A FIFTH CENTURY HIERON SOUTHWEST OF
THE ATHENIAN AGORA

(PLATES 35–37)

THE road between the Athenian Agora and the Areopagus has followed the same natural course with minor variations from very early times until the present day. Near the southwest corner of the Agora, where modern Asteroskopeiou Street slopes westward into a small valley, the road of Classical times turned slightly southwest to join two important roads converging from the Pnyx and the Acropolis. Just east of this junction another road branches north to enter the Agora by the Southwest Fountain House. Near this main intersection, on the south side of the east-west road, the excavations of 1966 and 1967 uncovered the remains of a small sanctuary 1 with a boundary stone reading TO ΗΙΕΡΟ in place, marking an area apparently hallowed since Protoattic times. 2

The sanctuary was constructed across a steep east-west ridge of natural bedrock which rises to the south. A considerable part of the northern walls at the lower level has survived, while on the exposed ridge of bedrock to the south no trace of the boundaries of the precinct could be found. A mixture of 5th century B.C. and non-descript Roman sherds from a disturbed layer of fill across the upper remnants of the Hieron indicates that the original enclosure walls may have stood intact as late as the Roman era, centuries after the lower face of the northern walls was buried by an accumulation of road fill. In the 11th and 12th centuries the whole area over the remaining walls and across the top of the bedrock slope to the south was cleared for a building with a clay floor which housed several large Byzantine pithoi. One of these storage pits was cut through bedrock on the line of the east wall of the Hieron, while another cut through the north wall, leaving a gap of one meter near its west end (Fig. 1; Pl. 35, a). This disturbance has erased any trace of the south side of the sanctuary and of the upper portion of its north wall which may have survived the Roman period. 3

1 I would like to thank Homer A. Thompson, Director of the Agora Excavations, for his guidance and helpful observations during the excavation and study of this material and for entrusting me with its publication. My work in Athens for two summers was made possible by a grant from the University of Washington for which I express my thanks to the Classics Department there, especially to Colin Edmonson. I am grateful to Benjamin D. Meritt for his helpful suggestions and changes in the section dealing with the inscribed boundary stone. I am indebted to John Travlos for the drawings, and to Eugene Vanderpool Jr. for the photographs.

2 The area under discussion lies in Section Kappa, at the grid coordinates G 16 on the Agora Plan. See above, H. A. Thompson, fig. 8, plate 15.

3 The remains of this Byzantine settlement consisted of 18 pithoi, all of commercial size, found

Hesperia, XXXVII, 2
The chief remains of the Hieron are the north and east walls, extending at an angle of 60 degrees from the well-preserved northeast corner. The east wall is present in a short stretch along the road south of the Southwest Fountain House. The fill of the pit cutting through the north wall of the Hieron included many fine pieces of glazed sgraffito ware and 17 coins of the emperor Manuel I Comnenus (1143-1180), while another pithos near by produced one coin of Alexios I (1081-1118).
served for 2.40 m., to a point where the bedrock rises sharply, while the north wall, 1.10 m. high in places, is preserved throughout its entire length of 8.67 m. except for the gap left by the Byzantine pithos and the missing northwest corner. Beyond the last rectangular block at this end of the wall is a flat area of bedrock which must have held the northwest corner block of the temenos; the wall cannot have continued farther west because of a steep unworked bedrock scarp and the southwest turn of the road. Several stones from the inner packing of the collapsed wall lie south of the corner area, and two pieces of Acropolis limestone, stuck into the north face of the bedrock scarp above, at an angle of about 60 degrees to the wall, appear to be part of the returning west wall of a sanctuary of triangular shape and nearly equilateral dimensions. Given the exact angle of the northeast corner and the approximate length of the north wall, the restored plan and dimensions, somewhat less than equilateral, can be seen in Figure 2. Two triangular abata excavated on the island of Delos are comparable to this in size and shape: one at the east end of the Agora of the Italians.
Excavations on the acropolis at Eretria in recent years have unearthed a sanctuary which developed around the graves of several heroes of the early city and which is comparable to the Agora Hieron in many respects. The Eretrian precinct, constructed above the bronze cauldron burials of six heroes, was rebuilt and expanded in four successive periods from Late Geometric times until the destruction of the city, probably in the Mithridatic War of 87 B.C. One stage of this heroon, dating from about 400 B.C., is a temenos wall in the shape of an equilateral triangle built over an archaic enclosure of the same shape and very near in size to the Agora Hieron of the late 5th century. A very similar situation could be imagined for the Agora shrine if the shallow circular depression on the high bedrock bank on the line of the restored west wall (Fig. 1), very similar to those into which the cauldrons containing the ashes of the Eretrian heroes were set, could be shown to be early. Unfortunately, it lies in an area which has been disturbed in Roman and Byzantine times, and certainty is impossible. The evidence suggests that the Agora Hieron had no ritual function, but, like the Delian sanctuaries, was a simple abaton or sacred precinct to which entrance was forbidden. There is no sign of an entrance to the street, and the floor level inside the Hieron is a full meter above the road level outside the north wall.

