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THE ROMAN AGORA AT ATHENS REVISITED: POTTERY EVIDENCE FOR THE MONUMENT'S CONSTRUCTION AND THE FUNCTION OF THE AREA IN THE POST-SULLAN ERA

The so-called Market of Caesar and Augustus is one of the most prominent monuments of Roman Athens, whose chronology and original date of construction still pose problems. Deep excavation carried out by the Ephorate of Antiquities of the City of Athens below the west stoa yielded deposits relating to the foundation of the building complex, including a rich assortment of ceramics of all functional categories from various eastern and western sources. In addition to providing pottery evidence for dating the market's foundation, the finds contribute new data regarding the function of the area prior to the construction of the Roman Agora and shed light onto the still little-known pottery supply of the city in the post-Sullan and Early Augustan period.

Athens – Roman Agora – Fine Wares – Amphorae – Coarse Ware

Introduction

The so-called Market of Caesar and Augustus, also known as the Roman Agora, is one of the most prominent yet also puzzling monuments of Roman Athens. Its most visible element nowadays, the western gate with the inscription dedicated to Athena Archegetis, was known for centuries but a large part of the building still lies buried underneath the modern city (**fig. 1**). Although investigated since the mid-19th century, it was only in recent decades that it has been possible to gain more detailed information about its ground-plan and phasing (Sourlas 2008; 2012; 2013). As a result, our knowledge about its construction and chronology relies heavily upon various, and sometimes conflicting, interpretations of the available epigraphic and literary evidence (Travlos 1971: 28). In this paper, drawing upon our ongoing work on the finds from a rescue excavation conducted by the former First Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities (currently Ephorate of Antiquities of the City of Athens), we present for the first time stratified pottery finds related to the construction of the monument and discuss the evidence for activities in the area prior to the start of the building operations.

The market is a near-rectangular building measuring 111 by 104 m in plan, consisting of an open-air area enclosed on all four sides by stoas and accessed through two monumental gateways on the western and eastern sides. On the lintel of the western gate, an ambiguous inscription informs us about the dedication during the archonship of Nikias of Athmonon. Just what was dedicated, the gate or the market, is not entirely clear, but this inscription together with other literary and prosopographic evidence has been regarded as the principal benchmark for dating the construction. Accordingly, it is generally accepted that the project was initiated in 51 BC with funds provided to the city by Julius Caesar. As a result

of the city's siding with Pompey, it has been suggested that the project was abandoned after 47 BC, to be resumed only in 19 BC, during the hoplite generalship of the Athenian magistrate Eukles of Marathon, and was completed in 11 BC (Hoff 1989). Its dedication is dated to between the years 10 or 9 and 2 BC, but more recently it has been argued that Eukles served as archon in the mid-to-late 20s BC, during which time the dedication of the market presumably took place (Schmalz 2009: 79-80).

The excavation below the market's west stoa

Since 1999 the First Ephorate has carried out works along several areas of the Roman market as part of a large-scale project aiming at the unification of the archaeological sites of Athens (Sourlas 2008). Of particular importance is the rescue excavation which took place in 1999 and again in 2001 and 2002 in the interior of a private property across Taxiarchon and Dexippou St. which is situated exactly above the west stoa of the Roman market (Sourlas 2008: 106-109; Fig. 1). The excavation of four rooms in the cellar of the modern building led to the discovery of the foundation of the stylobate and of the back wall of the Roman market's western stoa, all built with the use of large conglomerate blocks placed in nine alternating header and stretcher courses without any use of plaster. Smaller parts of the same foundations had been discovered in the course of previous works in adjacent plots. The foundations of the about 83 m long western stoa were discovered at their northern end to a length of almost 24 m. Also, the entire width between the foundations of the stoa, measuring 7.75 m, could be established. Despite the restrictions posed by the excavation within the basement of the modern building and the occasional disturbances and

modifications during the Ottoman and later periods, the investigation yielded significant undisturbed stratigraphy relating to the construction of the monument.

Deep excavation down to about 4.80 m from the modern street level produced a series of fills, consisting of layers of dark brown earth full of pottery, alternating in a non-regular

fashion with layers of chipped bedrock soil that contained no finds (**fig. 2**). From the thickness and regularity of the deposits, it seems certain that these massive fill layers had been created to prepare the area for construction – a significant technical undertaking because of the steep northern slope of the Acropolis. More specifically, it seems that the purpose

