

A DOORSILL FROM THE LIBRARY OF PANTAINOS¹

(PLATE 65)

IN 1933 Arthur W. Parsons began to excavate the Library of Pantainos in the ancient Agora of Athens (cf. *Hesperia*, XVI, 1947, plate XLIX).² Only the three southernmost of the western rooms were sufficiently preserved so that anything more than their plans could be recovered. The room at the extreme south became known among the excavators at the Agora as the "Sculptor's Workshop," because fragments of unfinished sculpture were found in it or close by,³ and, also, because an examination of the floor showed several successive layers of marble chips and dust, each layer, further, characterized by a number of small shallow pits containing the emery dust used in giving the final polish to the marble.

The workshop seems never to have communicated with the court to the east; but originally two steps led down through a narrow doorway into the adjoining room at the north (cf. *Hesperia*, XVI, 1947, pl. XLIX). The floor of this second room was some 0.40 m. below that of the workshop. There may have been a water-basin in the second room, for a small terracotta rectangular drain leads out of the room near the northwest corner, at the approximate level of the floor of the workshop: we may remark that a supply of water is a prime need for a sculptor. Parsons found the floor covered to a depth of about 0.10 m. with chips and dust of marble.

The sill of the entrance into the shop from the main portico of the Library—the portico facing the Street of the Panathenaia—is still *in situ* (cf. Plate 65 and Fig. 1). It is composed of two blocks of Hymettian marble of unequal thickness. The blocks together measure 2.17 m. in length. Both are reused blocks, judging from the worn edges of the under sides. The upper surface of the sill was *ca.* 0.04 m. above the floor of the shop. On the upper surface of the blocks is a set of interesting cuttings, worn places, etc., from which the method of closing the shop can be deduced (cf. Plate 65 and Figs. 1-2). We note:

- 1) A long slot from "A" to "B," Figure 1. The bottom of the slot is worn smooth in six places, related to each other as shown in Figure 1. The distance from "C" to "A" is one third of the distance from "A" to "B"; in other words, "C"—"A" is equal to two of the six units of "A"—"B."

¹ The first and second paragraphs of this article were kindly prepared by Professor Homer A. Thompson from the careful notes of the late Arthur W. Parsons, the excavator of the Library.

² *Hesperia*, IV, pp. 327-339, pp. 394, 395; IX, pp. 293-295.

³ For example, the two following objects, both now (1949) in the temporary museum of the Agora; S 1170, a sculptor's model in poros; S 1174, a figure of Dionysos in marble.

