

A PUBLIC BUILDING OF LATE ANTIQUITY IN ATHENS (IG II², 5205)*

(PLATES 62-64)

IN 1881, while digging for the foundations of a house immediately south of the Little Metropolis (St. Eleutherios or Panagia Gorgoepikoös) in Athens, workmen came upon a large inscribed epistyle. It was broken in two pieces, with an original length of over five meters, and bore a dedication of a building by Aëtius, Proconsul of Achaëa, to the Emperors Arcadius and Honorius. The pieces were taken to the courtyard of the National Museum, where they now lie (Pl. 62).¹ Announcement of the discovery, with a reading, was made by S. Koumanoudes,² followed almost immediately by a brief analysis of content and date, by H. Swoboda.³ At that time interest in late Roman Athens was limited to a very few scholars and the inscription has received only superficial attention ever since.⁴

In the summer of 1977 permission was obtained for a thorough examination of the epistyle, which involved cleaning and turning the blocks so that all faces could be studied, measured and photographed, raising them on wooden supports to clear them from the ground, and moving them together into their original relationship.⁵

The epistyle, comprising both architrave and frieze, was originally a single block of Pentelic marble (Fig. 1, 2; Pls. 62-64).⁶ It was made for the front of a prostyle, distyle structure, and the joints with the lateral epistylia were placed so as to be visible on the flanks rather than on the front of the building (Pl. 64: a, b). The original length of the block, measured on its soffit, was 5.12 m., its height 0.655 m. The columns were placed with centers 4.58 m. apart.

On its outer face the architrave has two fasciae, the frieze one. The top of the crowning molding of the frieze lies *ca.* 0.04 m. below the top of the block—an unusual feature the purpose of which is not apparent. On its inner face the architrave was

* A generous grant from the American Philosophical Society made this investigation possible.

¹ IG II², 5205; E.M. 11892, 11893. For a description of the blocks, see below.

² *Αἶων*, 21 October, 1881 (vol. 43, no. 3679).

³ *AthMitt* 6, 1881, pp. 312-314.

⁴ Brief notices derived from Swoboda are furnished by E. Curtius, *Die Stadtgeschichte von Athen*, Berlin 1891, p. 308, and W. Judeich, *Topographie von Athen*², Munich 1931, p. 457 (as an addendum to p. 105). E. Nachmanson, *Historische attische Inschriften*, Berlin 1931, p. 71, no. 87, comments a little more fully chiefly quoting from Swoboda; E. Groag, *Die Reichsbeamten von Achaia in spätrömischer Zeit*, Budapest 1946, p. 71.

⁵ Grateful acknowledgment is made to Dr. Nicholas Yalouris, Director of the National Museum, for facilitating this work.

⁶ The description of the blocks was provided by Homer Thompson who kindly examined them with me. John Travlos made the drawings. To both I am indebted for much aid and counsel as well.

