

## **Excavations Northeast of the Theater**

In the 2018 excavation season, a new area of excavation was opened up northeast of the theater on a three-stremmata property purchased in the fall of 2017 (Figure 1). The decision to excavate this particular plot was based on a variety of factors, the foremost being that this part of Corinth, between the theater district to the south and the "Gymnasium" area to the north, has remained largely unexplored, though it lies only a short distance north of Temple Hill and the rest of the main excavation site. It is hoped that this area will tell us more about the urban plan of Roman Corinth and more about the nature of this particular district of the city from the time of the founding of the Roman colony to the end of antiquity. It is also hoped that excavation here will tell us more about the nature of this area in earlier periods and more specifically shed light on the question of the location of Corinth's agora.

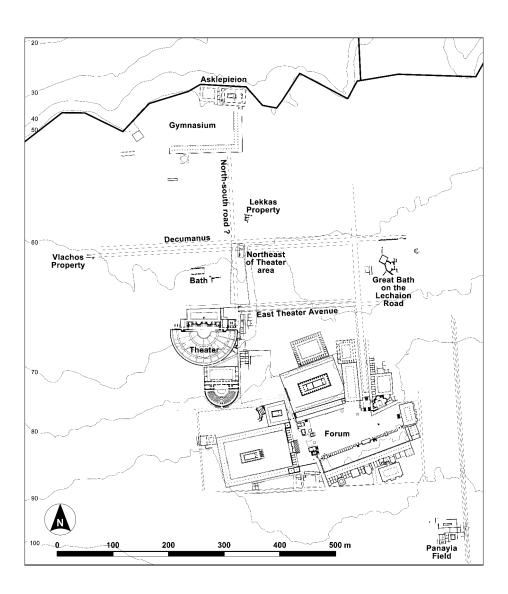


Figure 1. Plan of Corinth showing the location of the Northeast of Theater area (J. Herbst)

Because relatively little was known about the area at the start of the excavations, it was not entirely clear what would be found here. The only solid clue was provided by the discovery of an east-west road in a test trench dug in 1973 some 250 meters to the west on the property of S. Vlachos. As expected, a continuation of this road (one of the *decumani* of the city's urban plan) came to light at the northern edge of the new excavation site (Figure 2). Exploration of this road revealed layer upon layer of hard-packed road metal, which included large numbers of coins as well as other small finds. The uppermost road layers appear to date from the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 6<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D., while the lowest layers revealed so far may date as much as a century earlier. Because the position of the road appears to conform to the Early Roman survey (centuriation) of Corinth, it is reasonable to imagine that future excavation will reveal earlier layers of road extending back in time to the early years of the Roman colony.

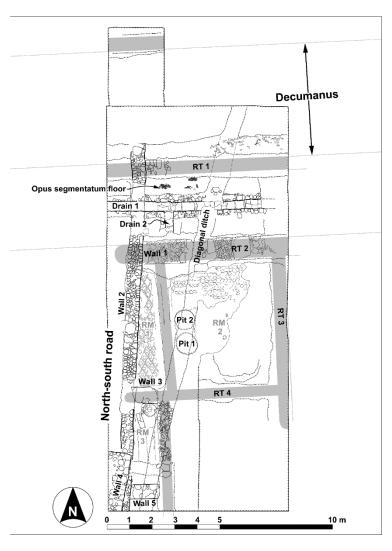


Figure 2. Plan of the East of Theater excavations (J. Herbst)

Excavation immediately to the south of the road revealed a series of strata that may represent successive layers of a compacted earth sidewalk. The earliest of these strata seem to date to the Early Roman period and so are earlier than the earliest road layers discovered thus far

to the north. At a higher level, adjacent to the upper road layers, a long east-west robbing trench (RT 1) was discovered, which may mark the position of a colonnade flanking the south side of the road in Late Antiquity (Figures 2, 3). South of the line of this robbing trench a built drain (Drain 1) lined with tiles was revealed running parallel to the road (Figure 4). This drain was

