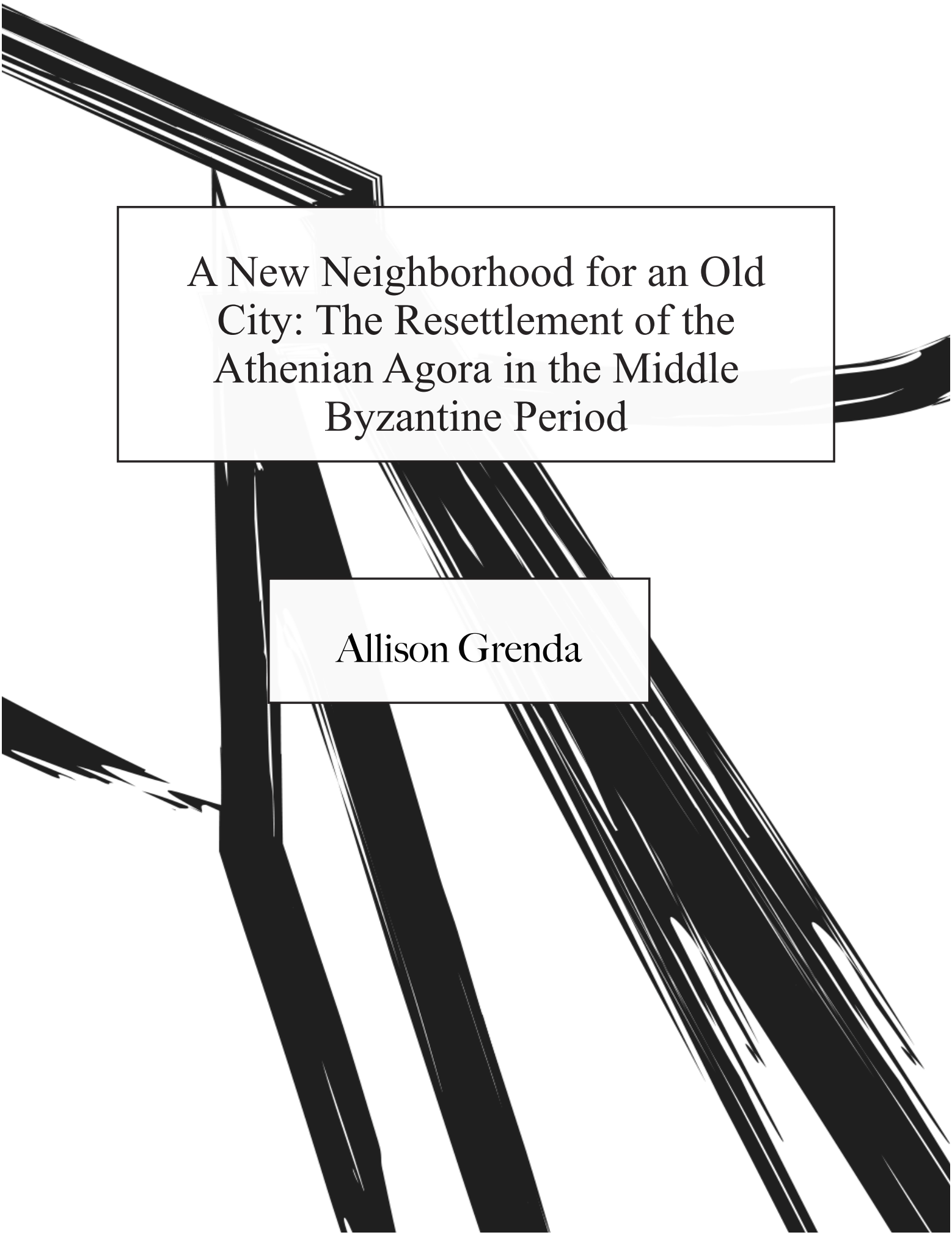

A New Neighborhood for an Old City: The Resettlement of the Athenian Agora in the Middle Byzantine Period

Allison Grenda

A New Neighborhood for an Old City: The Resettlement of the Athenian Agora in the Middle Byzantine Period

Allison Grenda

Abstract: When Rome fell in 476 CE, the city of Athens in Greece also shrank, moving inside its walls to protect its people. This left the Agora, the bustling marketplace which sat outside the walls, abandoned. In the tenth century, at the economic height of the Byzantine Empire, Athens expanded outside its walls, ushering in a new period of rebuilding in the Agora. This project sought to characterize the shift in domestic architecture from before and after the abandonment, which led to a better understanding of Athenian identity as expressed through architecture. Research conducted on excavation reports from the American School of Classical Studies in Athens (ASCSA) revealed that the houses in these new neighborhoods were modest, more closely resembling homes seen in the Roman period than contemporaneous Byzantine constructions. While they may not be known for the innovative, extravagant architecture of their ancestors, the Byzantine Athenians are ultimately remembered for the simple accomplishment that they were there at all—attempting to rebuild, repopulate, and worship a new faith in an old city.