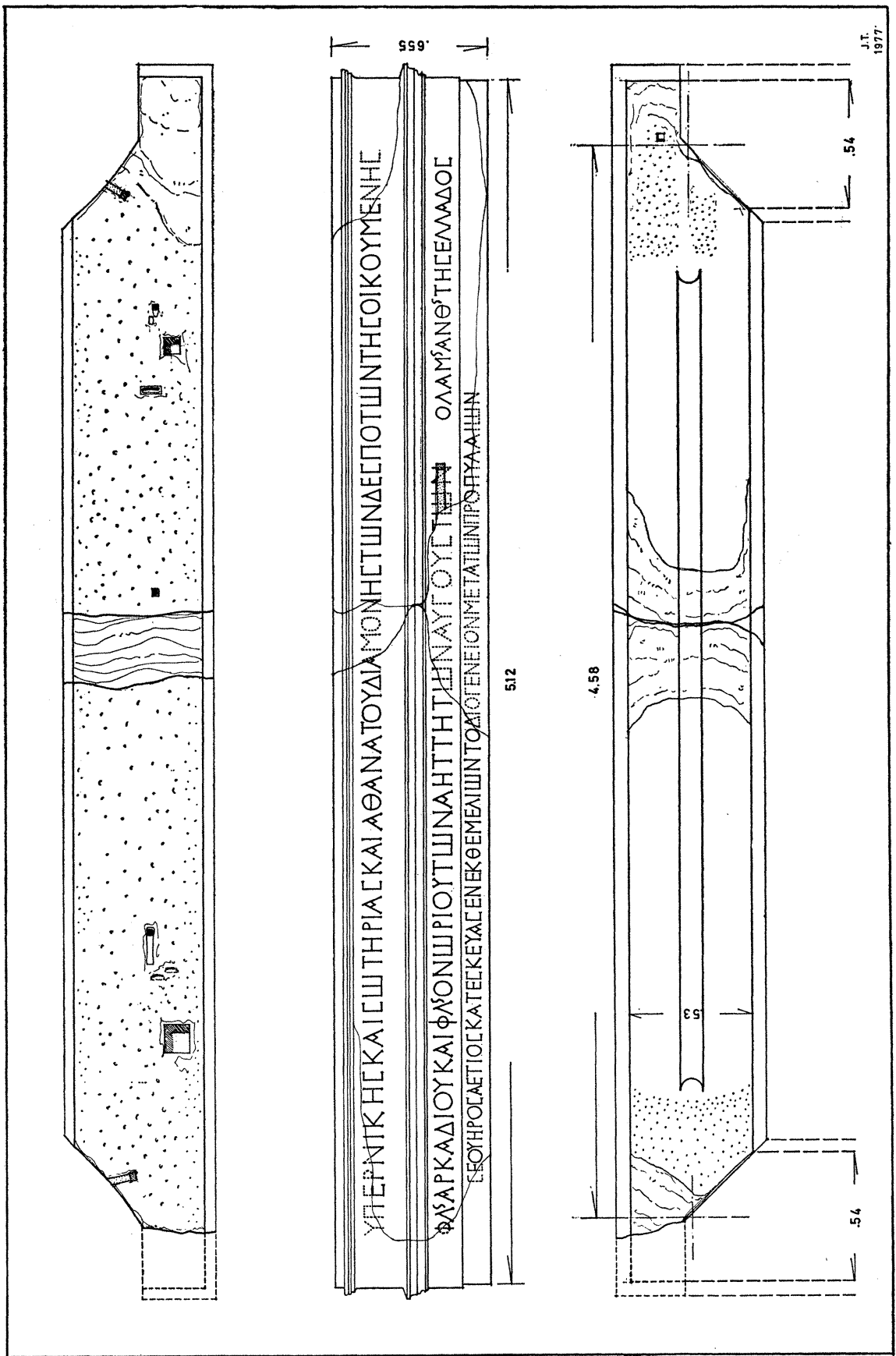


FIG. 1. Epistyle block IG II², 5205: top, face and soffit.

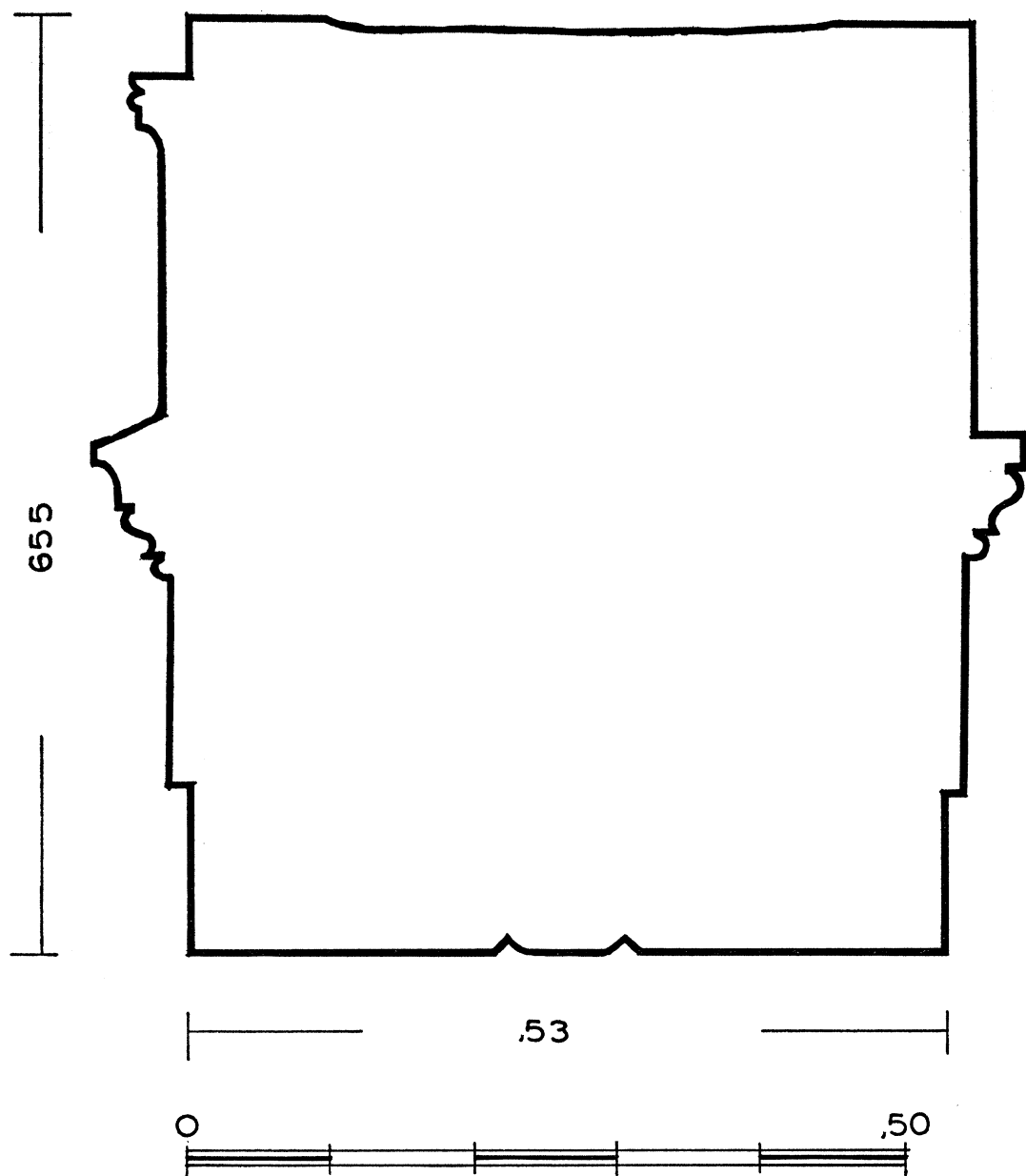


FIG. 2. Epistyle block *IG II*², 5205: section.

treated in the same way as on the outer face, but the inner face of the frieze was left rough picked and without a crowning molding (Pl. 64: a, b).

