

INVESTIGATIONS AT CORINTH, 1953 – A TAVERN OF APHRODITE

(PLATES 45–46)

EXCAVATIONS in the Agora of Corinth during the spring of 1938 revealed traces of a Greek building of unusual type which had been destroyed in the fourth century B.C. during the construction of the great South Stoa and the retaining, or terrace wall to its north.¹ In the hope of learning more about this early structure and the area in which it stood, exploratory clearing by four workmen was undertaken intermittently for a period of two months during the spring of 1953.²

The area investigated (Fig. 1) lies just north of the foundation of the stereobate of the South Stoa in front of Shops XXVI to XXX, and extends northward as far as the rear wall of the Central Shops.³ It had suffered cruelly from late Roman and early Byzantine intrusions. No less than nine great mediaeval pithoi had cut their mighty circles into and through the walls and pavements of the building itself; Early Christian squatters had built kitchens at lower levels than the Greeks, and had worked further havoc with the scant remains by interring infants below their hearths. The Greeks themselves had liberally pillaged walls and foundations to construct the terrace wall of the Stoa, and had rifled the Geometric graves in the area. Thus the reconstruction must remain as fragmentary as the stones and cuttings and pottery of which it is composed.

The earliest evidence of habitation in the area is provided by a deep deposit of Early Helladic fill that runs along the northern part, bounded on the south by a wall of large rough boulders (A on plan Fig. 1). Not enough of this wall was uncovered to give certain evidence for its date; but while it seems more likely to be of Geometric

¹ *A.J.A.*, XLIII, 1939, p. 258.

² Work began on the 20th of February and ended on the 18th of April. The inventories were kept by Mrs. Jeanne Face, and the basic plan was drawn by Mr. C. W. J. Eliot, both Fellows at the School. The foreman was Evangelos Lekkas. Cleaning of objects and mending of pottery was done by George Kachros. Particular thanks are due to Dr. Oscar Broneer whose studies in connection with the South Stoa (to be published shortly in *Corinth*, Vol. I, part iv) have contributed much to the explanation of the earlier building. I am further indebted to Dr. Lucy T. Shoe, Dr. and Mrs. Homer A. Thompson, and to Dr. John L. Caskey, Director of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens, who not only forwarded the work through official channels, but also gave generously of his time in the field and in the workrooms. Most of the illustrations are his; the others were taken by Mrs. Morgan.

³ *A.J.A.*, *loc. cit.*, fig. 1, area marked 1938.