Keywords: *Byzantine Athens, Domestic Architecture, Agora, Urbanism, Architectural History*

Introduction

The middle of the first millennium CE saw a major change to the structure of the Roman Empire. In the mid-fifth century, the siege of Rome by Visigoth tribes meant that the western half of the empire became divided into factions, while the east was ruled by the Byzantine Emperor in his capital of Constantinople. Consequently, Athens transformed from a proximate center of a powerful empire to a fringe colony in a significantly reduced regime. Rather than remaining under the security of Rome, Athens became reliant on the Byzantine defense system, which was more concerned with protecting and growing the new capital of Constantinople than with securing its border towns. Thus, when the Slavs invaded during the sixth century CE, Athens contracted, retreating inside its walls to protect its people. This contraction left the Agora abandoned. Previously the city's major civic and commercial center, teeming with crowds of shopping Athenians and philosophizing students since the sixth century BCE, the beating heart of Athens now became still.[1] This abandonment persisted for approximately three centuries, from the end of the sixth century CE to the tenth century. Finding stable footing after centuries of tumult, the Byzantine Empire entered its peak at the end of this period. Athens likewise experienced greater economic success, expanding outside its walls of safety and resettling the city's center, the Agora.

With this repopulation came a new period of construction in the Agora. The city was still largely pagan at the time of abandonment three centuries prior, leading Christian churches to be suddenly in great demand during the tenth century. Churches were built, clergy were sent from Constantinople, and neighborhoods began to grow around the new churches. Unlike the innovation commissioned by the wealthy church elites for their homes in Constantinople and elsewhere around the empire, the houses in the Agora's new neighborhoods were modest, resembling the homes seen during the Roman period more than their contemporaneous constructions. Built on the remnants of

[1] "The Athenian Agora: Overview," Accessed March 18, 2017, http://www.agathe.gr/overview/

existing foundations and fashioned with spolia (reused material) from Roman-era monuments, the Byzantine Athenians had little interest in creating a decorative style or expressing city pride. Instead, their houses were simple, following the architectural footprints of their ancestors. Thus, the Athenians lived in a shadow of their city's former glory, huddled in small homes at the base of the Acropolis, trying to rebuild a life they never knew, and attempting to resurrect a city which had peaked long ago. The little effort they summoned was put into constructing churches, whereas housing was based more on subsistence than on self-expression. While they may not be known for their monumental villas or innovative artistic extravagances, the Byzantine Athenians, through evidence of their resettlement in the Agora, are to be remembered for the simple accomplishment that they were there at all—attempting to rebuild, repopulate, and worship a new faith in an old city.

Unfortunately, a majority of the scholarship in the 20th century disagree. Many art historians and archaeologists focus solely on the height of the Agora before the Slavic conquest and disregard any history in later centuries. Indeed, in 1986 leading Agora archaeologist and scholar John Camp wrote, "the world of the Agora came to an end" in the seventh century CE.[2] While he acknowledged the resettlement and construction of neighborhoods in the tenth and eleventh centuries, it is a mere mention, a short paragraph out of a two-hundred-plus page book. Echoing the sentiment of many Byzantine and medieval scholars, Camp decisively asserted that "the Agora ceased to be of significance only when Athens herself finally sank into obscurity at the end of antiquity."[3] This paper seeks to revise this perspective, arguing as Anthony Kaldellis did in 2009 that Byzantine Athens was not a forgotten, backwater town fading into oblivion but a center of Christianity attempting "to succeed in a changed world."[4] Kaldellis uses his book, *The Christian*

[2] John Camp, *The Athenian Agora: Excavations in the Heart of Classical Athens*, (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd, 1986), 215.
[3] Camp, *The Athenian Agora*, 215.
[4] Anthony Kaldellis, *The Christian Parthenon* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 3.

Parthenon, to fill in the history of Byzantine Athens, which he notes is a history that according to many should not and does not exist.[5] While it may not have been the peak of the Agora's existence, the Byzantine period is part of the Agora's history, and to leave it out would be to disregard an entire chapter of its story, as well as the characters who lived their lives during this time. Therefore, this paper is written with the hope that as scholarship advances, the real history of Byzantine Athens may be further examined, revealing the city's dynamic persistence beyond antiquity. The world of the Agora did not come to an end when Athens retreated behind her walls, as Camp argued. Rather, it simply paused before entering a new phase of life, one that deserves to be acknowledged.

History of the Agora

In order to truly understand the world in which the Byzantine Athenians lived, it is necessary to take a look at where they came from. Athens' Agora was first used as a public space in the sixth century BCE, with commercial, civic, religious, and domestic functions. It held a mixture of administrative buildings, temples, houses, and infrastructure, including aqueducts and fountains. However, soon after the Agora's construction, the Persians invaded the city, causing damage to the town center. This forced the Athenians to rebuild early on in the site's history. Yet Athens' leaders rebounded well by building numerous public structures as a reflection of their persistence through the warfare and to showcase their civic goals for greater power in Greece. This is notably remembered as the Periclean building program, which gifted the world with such marvels as the Parthenon.[6] This Classical period is considered the golden age of the Agora, a time in which history's greatest philosophers discussed and debated issues such as the human condition or the political structure of Athens, which is regarded today as the ancestor of modern democracy. Students who sought the highest philosophical education came to study at the Agora, while worshipers frequented the Agora's

[5] Kaldellis, *Christian Parthenon*, 9.
[6] "The Athenian Agora: Overview."

temples in one of the world's most devoutly pagan cities at the time. Additionally, its location at the foot of the Acropolis added to its grandeur, as pilgrimages or ritualistic processions to the Parthenon necessitated a trip through the Agora.[7]

The Agora as a whole served a multitude of functions in the Classical era, and it continued to be of great importance during the Roman period. Despite the city of Athens' decreased influence on the world stage at this time, the Agora continued to flourish. This epicenter of Athenian activity attracted the attention of the Romans due to its celebrated history of accomplishments and constant construction of new buildings.[8] However, this relationship with a new central power did not come without its difficulties. Athens quarreled with Rome over political affiliations, and the empire's violent responses to Athenian attempts at rebellion often resulted in damages to the Agora in particular.[9] Yet the Agora never failed to bounce back after catastrophe, making it a superbly persistent region of a seemingly immortal city. No matter what attack, political issue, or struggle the Agora was faced with, it continued to build, thrive, and teem with life throughout it all. This is its story, its modus operandi, its lifeblood—persistence.