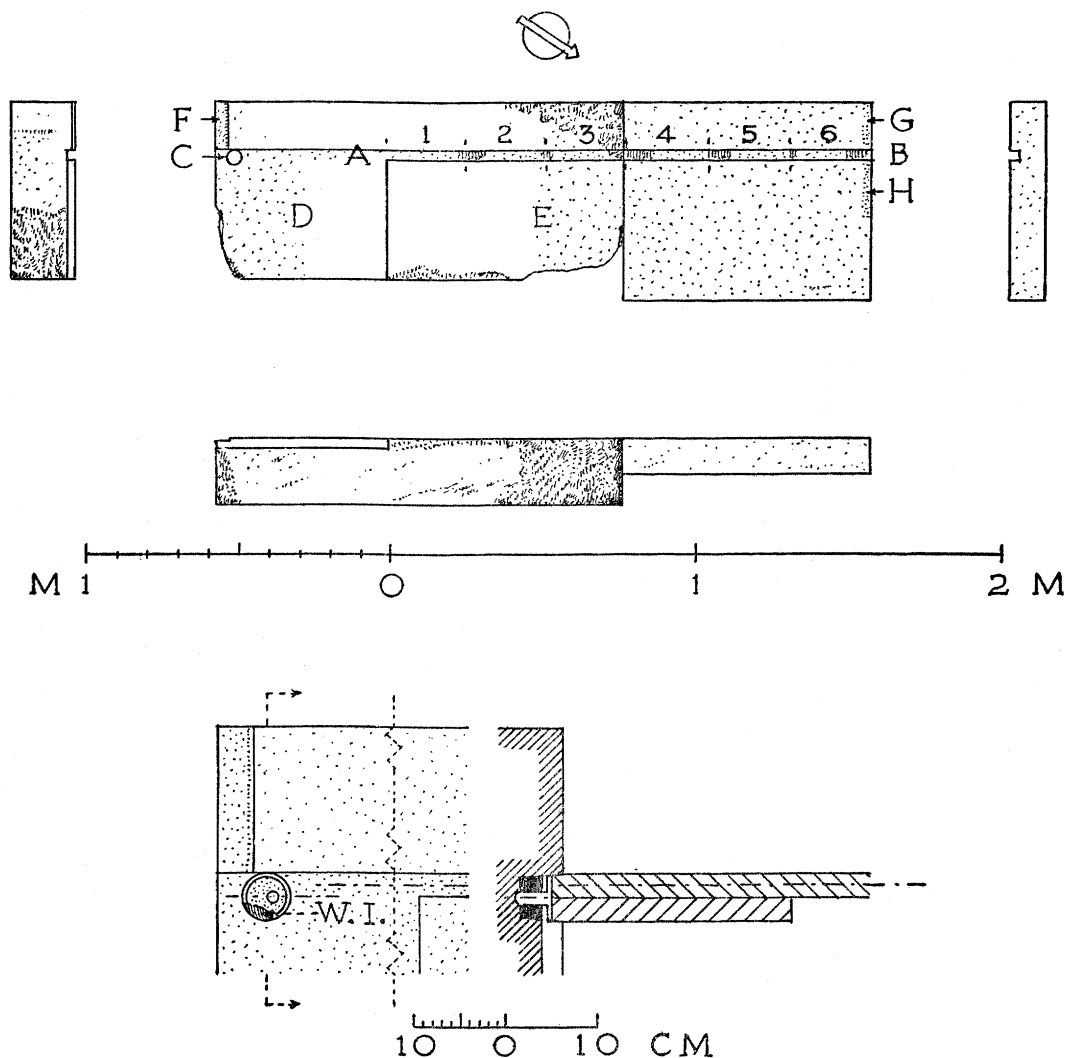


Fig. 1. Doorsill between the Main Portico of the Library of Pantainos and the Southernmost Room of the Library

- 2) An area at "D" sunk to the same depth as the slot "A"—"B."
- 3) Between "D" and "E" the sill is well worn by the feet of people entering and leaving the shop; elsewhere the sill is not particularly well finished. The chief dressing tool was the point.
- 4) A much-used pivot cutting at "C." A small piece of rusty wrought iron is still adhering to the bottom and side of the pivot cutting (cf. detail of the pivot cutting in Figure 1). It should be observed that the axis of the pivot does not fall on the axis of the long slot (cf. the detail of the pivot cutting in Figure 1).