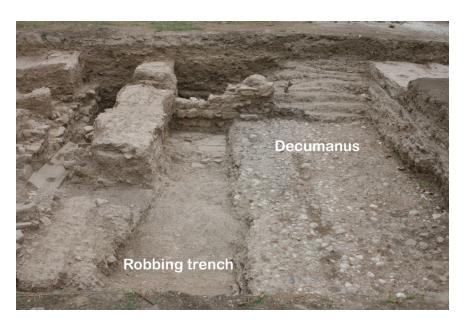


Figure 3. *Decumanus* (view from the east)



Figure 4. East-west drain south of the decumanus (view from the west)

evidently covered by a coarse mosaic (*opus segmentatum*) floor, of which only small patches survived. The construction date of the drain and floor is not yet well fixed, but lamps found in the fill within the drain suggest that it went out of use by the 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D. (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Imitation North African lamp from Drain 1

Excavation to the south of the road and drain brought to light remains of three rooms of a substantial Roman building (Figure 6). Although the walls of the building were thoroughly robbed out in the 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D. (or somewhat later), the discovery of numerous small

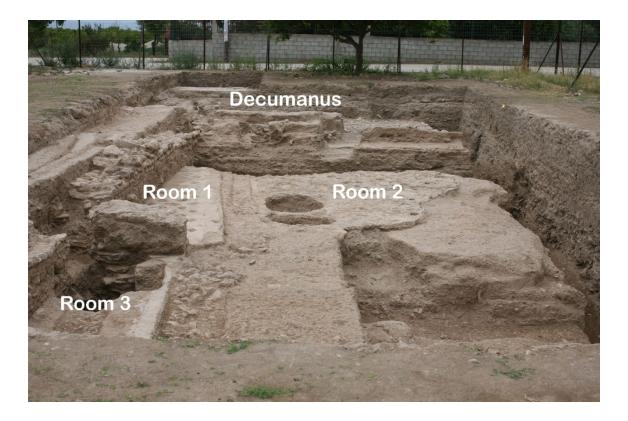


Figure 6. Roman building, view from the south

fragments of painted wall plaster (mostly red and yellow with simple panels) and fragments of various types of imported marble revetment and moldings suggests that the building was nicely decorated (Figure 7). In one room (Room 2) the mortar subfloor reveals that there was originally



Figure 7. Fragments of painted wall plaster from the Roman building

a pavement of diamond-shaped tiles (probably of marble) set in a continuous herringbone pattern. In two other rooms (Rooms 1 and 3) the floor pavement consisted of marble, diamond-shaped tiles set within diamond-shaped fields of black stone chips bounded by a trellis pattern of white stone tesserae (Figure 8). These floor designs, though previously unattested at Corinth, find parallels in Italy and elsewhere in the Roman world during the first centuries B.C. and A.D.



Figure 8. Floor of Room 1, view from the south

Whether the newly discovered floors are as early as the parallels suggest remains to be confirmed by future excavation. Clarification of the overall plan and function of this Roman building will also require further investigation, though at this point it seems most likely that the building is an urban house.

At some time, perhaps after the paving tiles of the floor of Room 2 were robbed away, a pair of round pits were cut into the mortar sub-floor of this room to hold built pithoi (Figure 2, Pits 1 and 2). Earth fill within these holes, which included fragments of a Palestinian amphora, would seem to indicate that the pithoi ceased to be used in the 6<sup>th</sup> century or perhaps slightly later. Surprisingly, the fill in these holes contained a large number of coins dating generally from the 4<sup>th</sup> to the 5<sup>th</sup> centuries (51 coins in the southern pit and 47 coins in the northern). Since these coins were mixed with the fill deposited in the pits after the pithoi were destroyed, it seems likely that they represent discarded coins rather than hoarded coins purposefully hidden away in the pithoi. Why they were discarded, however, remains to be determined.

Also in the 6<sup>th</sup> century or slightly later (and certainly after the floor of Room 3 was partially destroyed and covered with fill), the upper half of a very large four-handled stewpot was set upside-down into a compacted earth floor to the south of Wall 5 (Figures 2, 9, 10). Evidence of burning on the inner surface of the pot and the presence of ash and animal bones within it indicate that the pot was repurposed to serve as a kind of hearth for cooking.





