

"MISERABLE HUTS" IN POST-146 B.C. CORINTH

ABSTRACT

Scholars have long reported that the early excavators at Corinth found houses dating to the "interim period" between the destruction of the Greek city and the foundation of the Roman colony (146 B.C.–A.D. 44); apparently unaware of the precise location and continued existence of these structures, however, they have not discussed the buildings themselves. Material in the archives of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens allows these structures to be located precisely and thus examined. The absence of evidence for dating them to the interim period precludes their use as evidence for habitation during this period.

INTRODUCTION

Scholars have long been interested in the evidence for activity at Corinth during the so-called interim period, the century between the destruction of the Greek city by L. Mummius in 146 B.C. and the foundation of the Roman colony in 44 B.C.¹ The reasons for this interest vary, but generally have arisen from attempts to ascertain the extent of the destruction, the existence of continuity between the Greek city and the Roman colony, particularly in terms of the physical layout of the city, or the degree of Roman involvement in the area prior to 44 B.C. Evidence for this important period in the history of Corinth is scarce, however, with the result that undue weight has been attached to unreliable scraps of evidence. A case in point is the squatters' "miserable huts" that were reportedly found in the early excavations and are now among the standard pieces of evidence cited

1. The precise foundation date for the colony is in fact uncertain; for bibliography and various possibilities, see Amandry 1988, p. 13. For the most recent discussion of the interim period generally, see Gebhard and Dickie 2003; for a concise synopsis of the

period, see Amandry 1988, pp. 7–8.

I owe a debt of gratitude to the following: Guy D. R. Sanders, Charles K. Williams II, and Nancy Bookidis for helpful discussion and criticism; Natalia Vogeikoff-Brogan, archivist of the American School of Classical Studies

at Athens, for allowing access to the Theodore Woolsey Heermance papers; Ioulia Tzonou-Herbst, assistant director of the Corinth Excavations, for supplying a copy of Corinth negative 266; and the two anonymous *Hesperia* reviewers for suggesting improvements.

in discussions of interim-period habitation at Corinth. The interpretation of these remains began as scholarly conjecture but has, through a growing chain of bibliography, acquired a patina of factuality; moreover, no one in the past century seems to have attempted either to confirm or disprove the early report, perhaps under the impression that the walls in question no longer exist. For these reasons, the so-called miserable huts of interim-period squatters deserve a second look.

Elizabeth Gebhard and Matthew Dickie are the most recent to draw upon this evidence, noting that “the early excavators reported finding ‘squatters’ huts’ along the Lechaion Road, near the Captives’ Facade, and in the area of the West Shops.”² Their accompanying footnote directs the reader to “Wiseman 1979, p. 494 and note 207 with references.” Upon turning to this source, one reads that “the early excavators at Corinth reported finding remains of ‘miserable huts’ belonging to inhabitants of 146–44 B.C. along the Lechaum Road near the propylaea and in the area of the West Shops.” Wiseman too offers support for his claim: “On the ‘miserable huts’: see Fritz Sage Darrow, *The History of Corinth from Mummius to Herodes Atticus*, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation (Harvard University 1906) 75 and note 553, where he cites a lecture in Athens by T. W. Heermance.” Finally, Darrow himself states: “Excavations have revealed that squatters, despite the curse laid upon the site[,] did not hesitate to settle over the ruins of Corinth. Traces of their miserable huts have been discovered along the Lechaum Road in the neighborhood of the ‘Propylaea’ and the ‘Western Shops.’”³ His note 553 reports only that he derived the information “from a lecture delivered by Doctor Heermance in Athens” and does not provide any further details of what Heermance may have said.

Two important points have now become clear. First, the sum total of the evidence provided thus far for the existence of the “miserable huts” is the opinion of Heermance as put forth in an unpublished lecture, presumably delivered during the 1903–1904 academic year when Darrow was a student at the American School in Athens.⁴ Second, Darrow speaks not of the “West Shops” (now known to be the eastern facade of the enclosure for Temple E) but of the “Western Shops,” that is, of the Lechaion Road. The subsequent confusion is perhaps forgivable because of the similarity of the names and the fact that the West Shops were also excavated in 1903 and 1904; nevertheless, one might have noted that since excavations in the area of the West Shops did not go below Roman levels they could scarcely have exposed pre-Roman dwellings.⁵