During the Roman period, in 267 CE, Athens experienced an attack by the Herulians, who destroyed a fair portion of the city, including the Agora. For the subsequent century and a half, the Agora experienced its first indication of serious decline, with industry replacing sophistication.[10] Athens as a whole never fully recovered from the Herulian blow; however, ever-persisting, the Agora rebounded, constructing new Roman-style buildings and schools and continuing its legacy as a place of learning and philosophy.[11] The city also refortified after the attacks, building a key wall near the base of the Acropolis which incorporated very little of the Agora into its protected area.[12] This wall would prove to be a decisive element in the Agora's later abandonment. When

[7] Kaldellis, *The Christian Parthenon*. 60.
[8] "The Athenian Agora: Overview."
[9] Ibid.
[10] Alison Frantz, *The Middle Ages in the Athenian Agora: Issue 7, Part 1* (American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 1961).
[11] Camp, *The Athenian Agora*, 197.
[12] Ibid.

the Slavs attacked in 582 CE, the Athenians moved inside the wall, deserting the Agora for centuries.[13] By saving their lives, they consequently ensured the ruin of their former home. Despite its effect on the desertion, the wall ironically also foreshadowed the tenth century repopulation in its architectural style, as it was the first instance of spolia, or reused materials, in construction at the Agora. In order to build the wall, the Athenians used rubble from the buildings that were destroyed in the Herulian attacks. When finished, the wall incorporated inscriptions, statue bases, and sculpture, with squared blocks forming the bulk of the wall's faces.[14] As discussed later, this method would be widely adopted in reforming the neighborhoods of the Agora.

After the Roman era, Athens continued her decline, due both to barbarian attacks as well as the transition of religion from paganism to Christianity. In 313 CE, Roman Emperor Constantine and the Council of Nicea ratified the Edict of Milan, which legalized the practice of Christianity within the empire.[15] With this act of religious tolerance, churches were allowed to be built, temples were converted, and the rulers slowly became increasingly pro-Christian in their reigns. However, Athens was slow to follow suit and held onto its pagan traditions for much longer than the rest of the empire.[16]

In the sixth century, Justinian (r. 527-565) was the deeply Christian, ambitious, and powerful ruler of the Byzantine Empire, and he would not stand for the continuation of pagan teachings and worship. He sought a unified empire like that of his Roman predecessors, which in his eyes meant a religiously homogeneous empire. In 529 CE, this vision led to an edict that outlawed the teaching of philosophy in schools, as it was considered to be associated with paganism.[17] In Athens, this heralded the closing of the academy at the Agora, which had been teaching philosophy for over a thousand years. As Camp bluntly stated, this decree "was the death knell of the city, depriving

[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Diana Bowder, *The Age of Constantine and Julian*, (London: Elek, 1978).
[16] Frantz, *The Middle Ages in the Athenian Agora*.
[17] Ibid.

Athens of her last claim to significance."[18] Kaldellis, meanwhile, pointed out the anti-pagan, scapegoat propaganda born from Justinian's act: Constantinople's elite boasted about the fall of Athens, criticizing its once-admired reputation as instead forever "stained" by paganism, and celebrating its death on the world stage, all while adorning their mansions with the best of Athenian Classical artwork.[19] With the closing of the schools, the leaders in Constantinople found a much-needed victory in their quest for a solely Christian empire, as they both "rhetorically and physically" eliminated Athens—at least, in their own eyes.[20] To this point, Kaldellis made the rightful distinction that while these primary accounts predicted the end of Athens, the history that followed tells a different story. Today's audience must not fall prey to historical conjectures that were made only to inspire pious Christian pride in Byzantine citizens.[21]

Without knowing of her future revival, however, it is possible to surmise that as victorious as Justinian felt, Athens felt just as defeated. When the Slavs fatally attacked Athens only fifty years after the closing of the schools, in 582 CE, the Athenians easily retreated into their walls and remained there for centuries, hiding not only from the barbarians but from a new empire that openly mocked them—a rapid reverse from the reverence of the Romans. Although some may see this as a "death knell," this contraction of the city and abandonment of the Agora was not the final chapter, as will soon be revealed.

Case Study

To fully illustrate the typical organization and architecture of the new Agora, a case study was undertaken based on excavations conducted through the ASCSA, which has been researching and excavating the site since the 1930s. From the sixth to tenth centuries CE, after the Slavic invasion, there was little movement in the region of the Agora, as most life occurred inside the walls

[18] Camp, *The Athenian Agora*, 203.
[19] Kaldellis, *The Christian Parthenon*, 9.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid.

built after the Herulian attacks. However, in the ninth century the Slavic threat from the north had subsided, and there was little danger from the south, as Crete had recently been retaken from invading Arabs.[22] According to the ancient houses, Agios Nikolaos underwent archaeological record, it was at this time that the Athenians began to move outside of the walls.[23] With this development came a population increase and restoration of urban functions.[24] The Agora in particular mainly became a residential area, with small neighborhoods clustered around community churches. The residents, however, were not ideologically the same people who had retreated three centuries earlier. Instead, they used their walls as a cocoon, evolved their civic character, and subsequently emerged as a new, fully Christian people with no trace of paganism left. Therefore, their efforts focused toward constructing churches and establishing themselves as faithfully practicing Christians, rather than displaying a concern for the details of their own homes.