The boundary stone of the Agora Hieron is in a prominent position facing the street at the northeast corner, and is set 0.30 m. into bedrock against the wall (Fig. 1, a; Pl. 35, b, c). On the ridge of bedrock to the west and southeast, two rectangular cuttings were found which may have been sockets for other boundary stones. One of these cuttings (Fig. 1, c) lies in line with the outer edge of the east wall, 4.60 m. from the northeast corner, and at nearly the midpoint of the wall according to the restored plan. The other cutting (Fig. 1, b) is on top of the bedrock scarp above the northwest corner of the Hieron to the south. If this cutting held a stele, its position would have provided maximum visibility to traffic approaching the sanctuary on the road which swings around this rock from the southwest. Such liberal distribution of boundary markers was common in antiquity, especially around small sanctuaries of this kind.

5 R. Vallois, L’Architecture hellénique et hellénistique à Délôs, I, Paris, 1944, p. 69; Guide de Délôs, p. 120, no. 63.
7 Cf. the small temenos below the terrace of the Middle Stoa in the Athenian Agora with a bedding for a horos at each of its two surviving corners (Hesperia, XXXV, 1966, p. 48); also the unwalled part of the sanctuary of the Tritopatores in the Kerameikos, a roughly trapezoidal area filling the angle where the West Road branches off from the Sacred Way, delimited by three boundary stones (latest report and illustrations, D. Ohly, Arch. Anz., 1965, cols. 327-332; report of the original excavation, Brueckner, Практікаі, 1910, pp. 102 ff.); and the small semicircular abaton set against the outer north wall of the Stoa of Antigonos on Delos with four stelai inscribed simply ABATON facing outward from the circuit of its wall (F. Courby, Délôs, V, Le portique
The Hieron walls are very neatly constructed but clearly not made to support a heavy superstructure, since the lower blocks are set into a footing trench in bedrock only 10 centimeters deep without further socle or foundation. The walls are made of Acropolis limestone in the form of intermittent large blocks, roughly trapezoidal in shape, with smaller trapezoidal and rectangular blocks trimmed and fitted between them in so-called stackwork, and bonded with a thin layer of clay mortar. At the foot of the wall were found many limestone working chips from the trimming of the wall blocks, and a deposit of red ocher dye probably used as a marking agent for testing the fit of the blocks. This technique of wedging smaller stones between larger blocks was a favorite type of light wall construction in Attica in peribolos walls and small buildings. The outer surfaces of the Hieron wall blocks are carefully aligned with one another, and have been finished by the blows of a blunt hammer. Beneath the floor level of the temenos the inner face of the wall was roughly finished and backed with a packing of fieldstones, while the inner face above the level of the floor, though very little is preserved, was more carefully finished and its thickness is uniformly 0.50 m. (Fig. 1, Section A-A).

The boundary stone (I 7012; H. 0.77 m., W. 0.27 m., Th. 0.17 m.) of Pentelic marble is rough picked on all its surfaces except the top 10 centimeters of the front side which have been smoothed with a chisel to receive the inscription (Fig. 1, a; Pl. 36, a, d). The letters (0.028 m. high) are remarkably fresh, and the stone is in excellent condition except the upper surface and edges which have been worn smooth and cracked, apparently by traffic at that level. The inscription TO HIERO, simply the genitive with horos understood, leaves us tantalized and ignorant of the honored deity or hero. The tailed rho is the most interesting letter-form and, were such boundary stones not given to archaizing, would indicate a date no later than the early 430's. The epsilon with short central stroke is in general use in the late fifth century, but examples also occur earlier. The stonemason could have achieved a more emphatic archaizing effect by the use of a definitely early epsilon and an angular rho.