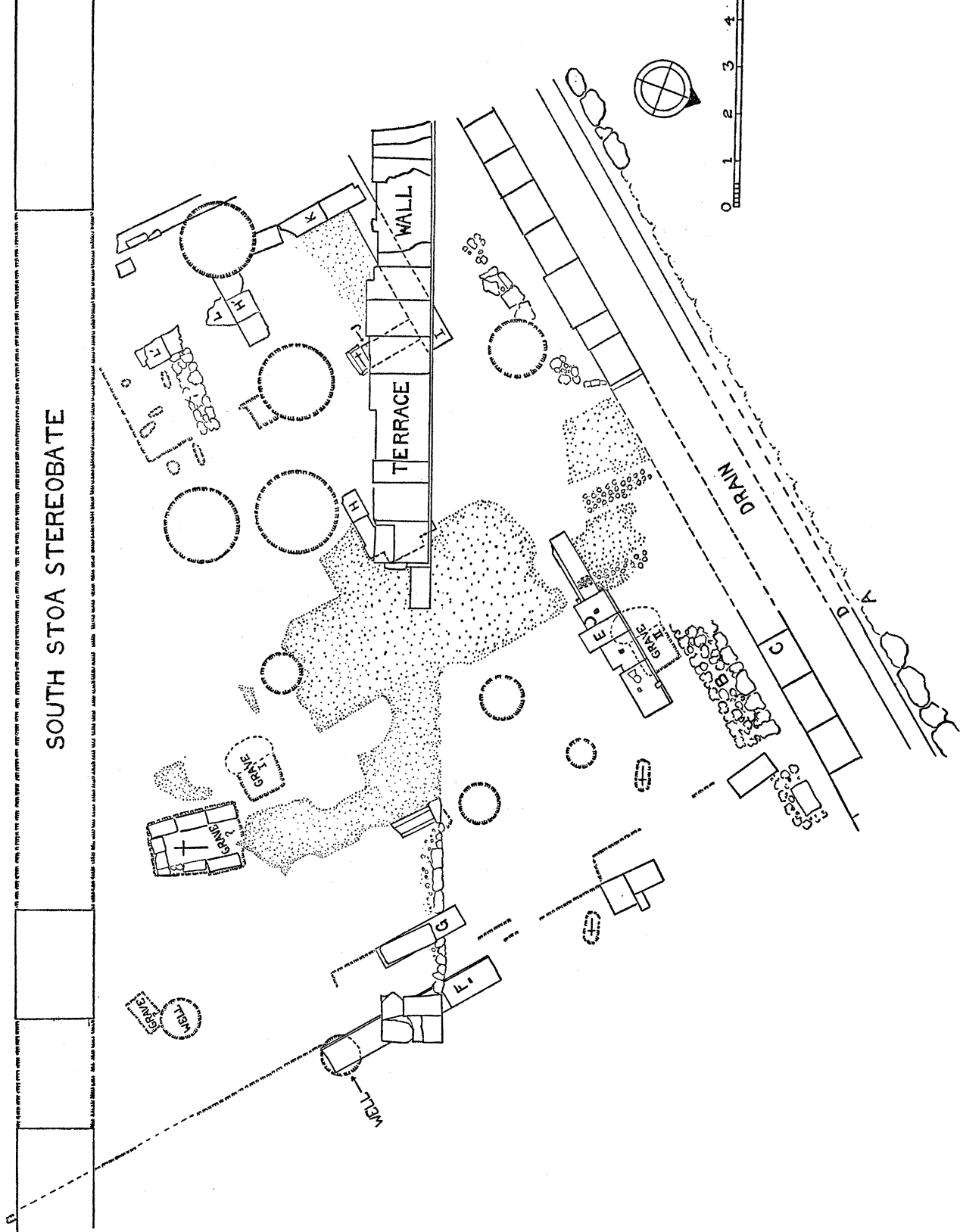


FIG. 1. Plan of the area, actual state.