One such instance of church construction was found in archaeological sections BE, BZ, and BH, in the northernmost region of the Agora (Fig. 1). Here, a Byzantine neighborhood was formed near a new church, Agios Nikolaos, known by a name found in a city architectural record from 1931.[25] It sits in the southeastern portion of the area, near Hadrian Street (see 1990 section, Fig. 2). Small in size and built over the remains of ancient houses, Agios Nikolaos underwent multiple construction periods, the earliest of which was around the late eleventh or early twelfth century.[26] It is clear that it was constructed over domestic ruins due to the presence of pithoi, or storage vessels built into the floors of homes, which were found directly beneath the church's

[22] Alison Frantz, *The Church of the Holy Apostles: Volume 20 of the Athenian Agora*, (American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 1971), 1.
[23] Maria Kazanaki-Lappa, "Medieval Athens," in *The Economic History of Byzantium*, ed. Angeliki Laiou (Dumbarton Oaks, 2007), 642.
[24] Frantz, *The Church of the Holy Apostles*, 1.
[25] T. Leslie Shear, "The Athenian Agora: Excavations of 1989-1993," *Hesperia: The Journal of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens* 66, no. 4 (1997): 495-548.
[26] Shear, "The Athenian Agora: Excavations of 1989-1993."

Fig. 1: Agora Excavation Map (note Sections BZ, BE, and BH in the north). Source: American School of Classical Studies Digital Collections

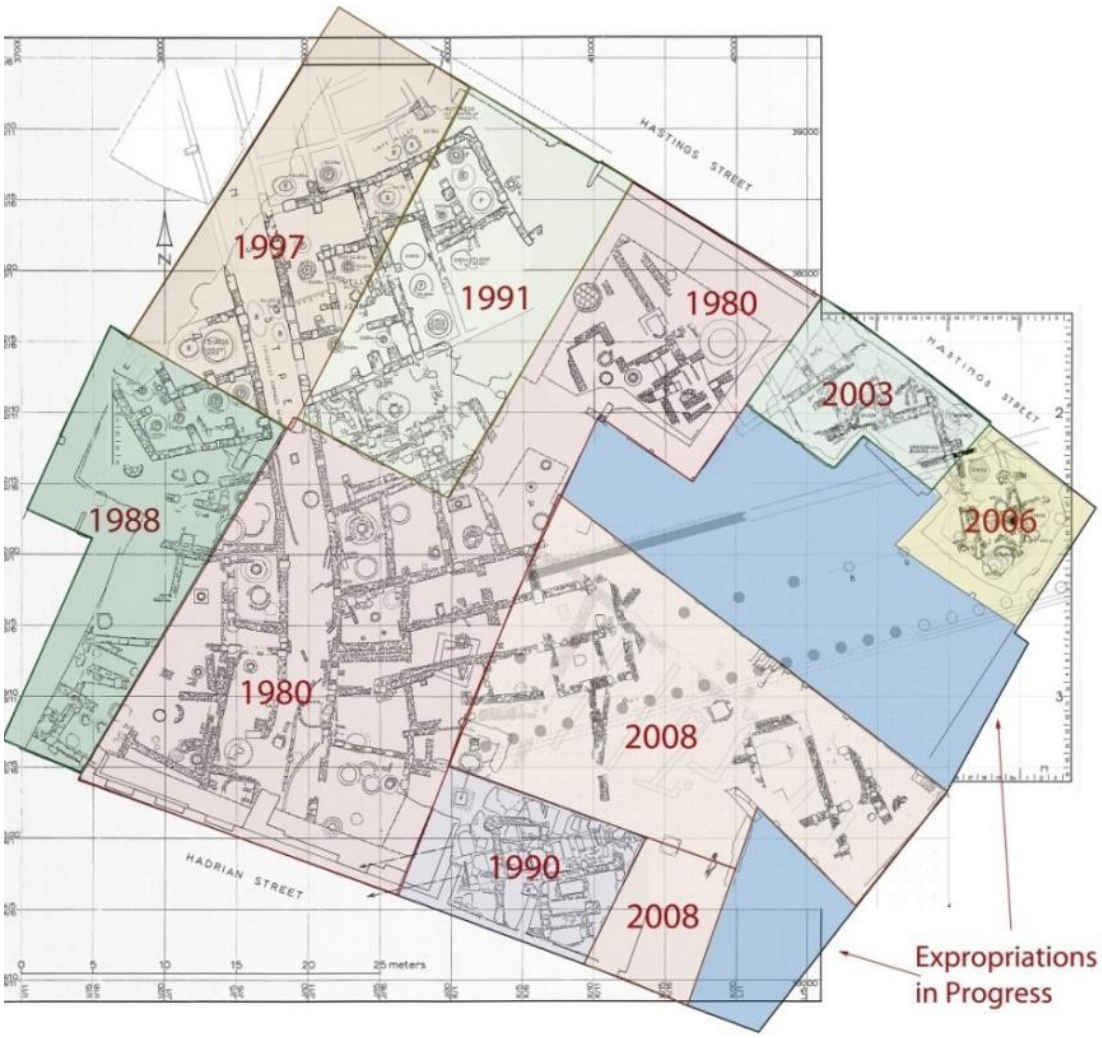

Fig. 2: Map of sections BZ, BE, and BH, Agora, Athens. Labeled by excavation date. Source: American School of Classical Studies Digital Collections

foundation.[27] However, the church did not follow the alignment of the Roman houses below it, instead placing its new ecclesiastical design on the old scraps in no particular fashion. Agios Nikolaos was originally a single aisled church with a semicircular apse (recess at the end of a church for the altar) and bema (raised area used for the altar or podium) on the eastern end (Fig. 3).[28] Later, two aisles were added on either side of the original central plan, and a narthex (enclosed porch between the front doors and area

[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid.