The weather marks left by the capitals on the under side of the block are concave, implying the use of the Corinthian order. In the underside toward one end is a small square hole evidently for a dowel to secure the epistyle to the capital; this probably dates from the second period of use (cf. below). In the soffit is a panel *ca.* 0.10 m. wide delimited on either side by a V-shaped groove (Pl. 63: b).

In the top of the block at either end is a cutting for a single hook clamp to hold this block to its neighbor. The corner geisa were secured to the epistyle each by a single dowel for which a large rectangular socket was cut toward the outer face of the block (Fig. 1; Pl. 64: d). The pry holes to be associated with these dowel holes indicate that the corner geisa were placed first. Since there are no appropriate dowel or pry holes in the intervening space, the middle part of the geison would appear to have been cut from a single block with a length of *ca.* 2.85 m. and left undoweled; this would have reduced somewhat the strain on the exceptionally long, slender epistyle. The series of three small dowel holes which retain remnants of iron and lead may be assigned to the second period of use.

The articulation of the faces of the epistyle, the straight profile of the frieze, the rather coarse but competent workmanship, may all be paralleled in Athenian buildings of the time of Hadrian and the Antonines such as the Library and Arch of Hadrian and the façade of the reservoir of the aqueduct that was begun by Hadrian but finished by Antoninus Pius in A.D. 140.⁷ This last monument, part of which survived *in situ* until 1778, may well have served as a model for the arrangement on our own block of the inscription which evidently dates from the period of re-use in late antiquity.

At some time the block was broken in the middle. When it was re-used the two fragments were tied together by a single, very long clamp on each side; the positions of the clamps are indicated by a cutting in the upper fascia of the architrave on either face of the block. In addition to the clamps some sort of vertical support was surely required beneath the break. If this support was a column it must have been placed off center; it may, however, have been a pier of sufficient width to permit a central position.

The damage and repair attested by the clamp cuttings may be assumed to post-date the inscription, since the repair clamp on the front was set in the top fascia along the line of the inscription, which, though broken away at that point, obviously took no account of the repair (Pl. 64: c). The cutting is too shallow to allow for any replacement of the surface, whether in marble or in cement, to receive the inscription. The subsequent collapse of the epistyle may have been due simply to the undue strain put on so long a block, and may have occurred while the rest of the building was still standing, thus justifying the elaborate repair work.

⁷ J. Travlos, *Pictorial Dictionary of Ancient Athens*, London 1971, pp. 242 ff. (Reservoir), 244 ff. (Library), 253 ff. (Arch).

The inscription, as we shall see, tells of a radical rebuilding. This implies serious damage to the structure at some time between its erection in the 2nd century and its rehabilitation in late antiquity. The most probable occasion was the Herulian incursion of A.D. 267 which resulted in the total or partial destruction of many other Athenian buildings. It is not improbable that the entrance façade of our building remained standing even though the building itself may have been destroyed down to the foundations; a close parallel is provided by the nearby Doric gateway to the Roman Market which still survives, even though little remains of the walls of the main part of the building. The damage in Athens caused by the Herulians was often only enough to make the buildings unsusceptible of repair; their total destruction was completed by the Athenians themselves who systematically stripped the ruins of useful building material. For this purpose squared wall blocks were in far greater demand than architectural trimmings.

The inscription is carved in three lines: the first on the frieze, the other two on the fasciae of the architrave. The letter heights in line 1 and the first part of line 2 are approximately 0.07 m.; in the second part, slightly smaller; in line 3 *ca.* 0.05 m. The inscription as restored by Koumanoudes and supplemented by Swoboda reads as follows:

ὅ]πὲρ νίκης καὶ σωτηρίας καὶ ἀθανάτου δια[μο]νῆς τῶν δεσποτῶν τῆς οἰκουμέ[νης
Φλ^s Ἀρκαδίου καὶ Φλ^s Ὀνορίου τῶν ἀητητήω[ν Αὐγούσ]των. ὁ λαμ^s ἀνθ^s τῆς Ἑλλάδος
Σεονήρος Ἀέτιος κατεσκεύασεν ἐκ θεμελίων τὸ [μετὰ τῶν πρ]οπυλαίων.