Figure 9. Four-handled stewpot in situ

Figure 10. Four-handled stewpot after conservation

Still later (though the precise chronology remains uncertain), a long rubble wall (Wall 2) was constructed on roughly a north-south line over fill that had accumulated over the floors of Rooms 1 and 3 of the Roman building (Figure 2). To the west of Wall 2, which may have been simply a property wall, two compacted earth layers of what appears to be a late north-south road were revealed; a still later layer of this presumed road was found overlapping a part of Wall 2 that had been robbed out to a low level. The latest structure discovered so far in the excavations is represented by another rubble wall (Wall 4), which seems to have been set into the latest road layer. The nature of this structure, which lies just below the modern surface level and extends into both the southern and western balks, remains to be determined.

Although no substantial remains pre-dating the Roman period have yet come to light in the excavations, the presence, in later contexts, of isolated Late Neolithic, Early Helladic II, Early Iron Age, Archaic, and Classical sherds and more substantial quantities of Hellenistic pottery suggests that the area has a long history of use and offers hope for the discovery of earlier in situ remains at lower depths. Although they are small, fragments of molds of several different relief bowls may indicate that a Hellenistic ceramic workshop was located somewhere in the vicinity (Figure 11).



Figure 11. Molds of Hellenistic relief bowls

For a fuller account of the excavations, see: Pfaff, C. A. 2020. "Corinth, 2018: Northeast of the Theater," *Hesperia* 89, pp. 125-190.

#### **Site Conservation**

Conservation of the Frankish Area south of the Museum was limited this year to backfilling the area immediately to the west of Units 1 and 2, where excavations of the 1980s had partially exposed the remains of other medieval structures (Figures 12-14). The aim of this operation was to provide a safe and attractive area adjacent to the main portion of the Frankish complex that should soon be accessible to the public. The backfilling is also intended to protect the antiquities of the area until such time as it is deemed appropriate and desirable to resume excavation there. Prior to backfilling, the area was thoroughly cleaned, photographed, and covered with geotextile to ensure maximum protection.

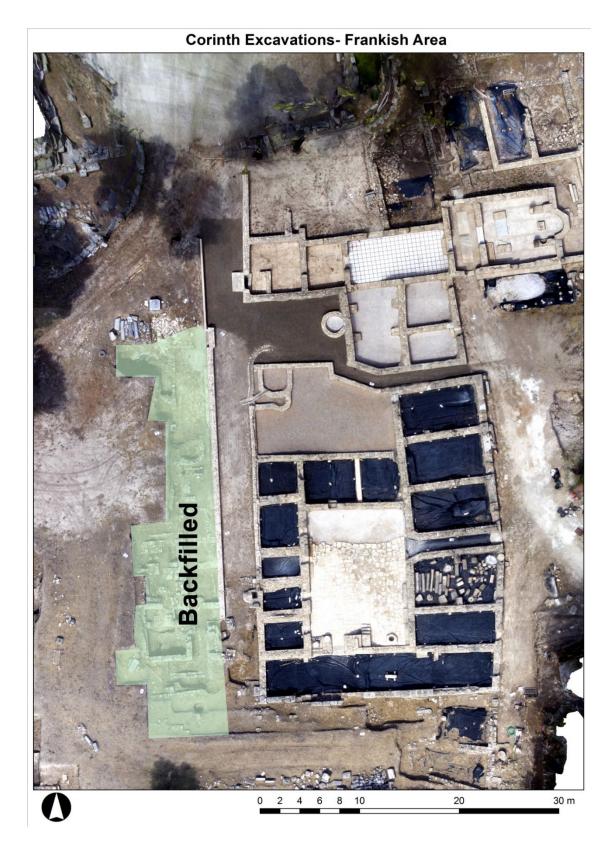


Figure 12. Aerial orthophoto of the Frankish Area showing backfilled area to the west (J. Herbst)





Figure 13. Frankish Area backfilling operation

Figure 14. Frankish Area after backfilling

Planning of a new shelter to cover the room C of the South Stoa, which likely served as the office of the Roman *agonothetes* of Corinth, has progressed through several phases this year in consultation with the design firm of Thymio Papayiannis and Associates Inc.