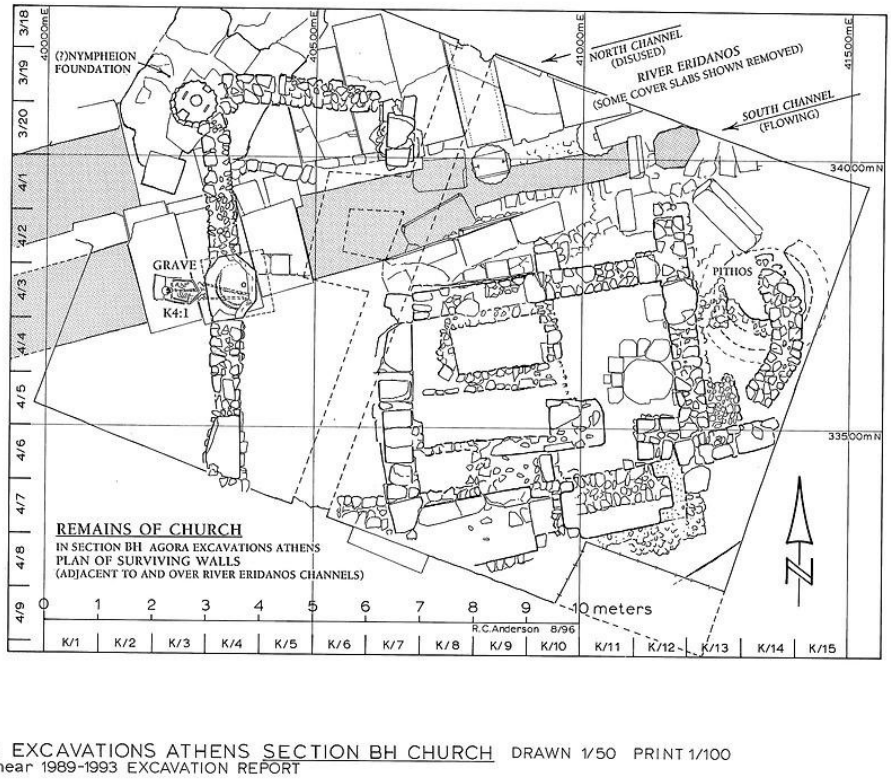

Fig. 3: Agios Nikolaos, Section BH, Agora, Athens. 11th century CE. Source: American School of Classical Studies Digital Collection

for worship) also extended the church.[29] While originally thought to be in the typical Greek cross shape, evidence of piers used to distinguish the outer aisles proves that it could not have been a perfect square, making it instead a rectangle tending towards a square.[30] This echoes other Athenian churches of the time, which were likewise not constructed in perfect squares. In this regard, Athens distinguished herself artistically from other Greek communities at the time, creating a unique form of architecture. All in all, Agios Nikolaos measures 11 meters long and 9.2 meters wide, a small structure like many seen across Athens at this time. Rather than the large, monumental churches of Constantinople or Ravenna, Athenian churches in the Byzantine era were humble

[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid.

and accommodated only a small population, seeking to serve the immediate community rather than be admired by the empire.

Instead of bringing in their own new building materials for Agios Nikolaos, the Athenians who constructed the church used ancient marble blocks from the ruins of nearby Classical buildings.[31] Notably, a Doric column drum and capital were placed at the corner of the narthex and its western wall, indicating that this *spolia* may have come from a temple.[32] The new Athenians, despite their ancestors' fierce attachment to pagan traditions, now had no qualms about using sacred pagan rubble to build up their own Christian churches. Therefore, it seems that Justinian's vision of a unified Christian empire came to fruition, for even on the edge of the realm, pagan loyalties were nowhere to be found. Instead, Christian churches acted as a unifying force, bringing people together both geographically and spiritually.

Following the pattern of community churches surrounded by residential neighborhoods, remains of Byzantine houses were found slightly north of Agios Nikolaos. Situated over former Roman ruins, they demonstrate the tight-knit characteristics of their inhabitants through their shared walls and small spaces. While the Roman buildings were a mix of domestic and commercial use, these Byzantine structures were most likely solely residential, shown through the organization of wells within private courtyards, rather than on the public street.[33] Archaeologists found numerous remains, and it is believed that the settlement stretched much farther than the current excavation limit, creating "a densely crowded urban environment," according to T. Leslie Shear, who originally documented the excavation findings.[34] Not only was there a high volume of buildings, but the homes were tightly packed together, shared walls made it difficult to tell where one dwelling stopped and another began. This was typical for the houses of the Byzantine era, perhaps as a response to the violence of the past; rather than having their own private spaces, people now huddled together for protection.

---

[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Shear, "The Athenian Agora: Excavations of 1989-1993."
[34] Ibid.