N. B. The ^s superscript that appears in line 2 is an approximation of the sign; it is clearly shown in Figure 1.

A date between 396 and 401 was established by Swoboda. Arcadius and Honorius reigned jointly from 395 to 408, but Antiochus was Proconsul of Achaëa in 395 and there is no mention in the inscription of Theodosius, born late in 401 and proclaimed Augustus early in 402. The restorations in lines 1 and 2 follow standard formulas and present no difficulties. When the blocks were moved together they were found to join through a considerable depth of the epistyle (Pl. 64: c). None of the face was preserved at either side of the break but the spacing confirmed the restorations.

Line 3 presents a number of problems, chief of which is the loss of the crucial word in the whole inscription: the kind of building to which it refers. But first, the identity of the donor. Koumanoudes proposed the famous general, Flavius Aëtius. Swoboda, while admitting chronological difficulties, did not utterly exclude Aëtius, but the possibility was rejected by Nachmanson and Kirchner because of his youth at the time.⁸ The most likely candidate is another Aëtius who was Urban Prefect of Constantinople in 419 and Praetorian Prefect of the East in 425.⁹ Little is known

⁸ For his birth *ca.* 391, cf. most recently F. M. Clover, *Flavius Merobaudes*, Philadelphia 1971, p. 30.

⁹ *Cod. Theod.* XIV.6.5; XV.4.1; *RE* I, col. 701, no. 3. Both Kirchner and Groag favor this identification.

otherwise about his career. The *Chronicon Paschale* records an attack on his life as he was leaving St. Sophia.¹⁰ More relevant is the entry in the *Chronicle* of Count Marcellinus for the year 421 (when he was no longer prefect) in four words: "Cisterna Aetii constructa est."¹¹ An abbreviation mark at the beginning of the break, included by Swoboda, is dubious. Groag restores Φλ before it as the only possibility for the space, but the prevalence of the name Flavius in the 4th and 5th centuries makes it of little help in the further identification of the man.

In the absence of any other part of the superstructure and of foundations, little can be determined about the location or nature of the building, nor is it certain whether we have to do with a totally new structure or a radical transformation of an old. The word *κατεσκεύασεν* usually implies new construction, but followed by *ἐκ θεμελίων* it might also suggest rebuilding of a structure that had been destroyed down to its foundations; otherwise the phrase seems superfluous. For repairs to a merely damaged building *ἐπεσκεύασεν* was the regular term. The epistyle, as we have seen, is certainly of earlier date than the inscription. That it belonged originally to the building now restored cannot be stated with certainty but the probability is strong.

It is generally recognized that the erection of such a substantial building in Athens so soon after the Visigothic invasion of 396 is a matter of the greatest interest for the history of Athens in late antiquity.¹² But speculation about the nature of the building has tempted few scholars, possibly because no one since Swoboda had examined the epistyle closely, and the estimates of the number of missing letters were divergent. Groag proposed that the inscription referred to some aspect of the Propylaia on the Acropolis; but this is clearly inadmissible since there is no possibility that Perikles' gateway ever received such radical treatment as the inscription would imply.

As noted above, the epistyle represents the façade of a structure with a width of 5.12 m. supported by a Corinthian column at each outer corner. From its nature, and from the reference in the inscription, this is almost certainly a porch. The proportions of porches to façades in ancient buildings vary widely, but seldom does the relationship appear to be less than 1:4. As an initial hypothesis therefore it might be assumed that the façade of Aëtius' building was not less than twenty meters.

It is curious that no commentator except Swoboda has adopted Koumanoudes' restoration of [μετὰ τῶν πρ]οπυλαίων.¹³ Again, probably, it is because of uncertainty

¹⁰ Bonn, I, p. 574.

¹¹ *Patrologia Latina* 51, col. 924; also Mommsen, *Scripta minora*, MGH 11, p. 75. For reasons for identifying the donor of the cistern with the prefect, cf. R. Janin, *Rev. des études byz.* I, 1943, pp. 89-92.

¹² For archaeological evidence that Alaric caused serious damage in Athens, cf. Frantz, "Some Invaders of Athens in Late Antiquity" in *A Colloquium in Memory of George Carpenter Miles (1904-1975)*, The American Numismatic Society, 1976, pp. 12-13. A more detailed account will appear in a forthcoming volume in the series *The Athenian Agora*.

¹³ Nachmanson included it in his text; his only comment, however, was that it would leave only two or three letters for the building.

about the number of missing letters. When the blocks were moved into their joining position these could be estimated as a total of eighteen or nineteen, thus leaving nine or ten for the building itself, i. e. (the building) with its porch(es).¹⁴

The logical question, then, is in what type of building did the porch play so important a part as to deserve special mention in the dedicatory inscription? The gymnasium is a type readily associated with porches; it is also one most suited to a city such as Athens where education was the primary concern. Many entrances were required to accommodate the crowds attending the various activities which took place there, and the doorways provided an opportunity to enliven the stark monotony of the long stretches of outer walls. Enough examples are preserved to show that the opportunity was often fully exploited, and numerous inscriptions attest to the importance attached to the porches (*πύλων, προθύρωμα, πρόπυλον*).¹⁵

The entrances in known gymnasia range in form from simple openings in the wall, distinguished only by marble doorframes, to slightly deeper passageways going through the whole side of the building, with two columns *in antis* on both inner and outer faces, and, finally, the most elaborate type in which the gateway constitutes a distinct part of the general scheme and projects beyond the wall far enough to give it an independent and monumental character. It is to this category that Aëtius' porch belongs. In both the second and third categories the actual doorway is in a wall between the outer and inner porches or façades, dividing the passage into two compartments, e. g., in the lower gymnasium at Priene¹⁶ and in the palaestra at Olympia.¹⁷ Such an arrangement might account for the plural, *προπυλαίων*, in the Aëtius inscription. Even more probable is the existence of other porches in the same building.

