

THE “AGORA” OF PAUSANIAS I, 17, 1–2

PAUSANIAS has given us a long description of the main square of ancient Athens, a place which we are accustomed to call the Agora following Classical Greek usage but which he calls the Kerameikos according to the usage of his own time.

This name Kerameikos he uses no less than five times, and in each case it is clear that he is referring to the main square, the Classical Agora, of Athens. “There are stoas from the gates to the Kerameikos” he says on entering the city (I, 2, 4), and then, as he begins his description of the square, “the place called Kerameikos has its name from the hero Keramos—first on the right is the Stoa Basileios as it is called” (I, 3, 1). Farther on he says “above the Kerameikos and the stoa called Basileios is the temple of Hephaistos” (I, 14, 6). Describing Sulla’s capture of Athens in 86 B.C. he says that the Roman general shut all the Athenians who had opposed him into the Kerameikos and had one out of each ten of them killed (I, 20, 6). It is generally agreed that this refers to the Classical Agora. Finally, when visiting Mantinea in far-off Arcadia (VII, 9, 8) Pausanias reports seeing “a copy of the painting in the Kerameikos showing the deeds of the Athenians at Mantinea.” The original painting in Athens was in the Stoa of Zeus on the main square, and Pausanias had already described it in his account of Athens (I, 3, 4). Other late writers such as Poseidonios (in Athenaeus, V, 212), Philostratos and Arrian also use the name Kerameikos when referring to the main square of Athens: see R. E. Wycherley’s essay on the Kerameikos, which covers this and other uses of the name, in *The Athenian Agora*, III, *Literary and Epigraphical Testimonia*, Princeton, 1957, pp. 221–224.

As he reaches the end of his account of the main square Pausanias describes in chapter 15 the Stoa Poikile and the paintings it contained. Then in the first sentence of chapter 16 he mentions a bronze statue of Solon in front of the stoa and a statue of Seleukos a little farther off. The rest of chapter 16 is a digression on Seleukos.

In chapter 17 Pausanias resumes his description of the city and tells us that “in the Athenian Agora . . . is an altar of Eleos,” that “not far from the Agora is the gymnasium of Ptolemy” and that “near the gymnasium is a sanctuary of Theseus.” Since this is the only passage in which Pausanias uses the word Agora with reference to a place in Athens, we may ask what this “Agora” is which serves as a point of reference for this group of monuments. Modern topographers are almost unanimous in seeing it as the main square, the old Classical Agora, of which Pausanias is just finishing the description.¹ But we

¹ W. Judeich, *Topographie von Athen*², pp. 351–357. Homer A. Thompson and R. E. Wycherley, *The Athenian Agora*, XIV, *The Agora of Athens*, 1972, p. 205; cf. pp. 116, 124–126, and 129–136. John Travlos, *Πολεοδομική Ἐξέλιξις τῶν Ἀθηνῶν*, 1960 and *Pictorial Dictionary of Ancient Athens*, 1971. Travlos does not deal directly with the Pausanias passage, but only by implication. In his first book (1960) he equates the Altar of Eleos with the Altar of the Twelve Gods (p. 36, note 7, and p. 121) and puts the Gymnasium of Ptolemy and the Theseion just southeast of the Classical Agora (p. 90) following the orthodox view. In

have seen that Pausanias consistently calls the main square the Kerameikos. Surely, therefore, this "Agora" must be something else, and I have no doubt that the commercial market is meant, whether this be the Market of Caesar and Augustus, the old "Eretria" market, or some other area.²

