

ASCSA Excavations
in Ancient Corinth
2019 Report

Excavations Northeast of the Theater

In 2019, work continued in the area directly northeast of the ancient theater where a new program of excavation was begun in 2018 (Figure 1). An area of approximately 182.5 m² was dug from the modern surface in grid-squares 2C, 3C, 4C, 5C, 6C, 6D, 6E, and 7C, to the west and south of the area opened up in 2018.

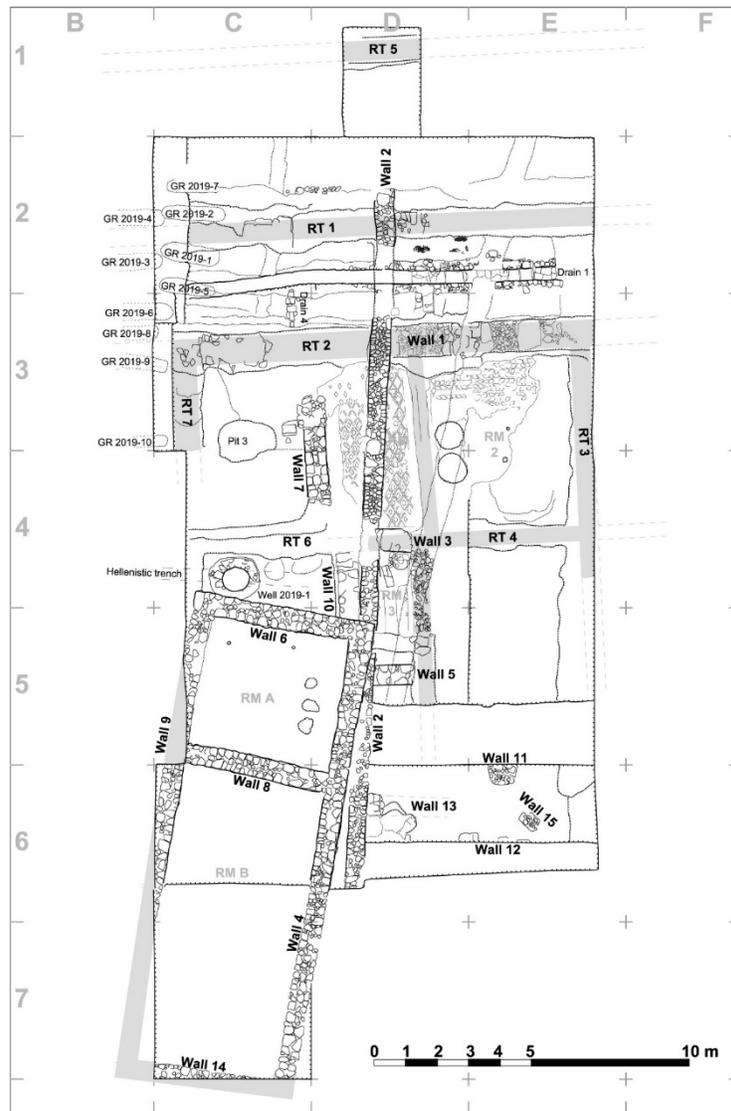


Figure 1. Plan of the excavations northeast of Theater after the 2019 season (J. Herbst)

In the northern part of the area, a portion of the top surface of the east-west road (*decumanus*) was revealed directly to the west of the section of the road excavated in 2018 (Figure 1). The newly exposed portion of the road, like that unearthed previously, was flanked on the south by a robbing trench, which may mark the line of a colonnade that lined the street in late

antiquity. Excavation to the south of this robbing trench, in an area that may have served as a sidewalk, brought to light an additional stretch of the built drain (Drain 1) discovered in 2018 (Figure 2).