Aëtius' porch would suit the requirements for a gymnasium. But both Swoboda and Kirchner show at the break on the left the top of a letter, still visible, which can only be an alpha, delta or lambda (Pl. 64: e). Consequently *γυμνάσιον* is ruled out, and no generic word presents itself for the gymnasium or any other likely sort of building that satisfies the epigraphical requirements: a singular neuter noun of nine or ten letters beginning with one of the above three letters. We may do better to look for the name of some specific building. Three buildings (or institutions) of a suitable

¹⁴ For an example of this use, cf. the inscription on a nymphaeum at Argos: “τ]ὼν πηγῶν καὶ τὸ νυμφαῖον μετὰ τῶν δοχε[ίων” (BCH 78, 1954, pp. 160-161 and fig. 5).

¹⁵ Cf. J. Delorme, *Gymnasium*, Paris 1962, esp. chap. XII, for an illuminating discussion of this aspect of gymnasia with many examples. His general remark deserves to be quoted in full: La foule qui fréquentait ces établissements, les fêtes qu'on y donnait au cours desquelles manquait rarement une procession, les bêtes qu'on y introduisait pour les sacrifices rendaient nécessaires des accès nombreux et commodes dont l'un, au moins, devait par son caractère monumental faire honneur à la place que le monument occupait dans la cité. La plupart de nos édifices, en effet, possèdent plusieurs portes et l'une d'entre elles l'emporte presque toujours sur les autres par ses dimensions, son dispositif et sa décoration. L'importance de cet élément nous est attestée tant par les textes que par les monuments. On le trouve mentionné assez fréquemment dans les inscriptions” (p. 357).

¹⁶ *JdI* 38-39, 1923-24, p. 134, fig. 2; Delorme, *op. cit.*, pl. XXX, fig. 49.

¹⁷ *Olympia Bericht* IV, 1943/44, pl. 4; Delorme, *op. cit.*, pl. XII, fig. 21.

character have names beginning with one of the required letters: Ἀκαδήμεια, Λύκειον and Διογέλειον. Ἀκαδήμεια has the right number of letters but is feminine; also the location of the Academy is well known and too remote (in the northwest suburbs) for serious consideration.¹⁸ The possible location of the Lyceum in the area of Syntagma Square, in the heart of Athens,¹⁹ brings it within the general topographical range of our inscription, but Λύκειον would be two or three letters too short.

Here a bit of cautious speculation may be permitted. Διογέλειον fits all the epigraphical requirements and presents fewer apparent obstacles in other respects. The earliest epigraphical evidence for the Diogeneion, the main headquarters of the ephebes, is in an ephebic decree of 107/6 B.C. recording the repair of the walls of the enceinte, which had crumbled, implying that the building was already old.²⁰ As a building in constant use it might easily have undergone several successive repairs or remodelings necessitated by age or violence, including a substantial rebuilding in the Hadrianic or Antonine period before being destroyed by the Herulians in A.D. 267.

The site of the Diogeneion is generally believed to lie just outside the Post-Herulian Wall, near its northeast corner (Fig. 3:2). The location is based on a great number of inscriptions relating to the ephebes, along with a long series of portraits of kosmetai found in 1861 built into the lower courses of the wall near the church of St. Demetrios Katiphori. One of the inscriptions states that three copies are to be set up, one in the Eleusinion, one at Eleusis and one in the Diogeneion. Another inscription mentioning the Diogeneion was found near by more recently.²¹ Many ancient marbles lie around on the site but the area was never explored, either by the Greek Archaeological Service when the inscriptions were found or subsequently. The weight of the evidence has persuaded most scholars of the correctness of the identification.²² A few have been sceptical, pointing out the great number of ephebic inscriptions found elsewhere, especially in the Agora, but this is to ignore the exceptionally heavy concentration of material in the one small spot.²³ If the spot is indeed that of the Diogeneion it would be about 150-200 meters south of the finding place of the Aëtius inscription, a not impossible distance for useful building material to travel.

¹⁸ For a convenient summary of the known facts about the Academy and other schools, cf. R. E. Wycherley, "Peripatos: The Athenian Philosophical Scene - II," *Greece and Rome*, ser. 2, 9, 1962, pp. 2-21.

¹⁹ Wycherley, *op. cit.*, p. 12 and E. Vanderpool, Ἀρχ᾽Εφ, 1953-54, Part II, pp. 126ff.

