–420 B.C. and economies brought on by the Peloponnesian War may have determined the use of mudbrick and reused blocks in its construction. The off-center doors indicate the placement of dining couches in the rooms, perhaps used by magistrates fed at public expense, and an inscription found in the building suggests that at least one room was used by the *metronomoi*, the officials in charge of weights and measures. Numerous coins found in the excavations also reflect the commercial function of the building. The stoa was dismantled in the middle years of the 2nd century B.C. to make way for South Stoa II.

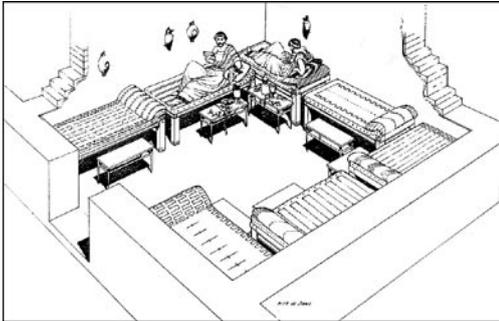


Figure 31. Reconstruction of a dining room in South Stoa I, ca. 430–420 B.C.

Figure 32. Aerial view of the east end of South Stoa I, ca. 430–420 B.C.



THE SLIGHT TRACES just south of the Church of the Holy Apostles have been identified as the remains of an early fountain house (Figs. 33, 34). The identification is based on a large terracotta pipeline that delivered water to the rear of the building from the east, and overflow channels designed to carry water away from the two side chambers (Fig. 35). The central hall is restored with a colonnaded facade. A date of ca. 530–520 B.C. is suggested by pottery found under the floor and the use of polygonal limestone masonry, with Z-clamps to join the blocks. The fountain is one of the earliest public buildings in the Agora, and the fact that water was piped to this specific spot suggests that the area was being deliberately developed to accommodate large numbers of people.

In the 2nd century A.C. Pausanias identified this building as the Enneakrounos (nine-spouted) fountain, built in the 6th century B.C. by the tyrant Peisistratos, but Thucydides—who presumably knew better—locates that famous monument south of the Acropolis, below the sanctuary of Olympian Zeus.

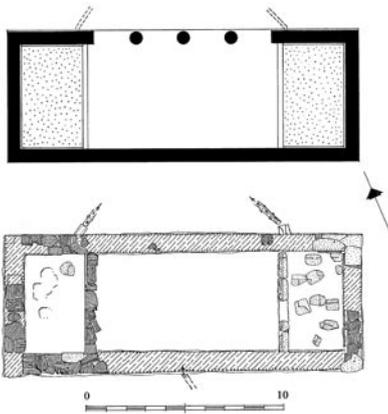


Figure 33. Actual state and restored plans of the Southeast Fountain House, second half of the 6th century B.C.



Figure 34. Model of the Southeast Fountain House, view from the north.



Figure 35. Juncture of overflow pipes from the basins of the Southeast Fountain House.

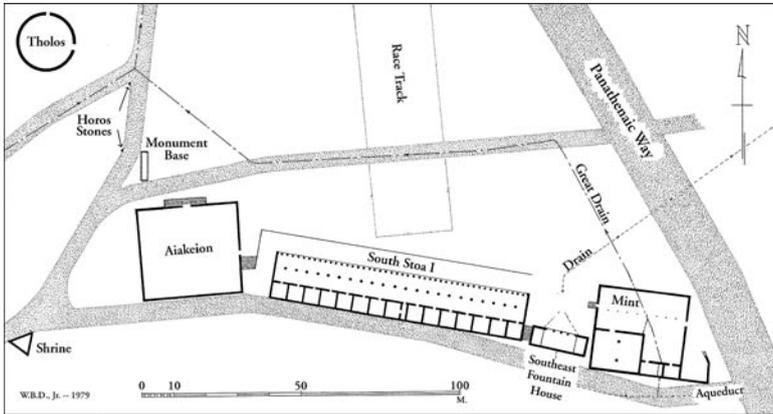


Figure 36. South side of the Agora, ca. 400 B.C.

MINT 16

JUST EAST of the fountain house lie the miserable remains of a large square building with several rooms; the northern half lies under the Church of the Holy Apostles and the Southeast Temple (Early Roman) (Figs. 36, 37; see also Fig. 41). Originally built in ca. 400 B.C., the structure was used in the 3rd and 2nd centuries B.C. as the mint for bronze coinage. Dozens of bronze flans or unstruck coin blanks were found scattered throughout the building, along with evidence of industrial debris. There is nothing to suggest that Athenian silver coinage was minted in this building.

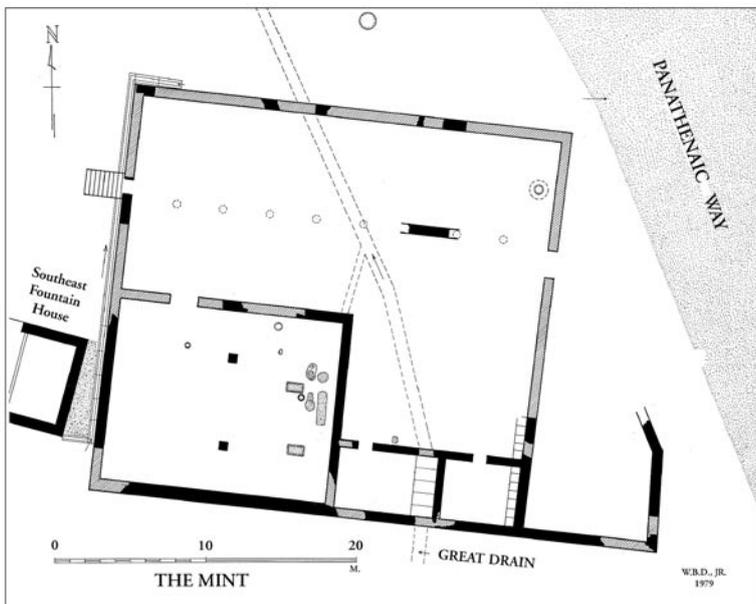
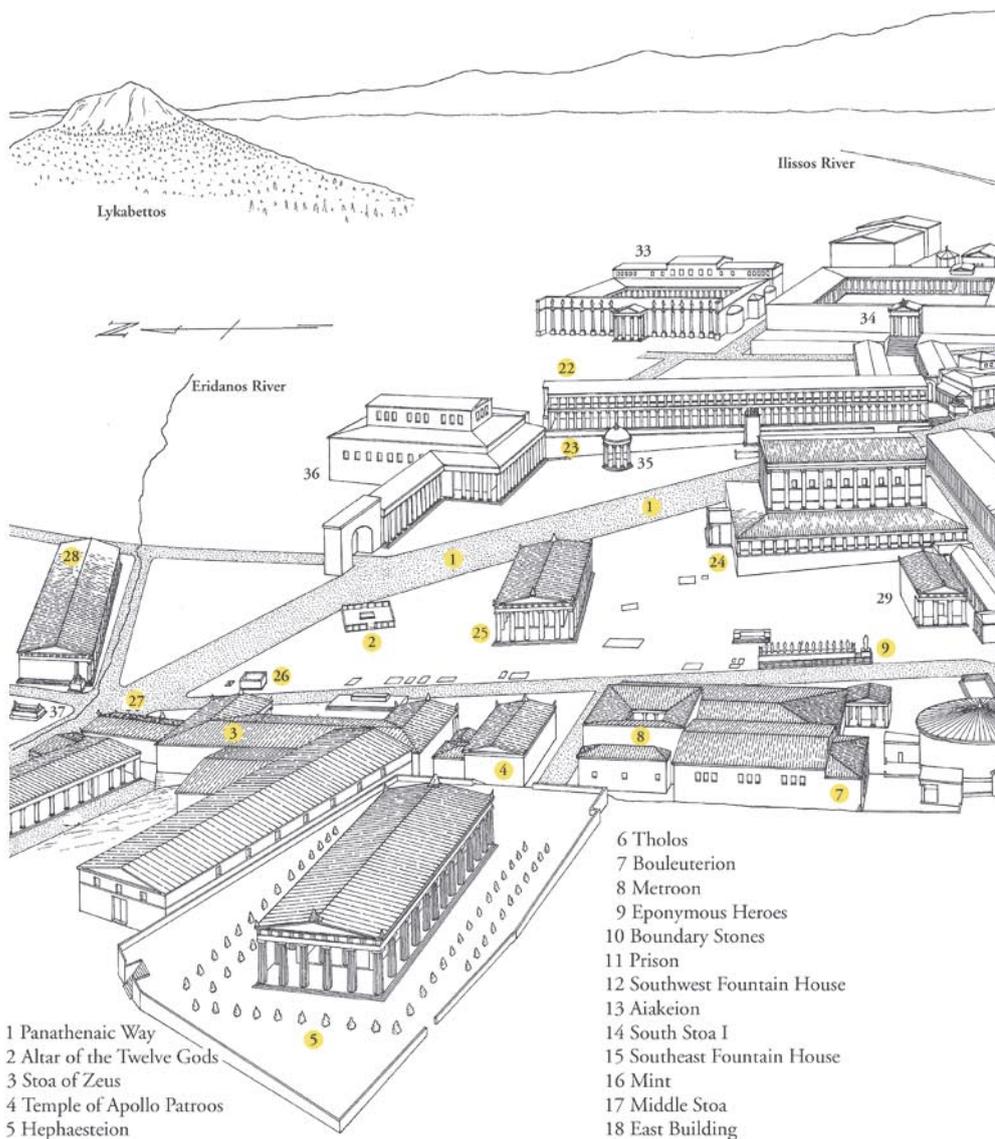