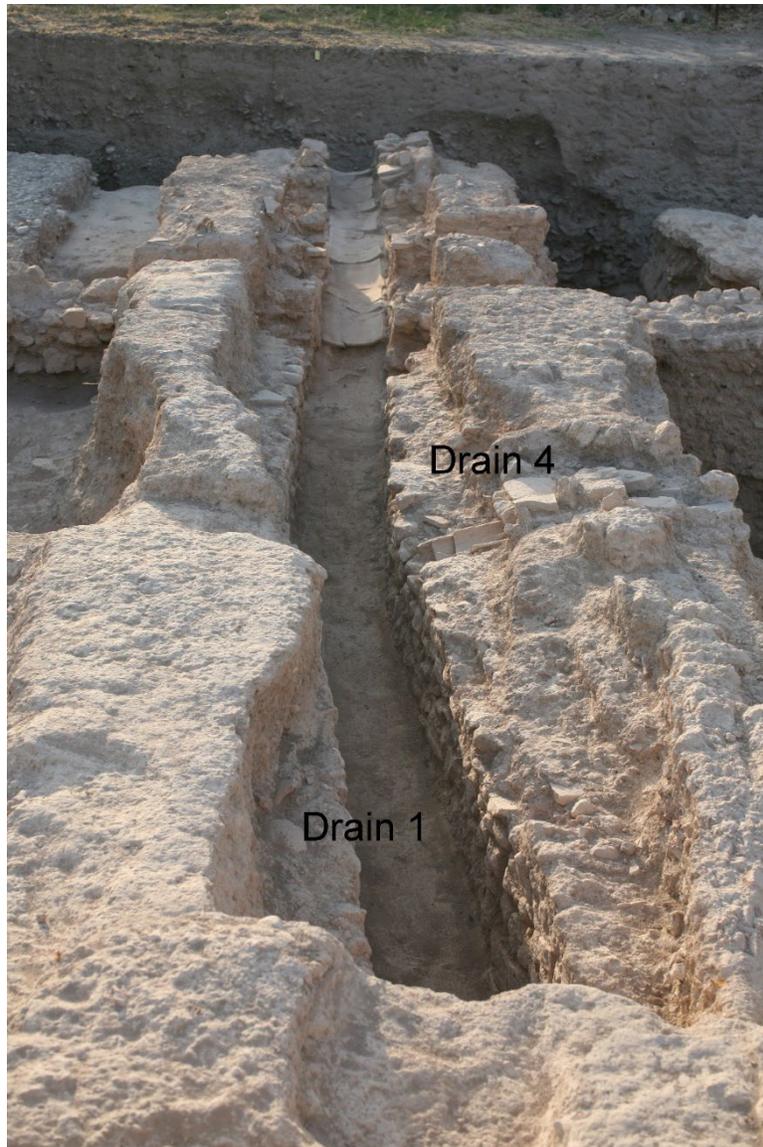


Figure 2. Drains 1 and 4, view from the west

This drain, which went out of use in late antiquity, runs the full length of the excavated area along a slightly wavering course with a slight downward inclination to the west. The newly revealed portion of Drain 1 is generally lacking its tile lining but is otherwise well preserved. A much smaller built drain (Drain 4) was discovered to the south of Drain 1 (Figure 2); this drain, of which only a small segment is preserved, must have served as a conduit for channeling water into Drain 1 from a source to the south.

In 2018, portions of the floors of three rooms of a large Roman building (perhaps a *domus*) were discovered south of Drain 1, and in 2019, an additional portion of one of these floors (in Room 1) was revealed (Figure 3). This floor, whose design and technique is related to



Figure 3. Floor of room 1 of the Roman building (*domus?*), view from the southwest

those of some early Roman floors in Italy and elsewhere, has a surface layer of black stone chips set in mortar and ornamented with a white tessellated trellis pattern studded with diamond-shaped tiles of white marble. A small section of another floor with an undecorated black stone chip surface was also uncovered further south, and it presumably represents a fourth room of the same Roman building. The walls of this building continue to be illusive. Only deep robbing trenches with fill predominantly of the 6th or 7th century A.D. provide indirect evidence for the foundations. Although attempts were made to locate the west end of this Roman building, the only evidence found so far for the west wall – a north-south trench (robbing trench 7) – is not entirely conclusive.