²⁰ IG II², 1011, line 41: καταπεσόντος δὲ τοῦ περιβόλου τοῦ Διογενείου προενοήθ[η] τῆς ἐπισκευῆς αὐτοῦ ἀναδεξάμ[ενος τὴν εἰς τ]αῦτα δαπάνην ἐκ τῶν ἰδίων. Cf. Delorme, *op. cit.* (footnote 15 above), pp. 144-145 and Ch. Pélékidis, *Histoire de l'éphébie attique*, Paris 1962, pp. 264-265, for the lack of other evidence for its date.

²¹ E. Vanderpool, *Hesperia* 22, 1953, p. 178, no. 2 and pl. 53:c.

²² E. g., P. Graindor, *BCH* 39, 1915, pp. 241 ff.; Pélékides, *op. cit.* (footnote 20 above), pp. 264-266; E. Lattanzi, *I ritratti dei Cosmeti nel Museo Nazionale di Atene*, 1968, pp. 21-23; Travlos, *Pictorial Dictionary*, pp. 281, 579.

²³ E. g., G. Guidi, "Il muro valeriano a S. Demetrio Katiphori e le questione del Diogeneion," *Annuario* 4-5, 1921-22, pp. 33-54, esp. 37-42; Delorme, *op. cit.* (footnote 15 above), pp. 144-146.

Koumanoudes described in some detail the circumstances of the discovery of the epistyle. It was made during the demolition of a house which reputedly belonged, before 1821, to the English Consul, Misaraliotis (Fig. 3:1). The trench in which the blocks were found was ruled out as the original site of the building because only the remains of a house of Turkish times were found on the spot. Koumanoudes opined, however, that in view of their size they were unlikely to have traveled far from their place of origin (an opinion reinforced by the finding of the two fragments

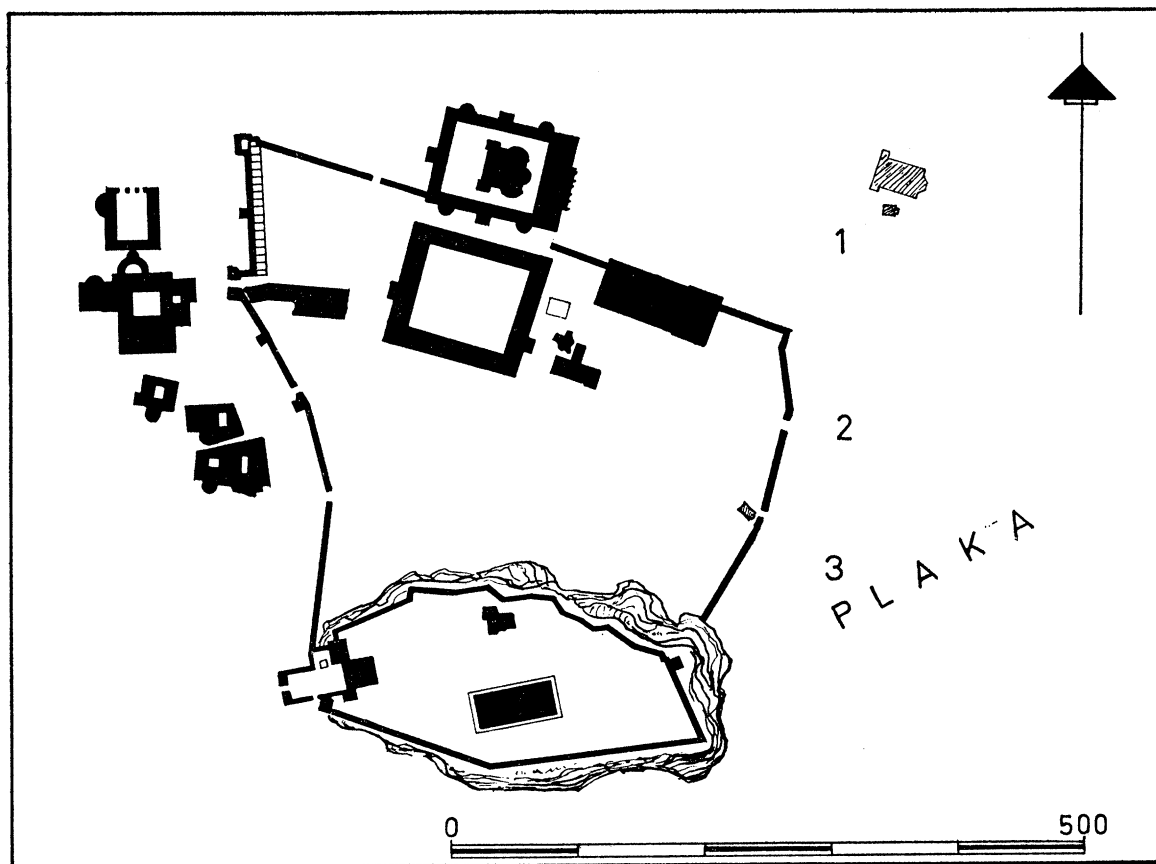


FIG. 3. Sketch plan of central Athens. 1. Finding place of *IG II*², 5205. 2. Site of Diogeneion (?). 3. Finding place of E.M. 1861.