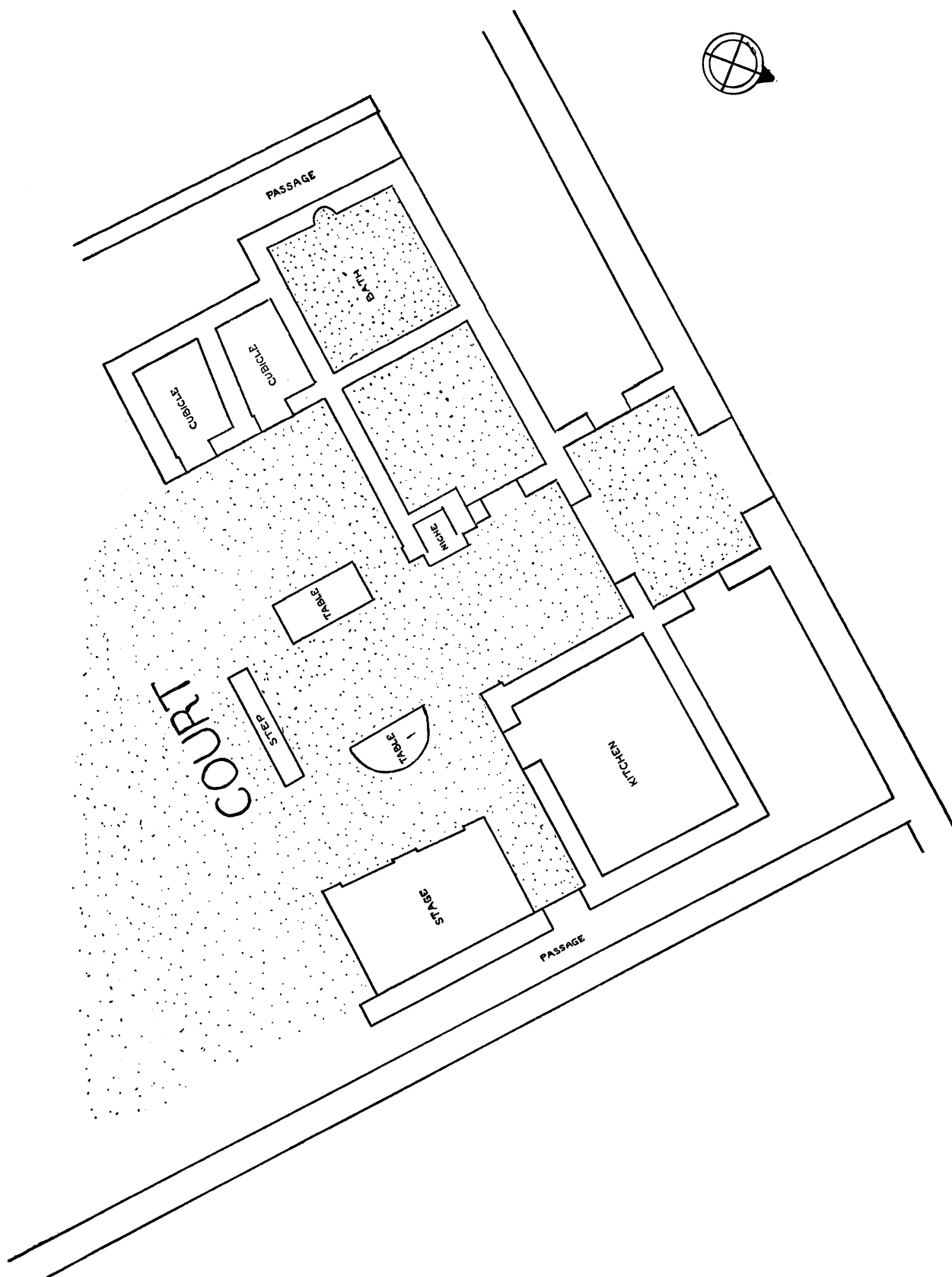


FIG. 2. Proposed reconstruction of main building in the IV century B.C.

date, nothing later than the Early Helladic fill to the north has as yet been found behind it.

South of, and parallel to, this boulder wall is a second wall of smaller, uncut stones, some 0.85 m. wide (B on plan; Pl. 45b). This is firmly dated in the eighth century by the considerable fragments of late Geometric pottery associated with it. The wall extended for the full length of the area under investigation and seems to have determined the main axis of orientation for the whole region until the fourth century B.C. when the expansion of the Agora and the building of the South Stoa caused a drastic reorganization.

The Geometric wall seems to have served as a retaining wall for a cemetery to the south. Cut into hardpan were two, possibly four, graves, of a rather different type than those found in 1937 near the Bema.⁴ Those had been simple shaft burials. The two well-preserved specimens in this new group showed that the interment was made in a shallow cave scooped out of hardpan to the west of the bottom of the rather shallow shaft. In only one was the skeleton preserved (Grave I, Pl. 45c), the legs drawn up in contracted position. The cave was walled off from the shaft with a thin partition of small stones. Though the filling of the shafts contained plentiful small fragments of Geometric pottery, a few sixth century sherds at the bottom of one provides an explanation for the total lack of offerings.

It seems probable that wall A formed the northern boundary of a shallow open drain through which the natural surface drainage flowed northeastward in the direction of Peirene.

Not long after the middle of the sixth century B.C. the expansion of Corinth, best marked by the Temple of Apollo, manifested itself in this region. A great covered drain, 1.03 m. wide, was constructed within the earlier open one, its south wall carefully built of fine ashlar blocks 0.90 m. in width (C on plan; Pl. 45b), its north wall more hastily fabricated of large cut stones indifferently set together (D on plan). The covers were similarly disparate, odd lengths and thicknesses of squared stone and split column drums. Over these and extending far beyond them to the north was laid a tough cement pavement, 0.25 m. thick in places, and bedded on the Early Helladic deposit.⁵

South of the drain two further walls were built about this time. One runs

⁴ *A.J.A.*, XLI, 1937, p. 543.

⁵ The date of the north wall of the drain, previously thought to have been later (see *A.J.A.*, XLIII, 1939, pp. 258 and 259) was firmly established this season as contemporary with the south wall. The date of the pavement was determined by the discovery, in places, of a very thin layer of earth below it which contained nothing later than sherds of the sixth century. Embedded in it at one point appeared a small bronze coin of the familiar Pegasos and Trident type dated 400-146 B.C. This sole conflicting item seems probably to represent a fourth century repair. Similarly the split sections of columns used for covers bore no trace of the pavement and are considered by Dr. B. H. Hill as Roman repairs.

parallel to it at a distance of two meters, and consists of a single course of squared blocks bedded on hardpan, with euthynteria cut along the northern face (E on plan; Pl. 45b). Only four blocks remain, though *stereo* is prepared for at least one more to the east. Beyond this point a Roman household had removed all traces of Greek activity. To the west the wall was interrupted by a later threshold; and though large blocks continue its line on from a point six meters further west (I on plan; Pl. 45b), these, like the threshold, may have been set more than a century later.