Figure 37. Restored plan of the Mint, ca. 400 B.C.



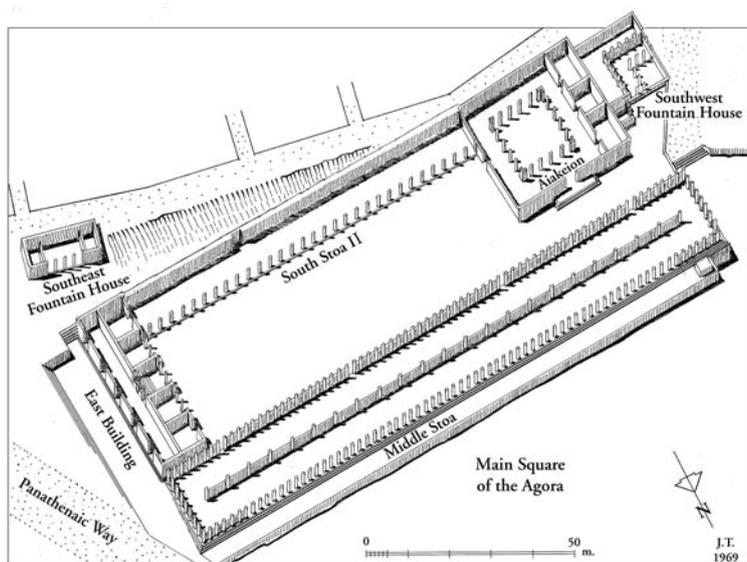


Figure 38. Cutaway view of the South Square, 2nd century B.C.

THE HELLENISTIC SOUTH SQUARE

THE APPEARANCE of the south side of the Agora was radically changed during the 2nd century B.C. with the construction of several new buildings. This South Square, as it is called, was made up of two long stoas with a third building linking them (Fig. 38). Of the Classical buildings, the Aiakeion and Southwest Fountain House were incorporated, South Stoa I was demolished, and the Southeast Fountain House and Mint were left out. The new square can best be understood from the so-called East Building, just north of the Church of the Holy Apostles.

MIDDLE STOA 17

FIRST TO BE BUILT was the Middle Stoa, which ran east–west across the old square, dividing it into two unequal halves and obscuring one of the original boundary stones at its western end. At just under 150 meters long, it is the largest building in the Agora, with colonnades at both north and south as well as down the middle. Traces of a narrow parapet that ran between some of the columns can be made out on individual drums. The original steps and three columns remain *in situ* at its eastern end; to the west, only the heavy foundations of reddish conglomerate survive. Except for its size the stoa is a relatively modest building, made of limestone, with a terracotta roof (Fig. 39). It was built between ca. 180 and 140 B.C.

Figure 39. Watercolor of the restored upper parts of the Middle Stoa, mid-2nd century B.C., showing the colors used to decorate this and most Greek buildings.



EAST BUILDING 18

RUNNING SOUTHWARD from the east end of the Middle Stoa is the East Building. Its eastern half takes the form of a long hall with a marble chip floor and stone slabs designed to carry wooden furniture, presumably tables (Fig. 40). The furniture supports are perhaps best interpreted as holding bankers' or money changers' tables and suggest that the South Square served a primarily commercial function. The western half of the building consisted of four rooms and a stairway designed to take people down to the lower (ground) level of the South Square.



Figure 40. Detail of the floor of the East Building, showing the marble slabs with cuttings for the attachment of wooden furniture, 2nd century B.C.