2. Gebhard and Dickie 2003, p. 269.

3. Darrow 1906, pp. 74–75.

4. More recent excavation at Corinth has revealed additional evidence for interim-period inhabitation in three areas: (1) dumped fill and “rudimentary walls” in the northeast corner of the Forum area (Williams and Russell 1981, p. 27); (2) an occupational stratum with which “no architecture has been associated” in the southwest corner of the Forum area (Williams

1978, p. 22); and (3) a foundation dated after ca. 86 B.C. but before the creation of the Roman Forum in the area “over the temenos of the Sacred Spring and south of the Captives’ Facade” (Williams 1978, p. 22). Although the statement by Gebhard and Dickie (2003, p. 269) that “squatters’ huts” were found near the Captives’ Facade might seem to imply the equation of the early excavators’ finds with the last-named area, in

reality the two must be sharply distinguished.

5. One might also note that the excavators of the West Shops thought at the time that they were dealing with structures dating to the Turkish period; cf. Heermance 1904b, p. 433: “A series of six vaulted rooms on the west side of the excavations, presumably cellars of Turkish times, is particularly responsible for the thoroughness of the demolition of ancient remains there.”

ARCHIVAL EVIDENCE AND AN OVERLOOKED PUBLICATION

Fortunately, fuller exposition of Heermance’s views survives in several forms, as do at least some of the features that he regarded as evidence for interim-period habitation. The collection of Heermance’s papers housed in the archives of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens contains the typescripts of several lectures that he delivered while director of the school. One entitled “The Chronology of the Building Remains at Corinth,” read at the School’s open meeting on March 4, 1904, was almost certainly the one to which Darrow refers; it contains the following paragraph:

When this building [i.e., the North Building] was in ruins, and when the accumulation of debris was already a metre or more above its floor level, but before the construction of the shops [i.e., of the west side of the Lechaion Road] and the attendant filling in, certain wretched habitations were reared in its midst. Their uneven stone⁶ floors still show traces of the fires built on them, and a handy block from the back wall of the early building was hollowed out as a washtub—just such a tub as one can see in any Greek village today. There can be no doubt as to the date of these remains. No other period in the history of Corinth is possible than⁷ the century between the destruction of 146 and the rebuilding of 44 B.C. It is an interesting commentary on the thoroughness of the destruction, when squatters could settle within a stone’s throw of the Agora in the ruins of a public building.⁸

Another unpublished paper⁹ repeats the above paragraph with a few superficial changes in the wording, largely for greater clarity; importantly, however, Heermance also specifies more exactly the location of the “wretched habitations” (there “were constructed certain wretched stone floors and poor walls [Plan I H 2–3]”) and gives greater precision to his dating of them (“they are habitations which date from the century of desolation, 146 to 44 B.C., and to its latter, rather than its earlier, part”).¹⁰ Some slight

6. Heermance had originally typed “tile” but subsequently corrected it to “stone.”

7. “Than” is Heermance’s change from his original “but.”

8. Heermance 1904a, pp. 8–9.

9. Heermance and Hill n.d. Within the body of the text, the sections on each building have separate page numbers; the relevant section is that on the “East Building,” as the North Building was then designated since it was to the east of Temple Hill, the fixed point of the early excavations. For more on the “Bulletin,” see Lord 1947, pp. 107–108, 170–172. Heermance and Hill’s Greek plan (plan I) and Roman plan (plan II), the relevant sections of which are re-

produced here as Figs. 2 and 3 respectively, were also reproduced as pls. I and II in *Corinth* I.1, where they were misleadingly (insofar as they imply that Greek levels were reached before Roman levels) labeled as “Main Field of Excavations, 1902” and “Main Field of Excavations, 1904,” respectively.

10. Heermance and Hill n.d., pp. 6–7. Heermance’s observations are briefly mentioned by Fowler (1922, p. 198), although he does not name the source: “Toward the end of the century of desolation that followed [Mummius’ sack], or immediately after the refounding of the city, what then remained of the old Market above the metre of earth that had accumulated upon its

floor was occupied in a humble way, as is witnessed by a few slight walls, two areas of flagging, and a stone tub, buried when the Basilica was built.” In his prefatory note (p. 171), Fowler notes that “a large part of the account of the excavations at Corinth is printed exactly as sent by Dr. Hill”; this fact, together with some similarities of wording, indicates that the source for these statements was almost certainly the “Bulletin,” to which Hill, as co-author, naturally had access. Fowler’s reference to these remains was in turn quoted by Carpenter (1928, p. 17), although the quotation was omitted from all subsequent editions of the guide to Ancient Corinth.