The preserved four blocks, though neatly joined, are of different lengths; nor were the builders disturbed by the variety of their widths which project irregularly to the south. Clearly these must have been at least at floor level if not actually beneath it. Numerous round and rectangular cuttings on the upper surfaces imply vertical wooden members of some sort, though their irregularity of size and spacing offers no clue to their original purpose.

The other sixth century wall, running at right angles to the drain, resembles the first in that it consists of a single course, bedding on *stereo* (F on plan). It is, however, different in the greater size of its blocks (0.63 m. wide) and their even finish on all sides. Of this construction only three blocks remain, euthynteria cut along their western face; but the footing trench extends southward under the foundations of the South Stoa stylobate where it ends, and *stereo* to the north is prepared for at least two more blocks. Beyond this point, where the surface of the hardpan slopes more sharply down to the north, three other blocks, not perfectly aligned for the purpose, may have served as a foundation for its continuation.

That it supported an adobe wall, probably above a thinner cap stone, was shown by a mass of fallen bricks, thrown down from it when the South Stoa was built. At that time, too, the now missing blocks were removed. The slight, though noticeable, slope of the wall from south to north suggests that at this time it served to bound an enclosure rather than to support a roofed building.

While these developments were in progress, work on two wells was discontinued and they were refilled. One of these, lying directly under the north-south wall, had reached a depth of only 0.80 meters. Its fill consisted largely of iron and bronze scoriae from a foundry. The other, just north of the Stoa foundations, had been cut to a depth of 5.15 meters without reaching water. In it were found fragments of hundreds of vases, fine and coarse, which, when mended, will provide good comparative material for study in connection with the sixth century well found in the 1937 campaign some forty meters to the east.⁶

The bulk of the finer pottery, mostly skyphoi and oinochoai, was of local manufacture (Pl. 46a, 1, 2), decorated simply in the debased Corinthian style or in the conventionalizing manner. One bears a graffito reading ΠΙΕ (Pl. 46a, 1) in the archaic Corinthian alphabet. A few imported vessels, mostly kylixes, were not com-

⁶ M. Campbell, *Hesperia*, VII, 1939, pp. 557 ff.

parable to the many figured pieces from the 1937 well. A figurine of a seated goddess (Pl. 46a, 3) is of Rhodian manufacture.⁷ Three small, hand-made terracotta groups, all fragmentary, represent kneeling women kneading bread.

At some time during the fifth century the character of the area underwent a marked change (Pl. 45a). Within the earlier enclosure walls an extensive courtyard, paved with pebble cement, was laid behind the north wall probably bedding against it. Its shape was irregular, cut into by spur walls ending in antae and by light bases or offering tables.⁸ The central section was relatively level and flanked by two "bases," one of which was certainly semi-circular, the other possibly so. A part of one of these has probably been recovered from its later position as a cover of a near-by Byzantine grave. To the east and probably also to the west of the central section the pavement rose markedly in a southerly direction. There is no surviving indication of the means by which this disparity in level was reconciled beyond the preserved part of the central section, but a step or a low base seems the most likely solution. How far the pavement extended to east, south and west could not be determined.

A probable reconstruction of the area, based upon fragments of walls, occasional cuttings in hardpan, and the edges of the pavement itself, suggests that the visitor, entering from the north, found himself immediately confronted by a long east-west corridor, beyond which he approached a large open court with a wall, ending in an anta, on his left hand (Fig. 2). Immediately beyond the anta a paved passage, two meters wide, led eastward toward the old sixth century wall, but before meeting it, passed through a thinner wall of orthostates (G on plan). Directly south of this passage was a deep, low rectangular base, perhaps a stage, decorated on its western face with three pilasters, the settings for which are still indicated in the pavement. The facing of this stage, so far as it is preserved, was made of re-used material, behind which there was no solid foundation. The small stones remaining above hardpan clearly represent a late Roman filling.

Again approaching from the north, on the right (west) side the courtyard was closed on the north by an east-west wall (H and H' on plan) which terminated in a curious thickening⁹ flanked by antae, with a slight projection between them, perhaps the basis of a niche for an image.

