

ASCOSA Excavations
in Ancient Corinth
2021 Report

Excavations Northeast of the Theater

The 2021 excavation program was somewhat reduced in scale as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Over the course of eight weeks in May and June, work was confined to two trenches adjacent to the single test trench dug in 2020 (Fig. 1). In the absence of student members of the American School this year, the excavation staff – Christopher Pfaff, Ioulia Tzonou, James Herbst, and Manolis Papadakis – supervised the excavations.

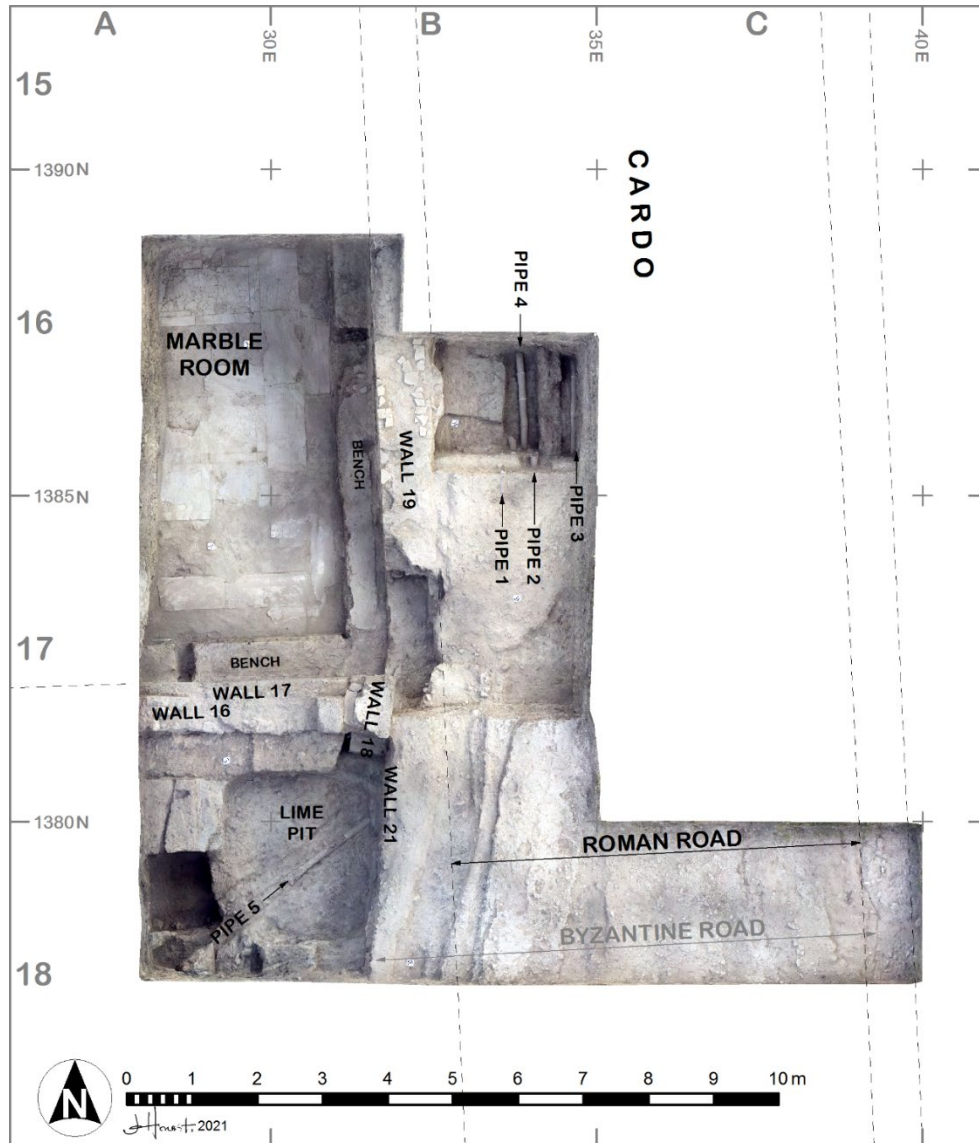


Figure 1. Excavations Northeast of the Theater, area excavated in 2021 (aerial orthophoto James Herbst)

Three main phases are represented by the finds from this year's excavations: Late Byzantine, Late Antique, and Roman. Beneath the modern plow zone, excavation revealed more of the Byzantine north-south road that was revealed in the three previous seasons. In a small area, the removal of Byzantine layers of road metal brought to light underlying Early Roman road layers with four successive terracotta pipelines (Fig. 2). This evidence raises the possibility that this road, which links the area of the theater to the south with the Gymnasium and



Figure 2. Early Roman layers of the north-south road with four pipe-lines

Asklepieion to the north, was part of the urban plan of Corinth from its founding as a Roman colony. The confirmed existence of this road also offers potentially significant evidence for interpreting Pausanias' itinerary through this part of the city in the 2nd century A.D.