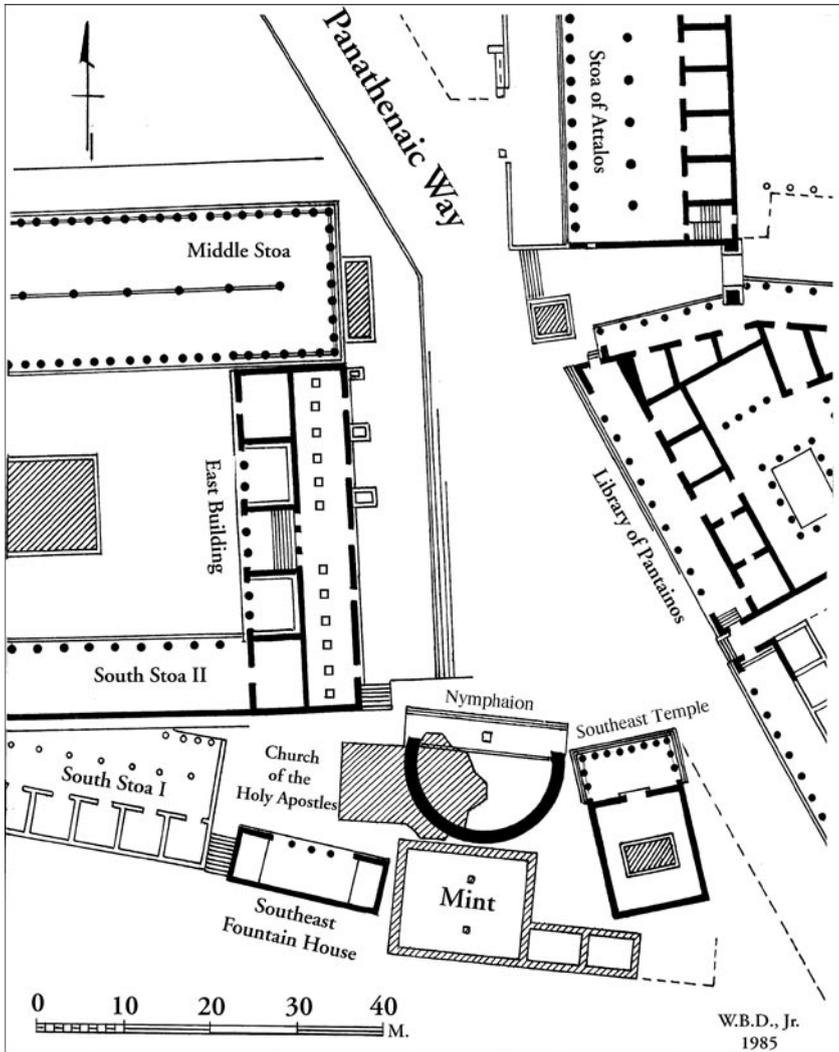


Figure 41. Plan of the buildings at the southeast corner of the Agora.

SOUTH STOA II 19

SOUTH STOA II ran westward from the south end of the East Building, parallel to the Middle Stoa (Figs. 38, 41). Dating to the second half of the 2nd century B.C., it consisted of a single Doric colonnade of limestone, the superstructure reused from a building of the 4th century B.C. Its only adornment is a small fountain set into the back wall. South Stoa I was put out of use by South Stoa II, and much of the earlier building was quarried away at the west to accommodate the lower floor levels of the South Square.

EAST SIDE

LATE ROMAN FORTIFICATION WALL 20

EAST OF the East Building and Mint we arrive once again at the Panathenaic Way, which in this area is lined along its eastern side by a massive wall built in the 3rd century A.C. (Fig. 42). The wall was constructed in the years following the sack of Athens by the Herulians in A.D. 267; it starts at the Acropolis with a new gate, runs north down the east side of the roadway, takes in the ruins of the Stoa of Attalos, and then turns eastward toward the Library of Hadrian. The old Agora, former center of town, is not even within the fortified limits of the Late Roman town, which lay to the east.

The wall is made up almost entirely of reused architectural pieces taken from buildings and monuments destroyed by the Herulians: marble architrave blocks, Ionic and Doric columns, inscriptions, and statue bases were all used to make two solid faces, while the interior was filled with rubble. Square towers, now largely dismantled, projected from the face of the wall at regular intervals.



Figure 42. Late Roman Fortification Wall, ca. A.D. 280–290, with many reused architectural blocks from buildings destroyed by the Herulians in A.D. 267.

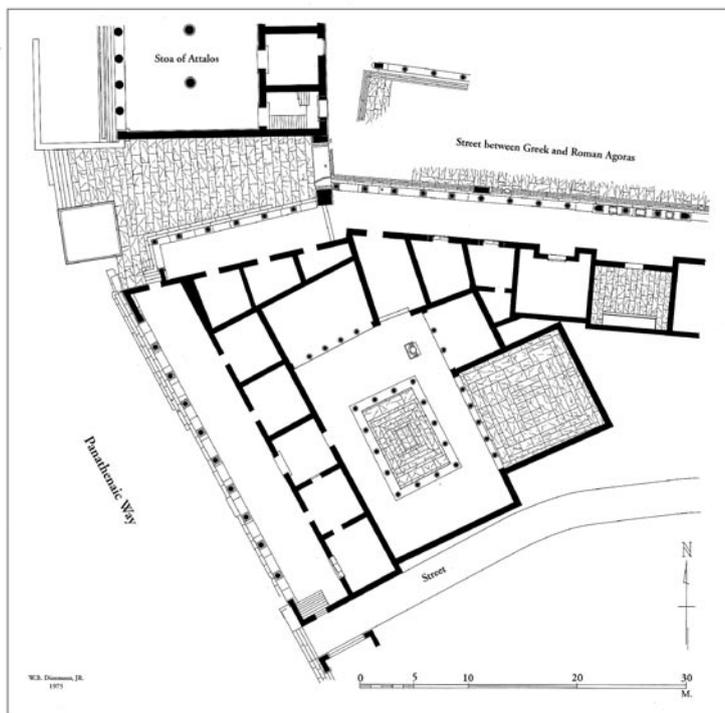


Figure 43. Plan of the Library of Pantainos, ca. A.D. 100.

LIBRARY OF PANTAINOS 21

LYING PARTIALLY UNDER and behind the Late Roman wall are the remains of a building identified by its inscribed marble lintel block as the Library of Pantainos, dedicated to Athena Archegetis, the emperor Trajan, and the Athenian people in the years around A.D. 100 (Figs. 43, 44). It consists of a large square room and a paved courtyard, surrounded by three stoas that had shops behind their colonnades. As a cultural and educational building, the library reflects the role of Athens as the principal university town of the Roman empire. The dedicator, Titus Flavius Pantainos, was the son of the head of a philosophical school and refers to himself as a priest of the philosophical muses. A second inscription preserves the library rules: “No book is to be taken out because we have sworn an oath. [The library] is to be open from the first hour until the sixth” (Fig. 45).

The northern stoa runs eastward, along the south side of a marble street that led in Roman times from the Agora to the Doric gateway of the market of Caesar and Augustus, also known as the Roman Agora. Destroyed by the Herulians in A.D. 267, the northern stoa was eventually rebuilt as part of a new large two-storeyed structure in the 5th century A.C. (Fig. 46), and the western stoa of the library was incorporated into the Late Roman fortification.

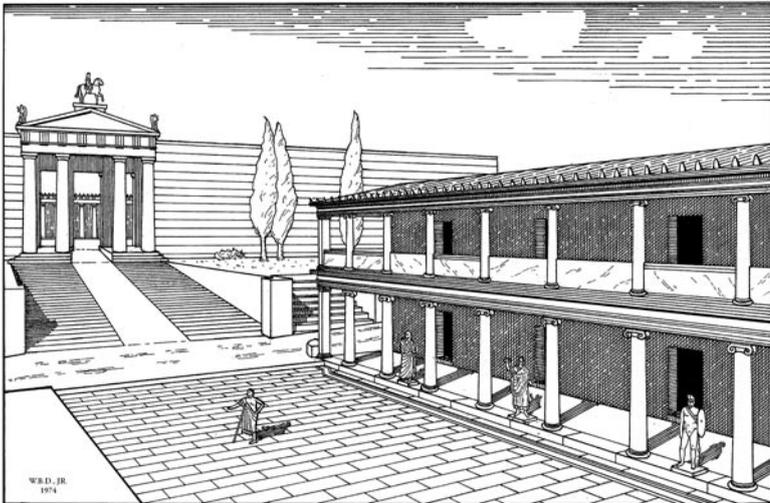


Figure 44. The north stoa of the Library of Pantainos, looking east toward the Gate of Athena.