Probably at this time changes or additions were made to the north and west of the court. An extension of the northern sixth-century wall (I on plan), now projecting under either side of the terrace wall, served, with southerly wings (J and K on plan), to enclose a tank of fair dimensions. Two plastered orthostates of wall K are still in position, standing to a height of 0.85 meters; a single block of wall J, and the

⁷ Cf. *Lindos*, I, pl. 96.

⁸ See *A.J.A.*, XLIII, 1939, fig. 4.

⁹ This is best seen in *A.J.A.*, *loc. cit.* Most of the lowest details of this peculiar feature can be determined by the fingertips under the Terrace Wall.

northern section of waterproof stucco floor still survive despite the incessant intrusions of later date. At the southern end of wall K the corner of the orthostate has been cut away in a singular manner. A quarter circle slot beginning at the floor and narrowing toward the top bears the same waterproof stucco as the floor and the rest of the wall. With the now missing block immediately to the south this may have formed the setting for a fountain. No ingress or egress for water has yet been found.

Late in the fifth or early in the fourth century changes were made in this plan. From the southern wall of the reservoir a poorer wall extended south (L and L' on plan), and from this at least one execrable wall (M on plan) returned eastward apparently forming at least two cubicles. The well-worn floor of the court was patched and its broken parts resurfaced. About the middle of the fourth century a deposit of terracottas was buried under the floor of one of the cubicles.

At the northern end of the structure another change was made. A door sill was constructed against the western end of the sixth century wall (E on plan), cutting away the existing pavement to the south for its insertion. Between this and the great drain another pebble floor was laid.

Toward the end of the third quarter of the fourth century work was begun on the South Stoa and the earlier building was abandoned and dismantled, most of its material being put to other uses in the new construction, the upper part of the terracotta deposit being disturbed and figurines scattered about to the north and west. Carts hauled construction materials over the new threshold, wearing deep grooves in it and in the northern pavement. That these ruts do not show in the southern pavement implies that it had already been deserted and partly filled in. The terrace wall of the Stoa extended diagonally over the earlier courtyard, and the area between it and the Stoa was filled up with earth and debris. Shortly thereafter the northern part of the structure was in part repaired, perhaps for a construction shack, for the wheel marks in threshold and pavement were repaired with small cobbles. A little later it too was deserted, filled almost to the level of the terrace, and surfaced with a firm pavement of cobbles sloping down gently to the north.

The plan of the building is peculiar. It is too extensive to have been a house, and its interior divisions are unlike known domestic architecture of the time. Nor does it suggest any type of formal public building. Quantities of drinking cups found on, in and under the floor of the courtyard indicate a tavern; and the likely interpretation of the low rectangular base with its facing pilasters as a stage adds the theme of another form of entertainment. Peculiar features are the possible niche near the entrance, the two bases formally arranged on either side of the main approach, and the tank toward the western end of the building.¹⁰ The niche suggests an image, the bases light stone offering tables, the tank some sort of ritual. Thus to the normal

¹⁰ A parallel for the flanking bases is to be found in the larger, later and more elaborate Delphinion at Miletos. See Kawerau and Rehm, *Milet*, Vol. I, 3, *Das Delphinion in Milet*.

functions of the tavern are added certain religious features, the nature of which is clarified by the deposit of terracotta figurines.

This deposit, more homogeneous than most of those found at Corinth, seems clearly to focus on the cult of Aphrodite. More than a hundred whole or fragmentary figurines were found tightly packed against one of the cubicle walls; and about half as many, apparently disturbed from the top of the deposit, were scattered about at a slightly higher level. Purposed burning had hopelessly ruined many of them, but more than fifty from the deposit itself and about half as many from the immediate neighborhood were sufficiently well preserved to warrant a place in the inventory.

The variety of types represented is a considerable one (Pl. 46b), but it condenses into two distinct categories: those relating directly to Aphrodite and those relating to masculine pursuits. Thus all the standing and seated divinities holding attributes are Aphrodite with a dove. Standing and flying doves, both mould- and hand-made, and miniature mirrors are numerous. Plaques with a single serpent, without the crowning helmet that associates them with hero cults, are here pertinent to Aphrodite in her underworld aspect.¹¹

The other general group includes a large number of hand-made horses and riders, dogs, rams, and mould-made banqueters and shields. These are all common types at Corinth, horses with riders and dogs being found in almost all Corinthian deposits.¹² The reclining male figures have been considered appropriate to hero cults.¹³

One of the unsolved problems of votive figurines is whether or not they represent the deity or the worshipper. An Aphrodite of Acrocorinth held a shield; and thus the small fragments of shields from the deposit may be intended as her attribute. But if the votary were a warrior the shield might equally well be interpreted as his symbol. Similarly the knight might dedicate a horse and rider group, the hunter a dog, the herdsman a ram, and the celebrant a banqueter.