This determination, if correct, opens up all sorts of new possibilities in the topography of the lower town and relieves us of the necessity of looking for the Gymnasium of Ptolemy and the Theseion near the old Classical Agora in the restricted area between the Stoa of Attalos and the Library of Hadrian, the Roman Market and the Eleusionion. We are now free to look elsewhere, and the logical place is east or south of the Roman Market. This area is one that could be fairly described as being "in the middle of the city", a rather vague phrase used by Plutarch in locating the Theseion (*Theseus*, 36, 2) and by Statius in locating the Altar of Eleos. There is, however, some archaeological evidence which suggests that the Theseion is in this general area, namely, the discovery here of certain inscriptions and sculptures. These marbles were found more than a hundred years ago at the church of St. Demetrios Katephores 200 meters east of the Roman Market when a section of the Post-Herulian wall was dismantled. The inscriptions are three stelai of the mid-second century B.C. with decrees in honor of the *Agonothetes* of the Theseia followed by a list of victors in the games. According to their texts they were to be set up in the Theseion (*I.G.*, II², 956, 957, 958). The sculpture is a life-sized group in Pentelic marble representing Theseus and the Minotaur, a subject most appropriate for the Theseion. It is thought to be a Roman copy of a Classical work. This group is now displayed in the "Poseidon Gallery" in the National Museum (inv. 1664-1664a) and is published in a rather dim photograph in Arndt-Amelung, *Einzeltaufnahmen*, no. 704.

his second book (1971) he continues to maintain the identity of the Altar of Eleos with the Altar of the Twelve Gods (p. 458) thus tacitly assuming that the "Agora" of Pausanias I, 17, 1 is the old Classical Agora. As for the Gymnasium of Ptolemy and the Theseion, he has several changes of mind. In the main body of his text (pp. 233-234) he puts them in the south square of the Classical Agora thus again implying that the "Agora" of Pausanias I, 17, 2 is the Classical Agora. In the Supplement (pp. 578-579), however, he makes a radical change and moves the Gymnasium of Ptolemy and the Theseion (but not the Altar of Eleos) to the area east and south of the Roman market, and one is thus left wondering where the "Agora" could be and how these three monuments, which Pausanias mentions all together and locates with reference to the "Agora" and to one another, could be separated by some 500 meters.

² Some nineteenth-century topographers, sensing this distinction in Pausanias' language, suggested putting the Altar of Eleos in the northern or commercial part of the Agora; by this they meant the area in front of the Stoa of Attalos as distinguished from the political Agora which they thought of as farther south on the slope of the Areopagus; cf. Curt Wachsmuth, *Die Stadt Athen im Alterthum*, I, pp. 211-212 and II, p. 436. Thomas H. Dyer, *Ancient Athens*, London, 1873, pp. 241-260, goes farther. Feeling the full force of Pausanias' distinction, he puts the Altar of Mercy (Eleos) in the Roman Market and the Ptolemaion and the Theseion farther east, i.e. more or less the solution proposed here, but Dyer's suggestion was brushed aside by Jane E. Harrison in *Mythology and Monuments of Ancient Athens*, London and New York, 1890, p. 141, and seems not to have been revived.

This archaeological evidence used to be dismissed as irrelevant when it was thought that the Theseion was to be sought near the Classical Agora, but it should now be seriously reconsidered. Even so it would be rash to claim that it gives more than a general indication of where the Theseion is to be sought since the inscriptions and sculptures were found re-used. John Travlos has indeed made such an attempt in the Supplement to his *Pictorial Dictionary*, pp. 578–579, fig. 722, but it is better, I think, to wait and watch for some new discoveries that may give a fresh clue.

If the Agora of Pausanias I, 17, 1–2 is indeed the commercial Agora as suggested above, it follows that the Altar of Eleos must have been in the commercial Agora; it cannot therefore be identical with the Altar of the Twelve Gods, an idea which has gained currency lately, for the Altar of the Twelve Gods is surely located in the main square. The assignment of the three-figure reliefs to the peribolos surrounding the Altar of the Twelve Gods, which is based on technical considerations, need not, however, be affected by the change.

This new interpretation makes Pausanias' route a bit easier and more logical and gives better coverage of the lower city with fewer blank areas. After the Kerameikos or Classical Agora which ends with the Poikile and the nearby statues, he moves on to the "Agora" or Market Place (which he had not mentioned according to the orthodox interpretation) and mentions the Altar of Eleos there. Then he goes on to the Gymnasium of Ptolemy "not far from the Agora or Market Place" and the Theseion "nearby." If the "Agora" is indeed the Roman Market, we may suppose that Pausanias reached it by following the street between the Stoa of Attalos and the Library of Pantainos. He then went on eastward and/or southward to the Gymnasium of Ptolemy and the Theseion.

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