Figure 45. Rules of the Library of Pantainos: "No book is to be taken out because we have sworn an oath. (The library) is to be open from the first hour until the sixth."



Figure 46. Reconstruction of the marble-paved street and stoa of the complex east of the Stoa of Attalos, ca. A.D. 420. At left is the Gate of Athena, the entrance to the Roman Agora.



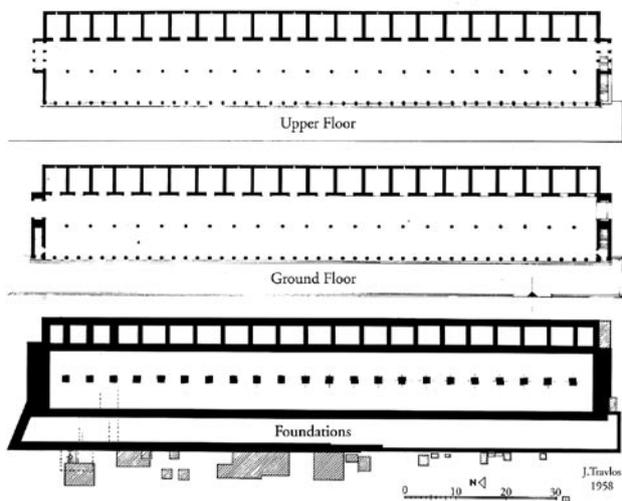


Figure 47. Plans of the Stoa of Attalos, 159–138 B.C.

STOA OF ATTALOS 22

LINING THE EAST side of the Agora square is the Stoa of Attalos (Fig. 47), built during the reign of Attalos II of Pergamon (159–138 B.C.), who studied in Athens under the philosopher Carneades before becoming king. In a sense, this is a gift from a loyal alumnus, and what he gave the Athenians was a shopping mall. Double colonnades on two storeys provided shaded walkways in front of forty-two shops that were rented out by the city. White Pentelic and blue Hymettian marble were used, along with limestone for the walls. The facetting of the lower part of the outer colonnade reflects the intense use of the building; lots of people and goods will have passed through, rubbing and banging against the columns, so there was little point in fluting them at the level of potential damage and wear. The column capitals used upstairs for the inner colonnade are of an unusual type (“Pergamene”), a late adaptation of early Egyptian prototypes.

The stoa served as the main commercial center for the Athenians for centuries; it was destroyed by the Herulians in A.D. 267 and then incorporated into the new fortification wall, which preserved its northern end up to roof level. It was fully restored in 1953–1956 (Figs. 48, 49) to serve as the site museum (separate guide). It houses storage facilities in the basement, a public display area on the ground floor, and offices and workrooms on the first floor. Parts of the original building were left or incorporated at the south end, so the visitor can check the validity of the restoration. The reconstruction demonstrates the effectiveness of the stoa as the ideal architectural form for a public building in Greece: the colonnaded walkways provide light and fresh air for literally thousands of people, while protecting them from the intense sun of summer or the wind and rain of winter.

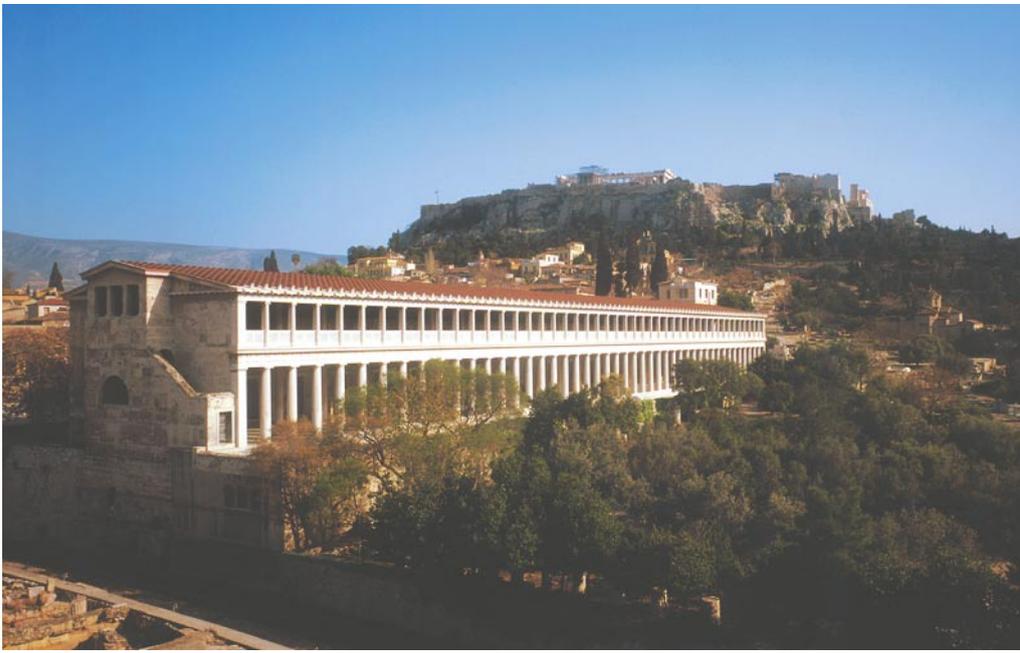
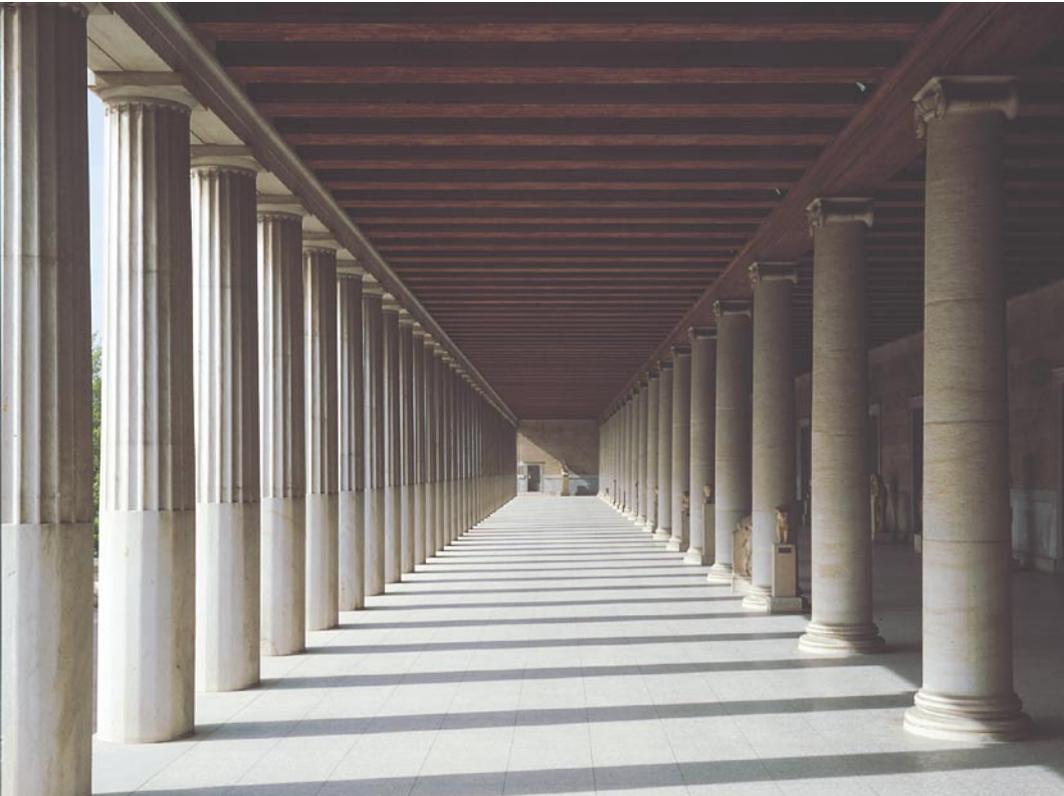


Figure 48. Reconstructed Stoa of Attalos (1953–1956), viewed from the north-northwest.