It is possible to notice some generalities in homes and neighborhoods across the Byzantine Empire. The courtyard style of house, in which a cluster of rooms surrounded an open courtyard, was popular in the Roman period and persisted through the Byzantine era. In this specific archaeological area of focus, which saw few wealthy residences, most homes had only one to five rooms around the courtyard, with one used as the kitchen and the others as necessary storage space. Other than the shared walls and private wells, specific storage areas are one of the most prevalent features that distinguish buildings as domestic sites. As mentioned previously in the discussion of Agios Nikolaos, it was common for homes to use pithoi to store grain and other food goods. Because they were sunken into the earth, pithoi were usually not disturbed over time, allowing them to often be found intact during archaeological excavation today. While the average ground floor of a home in the Agora was used to store and cook food, in many instances there is also evidence of stairs, which led to a partial platform rather than a full second story, allowing the family to sleep away from their animals (if they were able to afford them). These are common features of Byzantine homes which were likewise found at the Agora.

However, at the Agora, in sections BE, BZ, and BH, we also have the unique opportunity to compare Byzantine and Roman house structures at the same site and using the same foundations. Here, very few differences were found between the two periods of building, demonstrating a conscious choice by the Byzantine Athenians to ease the construction process. How do we specifically know that these Byzantine houses, dated from the ninth to thirteenth century CE, were purposefully constructed to mimic the earlier Roman homes? Most clearly, the walls followed a similar format as the walls of the Roman houses found beneath them. Furthermore, the same wells, pithoi, and bothroi (open pits) used in the Roman period were found to be in use during the Byzantine era. Lastly, we see that the drainage remains in the same pattern with the street, proving that the Byzantine Athenians not only reused Roman domestic architecture, but Roman infrastructure as well.

Focusing on the southwest corner of the excavated area, on

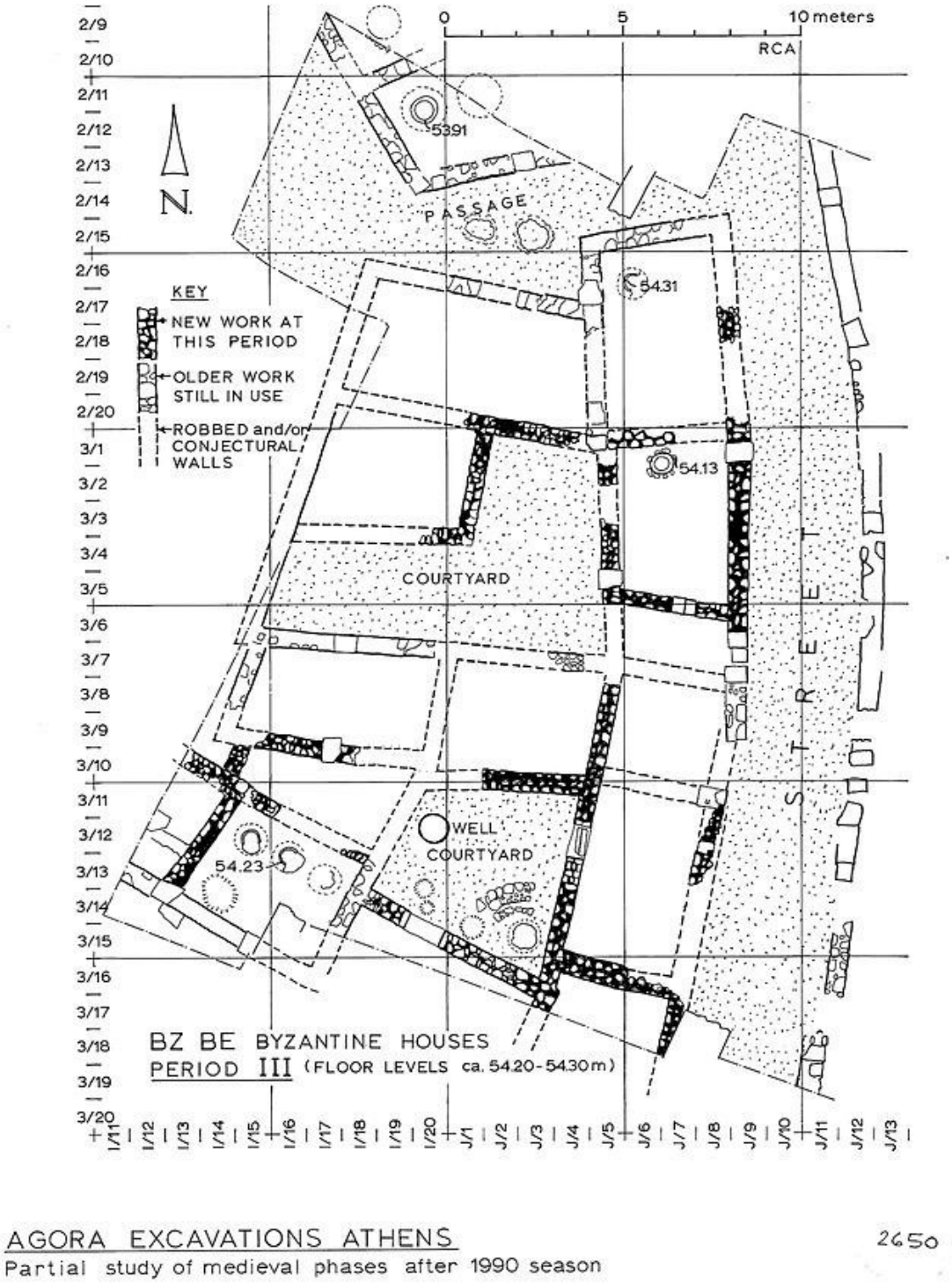

Fig. 4: Houses west of the street, Section BZ, Agora, Athens. 11th century CE. Source: American School of Classical Studies Digital Collection

