

Athena Chalinitis at Ancient Corinth

Pausanias' description of ancient Corinth as he walked through the Forum in the 160's A.D. has influenced generations of archaeologists who employed his account to identify monuments as they were uncovered, and who dug expressly to find lost installations that he mentioned. In 1925 and 1926 a long, narrow trench, the so-called Athena trench, was excavated just east of the Odeion and Theater to locate a sanctuary of Athena Chalinitis, Athena the Bridler, that Pausanias had located near the Fountain of Glauke and the tomb of Medea's children, on the western side of the Forum. At the time of this investigation, Pausanias' route toward Sicyon was thought to have taken him east of the Odeion and Theatre. By the second year of digging, the trench was some thirty meters long, extending north between the Odeion and the Theater, in the area where the tomb and the Athena shrine were thought to be located. The excavator identified walls and fragments of pottery and figurines as the site of the Athena sanctuary. But more recent investigations of the road east of the theater, coupled with a reevaluation of Pausanias' route to Sicyon, suggest that the traveler actually walked south of the Odeion before turning north toward the Sicyon gate, and that the Athena shrine should be located somewhere south of the Odeion. Oscar Broneer, who dug this building in the 1920's, included among the sculptural finds a large, fragmentary Roman statue of Athena wearing a bandolier style aegis. A glance at the excavation notebook reveals that it actually was discovered some fifteen meters south of the Odeion, in association with well built Roman walls. The findspot of this Athena statue could in fact be a clue to the whereabouts of the goddess' Chalinitis precinct, which we now expect to have been located south or southwest of the Odeion.

Oscar Broneer also attributed to the Odeion quantities of architectural sculpture fragments found in the so-called Athena Trench just east of the Odeion. This long narrow trench was excavated in 1925 and 1926 in order to find a sanctuary of Athena Chalinitis, Athena of the Bridle, that Pausanias had located near the tomb of Medea's children. At the time of this investigation, Pausanias' route toward Sicyon was thought to have been east of the Odeion and Theatre. By the second year of digging, the trench was some thirty meters long, extending north between the Odeion and the Theater, in the area where the tomb and the Athena shrine were thought to be located. The excavator identified some walls and fragments of pottery and figurines as the site of the Athena sanctuary. But Charles Williams' more recent investigations of the road east of the theater, coupled with a reevaluation of Pausanias' route to Sicyon, suggest that the traveler actually walked south of the Odeion before turning north toward the Sicyon gate. I won't consider here this still problematic issue, and will just tentatively propose that the findspot of this Athena statue, south of the Odeion, attributed by Broneer to the building itself, could in fact be a clue to the whereabouts of the Athena Chalinitis precinct, which we now expect to have been located south or west of the Odeion.