Figure 49. Interior view of the lower colonnade of the Stoa of Attalos.



UNDERLYING THE NORTH end of the Stoa of Attalos are the slight remains of a group of buildings dating to the 5th and 4th centuries B.C. (Fig. 50). Largely open courtyards, they seem to have served as the lawcourts of the city, designed to accommodate the 201 or 501 Athenians who regularly made up a jury. As in the American system, these courts had the final say as to the legality and interpretation of any law, and essentially represent the sovereign power of the state.

The identification is based largely on the discovery of a container made of drain tiles set on end holding seven of the inscribed bronze ballots used by jurors to render their verdicts (Fig. 51).

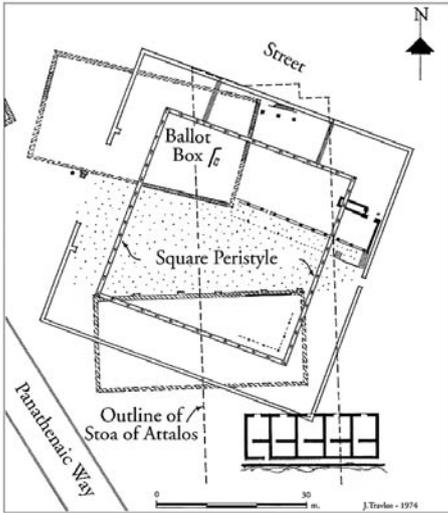


Figure 50. Plan of the lawcourts under the north end of the Stoa of Attalos. (5th–4th centuries B.C.)

Figure 51 (right). Ballot box found underneath the north end of the Stoa of Attalos.

"As Euboulos says in Olbia, you will find everything sold together in the same place at Athens—figs, summoners, bunches of grapes, turnips, pears, apples, witnesses, roses, medlars, haggis, honeycombs, chickpeas, lawsuits, puddings, myrtle, allotment machines, lambs, waterclocks, laws, indictments."

Athenaios 14.640b–c



CENTRAL AREA

LATE IN the 1st century B.C. the Athenians were given money for a new marketplace by Caesar and Augustus (pp. 24–25, no. 34), and the northern half of the old Agora square was filled with two new structures, the Odeion of Agrippa and the Temple of Ares.

ODEION OF AGRIPPA 24

A LARGE concert hall or odeion was given to the Athenians by Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa, the son-in-law and general of Augustus, in the years around 15 B.C. It was a huge two-storeyed structure that must have dominated the square (Fig. 52). The auditorium, with its raised stage and marble-paved orchestra, seated about 1,000 spectators. It was surrounded on three sides by a cryptoporticus (subterranean colonnaded hall) at the lower level, with stoas above. The exterior of the building was elaborated with Corinthian pilasters. Entry to the Odeion was either from the upper level of the Middle Stoa on the south or through a modest porch at ground level on the north (Fig. 53).

The great open span of the auditorium (25 meters) eventually proved too great and the roof collapsed in the years around A.D. 150. The structure was rebuilt as a lecture hall, with the seating capacity reduced to about 500, and a far more elaborate facade was built at the north, using massive pillars carved in the form of giants (snaky tales) and tritons (fishy tails) (Fig. 54).

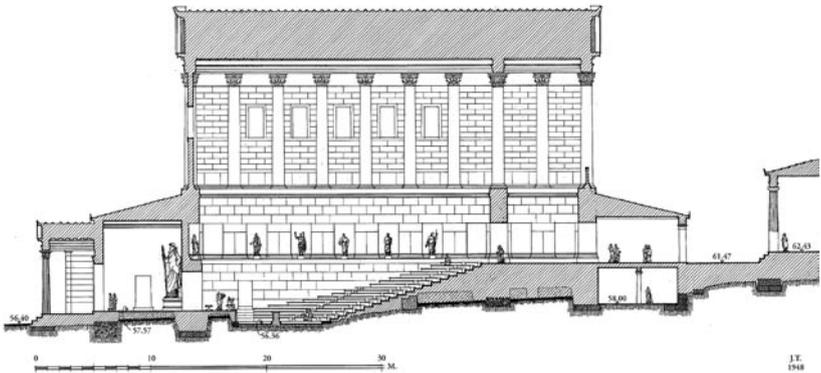


Figure 52. Cross section of the Odeion, 1st phase (late 1st century B.C.), looking east.

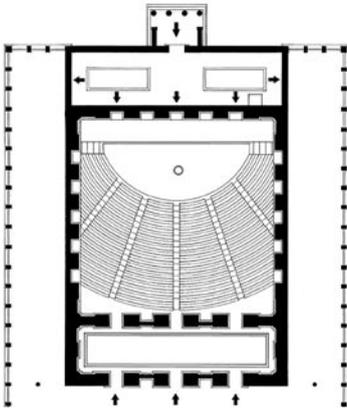


Figure 53. Ground plan of the Odeion of Agrippa, 1st phase.

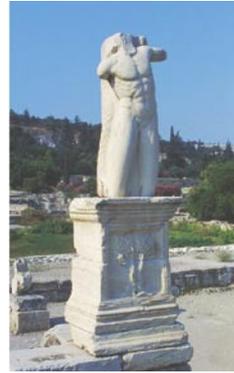


Figure 54. Giant from the facade of the 2nd phase (ca. A.D. 150–175), as reused in the early 5th century A.C.

"The lecture was interrupted by much shouting and laughter. Philargos shouted and screamed that they were treating him badly in preventing him from using his own material; but he was not acquitted on a charge which was now well established. All this took place in the Agrippeion."

Philostratos, Lives of the Sophists 597

The loss of this odeion for concerts presumably prompted Herodes Atticus to build his handsome new odeion on the south slopes of the Acropolis in the years around A.D. 160.

The Odeion of Agrippa was destroyed by the Herulians in A.D. 267. It was rebuilt in the early 5th century A.C. as part of a sprawling complex, perhaps a palace, with numerous rooms, a bath, and several courtyards, which extended southward all the way across the old South Square (Fig. 55). The Giants and Tritons were reused for a monumental entranceway, and their present position on high piers dates to this last phase of the building.

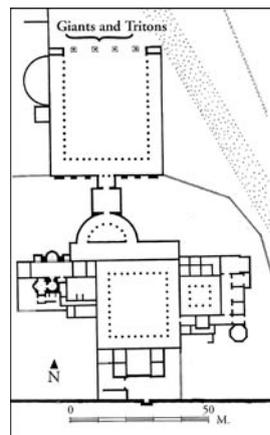


Figure 55. Drawing of the Late Roman reuse of the Odeion of Agrippa as part of a large palace-like complex, early 5th century A.C.