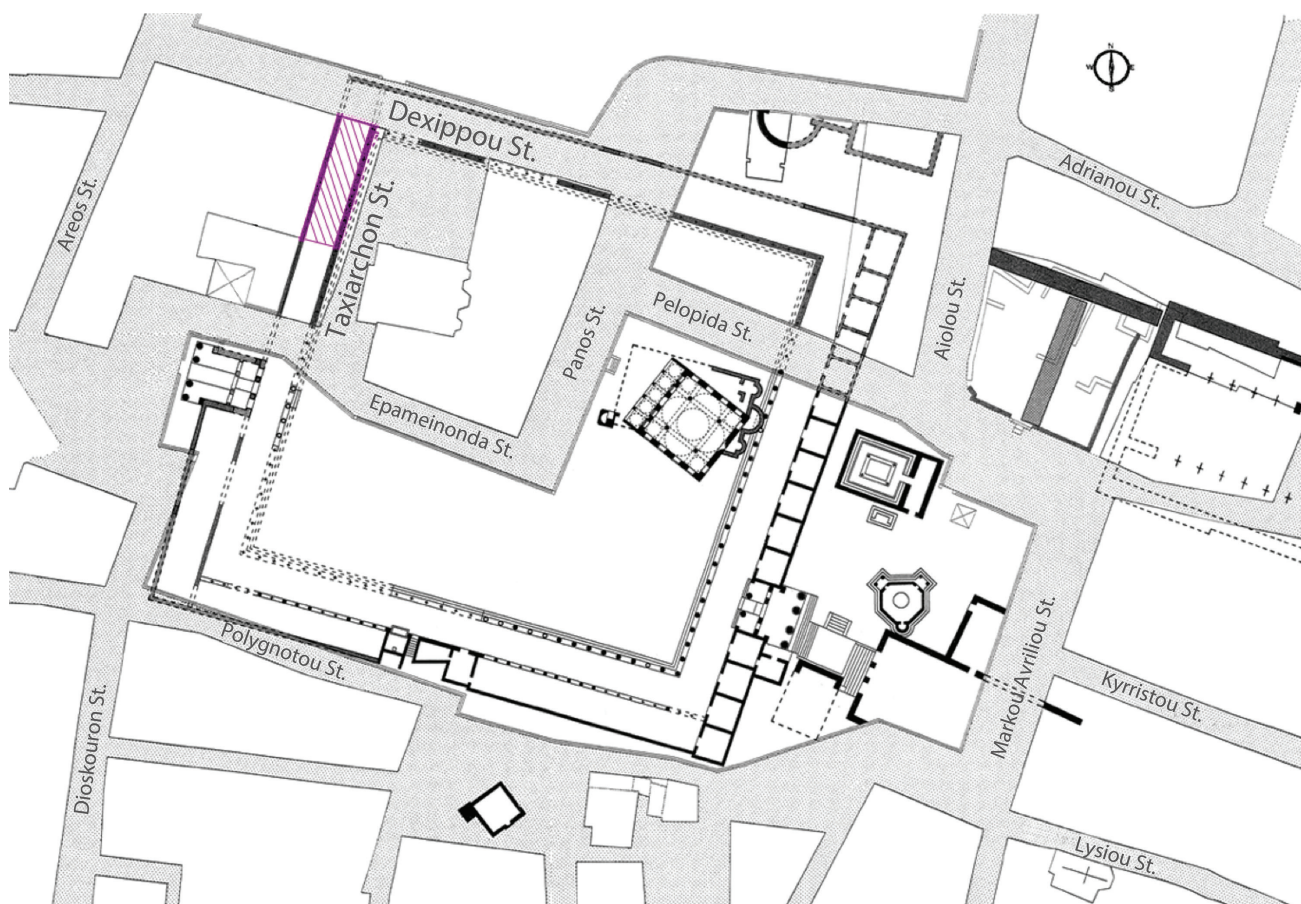


Fig. 1. Athens, Roman Agora and environs showing excavated property at Taxiarchon and Dexippou St. indicated by hatching (Archive of the Ephorate of Antiquities of the City of Athens).

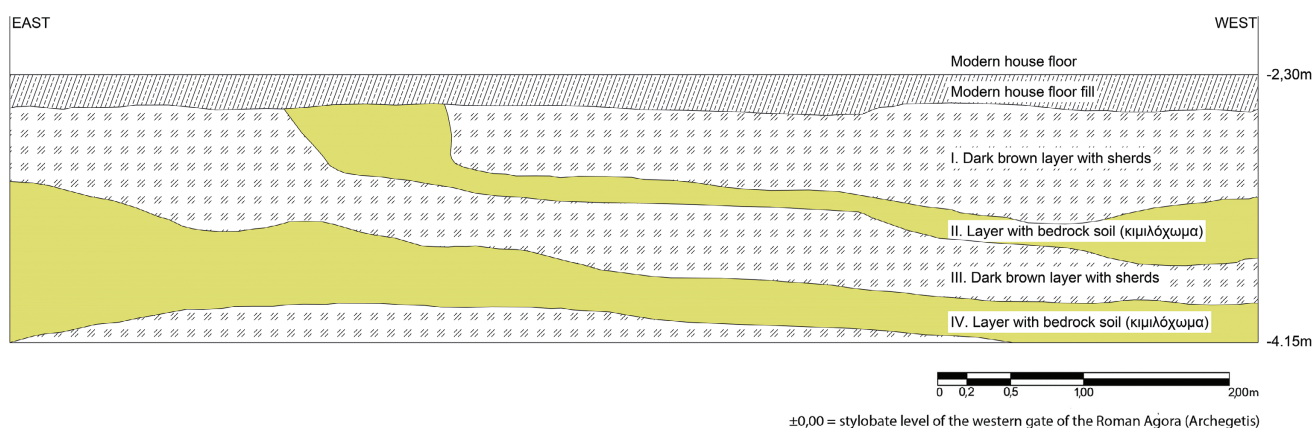


Fig. 2. Athens, Roman Agora. Stratigraphy of construction fill below west stoa.

was to raise the level of the ground between this part of the site and the area of the later library of Hadrian, where the natural bedrock is seven meters lower, and to create a well-drained foundation. Deposits of the same material had been encountered also during previous works in the area between the north peristyle and the north peribolos wall. This suggests that the respective fills were brought in and deposited during the same building operations. From this we are led to surmise that these works were executed as part of the same project and, most probably, during a rather short period of time (Sourlas 2008: 110). In one room of the modern property, excavation also revealed that the market's foundations had been constructed directly on the walls of pre-existing buildings dating to the Hellenistic period.

During our study, it became clear that the groups retrieved from the entire sequence demonstrate a similar range of finds, which consist of 1st century BC material mixed with that of Late Hellenistic and earlier date, containing, amongst others, the usual range of ceramics found in Athens in deposits related to the Sullan sack of 86 BC. Although not directly relevant for dating the construction of the Roman market, these finds clearly indicate the redeposition of Sullan debris during the building operations and thus provide a broad historical *terminus post quem*. This correlates well with the picture reported from elsewhere in Athens, where material from the Sullan destruction continued to be present in urban deposits as late as the 1st century AD (Rotroff 1997b: 35-36). More recently, Susan Rotroff based on the material from the Athenian Agora classified deposits containing Sullan debris into those created shortly after 87/6 BC, those created ca. 75 BC and those containing material of the later 1st century BC (Rotroff 2014). The deposits from the sequence under examination here can be assigned to these latter two groups. As will be discussed below, these derive not only from the building fill but also from an intensive phase of activity directly preceding the foundation of the market. In what follows, while focusing on the latest recognizable finds, we try to give an idea of the entire range of material present in the building fill and the contexts associated with the "pre-market" buildings in the area.