In the Potters' Quarter at Corinth a small deposit of figurines¹⁴ contained many of the same types although much earlier in date, and also a small fragmentary bronze bowl bearing an inscription: *τὰς Ἀφροδίτας ἐμί*.¹⁵ The female figurines are of the same types as those in the new deposit, as are the mirrors and doves. It is interesting to note the presence of a snake plaque and shield. The absence of dogs and banqueters is not disturbing, for the popularity of these types is later than the "Aphrodite"

¹¹ She was thus worshipped at Corinth under the title of *Μελανίς*. Cf. Farnell, J. R., *Cults of the Greek States*, II, p. 652. For the plaques crowned with a helmet and associated with a hero cult see Miss Davidson, *Hesperia*, XI, 1942, pp. 105 ff. and Dr. Broneer, *ibid.*, pp. 128 ff.

¹² Cf. Davidson, G. R., *Corinth*, XII, *The Minor Objects*, pp. 15-18 and Stillwell, A. N., *Corinth*, XV, *The Potters' Quarter*, Part II, pp. 21-24.

¹³ Cf. Broneer, *loc. cit.*; but none of the banqueters from the new deposit is bearded, and in only one instance, from the debris around the deposit, did a female figure sit on the end of the couch.

¹⁴ Stillwell, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

¹⁵ Stillwell, *op. cit.*, part I, p. 23.

deposit, which dates a century earlier than the latest figurines in our group. The "Aphrodite" deposit contained one figure of a comic actor. Among the figurines presumably disturbed from the new deposit is a finely preserved actor of New Comedy type (Pl. 46c). It will be remembered that the plan of the building very probably included a small low stage facing on the court, linking theatrical entertainment with the establishment.

With the terracottas were a number of miniature vases, kraters, mesomphalic phialai and skyphoi; and large unglazed pyxis lids, though no pyxides were found to go with them. These recall a similar circumstance noted at the Argive Heraion where it was suggested that the lids were dedicated alone.¹⁶ Since the pyxis is a type of vase essentially for feminine use, this symbolism is of possible significance, as is also the exclusive choice of vessels associated with wine, sacred and profane. In this connection it should be noted that in the later debris in the area of the building itself and in a small pit below floor level the numerous vase fragments were almost entirely from kotylai, skyphoi and kantharoi.

That more elaborate offerings were made with the terracottas is shown by the small bronze fox (Pl. 46d) obviously a mirror-rim ornament, that was found with the deposit. We can only imagine what other valuable dedications may once have been buried here, and perhaps motivated the disturbance of this otherwise inconspicuous deposit.

For the identification of our building none of the known types of plans is of aid. As noted above, it is too large for a house, but unlike any public building known. Its one parallel, perhaps superficial, is to be found in a sanctuary, the hellenistic Delphinion at Miletos. The ample provision for large offering tables and the presence of the terracotta deposit do much to strengthen this assumption; and the contents of the deposit indicate that the deity was Aphrodite. The cult of Aphrodite at Corinth was famous throughout the ancient world.¹⁷ It is quite apparent that her devotees and their admirers must have met at suitable places, and the agreeable hospitality of a tavern has been a favored place for such acquaintanceship since history began. The presence of quantities of drinking vessels supports this interpretation as does the extensive paved courtyard. In the fourth century at least, the banqueters could retire into the narrow cubicles on the west.

The present evidence allows us the following series of hypothetical reconstructions of the area:

1. Later VIth century. A large open precinct fronting on the new Agora area to the north.

¹⁶ Caskey, J. L., *Hesperia*, XXI, 1952, p. 191.

¹⁷ Cf. Broneer: "The Armed Aphrodite on Acrocorinth and the Aphrodite of Capua," *Univ. of Calif. Publications in Classical Archaeology*, I, No. 2, pp. 65-84.

2. Vth century. A generous courtyard with offering tables, surrounded by covered rooms, one of which was surely a bath or lustral basin, and another possibly a low stage for entertainment.