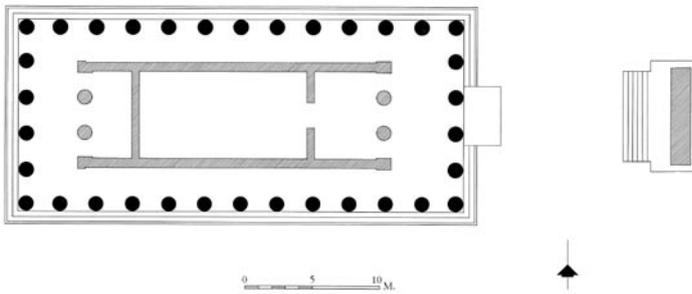


Figure 56. Plan of the Temple of Ares, second half of 5th century B.C., rebuilt in the Agora in the late 1st century B.C.

Figure 57. Architectural remains of the Temple of Ares.



TEMPLE OF ARES 25

JUST NORTH of the Odeion lie the ruins of a building identified by Pausanias as a temple of Ares (Figs. 56, 57). The foundations are of Early Roman construction and date, but the marble pieces of the superstructure, now assembled at the western end of the temple platform, are of the 5th century B.C. They can be restored as a Doric peripteral temple, close in plan, date, and size to the Hephaisteion [5]. Roman masons' marks carved on the blocks indicate that the temple originally stood elsewhere, was carefully taken apart with all the pieces labelled, and then reerected on the new foundations built for it in the Agora. This is the best example of a phenomenon known as "wandering temples," of which there are several similar examples in the Agora, dating to the early years of the Roman empire. Outstanding examples of Classical architecture were brought in from the outlying villages (demes) of Attica, largely deserted at this period, and reused in downtown Athens, presumably for the worship of deified Roman emperors; it was a relatively cheap and effective way to honor the new order. The probable origin of the Ares temple architecture is the sanctuary of Athena Pallenis (at modern Stavro), where large foundations for a temple have been found but with no trace of any superstructure.

THE AREA of the northwest corner is where the Panathenaic Way, leading from the main gate of Athens, the Dipylon, entered the Agora square (Figs. 58, 59). This was accordingly the appropriate place for Herms, primitive markers used by the Athenians to mark all entrances. These took the form of rectangular shafts of marble with a set of male genitalia carved halfway up and a likeness of the god Hermes at the top. Several dozen examples of these very conservative monuments have been found in the excavations in this area, ranging in date from the early 5th century B.C. to the 2nd century A.C. (Fig. 60).

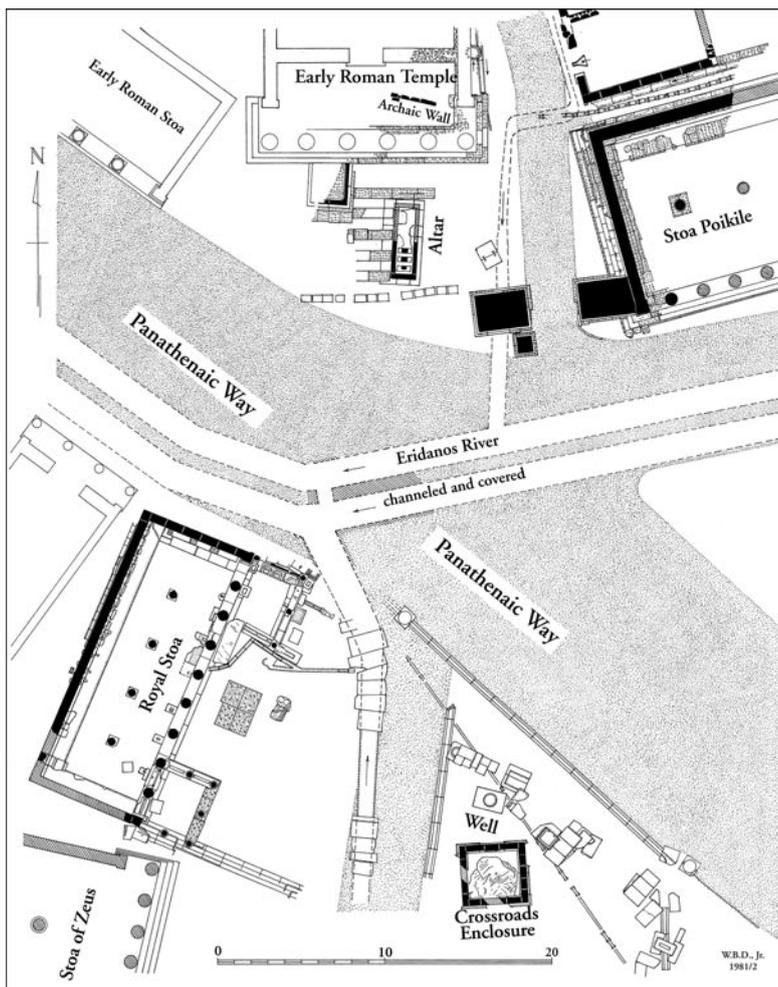


Figure 58. Plan of the northwest corner of the Agora, principal entrance into the public square.

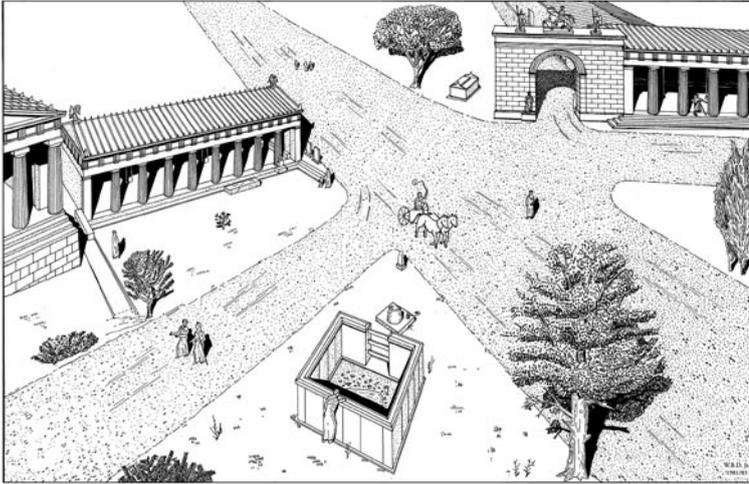


Figure 59. A reconstruction of the northwest corner of the Agora in ca. 420 B.C., with the Royal Stoa at left and the Painted Stoa at upper right, looking northwest.



Figure 60. Three Herm heads found at the northwest corner of the Agora (from left to right): 2nd century A.C., late 5th century B.C., and early 5th century B.C.

“Menekles or Kallikrates in his work on Athens writes, ‘From the Stoa Poikile and the Stoa Basileios extend the so-called Herms. Because they are set up in large numbers both by private individuals and by magistrates they have acquired this name.’”

Harpokration

[Sokrates speaks]: "I must now present myself at the Stoa Basileios to answer the indictment of Meletos, which he has brought against me."