Pottery from the construction fill of the west stoa

Due to its extent and undisturbed nature, the construction fill below the peristyle of the western stoa is the most relevant for dating the market's foundation. In lack of other internal dating evidence, the pottery finds provide the most important chronological markers. Regarding fine pottery, Eastern Sigillata A (ESA) is the most common imported red-gloss table ware, comprising specimens of *Atlante* Forms 3, 4 and 22 (fig. 3, 1-6). One fragment of an *Atlante* Form 4 dish has an Isis crown stamp (fig. 3, 3). Such stamps occur by ca. 100 BC at Tel Anafa (Slane 1997: 335, 340-341), while at Athens they are considered typical of the Augustan period (Hayes 2008: 24). The occurrence of these forms and the overall predominance of ESA is in line with the evidence from other post-Sullan contexts at the Athenian Agora (Rotroff 1997a). Other imports include greywares of unidentified

provenance (fig. 3, 7) and products from the region of Pergamon, which consist of dishes with incurved rim belonging to Meyer-Schlichtmann (1988) Forms T3, T4 and T5 (fig. 3, 8-10), small cups with outturned rim belonging to Form N15 (fig. 3, 11) and a bowl with flaring rim which is close to Form Sa 24 (fig. 3, 12). Italian imports are limited to only one fragment of a thin-walled 'thorn-ware' beaker or jar of unknown form and the rim fragment of a *Consp.* 4.4 dish (fig. 3, 13). The fragment is the only Italian sigillata find in the building fill and it is very important, since it is the latest identifiable fine ware, dated generally to the period between Oberaden and Haltern, namely 10 BC and AD 10, a significant piece of evidence for narrowing the date of the market's construction.

A wide range of local table wares, unguentaria and lamps provide further dating evidence. Local fine wares include numerous fragments of semi-glazed bowls with flaring rim (fig. 3, 14-16), hemispherical cups (fig. 3, 17) and fishplates with rilled rim (fig. 3, 18). They are all made in a rather soft, medium-coarse fabric and characterized by a red or reddish-brown matt glaze which most frequently covers the vessel's interior and the exterior of the rim. Similar shapes are attested in post-Sullan and 1st century BC contexts from the Athenian Agora (Rotroff 1997b: 152, 160). Except for a few imports from Asia Minor, most lamps are local mould-made products belonging to types spanning the third to the last quarters of the 1st century BC, such as Howland 52A (Howland 1958: 180-181), 52F (fig. 3, 19; Howland 1958: 189) and 52C/ Scheibler SML/ IV2 (fig. 3, 20; Howland 1958: 183-185; Scheibler 1976: 76-78). Rotroff (1997b: 513) dates Howland 52C lamps after 25 BC. A wide range of fusiform grey unguentaria are also attested. In addition to those with a tube-like shape and articulated or plain stem feet belonging to Rotroff's Category 6 (fig. 3, 21-22), there are also specimens of Rotroff's Categories 7 (fig. 3, 23) and 8 (fig. 3, 24), which are considered late in the series (Rotroff 2006: 154). Unguentaria of Rotroff's Category 6 and 7 are attested at the cemetery at Ag. Kostantinou and Geraniou St., a small number of which were found together with bulbous ones (Theodoropoulou et al. 2014). The fact that no bulbous unguentaria are attested from the market's construction fill is a strong indication that the building was founded before the new shape had become popular.

The coarse ware assemblage is also in line with a date late in the 1st century BC. Two series of household wares are attested. The first, comprising vessels with a matt partial red-coating, includes open shapes, mostly craters and basins or lekanai. The crater with the flaring rim and rolled horizontal handles (fig. 4, 1) is a shape frequent in Early Roman contexts in Greece and beyond (see e.g. Riley 1979: fig. 120, no. 809; Slane Wright 1980: fig. 6 no. 104; Dore 1989: 196-197, Type 216); here it represents an evolved version of the local lekane with offset rim of Hellenistic times (Rotroff 2006: 109-110); its shape and fabric are closely related to G 100 (Robinson 1959: 31 pl. 72) from a context now dated "ca. A.D. 20-40+" (Hayes 2008: 303, deposit R 10:1), from which it differs in the somewhat higher placement of the handles. The basin with an overhanging ribbed rim (fig. 4, 2) has no obvious direct parallels (for a Corinthian version with