Figure 1. The North Building and "squatters' huts," viewed from the north. Corinth Excavations, neg. 266

additional evidence appears in Heermance's 1904 field notebook, where he includes the following entry for 27 June: "Squatter constr. in E bldg [i.e., the building now known as the North Building]. Larger¹¹ poros floor. Smaller stone floor. Traces of fire. Below is chiefly earth."¹² These accounts are further supplemented by a photograph (Fig. 1) of the central part of the North Building taken from the north in 1903 and labeled in excavation records as "squatter constructions back of Lechaion road shops."¹³

Discussion of the actual remains appeared in print only once, in Richard Stillwell's publication of the North Building.¹⁴ That this crucial treatment of the remains themselves has not entered into discussion of the "miserable huts" presumably reflects a failure to appreciate that Stillwell and Heermance were referring to the same features. Stillwell does not refer to Heermance's views and differs from him on several points, but he is clearly discussing the same constructions:

In the centre of the building, after it was in ruins, but before the level had been raised to that occupied later by the basilica, certain very poor stone floors and foundation walls were constructed. The chief of these occupied the line of the former front wall of the shops, others, at right angles to this wall, partitioned off the area before and behind it. In this same period necessary repairs were made at the rear of the old building, where the scarped rock and clay had been worn and broken away at their line of juncture. The material for these repairs was old Greek blocks and tiles, procured for the most part, doubtless, from the North Building itself. The free standing stone tank already referred to¹⁵ found a new use in one of these poor later rooms. Though it is certain that there was no regular renewal of the structure . . . , it is likely enough that its heavier walls did survive in part through the earliest Roman period, to which the inferior constructions on the site must be assigned.

11. The notebook appears to read "largen."

12. Corinth notebook 20, p. 65. Much of the area had actually been cleared the previous year, as is obvious from the fact that Heermance had lectured on the area over three months previously; the relevant portions of the 1903 notebooks, however, contain little information aside from progress reports on the removal of soil. In 1904, Heermance was apparently studying the area in conjunction with his work on the "Bulletin" (see n. 10, above), as well as perhaps carrying out supplementary excavation.

13. Heermance is presumably responsible for the description of the photograph and most likely took it himself. Photographic duties for the excavation that year were assigned to Heermance with the assistance of L. D. Caskey (Corinth notebook 18, p. 85).

14. *Corinth* I.1, pp. 227–228.

15. *Corinth* I.1, p. 227.

Stillwell adds to Heermance's body of evidence an additional wall at the rear of the building and describes in relative detail its construction. Heermance's "washtub," on the other hand, he connects with the original Greek building, although it was found in a later context. Finally, and most importantly, Stillwell dates the entire phase to the early years of the colony, rather than to the years preceding it as Heermance had done.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

The fairly explicit descriptions by Heermance and Stillwell, together with Heermance's reference to his plan I, thus enable one to locate the remains of the "miserable huts" on site with certainty and to reexamine the evidence for their dating.¹⁶ The remains occur in three basic areas, all of which are in grids H 2–3 of Heermance's plan: (1) walls in and around martyr 1 (walls 1–3 in Fig. 2; see also Fig. 1, where wall 3 is visible to the left of martyr 1); (2) two roughly square sections of flooring (floors 1 and 2 in Fig. 2; also Fig. 1, where floor 1 is in the center foreground); and (3) the "washtub" set against the rear wall of the North Building (Fig. 2; also Fig. 1, center right) and repairs to the rear wall directly behind the "washtub" (wall 4 in Figs. 2, 3; Fig. 1, right-hand side).

The "washtub" and the repairs identified by Stillwell can be dealt with quickly. Stillwell, contrary to Heermance, was quite correct to associate the stone tank with the earlier Greek building; exact parallels exist in the tanks that are clearly part of the building's superstructure.¹⁷ The repairs noted by Stillwell, on the other hand, appear to bond with the somewhat more carefully built wall that continues north before making a return to the east opposite the party wall between Lechaion Road shops XIV and XIII (Fig. 3). Since these two walls, despite some differences in appearance, appear to bond, they ought to belong to the same construction and therefore be two sections of the same wall; since the more carefully built section clearly forms the foundation for the west and north walls of the basilica, the roughly built section must also belong to this phase and thus is undoubtedly Roman.