For similar masonry in houses in the area of the Agora cf. Hesperia, XX, 1951, p. 196; XXVIII, 1959, p. 101. W. Wrede, Attische Mauern, Athens, 1933, pp. 38-39, 58-59, figs. 110-113, treats several examples of which the closest parallel to the style of the Agora Hieron is the peribolos wall of the Tritopatreion (fig. 112) which also dates from the latter half of the 5th century B.C.; cf. also the walls of Dörpfeld's candidate for the temple of Dionysos in the Marshes (fig. 113) between the Areopagus and the Pnyx, the inner side of a temenos wall at Eleusis (fig. 110), and the socle of a housewall at Eleusis of the middle of the 5th century (fig. 111).

The last dated example of tailed rho in non-archaizing Athenian official inscriptions is in the final account of Pheidias' statue of Athena Parthenos in 438 B.C. (I.G., I², 354; see the photograph by G. Donnay in B.C.H., XCI, 1967, p. 72, fig. 4). Russell Meiggs discusses the tailed rho in J.H.S., LXXXVI, 1966, pp. 91-97.

In I.G., I², 6, lines 130-132, of the first half of the century; I.G., I², 31 of 449-446 B.C.; I.G., I², 39 of 446/5, especially in lines 40 ff.; in I.G., I², 45, once in line 7.
But the spelling and letter-forms are less reliable than the pottery in dating the sanctuary.

The clearest evidence for the date of the Hieron was provided by pottery from fill beneath its inner floor and from three undisturbed road levels of the Classical period running parallel to its north wall. The lowest of these road levels, which slopes markedly to the north, was in use long enough to develop rather deep wheel ruts, and it is this level into which the wall and horos were set, as is clear from the loose bedrock and limestone working chips in the shallow footing trench of the north temenos wall. Fill above this road surface contained pottery of the late 5th century B.C. in a well-defined layer ca. 0.40 m. deep, with another hard-packed road surface at its upper limit (Pl. 35, c, a ledge or martyr left in the scarp to the left of the horos). This road fill covered the inscription on the horos, and it was traffic at this level which damaged the upper edges of the stele.\(^{11}\) The uppermost road surface, some 0.23 m. above the top of the boundary stone, is a deeply rutted cobblestone street (Pl. 35, c, lower right hand corner) with a fill 0.33 m. deep containing sherd of the late 5th and early 4th centuries B.C.

There are indications that one or more attempts were made to decrease the slope of the lowest of these roads by filling in its northern side, and then a curb or barrier of unworked stones rising as high as 0.40 m. was built ca. 1.20 m. north of the boundary stone, which rerouted this portion of the road to the north (Pl. 35, c; note the underlying wheel ruts exposed to the right of the rerouted road). The fill from this “detour” contained fragments of a red-figured bell krater (Pl. 37, c) of which other sherd were found near the base of the Hieron wall several meters to the west, suggesting that the curbing was confined to the vicinity of the horos, though it may have continued to the east where portions of a similar curb were uncovered ca. 10 meters away beside the late 5th century road. The construction of this rough stone curb may have been contemporary with the temenos, for not only did it serve (at least incidentally) to protect the horos from traffic, but the pottery from the road north of the curb is indistinguishable in date from the late 5th century pottery beneath the floor inside the Hieron which dates its construction (below, p. 129).

The same traffic on the second road level which damaged the top of the boundary stone caused heavy wear on the upper portions of the curbing, and the detour to the north was short-lived. Pottery from this road level belongs to the late 5th century, and is also indistinguishable in date from that beneath the Hieron floor, as well as that from the preceding road layer, including the northern rerouting. This similarity of pottery and the remarkably fresh condition of the horos and its inscription suggest that three stages of development took place in surprisingly rapid succession during the last 30 years of the 5th century: 1) the Hieron was constructed beside a road already

\(^{11}\) Cf. the similar fate of the horos of the Agora (T. L. Shear, *Hesperia*, VIII, 1939, pp. 205-206, fig. 4; H. A. Thompson, *Hesperia*, Suppl. IV, 1940, pp. 107-110, fig. 80).
in use for many years; 2) a rough stone curb was built, shifting the road a meter or more to the north; and 3) the curb, horos and lower temenos wall were buried and the road returned to its original course.