together). Possibly they were brought in as building material for the Turkish house. It may be worth noting, too, that in the immediate vicinity were two monuments voracious of ancient buildings and churches as building material: the modern cathedral, under construction from 1842 to 1862 (for which some 40 churches were

Delorme followed Guidi, even to the point of still adhering to the now-disproved theory that the Post-Herulian Wall was built in the 15th century by the Florentine Dukes of Athens, thus leaving a long gap between the destruction of the Diogeneion and the building of its marbles into the wall. But with the construction of the wall now firmly placed soon after the Herulian invasion of 267 the destruction of the building in question must have preceded the building of the wall by only a few years, leaving little time for the inscriptions and other material to be dispersed.

deliberately demolished) and the little Metropolis, built in the early 13th century, presumably drawing on the ruins of buildings destroyed by Leon Sgouros on the eve of the Fourth Crusade in 1204, when he devastated much of lower Athens.

One difficulty in supposing the Diogeneion to have still been in use as late as 400 is the accepted belief, based on the lack of dated ephebic inscriptions later than 267, that the institution of the *ἐφηβία* ceased to exist after the Herulian invasion and was never revived.²⁴ The negative evidence on this point is so weighty that it cannot be easily dismissed. But with education a major factor in Athenian life, might not the Diogeneion have continued in use as a simple gymnasium, using its time-honored name, even though its official character had become obsolete?²⁵

The identification of Aëtius' building with the Diogeneion is admittedly tenuous. But in any case the structure remains important evidence that within five years after Alaric's attack interest in Athens was already being shown on a high level. And this was apparently not the only substantial building to be erected at that time. Koumanoudes remarked on the similarity of the letter forms of Aëtius' porch to those of a fragmentary inscription found fourteen years earlier in that same general region (the Plaka; Fig. 3:3), with the words [θειο]τάτων δεσποτῶν (Pl. 64:f).²⁶ One might be tempted to attribute it to the same building except for the unlikelihood that one building would bear two dedicatory inscriptions. The derogatory remarks of Synesius of Cyrene about the deplorable condition of Athens at the end of the 4th century²⁷ have too long been adduced as evidence and taken at their face value. At best in late antiquity Athens compared unfavorably with Alexandria, from which Synesius had recently returned. In all probability his visit to Athens took place within two or three years at the most after Alaric's invasion²⁸ when the city was at a low ebb. Its appearance then would have done nothing to enhance his view, already prejudiced by his preference for the Alexandrian type of philosophy.²⁹ Athens would never again become one of the important cities of the Empire, but evidence is gradually accumulating that it had another century ahead of it as an agreeable and handsome university town.

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PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY

²⁴ For the epigraphical evidence for its cessation, cf. J. Oliver, *Hesperia* 2, 1933, pp. 507-509. The latest known inscriptions are *IG* II², 2245 dated 254/5, and *IG* II², 2246, which must be at least five years later. For this revised dating, cf. H. A. Thompson, *JRS* 49, 1959, p. 66, note 28, with earlier references; also D. Geagan, *Hesperia*, Suppl. XII, *The Athenian Constitution after Sulla*, Princeton 1967, p. 1.

²⁵ Its situation might be comparable with that of the late Roman Gymnasium in the Agora, built over the ruins of the Odeion of Agrippa, which had also served academic needs.

²⁶ Like the Aëtius inscription, it was taken to the National Museum. It is undoubtedly the same as E.M. 1861 (our Pl. 64:f), but is not found in *IG*.

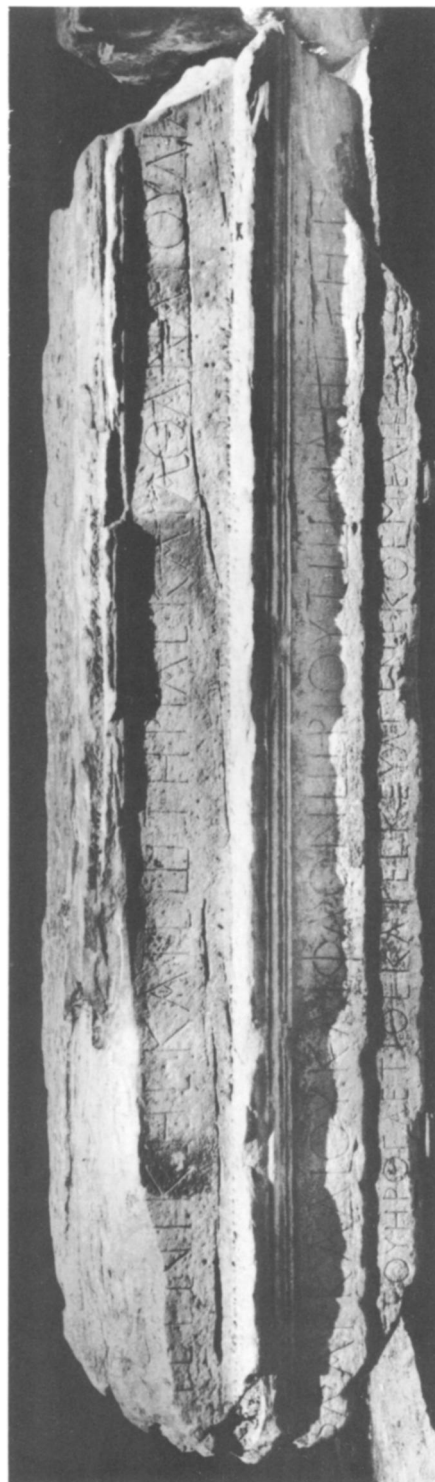
²⁷ In *Epistles* 54 and 135.