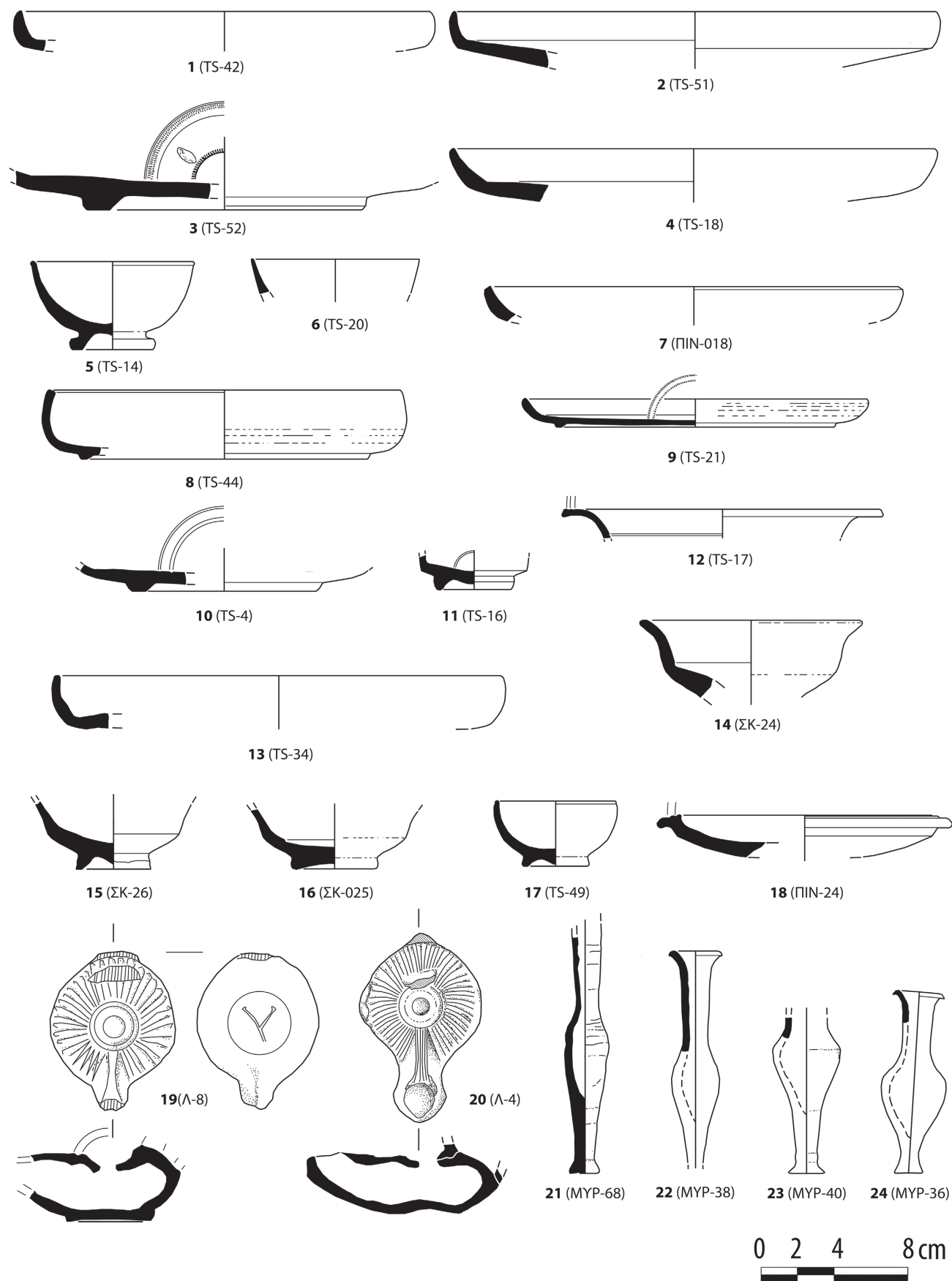


Fig. 3. Athens, Roman Agora, construction fill below west stoa: fine wares and lamps.

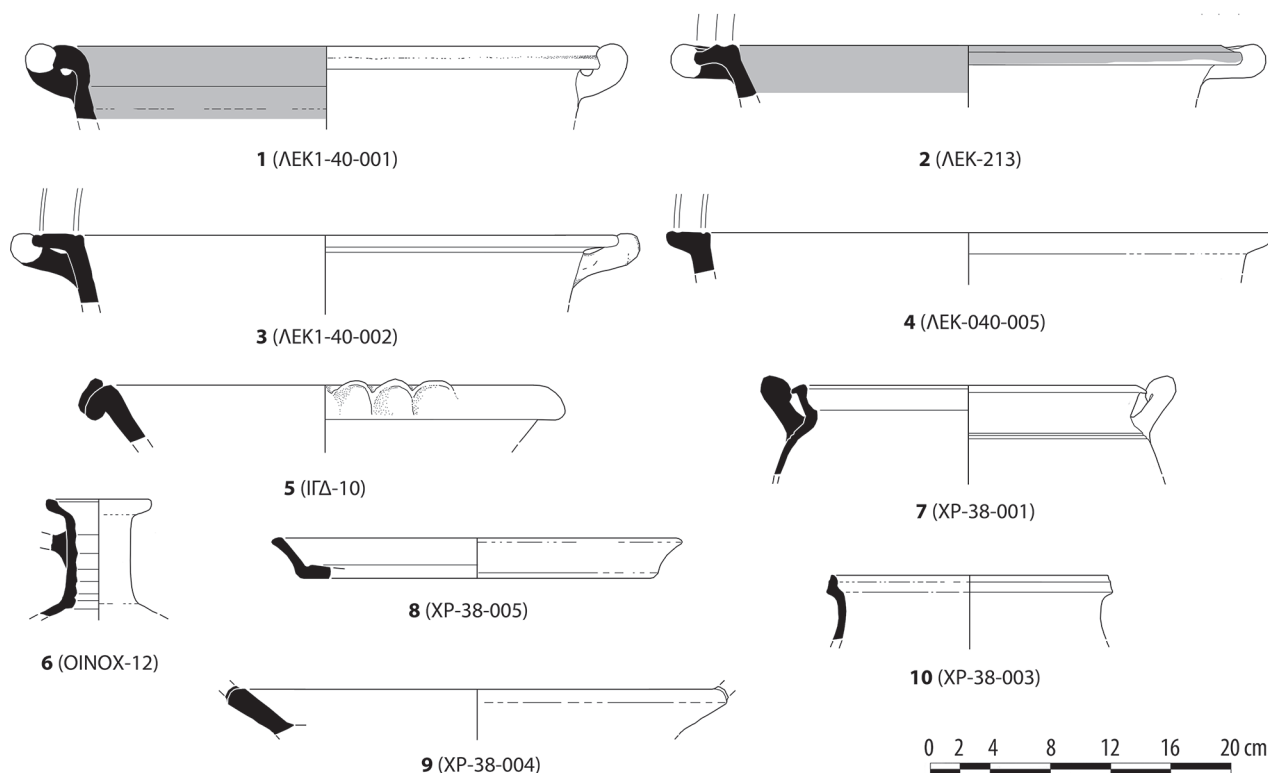


Fig. 4. Athens, Roman Agora, construction fill below west stoa: coarse wares.