A thin layer of clay excavated inside the Hieron proved to be the floor level of the 5th century structure, 0.27 m. below the highest point of its walls and 0.83 m. above the contemporary road surface outside the north wall. The sherds from the 11 centimeters of fill beneath this floor, like those from the lower road levels, fall within the last three decades of the 5th century, and form the surest evidence for the dating of the construction of the Hieron.

The pottery from in and around the Hieron, as is usual from the fill of roads and floors, is very fragmentary, but plentiful enough to allow a general description of the deposits in addition to the sample sherds illustrated here (Pl. 37, a, c). Most of the sherds are from red-figured and black-glazed wares with glazes of good to excellent quality. The bases of cups and bowls have neatly profiled feet, the undersides showing a good balance of light and dark colors in well defined zones and circles. Also represented in these deposits are black-glazed cup bottoms with impressed decorations of good quality. The most common of these decorations are a centerpiece of palmettes surrounded by a border of ovules or tongues, and a stamped pattern of radiating rosettes usually dated from about 430 B.C. In some cases the double lines of rays encroach on one another, and palmettes overlap the lines of their surrounding zones, a lack of care which begins with the last quarter of the 5th century, but in no case is there a sign of the wholesale carelessness which characterizes the breakdown of this stamping technique in the early 4th century. The pottery of the Hieron floor and adjacent lower road levels points to a date somewhere within the last three decades of the 5th century. This pottery from in and around the Hieron has many points in common with both the pottery from a 5th century well excavated just south of the Stoa of Attalos,12 and a slightly later group found in another well on the Kolonos Agoraios in 1937.13

The most interesting of the 5th century sherds are the 14 fragments of a red-figure bell krater (Pl. 37, c, P 27831 a-m; two small undistinguished fragments, j and 1, found subsequent to photography, are not illustrated here) from fill just above the lowest road level beside the north wall of the Hieron and from the rerouted road north of the curb near the horos.

Part of the thick base of the krater survives with its sides and concave undersides unglazed. The glaze is generally misfired to a bright red. One panel (Pl. 37, c, left) features two youths clad in flowing chlamydes, high-laced sandals, and petasoi

12 L. Talcott, *Hesperia*, IV, 1935, pp. 476-523, where the pottery is dated within the years between the middle of the 5th century and the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War.
13 P. Corbett, *Hesperia*, XVIII, 1949, pp. 298-351, assigns the pottery from this well to the years between 425 and 400 B.C.
hanging at their backs, riding horses to the left, a scene reminiscent of the riders of the Parthenon frieze. The reverse panel (Pl. 37, c, right) shows men, one with a staff, walking to the left. A ground line with a band of meander is beneath their feet. Bands of ovals border the outer sides of the handles, and a reserved area lies beneath them.

Details of draftsmanship, especially the rendering of the rider’s face, the garments, and the horses, and the details of the scenes of riders and walking men, suggest the work of the Marlay Painter. A column krater attributed to this artist, in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, has a nearly identical scene of two riders. Miss Richter points out the striking similarity of the scene on the Metropolitan vase with the scene of a single horseman on a calyx krater, by the same painter, formerly in the Marlay collection and now in Cambridge. She notes the similarity of features, wavy hair, the folds of the chlamys with turned-up corners at the back, the sandals, and the markings on the horses. She also notes that both of these scenes of spirited riders, sketchily drawn, are reminiscent of the Parthenon frieze by which they may well have been inspired. All of these observations apply equally to the equestrian scenes on the Agora fragments. Furthermore, the reverse side of the Cambridge vase has a scene of walking men with staves, which is very close to the remnants of the scene on Agora fragment c. Like the Metropolitan vase, the Agora krater may be dated to about 430 B.C. on the basis of its scene of “Parthenon” horsemen.