Plato, Theatetos 210d

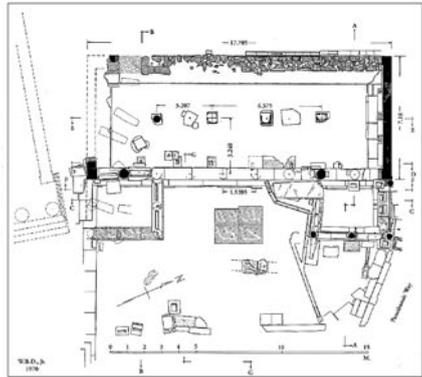


Figure 61. Actual state plan of the Royal Stoa.

ROYAL STOA 27

ON THE WEST SIDE, lying just south of the Panathenaic Way, are the remains of the Royal Stoa (*Stoa Basileios*), one of the earliest and most important of the public buildings of Athens (Figs. 61, 62). It served as the headquarters of the archon basileus (king archon), second in command of the Athenian government and the official responsible for religious matters and the laws. Here, inscribed copies of the full law code of Athens were on display, the annual oath of office was administered to all those about to serve the democracy (Fig. 63), and Sokrates was indicted for impiety in 399 B.C. The identification of the building is secure, thanks to Pausanias and two inscribed herm bases dedicated by king archons and found *in situ* on the steps of the building.

The building is small for a stoa, only 18 meters long, with eight Doric columns across the front and four down the middle (Fig. 64). It should date originally to the years around 500 B.C., but was extensively rebuilt in the 5th century. Two projecting wings were added between 410 and 400 to display new copies of the law code of the city.

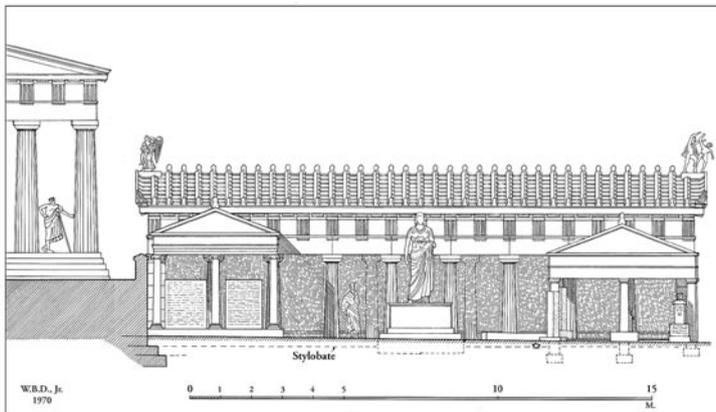


Figure 62. Reconstruction of the Royal Stoa, as it would have appeared in ca. 300 B.C.

"[The archons] took the oath near the Stoa Basileios, on the stone on which were the pieces of the victims, swearing that they would guard the laws."
Pollux 8.86



Figure 63 (right). The lithos or oath-stone, set up on the steps of the Royal Stoa.

Figure 64. The remains of the Royal Stoa, view from the south.



ACROSS MODERN Hadrian Street are the most recent excavations (2003), along the north side of the square. Here have been revealed the remains of another large stoa, identified on the basis of Pausanias as the Stoa Poikile (Painted Stoa). The stoa was of the Doric order outside, with Ionic columns inside, built mostly of limestone, with marble for the interior column capitals (Figs. 65, 66). Pottery suggests a date in the years around 470–460 B.C. for the construction.

The Stoa Poikile, one of the most famous buildings of Athens, took its name from a series of handsome panel paintings that adorned it. Done by the best artists of Classical Greece, they were installed in the middle years of the 5th century B.C. Some 600 years later, in about A.D. 150, Pausanias could still describe four of them, showing Athenian military triumphs, both mythological and historical. Most famous, perhaps, was a picture of the battle of Marathon (490 B.C.) by Polygnotos. By A.D. 400 the paintings had disappeared, taken down by a Roman proconsul according to the Bishop Synesios, who was bitterly disappointed not to see them during his visit to Athens. Actual armor and weapons taken from defeated enemies were also displayed on the building to remind Athenians of former glory.

The stoa, unlike many of the buildings of the Agora, was a true public building, with no one official, group, or function claiming priority for its use. It was built and used as a popular hangout, and as such attracted huge crowds and those whose business required an audience: jugglers, sword-swallowers, beggars, and fire-eaters. Among those who plied their trade in the building were the philosophers of Athens, in particular Zeno, who came to Athens from Cyprus in ca. 300 B.C. and so preferred the Painted Stoa as his classroom that he and his followers became known as the Stoics.

“Zeno, son of Mnaseas or Demeas of Kition [in Cyprus], a philosopher who began the Stoic school. He was called Stoic because he taught in the stoa at Athens which at an earlier period was called Peisianakteios, but afterwards when painted with pictures received the name Poikile.”

Suidas

“Pass on in thought to the Stoa Poikile too—the memorials of all your great deeds are set up in the Agora.”

Aischines, vs. Ktesiphon 186

“Of Polygnotos the painter, a Thasian by birth, son and pupil of Aglaophon, given Athenian citizenship when he painted free of charge the Stoa Poikile. . . .”

Harpokration

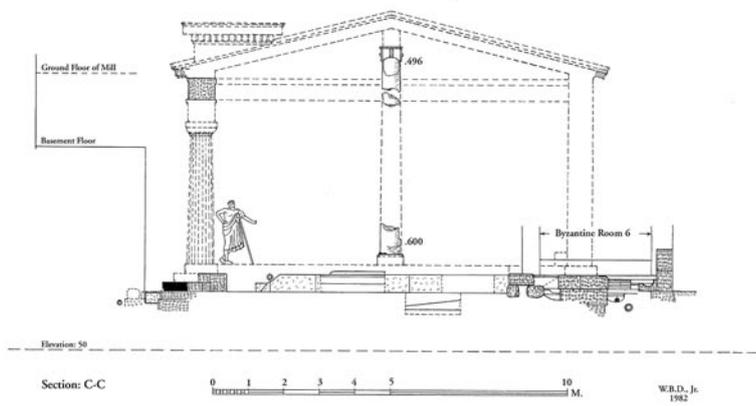


Figure 65. Cross section of the Stoa Poikile, with Doric columns outside, Ionic within; ca. 470–460 B.C.

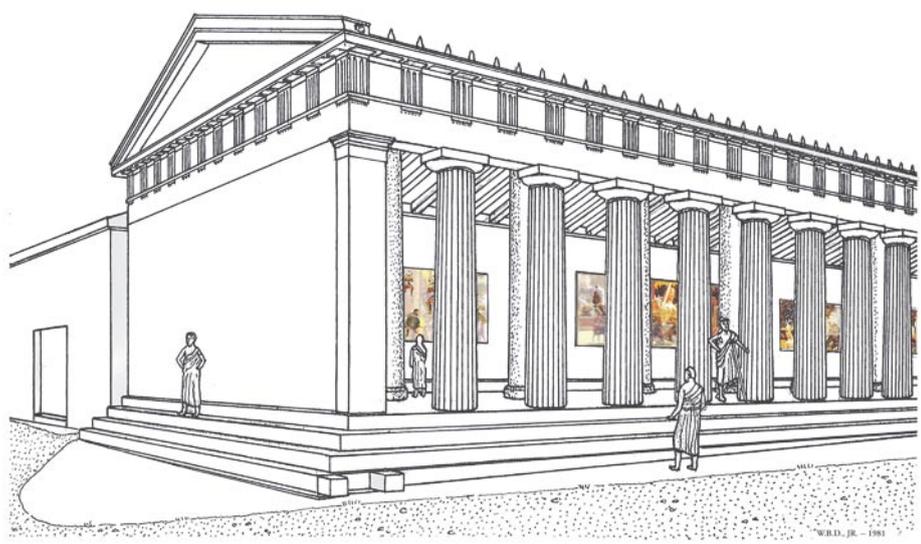


Figure 66. Reconstructed drawing of the west end of the Stoa Poikile as it would have appeared in about 400 B.C.