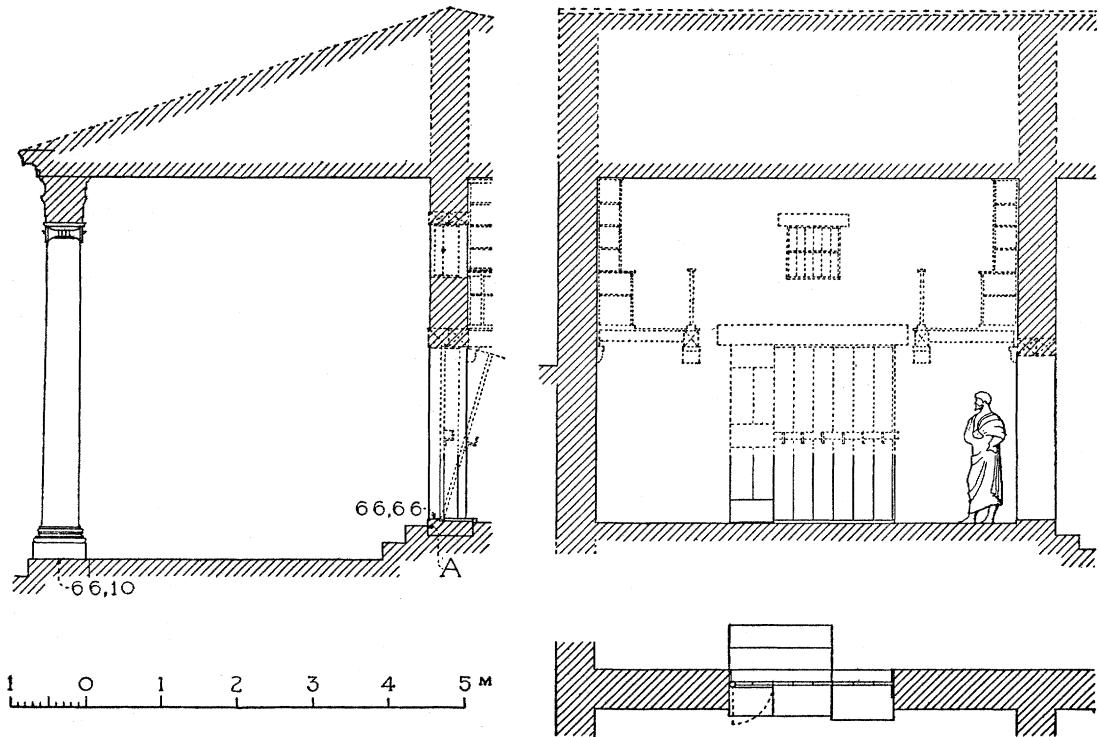


Fig. 2. Method of Closing the Door between the Main Portico of the Library of Pantainos and the Southernmost Room of the Library: Restoration (the Dotted Portions are Hypothetical)

- 5) A sinkage at "F," 0.008 m. deep and 0.035 m. wide.
- 6) At "G" and "H," strips of careful dressing *ca.* 0.03 m. wide, made with the toothed chisel.
- 7) A horizontal weather line on the vertical side of the thicker sill-block,—the side toward the portico. It is 0.085 m. below the top of the sill (at "A," Fig. 2). There is no corresponding weather line on the thinner sill-block, which indicates that the step resting against the thicker sill-block was not carried across the vertical face of the thinner sill-block (cf. Fig. 2): that is, people entered the shop only over the thicker block,—it was this circulation of people which caused the wear from "D" to "E," Figure 1, noted above. The space "E"—"B," where the sill is raised 0.56 m. about the portico, was, without doubt, the sculptor's "show window."
- 8) The entire order along the street of the Panathenaia was determined by Parsons and John Travlos (the architect of the excavations of the American School).⁴

⁴ The order in Figure 2 was drawn from data generously supplied by Mr. Travlos.

The cuttings in the sill of the Library of Pantainos are not unique in the ancient world. Similar cuttings are to be found in abundance in Italy; for example, at Pompeii,⁵ and especially at Ostia where shop-sills of over 1.50 m. in length without such cuttings are the exception. At Ostia there is at least one case where the lintel as well as the sill is preserved—the lintel is a flat arch of brick, with a slot cut into it like the slot “A”–“B” of Figure 1; and the lintel has a sunken area like “D” of Figure 1.⁶ Ostia also has many examples of the locking of shop entrances with horizontal bars.

Now we are in a position to make a fairly accurate restoration of the way the shop was closed (cf. Figure 2). Like the lintel at Ostia, mentioned above, the lintel of the Library of Pantainos should have a slot and area corresponding respectively to the slot “A”–“B” and area “D” of Figure 1. (Also compare footnote 8 for almost similar sill and lintel cuttings for windows at Assos, which were closed by sliding boards along slots.)

To shut the shop:

- 1) Six boards, each 0.265 m. wide and 0.025 m. thick, were one after the other slipped into the slot from area “D” (cf. Fig. 2).
- 2) The shop-keeper went outside the shop, pulling the door to behind him.
- 3) He then locked the door in some manner or other. The door itself was evidently two boards thick immediately above the pivot, for the axis of the pivot does not agree with the axis of the slot, as stated above—the door probably had a horizontal cleat at the bottom, which was as thick as the board. (Cf. the detail given in Figure 1; also Fig. 2.) Door and cleat would then have a total thickness of *ca.* 0.05 m. and would rest directly over the pivot hole—a good construction.

Because “C”–“A,” Figure 1, is one third of “A”–“B,” two boards, each exactly as wide as the boards in the slot, were used for the door; but we must imagine that these two boards were held together with horizontal cleats (cf. Fig. 2). Were boards of a stock width of one foot bought from a dealer and then trimmed to a uniform width of 0.265 m.? ⁷

⁵ Amadeo Maiuri, *Visioni Italiane: Pompei*, pp. 12, 23 (bottom), 83 (bottom).