Excavations beneath the floor of the Hieron revealed a deposit of undisturbed archaic fill covering the entire area between the inner packing of the north wall and the bank of bedrock to the south. This fill going down to bedrock at a depth of 0.79 m. below the 5th century floor contained a mixture of Late Geometric and Protoattic sherds of the 7th century B.C., with slight disturbances of the 5th and 6th centuries at its upper levels. Partially surrounded by this fill, and built against the bedrock scarp opposite the midpoint of the north wall, was a small rectangular structure of stones resting on bedrock, with its top surface just a few centimeters below the floor level of the Hieron (Fig. 1, Plan and Section A-A; Pl. 35, d). This structure is 0.78 m. wide at the top and 1.44 m. long, and the masonry of its exposed sides consists of large stones fitted with smaller stacked blocks, suggesting a crude prototype of the walls of the 5th century sanctuary. The top of the archaic structure is quite irregular, with blocks apparently missing from the southwest end where there is a depression in the bedrock scarp, but the vertical and horizontal alignment of the stones is quite

15 Lamb, C.V.A. Cambridge, III, I, pl. XXXVII, 2.
16 See Richter’s discussion of this type of footwear, op. cit., p. 99, note 3.
even. A disturbed layer about 18 centimeters deep around the upper level of the structure yielded a mixture of sherds of the late 5th century B.C. and Protoattic and Protocorinthian sherds of the 7th to the 6th centuries B.C. This mixture of pottery suggests that the upper level of the 7th century stone structure was visible in the late 5th century and was a form of proto-Hieron which was purposely surrounded and covered by the more monumental temenos of the Classical period. The undisturbed rocky fill around the lower level of the archaic structure had exclusively Late Geometric and Protoattic sherds, a number of disks cut from pottery of the same period, and two terracotta horses (Pl. 36, e). A few of these pieces had been scattered just outside the sanctuary by the intrusion of the Byzantine pithos which also damaged the 5th century wall. This assortment of sherds and pottery-cut disks (Pl. 37, b) is similar to the pottery from a Protoattic votive deposit excavated in 1932 about 20 meters southeast of the Hieron.17

The twelve disks, cut from Late Geometric and Protoattic pottery, are comparable to the collection from the Protoattic votive deposit both in their date and in the sacral context in which they were found.18 Though the provenience of these disks may tempt some to identify them as cult objects, their appearance suggests nothing so much as simple jar-stoppers.19 Three are cut from coarse household pottery, the others from glazed wares. The top edge of one (Pl. 37, b, bottom row center) is part of the rim of a large pot or the edge of a stand. The preserved black-glazed decoration includes part of the hindquarters, neck, and wings of a mythical beast, rendered in the stylized manner of the period. Zigzag, dot, and swastika decorations are painted on the reserved background. Another is unique in this collection for the hole bored through the center. The perfect roundness and smoothness of the hole suggest that an axle has run through it. The outer edges of the disk seem too crude for a wheel, but may have been damaged subsequent to its use. The piece was apparently made flat and not cut from the wall of a pot.20

Although the evidence will not allow a precise statement of the origin and history of the Hieron, it is clear that the enclosure wall was built within the last three decades of the 5th century B.C. Since its location suggests a civic rather than a private undertaking, the Hieron may have been a minor project in the final years of the Periclean building program or in the interbellum years of 421-415 B.C. No evidence, archaeological or literary, allows us to identify this shrine despite its conspicuous location at the crossroads next to the civic center of Athens. The small archaic structure

17 D. Burr, Hesperia, II, 1933, pp. 542-640.
18 Ibid., nos. 257-276, pp. 564, 603-604. Some of these disks from the votive deposit, unlike any from the Hieron, were cut from stone and marked with crosses.
20 Cf. H. Schmidt, Heinrich Schliemann's Sammlung Trojanischer Altertümer, Berlin, 1902, p. 223, for the disks from Troy which are mostly bored.
beneath the center of the triangle was erected perhaps as a *bomos* or simple marker of an early tomb found in this area, elaborating it as the grave of an old Athenian hero. Already as early as the 7th century there may have been some simple form of temenos on this spot similar to the Geometric oval enclosure found in 1932 some 20 m. to the southeast and now seen to be a temenos associated with one or more of the early graves in the area. In any case, some earlier monument was apparently replaced by the more monumental triangular Hieron of the late 5th century. The temenos buried beneath the terrace of the Middle Stoa is another example of an early establishment of this nature that was given a more substantial form in later times.