²⁸ For details of the probable date after 395 and before 399, cf. C. Lacombrade, *Synésius de Cyrène, hellène et chrétien*, Paris 1951, chap. VI.

²⁹ Cf. Frantz, "From Paganism to Christianity in the Temples of Athens," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 19, Cambridge, Mass. 1965, pp. 187-205, esp. pp. 189-190.

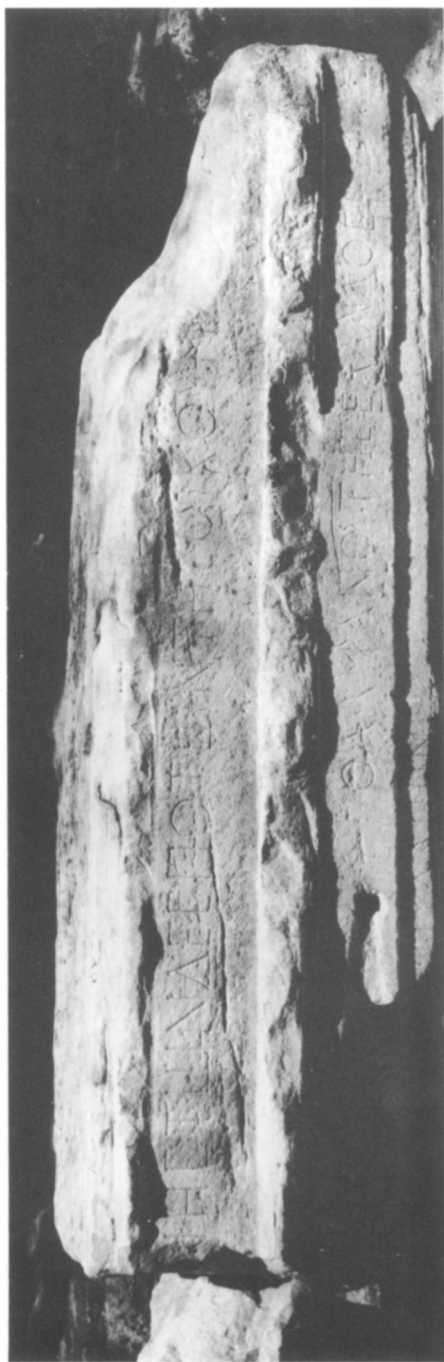


a. Fragments *a* and *b* joined



b. Fragment *a*

ALISON FRANTZ: A PUBLIC BUILDING OF LATE ANTIQUITY IN ATHENS (IG II², 5205)



a. Fragment *b*



b. Fragments *a* and *b*, soffit

ALISON FRANTZ: A PUBLIC BUILDING OF LATE ANTIQUITY IN ATHENS (*IG* II², 5205)



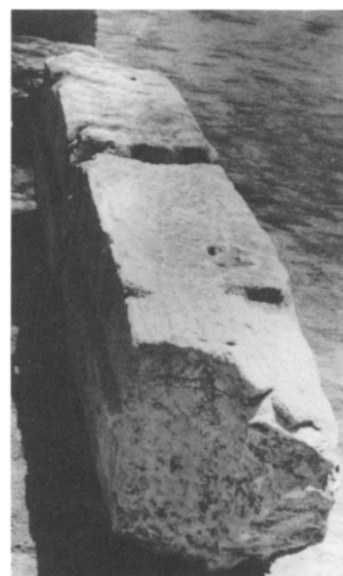
a. Right end, inside face: cutting for return



b. Left end, inside face: cutting for return



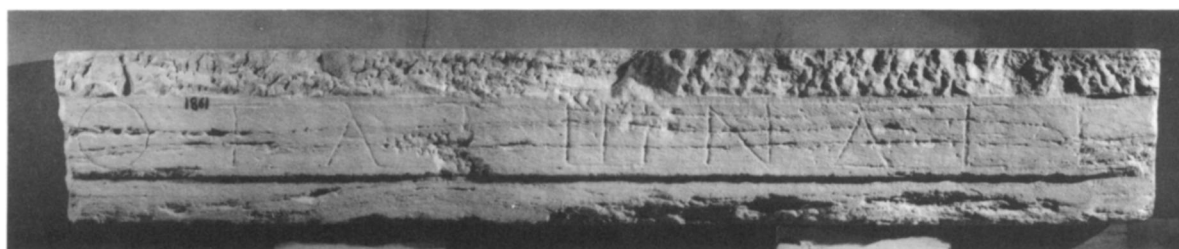
c. Junction of fragments *a* and *b*



d. Top



e. Fragment *a*, detail of third line of inscription at break



f. Epistyle block E.M. 1861