Somewhat less straightforward are the two sections of flooring. The smaller, southernmost (floor 2) of the two has mostly disappeared since Heermance's description of it, and little information can be elicited from the scanty remains that are still preserved. Nevertheless, the material and construction technique appear to be identical with those of the larger section to its north. This larger section of flooring (floor 1) now comprises

16. The accumulation of soil washed into this relatively low-lying area and the gradual collapse of much of martyr 1 over the past century, together with the proliferation of weeds in this seldom-visited corner of the site, have obscured some details previously visible. In addition, the "washtub" has fallen to the east, away from the wall against which it had been set, and now lies on its side

immediately in front of its findspot. As a result, Corinth negative 266 (reproduced here as Fig. 1) remains the clearest depiction of the remains discussed in this article.

17. Cf. *Corinth* I.1, pp. 215–216, fig. 147; see also p. 227: "Besides the tanks that were built into the walls, there remains another similar tank which was free standing, one of many,

doubtless, that served a similar purpose." Stillwell's assumption that the building was a market and that the tanks incorporated into the superstructure served "perhaps for the display of fish, or whatever else requires a water-tight bowl for exhibition purposes" (p. 227) remains the only plausible suggestion to date; cf. Wiseman 1979, p. 485.



Figure 3. Detail from Heermance's plan II. After *Corinth* I.1, pl. II

The final area, to the south of the floors and in the vicinity of martyr 1, contains a wall (wall 2) on top of and in line with the remains of the earlier front shop wall and two walls at right angles to it. The lowest course of the original front shop wall is still in situ, as is part of the second course. On top of these remains, a section of the wall has been rebuilt using squared poros blocks, with the interstices occasionally chinked with broken roof tile; there is no evidence for the use of mortar or cement. Wall 1, at a right angle to the rear (west) of wall 2, is of similar construction but has no foundation and rests only on soil. Both these walls have been partially obscured, especially at the point where they presumably join, by the gradual erosion of martyr 1 over the course of the past century. Wall 3, again at a right angle to wall 2 but in front (east) of it, has now disappeared and is known only from the brief treatments of Heermance and Stillwell and from early excavation photographs. Like the two sections of flooring, these walls offer no evidence for their date other than the fact that wall 2 certainly, and walls 1 and 3 presumably, postdate the destruction of the North Building.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, Stillwell rightly dated the repairs at the rear of the North Building to the Roman period; since they appear to bond with the foundations of the basilica, their date corresponds to the construction of that building, which Stillwell, acknowledging the lack of direct evidence for the date, placed at the end of the 1st century B.C.¹⁸ The two sections of flooring and the walls built in the area of martyr 1 can only be dated relatively, as following destruction of the North Building and preceding construction of the basilica. Scholars have assumed that the North Building was destroyed by Mummius in 146 B.C.¹⁹ There is no evidence, however, stratigraphic or otherwise, to support this assumption. The most that can be said, therefore, about the date of the walls and floors is that it is after the late 5th or early 4th century B.C., the date to which Stillwell assigns construction of the final phase of the North Building,²⁰ and, assuming that Stillwell's date for construction of the basilica is approximately correct, before the end of the millennium. Future excavation of the remains of martyr 1 or beneath the two segments of floor may provide evidence for a tighter dating of these walls and floors. Until that happens, however, the lack of a firm date leaves the squatters' "miserable huts" as a vivid image and an interesting speculation, but entirely unsuitable as evidence for interim-period habitation at Corinth.

18. *Corinth* I.1, p. 211.

19. See, e.g., *Corinth* I.1, p. 228.

In fact, while the Romans presumably would have damaged the city's fortifications enough to render them ineffective, it is rather unlikely that they would have concerned themselves overly with dismantling individual buildings within the city. This is not to deny, however, the possibility that this and other buildings may have been targets of post-Mummiian stone quarrying.

20. *Corinth* I.1, p. 212; Coulton (1976, p. 227; cf. p. 53) suggests a slightly later date ("probably fourth century").

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