It has become increasingly clear from the evidence derived from the 2019 season that the Roman building associated with the decorated floors was succeeded in late antiquity by a multi-room structure, now represented by several short sections of walls built of rubble and tile set in lime mortar (walls 3, 5, 10, and 13 in Figure 1). Prior to the construction of this late antique building, portions of the floors of the earlier Roman building were dug through in places to a considerable depth, and the resulting irregular pits were refilled with earth. Finds in this earth fill included broken pieces of the earlier floors and pottery dating as late as the 6th, or possibly 7th, century A.D. One portion of this fill, which underlay wall 13 of the late antique building, yielded the season's most surprising find, a gold finger-ring with a magical gem of yellow jasper bearing an intaglio of the sign for the constellation Cancer and three accompanying "texts," including $\text{IA}\Omega$, the Greek transliteration of the Hebrew name for God, *Yahweh* (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Gold ring with yellow jasper magical gem

A well (2019-1) was discovered in close proximity to the late antique building, and it appears to be contemporary with that building (Figures 1, 5). The upper part of the well-shaft had been provided with a lining wall, though the topmost part of this had collapsed into the fill within the well. The lower part of the well, which was cut through bedrock for a depth of nearly seven



Figure 5. Well 2019-1

meters, did not require a lining wall. The use-fill of the well, which was encountered at about the level at which water began to flow into the well as it was being excavated, included a complete lamp of Samian type (Figure 6) and a number of large fragments and complete specimens of



Figure 6. Late Roman lamp of Samian type

table amphoras, transport amphoras, and pitchers, which may have been used for drawing water (Figures 7, 8). This pottery and that from the upper fill of the well indicates that this well was



Figure 7. Red-slipped table amphora



Figure 8. Late Roman 1 transport amphora

both used and filled in during the late 6th or early 7th century A.D. The shaft of this well cut through an earlier east-west trench that had been carefully dug into the bedrock. It is not yet clear what purpose this feature served, but the fill in it, which is datable to late 4th century B.C., is the earliest deposit encountered so far in the area. The fill contained an abundant quantity of fragmentary pottery, much of it normal domestic fine, plain, and cooking wares, as well as a couple votive miniatures and a number of sherds of imported transport amphoras, including several Punic amphoras, probably manufactured in Sicily (Figure 9). These amphoras provide valuable evidence for a continuation or resumption of Punic trade connections more than a century after the destruction of the so-called Punic Amphora Building, excavated by C. K. Williams II in the area of Corinth's later forum.



Figure 9. Rim of a Punic amphora

Remains of a north-south road came to light just below the plow-zone over much of the area west of the long boundary wall (Wall 2) that was revealed in 2018. As noted in last year's report, the lower layers of this road terminated against the west face of Wall 2, while the uppermost layer extended over a robbed out section of that wall, confirming that that road layer must post-date the wall's destruction (Figure 10). Pottery associated with this road does not provide a very precise date, but points generally to the late Byzantine or Frankish period.



Figure 10. Section of north-south road in grid-square 7C, view from the southwest

An entirely unexpected discovery was made near the west edge of the excavated area in grid-squares 2C and 3C. Here a series of shallow pit graves were discovered just below the plow zone (Figures 1, 11). Four graves were excavated, while an additional six were identified but left



Figure 11. Graves 2019-1 (top) and 2019-2 (bottom), view from north.

undug since they extend well into the west balk. This cluster of graves clearly represents part of a late cemetery, but its exact date remains uncertain. There are no grave goods to aid in the dating of the individual burials, but small isolated sherds of the 12th century in the fill of the burial pits provide a terminus post quem. All of the excavated graves contained the inhumed remains of adults (probably three male and one female). The disposition of the bodies (each fully extended on its back with the head to the west) conforms to the normal practice for Christian burials at Corinth. There is no memory among the local villagers of a cemetery here in modern times and no indication of a cemetery or church in this immediate area on two maps of Corinth produced between 1828 and 1833, so despite the shallowness of the burials, they may be earlier than one might expect. So far the only evidence for the existence of a church in the area consists of fragments of a marble offering table (*mensa*) with a cross monogram (Figure 12), a small piece of a gold glass tile, and a couple glass tesserae. These are all likely to be Early Byzantine and so must predate the burials by many centuries.



Figure 12. Marble *mensa*

The latest significant feature revealed in the 2019 season is a rectangular structure, almost certainly a house, comprising two rooms side by side – a nearly square room (A) to the north and a longer rectangular room (B) to the south (Figure 1). The walls, or rather the foundations for the walls, of this building are built with broken up pieces of poros and tiles set without lime mortar. Finds associated with this building include 19th-century pottery and coins of the early Greek monarchy. The absence of later 19th-century material suggests that this building was abandoned in the wake of the earthquake of 1858, which resulted in the general relocation of the local population to the new site of Corinth on the coast.