⁶ The lintel is in the courtyard of the House of the Lararium, on the other side of the Decumanus from the Pantheon. It is in the shop immediately across the courtyard (cf. *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome*, Vol. 8, pl. 54). For a sill cutting at Ostia consult Guido Calza, *Ostia, Itinerari dei Musei*, etc., figs. 27 and 28.

⁷ For shop-doors up to 1.50 m. in width, two valves were usually employed. But, where the openings were wider than 1.50 m., the valves, when open, must have protruded awkwardly into the shops. In so far as Italy is concerned, shop openings wider than *ca.* 1.50 m.—that of the Library of Pantainos is 2.17 m.—were as a rule closed with a series of boards and a small door. The boards could be stacked in a little used part of the shop, while the small door (which occurred on only one side of the opening, not on both sides) protruded only slightly into the shop. A two-valve door

There are a number of ways in which the shopkeeper might have locked the shop door of the Library of Pantainos:

- 1) There is space on the outside of the door for a horizontal bar of hard wood. Such a bar is set into one jamb, drops into a rabbeted piece of wood or metal attached to each board, and falls into a vertical slot in the other jamb where it is held by shooting a bolt from the bar into the jamb, the bolt then being locked to the bar.
- 2) The bar may have been on the inside of the door, but only across the six separate boards, to stiffen them (cf. Fig. 2). There are at least four ways of locking such a door:
 - a) By means of a bolt on the outside of the door, from the door to board number 1, Figure 1—a bolt which can be locked.
 - b) A padlock on the outside of the door, securing the door to board number 1.
 - c) A piece of wood or metal attached to the outside of the door and revolving in a plane parallel to the door. The revolving piece was dropped into a rabbeted member attached to the board next the door and was then locked.
 - d) A lock and key resembling the modern lock and key. The boards of our door are too thin for the lock to be set into the thickness of a board. There would be greater security if the lock were attached to the inside of the door rather than to the outside. Such an arrangement would require a key-hole in the wooden door. The key would shoot a bolt into a pocket fastened to the inside of the board next the door.

The shallow cutting at “F” and the two carefully dressed surfaces at “G” and “H” (cf. Fig. 1) remain to be explained. There can be little doubt but that the cutting at “F” indicates that the door had an outside wooden jamb *ca.* 0.03 m. in thickness: in fact such a jamb is necessary to cover the small open space between the door and the wall jamb. Dressings “G” and “H” are also for wooden jambs *ca.* 0.03 m. thick—they formed a vertical slot at “B” into which board number 6 was pushed.

When and where was the method of closing this particular shop first used?

Parsons established the fact that the Library was built *ca.* A.D. 100, and destroyed in A.D. 267 during the Herulian invasion. At Pompeii the method was in use when the city was finally buried in ashes and lava in A.D. 79. At Ostia the method was prevalent in the second century after Christ. But how long after A.D. 267 and how

for a big opening presents certain structural difficulties. The valves are so heavy that in time they are bound to sag; and sagging causes the valves to bind against the sill. Also, the weight of a big valve causes more of a strain on its jamb than does a small valve; a big valve must be more securely anchored into its jamb than a small valve.

long before A.D. 79 was the method in use? The question cannot be answered until we have more data at our disposal.

Where was the method used for the first time? This question, too, is hard to answer—we need more data. As the method in Greece is rare (the sill of the Library of Pantainos is the only example outside of Italy I happen to know of), and as there are many examples in Italy, perhaps the method was a Roman invention. But the Romans may have borrowed it from some one of the many countries with which they had commercial relations.⁸ The method is simple, inexpensive and effective, and on that account it would be popular with the shopkeeper of any time in a country where wood was available.

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⁸ A somewhat similar method for closing a *window* occurs at Assos, in Asia Minor. It is published by Francis H. Bacon (*Assos*, p. 93, fig. 1, pp. 103 f.). The sill has only a slot, but the lintel has cuttings on its under side like those on the sill of the Library of Pantainos, except that there is no pivot cutting. If the method of closing a window by slipping boards along a slot was in use at Assos, very probably the method was used to close the *doors* of shops in that same city. And if in Assos, why not in Asia Minor generally?



1. Doorsill between the Main Portico of the Library of Pantainos and the Southernmost Room of the Library,
viewed from the southeast

G. P. STEVENS: A DOORSILL FROM THE LIBRARY OF PANTAINOS