flaring rim, see Slane 1986: 290-291, no. 84) but it is related to the previous in both fabric and execution. The plain series is made in a buff medium-coarse fabric and, in addition to pouring vessels such as in **fig. 4, 6**, it comprises handled lekanai and heavy-duty basins with thick walls and grooved rims (**fig. 4, 3-4**). The latter two shapes are also attested in post-Sullan Athens in the 1st century BC (Rotroff 2006: fig. 48, no. 280; fig. 49, no. 285; for the development of the form at Corinth, see Slane 1990: 120). An imported mortar is made in a black sand fabric similar to Campanian amphorae (**fig. 4, 5**). The majority of cooking wares are made in the local cooking fabric and many find parallels from Group F of the Athenian Agora (**fig. 4, 7-8**; Robinson 1959: pl. 3, nos. F 80-F 85). The few imports include a Phokaian flat-based pan with ring handles, a Hellenistic form that may be residual, and a cooking pot with an overhanging rim (**fig. 4, 9-10**).

The amphora material is exceptionally rich. Most finds belong to imports from the Aegean, including Rhodian (**fig. 5, 1-3**), Knidian (**fig. 5, 4-5**), Koan (**fig. 5, 6-7**) and Chian (**fig. 5, 8**), as well as several minor and unidentified types. Another late stamp with a palm branch occurs on a Knidian amphora handle (**fig. 5, 5**). Such stamps are known from Athens and elsewhere and are dated to the later part of the 1st century BC (Grace 1934: no. 282; Römer 1983: 268, no. 9; Jöhrens 1999: 238, no. 810). An unexpected find is the rim of what appears to be an alum amphora from Melos (**fig. 5, 9**). The type is well-documented in North Italian sites by the last quarter of the 1st century BC (Cipriano et al. 2005; Quiri and Spagnolo 2015) but to the best of our knowledge it has not been reported so far from elsewhere in Greece outside Melos itself (Rapto-

poulos 2005). Imports from other areas of the eastern Mediterranean and the Black Sea are represented by few examples. From the former region comes a small flat-based table amphora (Agora F73; **fig. 5, 10**), the fabric of which suggests a Cilician origin (Robinson 1959: 18, no. F 73, pl. 2; 85, no. M 12, pl. 18). A single find (**fig. 5, 11**) can be identified as a Sinopean Sin Ic amphora on the basis of its fabric and form (Vnukov 2017: 106).

In contrast, Italian imports are numerous and from various sources. In addition to several Graeco-Italic amphorae manufactured mostly in Campanian fabrics, which date probably before 86 BC, the construction fill has yielded fragments of Lamboglia 2, Brindisi, Dressel 1B, Dressel 21-22 and Dressel 2-4. Several belong to types presumably imported to Athens in the early decades following the Sullan sack, but the majority seem to date from around the middle of the century onwards. Of interest here is the occurrence of two Dressel 1B fragments with stamps on the rim. The first has a smudgy, difficult-to-read, retrograde stamp which might record the name B.SENILIS (**fig. 5, 12**), a stamp reportedly attested on a Dressel 1 discovered at the oppidum of Châteaumeillant in Gaul (Laubenheimer and Barthélémy-Sylvand 2010: 26). The second is stamped with the name abbreviation NICOMAC and the countermark FAB (**fig. 5, 13**). These stamps are attested, amongst others, on Dressel 1B finds from the Dramont A shipwreck (sunk ca. 50 BC; Liou and Pomey 1985: 569) and the Late La Tène chariot burial from Boé, associated with pottery of the third quarter of the 1st century BC (Gruat 1994: 192).