# **Collections Management**

In July of 2018, the American School completed the construction of a 1058 square meter storage and study facility designed by the firm of K. Kyriakidis & Associates S.A. (Figures 15, 16). This facility is intended to provide storage space for Roman wall paintings discovered in past excavations of the ASCSA as well as a laboratory for the conservation of wall paintings. In addition, the building is intended to provide storage space for context pottery from current and future excavations as well as some context pottery from earlier excavations that has been stored in other facilities that are in need of repair or are otherwise unsuitable. The process of transferring material to this new facility has begun and will continue into next year.





Figure 15. Exterior of new storage and study facility

Figure 16. Interior of new storage and study facility

The fieldwork of 2018 was carried out with the permission of the Archaeological Service of the Ministry of Culture and Sport and under the supervision of the Ephorate of Antiquities of the Corinthia. We are grateful to the director of the Ephorate, Panayiota Kassimi, and the assistant Director, George Spyropoulos, for their cooperation and support.

Christopher Pfaff

## 2018 Corinth Excavations Staff

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Assistant Conservator: Takis Notis Steinmetz Museum Fellow: Katie Petrole

Foreman: Thanassis Notis

Assistant Foreman: Panos Kakouros

Domestic Staff: Vangelio Kondyli-Kakkava, Anna Kovalewska, Tassia Stammati

Specialists:

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Glass specialist: Tassos Antonaras Roman pottery specialist: Kathleen Slane

Trench Supervisors: Simone Agrimonti

Haley Bertram

Christina DeFabio

Katie (Carolin) Fine

John Haberstroh

Sarah Hilker,

Peter Moench

Janelle Sadarananda

Janet Spiller, Gretchen Stricker Jessica Tilley

Excavators:

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# **Photos**



Kostas Arberoris breaking ground in the first trench in the East of Theater area



Markos Vathis breaks ground in the second trench (Andreas Oikonomou, Michaelis Vathis, Ioulia Tzonou, and Thanassis Notis look on)



Panos Kakouros breaks ground in the third trench (Vasilis Kollias and Memo Karbouniaris look on)



Peter Moench and Markos Vathis excavate fill above the Early Roman building (Thanassis Notis gives instructions)



John Haberstroh and Peter Moench setting up the total station



Haley Bertram and Kostas Arberoris excavating in the decumanus



Thanassis Notis excavates in the area of the Early Roman building, while Janelle Sadarananda and Katie Fine survey



Janelle Sadarananda surveying with a furry observer



Memo Karbouniaris, Elias Coli, Christina DeFabio, and Katie Fine excavate Byzantine wall and adjacent road layers.



Kostas Arberoris, Jessica Tilley, and Sarah Hilker excavating in the area of the *decumanus* 



Nicol Anastassatou and Manolis Papadakis consolidating portions of the opus segmentatum floor south of the decumanus



Janet Spiller supervises excavation in deep disturbed area south of room 2 of the Early Roman building (Thanassis Notis, Michaelis Vathis, and Nikos Rathonis



James Herbst, Simone Agrimonti, and Katie Fine on the last day of the excavations



End of season party



Retirement party for Panos Stammatis: (Bea Peruzzi, Tassia Stammati, Nicol Anastassatou, Panos Stammatis, Petros Dellatolas, Manolis Papadakis, and Nikos Rathonis (back)



April Session



May Session



New storage facility under construction (December 2017)



New storage facility under construction (January 2018)



Kyriakos Kyriakidis (architect) and Kostas Phokas (engineer) inspecting the new storage facility during construction (March 2018)



Giota Kassimi, Jenifer Neils, and Ioulia Tzonou visiting the building site (March 2018)



Completed storage facility (south façade)



Completed storage facility (west side)



Thanassis Notis in the new storage facility (north storage unit) with lifting device (June 2018)



Study area of the new storage facility (July 2018)



Transfer of wall paining fragments from Pietri house to the new storage facility (June 2018)