the western side of the street, two mid-tenth century houses were identified with high certainty, and their construction materials lend great insight into the plight of the Byzantine Athenians (Fig. 4). The walls were built mostly of rubble masonry with blocks from ancient buildings.[35] This differs from the Roman or Classical style of building, where fresh limestone blocks were brought in during the rebuilding efforts, creating a neat and clean facade.[36] Instead, Byzantine builders used whatever materials they could find in the area, showing little concern for aesthetics. It is unlikely that these peasants attempting to rise from the ashes would have had the necessary resources to coordinate the creation of a quarry, transportation of large stones, or import of foreign goods. Therefore, the use of spolia is a strong representation of the humility of the Byzantine Athenians. While their ancestors were wealthy and powerful enough to command such ambitious new projects, the Byzantines were working from a level of mere subsistence or import of foreign goods. Therefore, the use of spolia is a strong representation of the humility of the Byzantine Athenians. While their ancestors were wealthy and powerful enough to command such ambitious new projects, the Byzantines were working from a level of mere subsistence.

In this same tract, two courtyards were identified, one per house, distinguished by their hard-packed clay floors, which contrasted from the softer earthen or clay floors of the surrounding indoor rooms.[37] Perhaps most importantly, in the courtyard of the northern house was a Roman-era well, covered by a large square block found in situ by excavators. T. Leslie Shear notes in extensive detail the evidence of rope marks in the well, created

[35] Ibid.

[36] For example, at the house of Simon the Cobbler, a fifth century BCE home on the outskirts of the Agora, there are two building periods identified in the archaeological record – before and after Persian attacks destroyed much of the city. In the post-invasion period, the rebuilders followed the same lines of Simon's earlier house, constructing a near-identical structure on the foundation. However, unlike the lack of regard for visual beauty by their Byzantine descendants, the fifth century Athenians used neatly cut, newly imported limestone blocks for the house's walls, creating a clean and pleasing aesthetic. (See: Dorothy Burr Thompson, "The House of Simon the Shoemaker," *Archaeology* 13 (1960): 235.)

[37] Shear, "The Athenian Agora: Excavations of 1989-1993."

from centuries of drawing water.[38] Furthermore, Shear makes a strong argument that this well is the reason the Byzantine Athenians chose this specific house for their own occupation in the resettlement of the Agora.[39] If a well was inside a house's confines, residents would not need to venture out to a public well. The presence of a steady, reliable water supply would have been invaluable to those searching for a new home, especially to those who had little resources to spend on building a new well. All in all, the combination of an existing plan and foundation, available rubble with which to build, and an interior well made this house a desirable location to move into and begin a new life.

Due to the close proximity of the two houses, it is possible that in the Roman period it was one house, but when the Byzantines moved in they divided it into two, a sign of their less prosperous lives. The Byzantine Athenians did not shy away from a site that their ancestors used, and they did not shun existing three-hundred-year-old infrastructure as too ancient or degraded to be of use. Rather, they embraced it, as it made their lives in a new neighborhood easier. The new residents were not picky or exclusive, and it is likely that they could not afford to be. In settling into a new neighborhood, they likely wanted the transition to be as simple as possible. They were also not focused on creating a new identity in this new period of settlement. There was no new decoration or innovation found within the homes, showing that the tenth century tenants essentially picked up where their ancestors left off, for better or worse.

Across the street lies another group of houses that were easily identifiable as simple two-roomed structures. A large principal room was found to be attached to a courtyard, with the indoor room used mainly for storage, as evidenced by the three large pithoi which lay beneath the ground, taking up a majority of the floor and bulging into one another.[40] The courtyard, meanwhile, was distinguished by its cobbled pebble floor.[41] The rooms adjoined by two openings too wide for doors, most likely

[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid.

making them arches.[42] Due to this combination of large pithoi and archways, the house would have mainly stored grain, picked from fields and transported in hefty containers through the arches, where their contents were deposited into the ground storage facilities. Therefore, this lends insight into the life and work of the people who lived in this house, as they were self-dependent for food and relied on daily toiling to survive. They most likely could not afford to buy statues or other decorative elements, unlike many of their ancestors who lived lavishly in the Agora.[43] The living quarters were probably on a second story as there is an indication of a foundation for a stairway in the southeast side of the courtyard.[44] This was common for Greek houses throughout history, showing that the builders of this house chose to follow the customs of their ancestors. This was done quite literally, as the home's walls follow the lines of their Roman-era predecessors.

Unlike the house previously examined on the western side of the street, which had its own private well in the courtyard, this house relied on a public well for its water, demonstrating the communal nature of the settlement. The well was known to be for public use based on the ground where it sat, which was a hard-packed gravel typically used for roads and not in domestic contexts.[45] The well was filled with broken pottery (exclusively of the type used to draw water), pieces of housing material, and coins dating from the late tenth century through the late eleventh century, making the well's use contemporaneous with the houses nearby. Indeed, like the neighborhood's houses, the well was also not an original Byzantine creation. Dated to origin in the third century CE, the Byzantines were fortunate to recycle this well

[42] Ibid.

[43] One of the most studied houses from the ancient Agora is the Omega House, an opulent house which most likely doubled as a school. It featured extensive decoration throughout its sixteen rooms and two courtyards, as well as a peristyle of twelve marble columns. Its sculptural program included a variety of pagan scenes and figures, and the home also contained a large library. This type of collection is one that could only have been amassed by a wealthy collector who was most likely part of Athens' thriving intellectual elite. It is unmatched in Byzantine Athens. (See: John Camp, The Athenian Agora: Excavations in the Heart of Classical Athens, (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd, 1986), 208.)