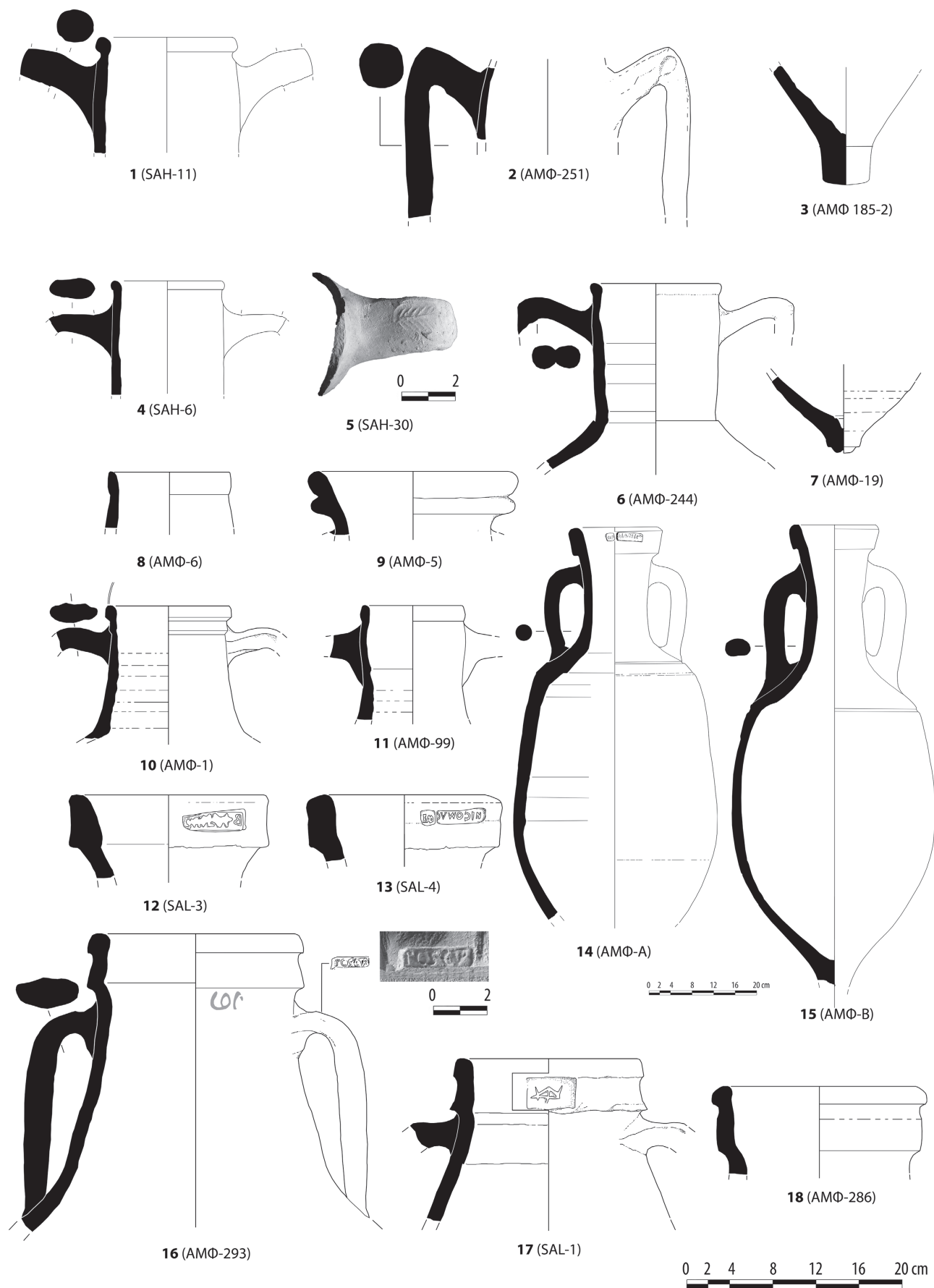


Fig. 5. Athens, Roman Agora, construction fill below west stoa: imported amphorae (nos. 14 and 15 drawn by A. Drigkopoulou).

Most of the Italian amphorae belong to the Lamboglia 2 class from the Adriatic. In addition to numerous fragments, two near-complete amphorae were retrieved from the building fill at the level of the fifth header-and-stretcher course of the foundation wall (fig. 5, 14-15). One has a rectangular stamp on the rim with the name MANTAM (M in ligature) and a square countermark stamp with the abbreviation FAB (fig. 5, 14). They both can be ascribed to the Lamboglia 2C subtype, which is considered as transitional between Lamboglia 2 and Dressel 6A, according to the classification by Alka Starac (2020) based on the material from Pula. Lamboglia 2 amphorae are reported from various find contexts in Athens (Baziotopoulou-Valavani 2001). Based on the finds from the Athenian Agora, it has been argued that amphorae of this class were imported to the city in small numbers from the late 2nd century BC but grew in importance in the post-Sullan period (Will 1997: 128), an observation reinforced by the assemblage under examination.

Another significant group of Italian amphorae, which, nevertheless, has not been reported so far from excavations in Athens, consists of Dressel 21-22, now considered to have carried various types of fish sauce. Following Botte's (2009) classification, two main types can be distinguished, namely Type 3 (fig. 5, 16), originating from Campania, and Type 1 which has been attributed to Sicily (fig. 5, 17). The specimens of Botte Type 1 have symbol stamps on the rim, while two Botte Type 3 fragments are stamped on the handle with the Latin abbreviation POSTCVRT, known amongst others from finds in Jerusalem and Ephesos, where it has been associated with the Roman banker and Cicero's friend Gaius Curtius Postumus who was active around the middle of the 1st century BC (Bezeczky 2013: 213-217). Also represented but in somewhat lesser quantities are specimens belonging to Botte Type 2 (fig. 5, 18), which has been attributed to a southern Calabrian production. The occurrence of all three types in the building fill is important in terms of the overall chronology of the class, as it suggests that by the time that the Roman Agora was built, production in Italy was already fully developed and exports from all respective producing regions were reaching Athens.

In addition to this material, the construction fill has also yielded small numbers of imports from North Africa, the Iberian Peninsula, as well as from other unidentified, possibly western sources. In addition to hollow spikes belonging to North African amphorae of the Punic tradition (fig. 6, 1-2), there is a ringed hollow spike from an unidentified type (fig. 6, 3), the rim of a possible Tripolitanian amphora (fig. 6, 4), and several 'a gradino'-type rims of another unidentified ovoid (?) type (fig. 6, 5-6). The latter are made in a relatively fine light brown fabric, and they show characteristic criss-cross brush-marks on the interior of the neck and rim. Amphorae with similar-looking profiles as the latter are known from the Jewish Quarter in Jerusalem, dating to the last third of the 1st century BC (Finkelzstejn 2019: 225, fig. 14). These western types have also been recorded from the Middle Stoa building fill (Lawall 2006: 271, fig. 2), now thought to have been deposited century 170 BC (Rotroff 2006: 362), but since they come from a disturbed area, it is possible that they date to the post-Sullan period, a possibility now reinforced by their occurrence in the assemblage under examination.

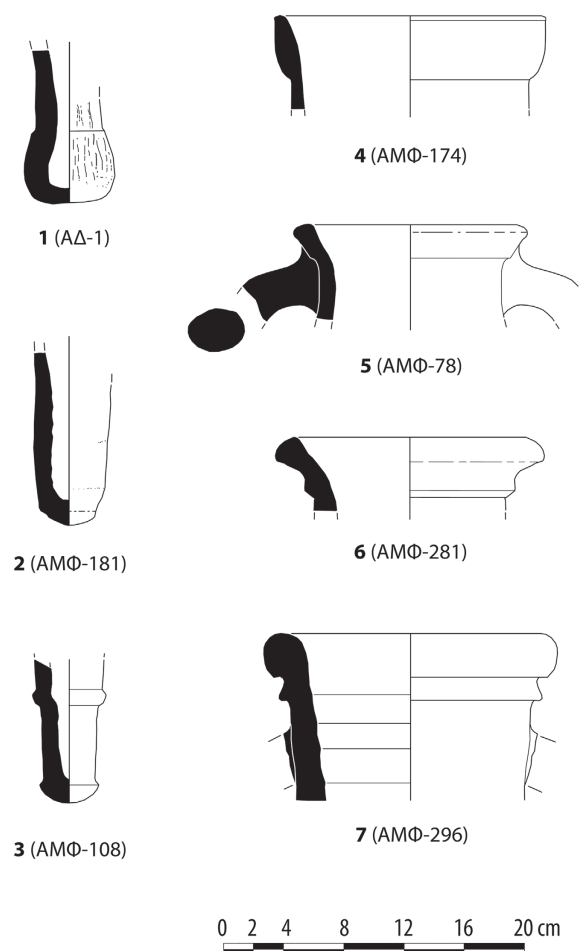


Fig. 6. Athens, Roman Agora, construction fill below west stoa: other amphora imports.