3. Early IVth century. The courtyard repaired and rearrangement of the western part of the building into cubicles (Fig. 2).

4. Late IVth century. The destruction and covering of the whole.

The builders of the South Stoa cut their giant footing trench across the south end of the building and laid the broad terrace wall across the remnants of its floor and walls. South of this wall they filled in up to the level of its top. North of the wall a cobble pavement sloped gently down from the level of a single step.

The area appears to have remained undisturbed until late Roman times. Then, during the period of disintegration in the fifth and sixth centuries after Christ the terrace wall was plundered for building material. Torrents of winter rain plunged down Acrocorinth through the resultant gaps, washing out the ancient fill and destroying some of the remaining traces of Greek times. Roman squatters then plugged up the openings with a thin wall of small stones, set up miserable huts virtually on hardpan and gouged out graves for their infants under their hearths. Thus the Byzantines, resettling in the ninth century, found the place, and continued to remodel it to suit themselves with walls, floors and pithoi, until by the ninth century the level of their own accumulated rubbish had lifted their building operations more than a meter higher.

One of the earlier pithoi used as its base the fragmentary marble of a statue base of relatively early Roman Imperial times (Pl. 45d). The broken text which reads:

[— — — — —]
 [— — — —] ονίκου θεοῖς
 [— — — —] ὁδάμος μεγιστοδάμου λα
 [κεδα] ιμόνιος ἐπόησε

is of interest chiefly because it offers a new name to the known roster of ancient sculptors, and especially because that sculptor was a Spartan.¹⁸

Further exploration through the apparently undisturbed fill to the west, and under the mediaeval deposits south of the footing trench of the South Stoa might produce further evidence relating to the Greek building. It is to be hoped that this may not be too long delayed.

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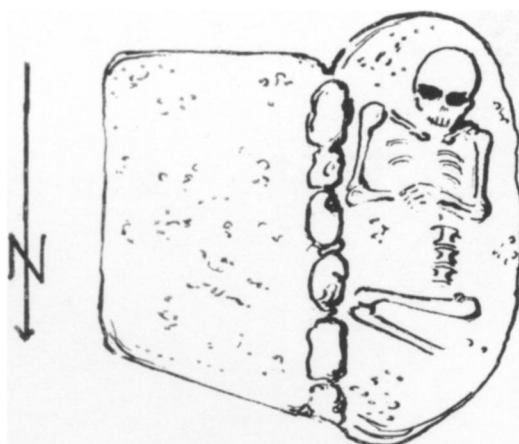
¹⁸ I am indebted to Dr. Benjamin D. Meritt for these observations on the inscription.



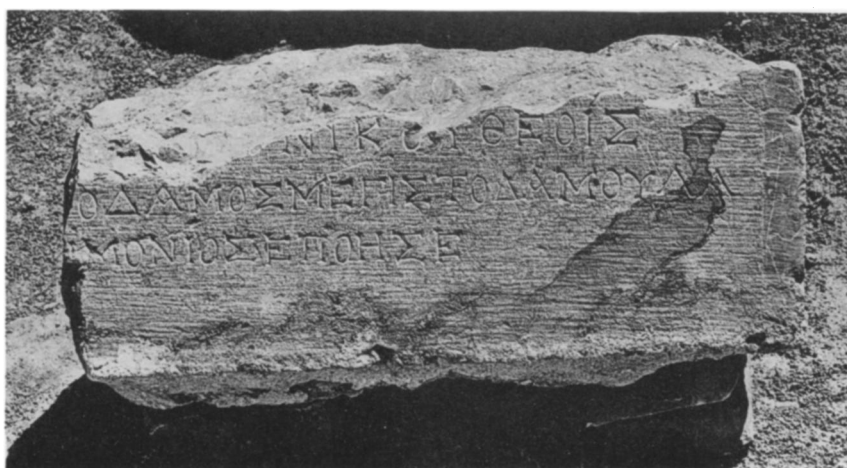
a. General View of Tavern of Aphrodite from S.W. Stylobate of South Stoa in lower right foreground; Bema at top toward right



b. Geometric Wall (B) from East



c. Grave I of Geometric Period



d. Statue Base



a. 1 and 2 Corinthian Vases of Later VI century; 3 Rhodian Figurine



b. Sample Figurines from the Deposit



c. Comic Actor Figurine



d. Bronze Fox from Rim of Mirror