The quick buildup of road fill around the horos and curbstone, and the similarity of its pottery to that from the Hieron floor, points to a strange and rapid sequence of events around the sanctuary after its construction sometime in the last third of the 5th century. The burial of the carefully executed masonry and the boundary stone beneath the rubble of the road so soon that they appear fresh from the mason’s hammer and chisel shows a sudden departure from the care shown in the construction of the shrine. The time of course was that of the Peloponnesian War when all the refugees of Attica crowded into the city and, in their desperation for living space, occupied even the sanctuaries and shrines of heroes, as described by Thucydides (II, 16,2-17,1):

> They were dejected and aggrieved at having to leave their homes and temples which had always been theirs,—relics, inherited from their fathers, of their original form of government—and at the prospect of changing their mode of life, and facing what was nothing less for each of them than forsaking his own town.

> And when they came to the capital, only a few of them were provided with dwellings or places of refuge with friends or relatives, and most of them took up their abode in the vacant places of the city and the sanctuaries and shrines of heroes, all except the Acropolis and the Eleusinion and any other precinct that could be securely closed.

The enclosure walls of the Hieron would have provided an ideal settling place for a band of these dispossessed rustics. The rapid buildup between the horos and the stone curb looks very much like purposeful filling, but may be the accumulated refuse of squatters in and around the Heiron and the dust of heavy traffic in the overcrowded city. A deep layer of marble chips amongst this fill and at similar levels around the Hieron suggests that some marble workers from among the outlanders took up their trade near by and used this area as a dump. This lack of concern for the sacred precinct apparently continued until more than half a meter of its north wall was covered by accumulated fill which was finally capped by the cobblestone road of the early 4th century.

Shortly after this time it seems that the sanctuary enjoyed a new revival and

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21 See H. A. Thompson, above p. 60.
became part of a further expanded temenos. A wall of the early 4th century, made of Acropolis limestone with conglomerate foundation blocks, was annexed to the east corner of the Hieron at the level of the cobblestone road, and extended about 11 meters to the east along the south side of the road (see above, Pl. 15; and on Pl. 35, c, note the west end of this wall where it abuts the northeast corner of the Hieron). A gap at the midpoint of this wall, with remains of projecting side walls, was thought at first to be an alley between two houses, but on further study was found to be the propylon of an enclosure wall. No signs of thresholds to the supposed houses were found fronting on the street, nor did any sign of the side or back walls of such houses appear in the excavations to the south in 1932. This enclosure wall, bridging a gap of time and space between the north wall of the 5th century Hieron and a Hellenistic building which it joins at the east, seems to be another part of a single sanctuary which, despite periodic decline, survived and grew from the early 7th century B.C. until Roman times.

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23 The proper identification of this gap as the propylon of an enclosure wall related to the earlier Hieron was made by John Travlos.
a. Hieron, looking Southwest

b. Outer Face of Northwest Wall with Boundary Stone

c. Looking Southeast, Stone Barrier in Foreground

d. Looking East, 7th Century B.C. Wall inside Hieron

GERALD V. LALONDE: A FIFTH CENTURY HIERON SOUTHWEST OF THE ATHENIAN AGORA
a. Boundary Stone at Northeast Corner

b. Abaton on Delos, East of Agora of the Italians
c. Abaton on Delos, North of the Sacred Lake
d. Boundary Stone, Detail
e. Protoattic Terracotta Horses

c. Protoattic Terracotta Horses

GERALD V. LALONDE: A FIFTH CENTURY HERON SOUTHWEST OF THE ATHENIAN AGORA
a. Sherds of Late 5th Century B.C.
b. Late Geometric and Protoattic Sherds and Disks
c. Fragments of Red-figured Bell Krater

GERALD V. LALONDE: A FIFTH CENTURY HERON SOUTHWEST OF THE ATHENIAN AGORA