To the west of the north-south road, excavation in 2020 had uncovered the southeast corner of a rectangular room (the "Marble Room") lined with a bench and paved with white marble slabs. In 2021, excavation revealed more of this room, which now has an exposed length (north-south) of 6.8 m. and width (east-west) of 3.8 m (Fig. 3). The context and function of this room have not yet been determined, but its importance is now more amply demonstrated by the

discovery that its floor incorporated an *opus sectile* pattern of framed circles, which makes use of white Pentelic marble, green Karystian marble (*Cippolino*), and red limestone breccia from Chios (*Portasanta*).



Figure 3. *Opus sectile* floor of the Marble Room

The relationship of the east wall of this room to the adjacent north-south road indicates that the room was built against preexisting Roman road layers and that the floor level within the room was about 1.3 m below the exterior ground level. The date of construction of the Marble Room is not yet securely fixed. New finds from the fill over the floor support the conclusion reached in 2020 that the room was destroyed and filled in during the 7th century (Figs. 4-5). This fill, which included a combination of building debris, pottery, and glass vessels, yielded a small fragment of inscribed marble revetment, which may refer to Gaius Curtius Benignus Iuventianus, a highly honored Corinthian, who is known from a previously discovered inscription to have served as a *theocolos* of Jupiter Capitolinus and an Imperial priest of Neptune (Fig. 6).



Figure 4. North African lamp



Figure 5. Late antique fruit amphora



Figure 6. Inscribed marble revetment

To the south of the Marble Room, a large lime-slaking pit was discovered. This pit, whose bottom and sides were coated with the lime that had evidently been mixed in it, contained a concentration of building debris (especially tiles and marble revetment), which was thrown into the pit when it went out of use. The latest datable finds in the pit point to the 7th century. If, as seems likely, the pit was created for the purpose of mixing lime for a nearby construction project, it is tempting to suggest that the lime was destined for the mortar used in a possible rebuilding of the Marble Room. Part of the east wall of the Marble Room and a still later wall (wall 18) that extends southward from the Marble Room fell victim to stone plundering in the 12th century, as is confirmed by Middle Byzantine pottery (including fine sgraffito, measles ware, and glaze-painted wares) in the associated robbing trench (Fig. 7). Byzantine activity in the area was also confirmed by an extensive dumped fill that overlay the late antique fill above the floor of the Marble Room and by a circular structure, probably an oven, ca. 3.10 m in diameter, located directly south of the Marble Room; of the circular structure nothing but the foundation trench

and some rough stones that may be remnants of the foundation were found in situ (Fig. 8). Finally, a small isolated pit located southwest of the circular structure produced the most



Figure 7. 12th-century sgraffito plate



Figure 8. Circular structure south of the Marble Room

unexpected find of the season: an intact Late Byzantine or Frankish grenade of the type used in warfare for propelling incendiary material against an enemy (Fig. 9). How it came to be buried here is an intriguing question that we cannot as yet answer.



Figure 9. Late Byzantine or Frankish grenade

For a fuller account of the excavations, see:

Pfaff, C. A. 2023. "Corinth, 2020 and 2021: Northeast of the Theater," *Hesperia* 92, pp. 355-404.

Geophysical Survey

In order to assess their potential for future excavation, various areas north and south of the theater were surveyed using ground penetrating radar and magnetometry (Fig. 10). The work was carried out in April by a team from the University of Cyprus led by Apostolos Sarris.



Figure 10. Subsurface survey with ground-penetrating radar

Among the findings that emerged from this work was confirmation of the continuation of a north-south roadway through the length of the plot now being excavated and of the existence of a second parallel road approximately 310 m to the west. The survey also revealed the apparent absence of remains of a temple or other monumental structure within the area of the colonnaded court of the Gymnasium to the north. This would suggest that the colossal Doric temple whose elements have come to light in this general area is likely to have stood elsewhere.

Conservation and Collections Management

Throughout 2021, the work of conserving and restoring the rich collection of wall paintings excavated in the 1980's in the area to the east of the Theater continued to be carried out by a team of conservators from the Centro di Conservazione Archeologica – Roma (directed by Roberto Nardi). To date, three walls of one large room, decorated with images of Zeus, Hera, Athena, Aphrodite, Eros, and Herakles, have been conserved and mounted; one wall of another large room, decorated with floral garlands and musical instruments, has reached a similar stage of completion; and various sections of other walls have been cleaned and assembled.

Some 42 trays of predominantly Neolithic and Early Helladic pottery, excavated in the early 20th century and returned to Corinth from the National Archaeological Museum in Athens in 2019, was reorganized and recorded according to its original archaeological contexts and was re-packed in new wooden trays for future study.

The fieldwork of 2021 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

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Photos



Charles Williams, Director Emeritus, receiving the Order of the Phoenix from the President of Hellenic Republic, Katerina Sakellariopoulou (April 19, 2021)



Apostolos Sarris laying out lines for geophysical surveying



Manolis Papadakis carrying out magnetometry survey



First day of the excavations



Kostas Arberoris and Georgos Tsakalakis revealing the *opus sectile* floor of the Marble Room



The site after the 2021 season



Context pottery from fill over the Marble Room



Dedication of the Bookidis-Bouzaki Center, August 10, 2021 (Nancy Bookidis, Charles Williams, and Stella Bouzaki)