

NEMEA EXCAVATIONS

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY
ΑΡΧΑΙΑ ΝΕΜΕΑ : ΚΟΡΙΝΘΙΑΣ : GREECE 205 00



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Mr. Alexander Hahalis
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Καπανδρίτι Αττικής 19014

Dear Mr. Hahalis.

Your request for my opinion regarding the Altar of the Twelve Gods and the remaining antiquities of the Ancient Agora of Athens takes me back 40 years. In 1971 I was a part of the excavating staff of the Agora, working on the north side of the Piraeus railroad. The previous year we had discovered the Royal Stoa and, in front of it, the "lithos" on which, as Aristotle tells us (*Ath. Pol.* 55.5), the Archons of Athens stood to swear their oath of office, and litigants stood to swear the truth of their testimony. Since we know that Sokrates went to the Royal Stoa for the preliminary hearing of his trial (Plato, *Euthyphro* 2a and *Theaetetus* 210d), the worn surface of the stone we had discovered was caused, in some small part, by the feet of that most famous of Athenians.

What excitement! What a thrill! I had been a part of a major contribution to the ancient topography of Athens, and one of the first to see what was surely destined to become a major attraction to students and tourists from around the world. Now there passed by the excavations a young man, a civil engineer from (if I remember correctly) the Ministry of Culture who was assigned the problem of how those visitors could see the Royal Stoa, the "lithos", and all our other discoveries. The train cut them off and made them virtually inaccessible.

This young man had decided that the only solution, given the need of modern Athenians to travel on the train, was to bury it, to dig a tunnel beneath the Agora. I asked if that would not be expensive, and he responded that it would be very expensive. He reminded me, however, that by unifying the whole of the Agora, people would flock to Greece to see "Sokrates' footprints". And he also pointed out to me that no visitor had seen, or could see, the Altar of the Twelve Gods unless the train was removed.

He was, of course, correct, but he did not need to remind me about the Altar. In my crew of workmen was an old-timer named Miltiades who had come to Athens as a young man and a refugee from The City. (He was also an original member of AEK, but that is another story.) Miltiades would tell the story of digging between the tracks in between the passings of the train. He recounted

the need to be careful of the "hot" rail, but how by putting the broad blade of his pickaxe on it, he could light his cigarettes on the opposite pointed pick end. Of course, his work revealed – to the extent possible – the architectural details of the Altar and its enclosure.

I cannot remember the name of the young engineer, and I never saw the study that he was preparing, but today it is all too obvious that the study was never put into effect. I have often wondered how many people would have come to Greece in order to visit the Twelve Gods and the Royal Stoa and the "lithos" during the past 40 years. But then I wonder if Greece will ever understand the value – the economic value – of its antiquities.

During those 40 years I turned to Nemea, and am still here. By importing more than \$11,000,000 I was able to create an archaeological park, build a museum, uncover the stadium where the Nemean Games took place, and begin the reconstruction of the Temple of Nemean Zeus. In the summer of 1973 there was one single visitor to Nemea. Last year there were more than 45,000 and this year we are on track to have even more. There are 16 local families living directly from the site, and stores which benefit in turn. It required investment. Does the Altar of the Twelve Gods deserve less?

Respectfully,



Stephen G. Miler
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University of California
Director Emeritus,
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