[44] Shear, "The Athenian Agora: Excavations of 1989-1993."

[45] Ibid.

from the previous tenants rather than dig their own, once again showing the repetitive cycle of this site and the willingness of the Byzantine Athenians to use their existing surroundings for a new life. Convenience and ease, rather than innovation, were of paramount importance.

Conclusion

> Such I hear were your founders of old: fond of learning, wise, forgiving, hospitable, humane, understanding, lovers of honor, generous, assistants to persuasion, servants of the word. If your race has been fastened to this golden chain, if the stream of succession is drawn from that source unsullied, if you were born not unworthy shoots of that stock, if you boast to be and be called native citizens of the best country, the coming time shall make known to me most clearly, and I shall quickly know the Attic blood and Athenian spirit.
>
> *- Bishop Michael Choniates, Inaugural Address at Athens, 1182 CE*[46]

The Athenians had, and still hold today, an epic legacy. Their ancestors were the founders of democracy, architects of some of the most monumental structures the world has ever seen, and brilliant scholars, especially in philosophy. They were revered by the Romans, respected by their neighbors, and romanticized in literature throughout the ancient period. Yet somehow, scholars mark the city's end, its death, its disappearance from our historical consciousness as coinciding with the fall of the Roman Empire. In 1182 CE, at age fifty, Michael Choniates was begrudgingly sent to Athens to be its archbishop, a dreaded assignment for the clergy

[46] Byron David MacDougall, "Michael Choniates at the Christian Parthenon and the Bendideia Festival of Republic 1," *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies,* 55 (2015), 273–299.

living a comfortable existence in Constantinople.[47] The view of Athens from the citizens of Constantinople was a city in ruins, once full of glory, the epitome of antiquity's accomplishments, but now broken, "redeemed only by its [Christian] faith, which the ancients had not known."[48] Choniates was inspired and awed by the city's history, fully aware that the current Byzantine Empire "paled in crucial ways in comparison to the ancient Greeks."[49] He had a similar view to many scholars today that Athens' only significance was in the ancient period. Yet he also believed in the potential of the city to rise, to endure and persist, to show the world that greatness in Athens was possible once again.

Today we can reflect on the history of Athens, and while the city in the Byzantine era did not rise in global status to its glory of the Classical period, it was certainly not dead. It had persistent people who lived, worshiped, and rebuilt, pushing through ruins like grass in the cracks of a sidewalk to grow a settlement of their own. Therefore, the pre-Ottoman history of Athens should not fade into darkness at the fall of Rome. The Byzantine Athenians, although neither highly innovative nor powerful, must be regarded for their ability to stand after so many setbacks. Their houses show this, for although they were humble and relied heavily on their Roman predecessors, they were present. Like the Savior they now worshiped in their new Christian faith, the Athenians too experienced a death and resurrection. If Athens had truly ceased to exist in the fifth century, there should be only stillness in the periods after, and certainly not the neighborhoods of the Byzantines or even the massive metropolis that exists today. Instead, there is not silence but life, worship, and, in that single word which has permeated Athens' existence, persistence—a persistence that has carried the Athenians to their place in the world today.

[47] Stephanos Efthymiadis, "Michael Choniates' Inaugural Address at Athens: Enkomion of a City and a Two-fold Spiritual Ascent," *Les Dossiers Byzantins*, 12 (2011), 63.

[48] Kaldellis, *The Christian Parthenon*, 145.

[49] Ibid.

References:

Barnes, Timothy. *Constantine and Eusebius*. (Harvard University Press, 1981).

Bowder, Diana. *The Age of Constantine and Julian*. (London: Elek, 1978).

Camp, John, *The Athenian Agora: Excavations in the Heart of Classical Athens*. (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd, 1986)

"Constantinople." *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

Efthymiadis, Stephanos. "Michael Choniates' Inaugural Address at Athens: Enkomion of a City and a Two-fold Spiritual Ascent." *Les Dossiers Byzantins*, 12 (2011): 63-80.

Frantz, Alison. *The Athenian Agora XXIV: Late Antiquity: A.D. 267-700*. (American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 1988).

Frantz, Alison. T*he Church of the Holy Apostles: Volume 20 of the Athenian Agora*. (American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 1971).

Frantz, Alison. *The Middle Ages in the Athenian Agora: Issue 7, Part 1*. (American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 1961).

Kaldellis, Anthony. *The Christian Parthenon*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

Kazanaki-Lappa, Maria. "Medieval Athens," in *The Economic History of Byzantium*, ed. Angeliki Laiou (Dumbarton Oaks, 2007).

MacDougall, Byron David. "Michael Choniates at the Christian

Parthenon and the Bendideia Festival of Republic 1." *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies*, 55 (2015), 273–299.

Shear, T. Leslie. "The Athenian Agora: Excavations of 1989-1993." *Hesperia: The Journal of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens* 66, no. 4 (1997): 495-548. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/148466.

The American School of Classical Studies at Athens. "The Athenian Agora: Overview." Accessed March 18, 2017, http://www.agathe.gr/overview/.

Thompson, Dorothy Burr. "The House of Simon the Shoemaker." *Archaeology* 13, no. 4 (1960): 234-40. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/41663802.

Acknowledgements: My deepest thanks to Professor Sharon Gerstel for her constant support, advice, and confidence as my thesis adviser; Kristina Borrman for always going above and beyond the call of duty as a graduate student; and the UCLA Undergraduate Research Center - specifically Kelly Kistner and Brittany Paris – for their positive guidance, helpful resources, and supreme dedication to their students.