CHURCH OF THE HOLY APOSTLES

SEVERAL CHURCHES were removed following the excavation of the modern neighborhoods overlying the Agora. The Church of the Holy Apostles, because of its early date, was deemed worth preserving and, indeed, restoring (Figs. 67–70; for location, see Fig. 41). Dated to the years around A.D. 1000, the church underwent successive additions over the centuries, especially at the west end. The original plan is unique: a standard cross-in-square arrangement, but with apses at each of the four ends of the cross. The central dome is supported on four interior columns. The outer walls are adorned with decorative brickwork known as “kufic” (Arabic writing developed in the city of Kufa). The fragments of frescoes inside are of the 17th century, some from this building and the rest recovered from other churches in the area.

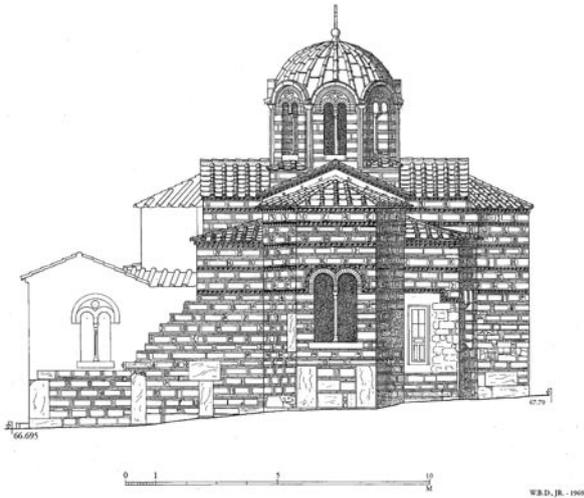


Figure 67. Church of the Holy Apostles, ca. A.D. 1000.

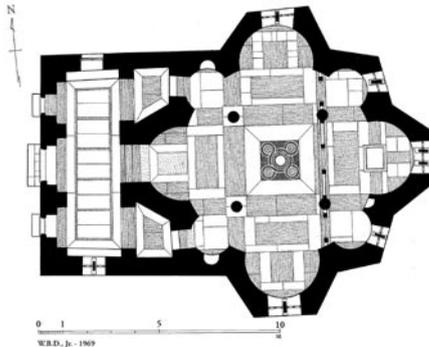


Figure 68. Plan of the Church of the Holy Apostles.



Figure 69. Church of the Holy Apostles before restoration. (1953)



Figure 70. Church of the Holy Apostles. (2002)

HISTORY OF THE EXCAVATIONS

SOME OF THE AGORA monuments have never been fully buried and were explored by the Archaeological Society starting in the 19th century: the Stoa of Attalos (1859–1862, 1874, and 1898–1902), the Giants and Tritons of the Odeion (1859, 1874, and 1912), and the West Side (1907–1908). The trench for the extension of the Athens–Piraeus railway in 1890–1891 also exposed remains of buildings and sculptures.

The American excavations were begun on May 25, 1931 and have continued in a series of yearly campaigns since then with a hiatus during the Second World War (Figs. 71–75). In 1953–1956 the Stoa of Attalos was restored to serve as the site museum, and the Church of the Holy Apostles was restored in 1954–1956. A program of landscaping the site as an archaeological park was also undertaken at this time.

Funding has come mostly from private sources: John D. Rockefeller Jr. (original excavations, Stoa of Attalos), the Samuel H. Kress Foundation (Church of the Holy Apostles, publications), the Ford Foundation and the Rockefeller Brothers Fund (excavations, 1969–1974), and the David and Lucile Packard Foundation (excavations, 1979–1998). The most recent excavations and the computerization of the excavation archives (1998–) have been funded largely by the Packard Humanities Institute.



Figure 71. The reconstruction of the Stoa of Attalos in 1956, view from the north.

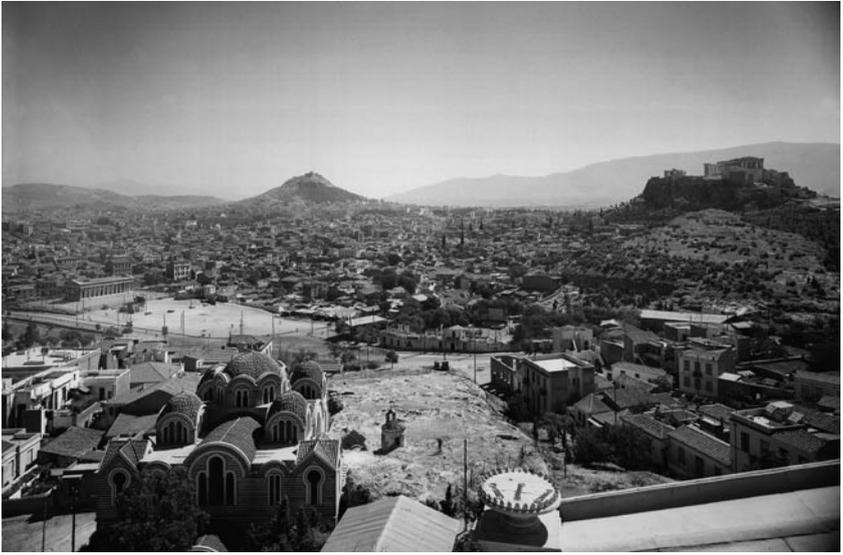


Figure 72. The area of the Agora before the start of excavations in 1931, view from the west.



Figure 73. Panorama of the Agora excavations, also from the west. (2002)



Figure 74. Watercolor of the Agora in 1834 (Wolfensberger), view looking west.



Figure 75. Giants and tritons of the Odeion of Agrippa before the start of excavations, view looking east.

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

THIS SHORT GUIDE is intended for visitors to the site. It updates and replaces the previous short guide, No. 16 in the Agora Picture Book series, by Homer A. Thompson. It presents the principal monuments following a counterclockwise tour around the site. The monuments covered are numbered (see Fig. 1). Those visitors arriving at the north gate (St. Philip's Square, Hadrian Street) should start at the Panathenaic Way (no. 1), those arriving from the Theseion gate should start at the Hephaisteion (no. 5), while those coming down from the Acropolis should start their tour with the Stoa of Attalos (no. 22).

This guide is for the site only; there is a separate short guide for the Agora Museum in the Stoa of Attalos. Visitors with more time and/or a deeper interest in the site are referred to the full site guide (Camp 1990) for longer descriptions, as well as information about the lesser monuments.

This picture book, like others in the series, is illustrated almost exclusively with material from the Agora Excavations. Except as noted, the black and white photographs are from the Agora archives and were taken by successive Agora photographers: M. A. Frantz, J. Heyle, E. Vanderpool Jr., R. K. Vincent Jr., and C. A. Mauzy. The type is set in Garamond and the book was designed by S. L. Martin.

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Excavations of the Athenian Agora

Picture Book No. 16

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