For a fuller account of the excavations, see:

Pfaff, C. A. 2021. “Corinth, 2019: Northeast of the Theater,” *Hesperia* 90, pp. 773-818.

Site Conservation

In the summer of 2019, the following work was carried out in the Frankish Area south of the Corinth Museum as part of a long-term project to open up this part of the site to the public. Five walls were consolidated north of the church and the roots of a dead pine tree adjacent to one of those walls were removed. A new mortar floor was laid down in the hall directly west of the church. Architectural elements discovered previously in the area were assigned inventory numbers and transferred to a location a short distance to the west of the Frankish Area. The area of old excavations located between the southern part of the Frankish Area and the Centaur Bath was cleaned of brush and debris and photographed from the air in order to record the features there for future heritage management planning. Finally, supplemental earth fill was added along the west side of the Frankish Area in places where settling had occurred in previously back-filled trenches.

Resource Management

Following the completion last year of a large, new storeroom, large quantities of excavated finds – primarily trays of context pottery and wall painting fragments – were transferred to this facility from various older, inadequate storage areas. Concurrently, other finds, including architectural elements and architectural terracottas, were transferred from older storage areas to a more suitable space in the former Synetairismos building. In the process of this work, an Access file was created to provide the Ephorate of Antiquities of Corinth and the American School’s excavation staff with a record of the new locations of all these materials.

The fieldwork of 2019 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

2019 Corinth Excavations Staff

Director: Christopher Pfaff

Associate Director: Ioulia Tzonou

Architect: James Herbst

Conservator: Nicol Anastassatou

Assistant to the Associate Director: Manolis Papadakis

Assistant Conservator: Takis Notis

Steinmetz Museum Fellow: Eleni Gizas

Foreman: Thanassis Notis

Assistant Foreman: Panos Kakouros

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

Specialists:

Photographer: Petros Dellatolas

Illustrator: Christina Kolb

Numismatist: Mike Ierardi

Glass specialist: Tassos Antonaras

Roman pottery specialist: Kathleen Slane

Trench Supervisors:

Gavin Blasdel

Alice Chapman

Alex Howell

Matthew Lupu

Ashley Mason

Simone Oppen

Elise Poppen

Emily Prosch

Andrea Samz-Pustol

Hanna Smagh

Janet Spiller

Charles Sturge

Michael Sullivan

Jessica Tilley

Excavators:

Soula Anastasopoulou

Kostas Arberoris

Elias (Hekuran) Coli

Spyros Christou

Panos Didaskalou

Elias Delistathis

Memo Karbouniaris

Vasilis Kollias

Phanis Kollias

Angela Stammati

Georgos Tsakalakis

Argyris Tsirikis

Photos



Kostas Arberoris, Argyris Tsirikis, and Memo Karbouniaris excavate one of the late graves while Gavin Blasdel and Elise Poppen draw and record the excavation in iDig



Kostas Arberoris, Argyris Tsirikis, and Memo Karbouniaris excavate one of the late graves while Gavin Blasdel and Elise Poppen draw and record the excavation in iDig



Thanassis Notis, Hanna Smagh, Alice Chapman, Elias Delistathis, Georgos Tsakalakis, and Elias Coli excavating below the Byzantine road (view from east)



Manolis Papadakis, Andrea Samz-Pustol, Panos Kakouros, Panos Didaskalou, and Angela Stammati excavating north of the 19th-century house (view from northeast)



Matthew Lupu and Emily Prosch supervising excavation below the Byzantine road in grid-square 3C



Panos Kakouros, Janet Spiller, and Panos Didaskalou excavating below the Byzantine road in grid-square 4C



Memo Karbouniaris, Simone Oppen, Ashley Mason, Argyris Tsirikis excavating the 19th-century house (view from north)



Eleni Gizas giving a tour of the excavations to a group of local school children



Michael Sullivan, Jessica Tilley, Spyros Christou, and Panos Kakouros excavating Well 2019-1



Kostas Arberoris, Alex Howell, Georgos Tsakalakis, and Charles Sturge excavating Early Roman strata in grid-square 6E



Charles Sturge, Kostas Arberoris, Georgos Tsakalakis, Alex Howell excavating a pit in grid-square 5D



Charles Sturge and James Herbst setting up the total station



A fluffy visitor to the excavations



April Session



May Session



June Session