A rare find is a rim made in a coarse sandy fabric (fig. 6, 7), which belongs to a Lomba do Canho 67 amphora from the Guadalquivir valley, a type also documented at Ephesos (Bezeczky 2013: 136-137).

Deposits associated with the “pre-market” activity in the area

Directly below the building fill of the Roman market, in the cellar of the private property investigated and almost in the middle of the excavated area, the lowermost course of the foundation wall of the west stoa was found straddling a NW-SE stone wall preserved to 5.50 m in length and measuring 0.80 m in width (figs. 7, 8). This wall abutted another short wall at its SE corner and incorporated a monumental threshold block and a smaller one, very close to the first, with pivot holes for doors. The original plan of the building, to which these remains belonged, could not be established further during the excavation, but, judging from the size of the threshold blocks, this must have been a private house or commercial space (Sourlas 2008: 107-108). Based on the pottery and other finds the building was constructed in the Hellenistic period and remained in use in post-Sullan times.



Fig. 7. Athens, Roman Agora. Foundation wall of west stoa and pre-existing building remains (photo: E. Bardani, Archive of the Ephorate of Antiquities of City of Athens).

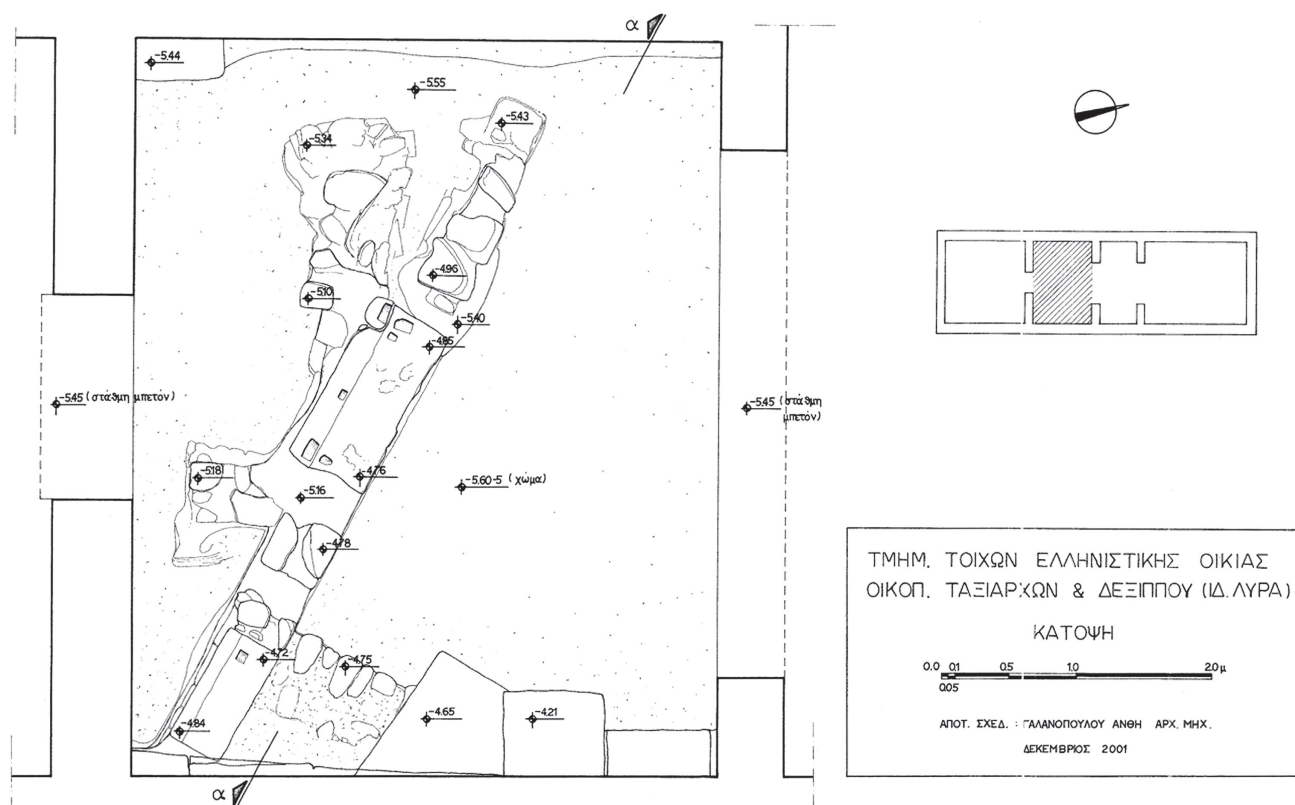


Fig. 8. Athens, Roman Agora. Plan of pre-existing building remains (drawing: A. Galanopoulou, Archive of the Ephorate of Antiquities of City of Athens).

