

Burial and urbanism in Athens (4th-9th c. A.D.)

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Urbanism in Early Byzantine Athens is generally discussed with reference to excavation results from the Athenian Agora.¹ In contrast, the bulk of material from rescue excavations in other parts of the city often awaits consideration. Studies of the Athenian Agora during late antiquity imply (and in some cases explicitly state) that the Herulian destruction of the Agora buildings was indicative of the disruptive character of the Herulian invasion on the city as a whole and on its evolution. They also make the assumption that the concealment of numismatic hoards from the later 6th c. is an indication of the disruptive impact of the Slavic invasions, which are known to have occurred during the same period. Finally, due to its renowned philosophical schools, Athens is often considered to have been a 'pagan city' until the first third of the 6th c. when the situation abruptly changed due to Justinian's edict on the closing of the schools in A.D. 529. The latter assumptions rely on the limited literary sources available, as well as on excavated material from the Agora, and exclude material evidence relating to the Christianisation of the city as a whole.

As the Agora lost its civic and political rôle during the mid-Roman period, structures and archaeological finds from this period should not necessarily be considered wholly representative of the city's later evolution. Athens provides the unique advantage of having both a c.130-year history of systematic excavations as well as a great number of rescue excavations which, due to the city's rapid modern development, have been undertaken in the last four decades. The total assemblage of cemeteries, their associated churches, topography, chronologies, and grave goods, provide valuable information for the status of distinct areas within the city, signs of demographic change, and religious trends. Moreover, the study of graves as closed archaeological contexts can offer well-dated parallels to be used when re-assessing finds from undated contexts. The issues described above are addressed here by considering all available evidence from excavation reports on graves and cemeteries dating from the 4th to the 9th c. A.D.

Cemeteries in Early Byzantine Athens: the excavated material

Cemeteries inside the Valerianic (and Justinianic) wall (figs. 1-2)

After being converted to a Christian basilica dedicated to Παναγία Ἀθηνιώτισσα (the Athenian Virgin), the Parthenon was also used for burials, mostly of clergy, but also of laymen, which are recorded by graffiti on the columns of the temple.² Among the 64 burial inscriptions, dated by indiction and/or year, three date to the 7th,³ four to the 8th,⁴ and ten to the 9th c.⁵ Prior to 793 when the first deacon was buried there, only bishops had the privilege of being interred around the Parthenon. The first archbishop is mentioned in 841. The earliest inscriptions of high-status laymen date to 848, 863 and 898.⁶

Abbreviations:

Praktika = Πρακτικά τῆς ἐν Ἀθῆναις Ἀρχαιολογικῆς Ἐταιρείας

ADelt = Ἀρχαιολογικὸ Δελτίο

ArchEph = Ἀρχαιολογικὴ Ἐφημερίδα

1 See A. Frantz, *The Athenian Agora XXIV: Late Antiquity, 267-700* (Princeton, NJ 1988); J. Travlos, *Η πολυεποχική εξέλιξις τῶν Ἀθηνῶν* (Athens 1960), partly translated in his *Bildlexikon zur Topographie des antiken Athen* (Tübingen 1971); and *Athènes au fil du temps. Atlas historique d'urbanisme et d'architecture* (Boulogne 1972).

2 A. Orlandos, *Τὰ χαράγματα τοῦ Παρθενῶνος* (Athens 1973) 22-25. Most of these inscriptions were situated towards the west of the temple (*ibid.*, plan on 15).

3 *Ibid.* nos. 34, 68 and 74. No. 74, which seems to be the earliest, dates to A.D. 550, 595 or 640; no. 141 to A.D. 591(?); no. 66 to A.D. 603 or 703; no. 34 to A.D. 693.

4 *Ibid.* nos. 67, 80, 82, 83 and 126.

5 *Ibid.* nos. 69, 70, 81, 85, 120, 121, 148, 157 and 164.

6 The person who died in 863 was a chanter. The one who died in 898 is named only as Σπαθαρία, i.e. the wife of a man with the title of *spatharios*; see Orlandos (*supra* n.2) 101, no. 121 Orlandos (*ibid.*, 24).