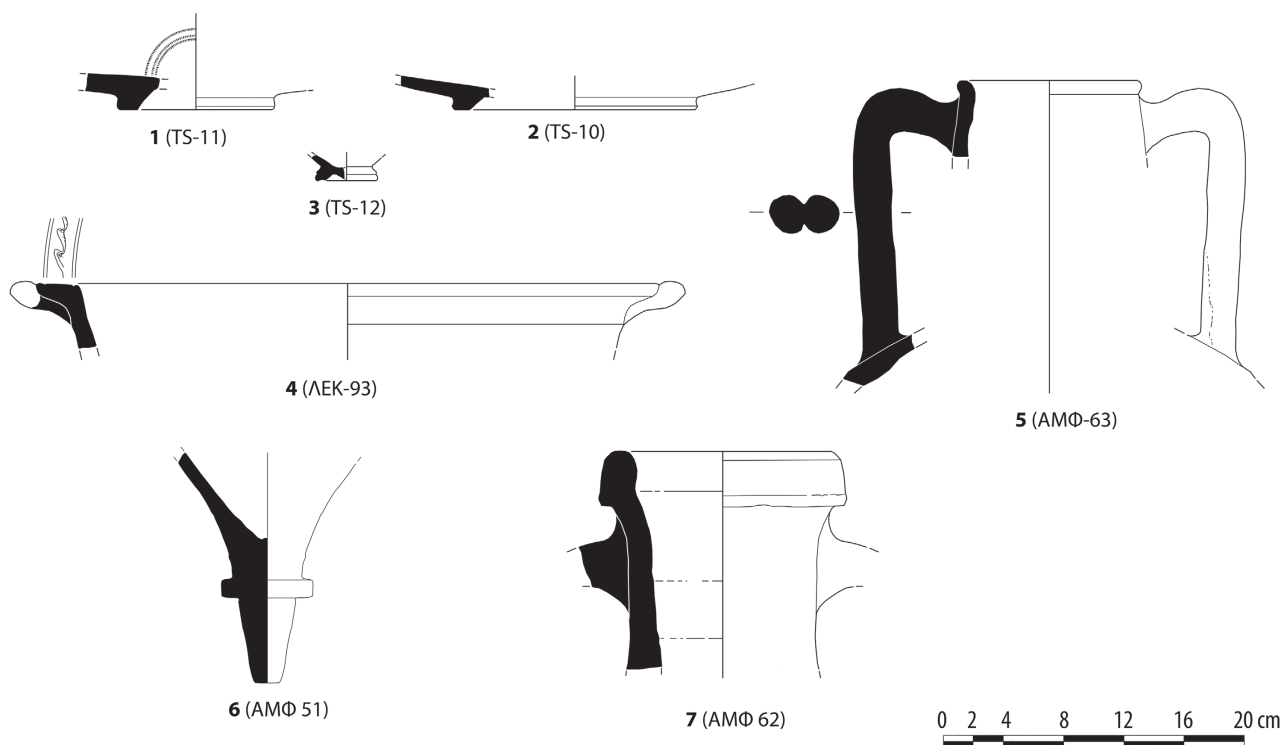


Fig. 9. Athens, Roman Agora. Pottery from use surface near Hellenistic building.

The pottery collected from underneath an associated use surface in front of the wall with the threshold blocks includes several diagnostic finds that can provide a *terminus post quem* for its use. Finewares include a few fragments of ESA *Atlante* Form 3 and 4 dishes (fig. 9, 1-2) and the fragment of a Pergamene cup of unidentified type (fig. 9, 3). A basin with grooved rim and a wavy line (fig. 9, 4) finds a direct form parallel from a context at the Athenian Agora dated 100-50 BC (Rotroff 2006: 275 no. 280, fig. 48; no. 282). Amphora finds include a double-barreled Koan (fig. 9, 5), a Knidian toe (fig. 9, 6) and a Lamboglia 2B rim (fig. 9, 7) close to Starac rim types 6-8 (Starac 2020: 30, fig. 59). Although all wares and types are attested in Athens already before 86 BC, the presence of the Lamboglia 2B amphora which is regarded to have developed after 80 BC (Starac 2020: 31) suggests that the assemblage dates to post-Sullan times, perhaps in the context of repairs following damages during the Sullan sack (Sourlas 2008: 108). This conclusion is reinforced by an Athenian “star-and-crescent” bronze drachma, dated 86 BC, and an Athenian New Style bronze drachma of ca. 70 BC recovered from underneath a concentration of rubble from the area to the S of the wall with the threshold blocks.

The discovery of these building remains demonstrates that prior to the construction of the Roman market a cluster of houses and/or commercial establishments existed in this area from Hellenistic times and into the post-Sullan period. This is in line with the older discoveries of residential and commercial buildings dated to the Late Hellenistic and earlier periods along the so-called “plateia odos”, the road that connected the Athenian Agora and the space where the Roman market was erected (Shear 1973: 138-142; 1975:

346-361). The precise duration that the establishment under examination here remained in use is difficult to ascertain. The building could have been demolished at any time during the first century BC, but only in the last decade at the latest, when the area was covered by the massive fills to raise the ground for the construction of the Roman market. Accordingly, the pottery from the building fill of the Roman market is likely to derive from the clean-up of such pre-existing buildings in the area that were cleared to make space for the new market complex. The commercial function of the area during this “pre-market” phase is reflected in the richness and variety of the amphora imports from across the eastern and western Mediterranean spanning the pre-Sullan period right into the later part of the 1st century BC. It could also indicate that in the post-Sullan period, at least, the commercial establishments that existed in this area specialized in the trade of specific commodities from certain regions, as in the case of Italian olive oil and fish products.

Conclusion

The finds examined above provide for the first time stratified evidence for establishing the date of construction of the Roman Agora. Although epigraphic and other sources have been taken to suggest that the market was built intermittently between the times of Caesar and Augustus, the sequence of deposits encountered during excavation of the building fill of the west stoa does not point to any distinct construction phases but suggests that the building operations took place in one go and as part of the same project. Based on the

latest finds from the construction fill, this took place in the last quarter of the century and most probably after 10 BC. Since works must have taken several years to complete, a date in the last decade BC seems reasonable. At the same time, the findings give a unique insight into the function of the area prior to the construction of the market. The range of pottery in the market's building fill and the discovery of Hellenistic building remains that continued to be in use in the post-Sullan period suggest that this district was already home to commercial establishments with links to extensive supply networks. Future work will contribute more detail to the local and imported wares and their significance for understanding post-Sullan and Early Roman Athens.

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