



# Ostraka from the Athenian Agora

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## Background

The ostraka uncovered during excavations in the Athenian Agora were published by Mabel Lang in 1990 in volume XXV of the *Athenian Agora* series. Excavations since then have uncovered more than 275 additional sherds that were used as ballots in votes of ostracism. The new ostraka date largely from the 480s, with a few later finds. Individual pieces share many features with previously published ostraka, and taken together they help refine modern understanding of both ostracism and the history of writing in fifth-century Athens.

## Archaeological Context

The new ostraka emanate largely from an area north of the ancient marketplace and outside the bounds of the Agora proper, where excavations have been conducted since 1980. Individual ostraka turned up throughout this zone, but the largest number were found immediately north of the west end of the Stoa Poikile in close proximity to the Classical Commercial Building (Fig. 1). That area was heavily occupied in Hellenistic, Roman, and Byzantine times, and later activity displaced many ostraka from their original fifth-century contexts. The dismantling of post-classical walls revealed some sherds, while others were found in fills along with material of post-classical date. Two deposits, however, stand out, since they appear to preserve groups of ostraka in their original, early fifth-century contexts.

One ostraka deposit, K 2:7, was discovered in the late 1990s immediately east of room 2 of the Classical Commercial Building, which was constructed in the mid-fifth century. It included more than 150 ostraka. The unincised pottery of the deposit dates from the decades before 480, and the ostraka themselves all come from shapes—lekanai, transport amphorai, and some fine-glazed wares—typical of the late Archaic period. A second deposit, J 1-2:1, came to light in 2010 about 15 meters to the northwest of K 2:7 in an area later occupied by rooms 5 and 6 of the Classical Commercial Building. No fewer than 50 ostraka are represented. They too come from vessels of the late Archaic period, as does their context pottery. These features, together with the names of candidates, help date both deposits to the 480s BC.

## Candidates and Texts

The vast majority of the new ostraka from the Agora target individuals politically active and already known as candidates for ostracism in the early decades of the fifth century. They are (numbers are tentative):

Candidate	Number
Acharnion	1
Aristeides Charopos	1
Aristeides Lysimachou	6
Eukrates Eudramonos	1
Habron Patrokleos	7
Hipparchos Charmou	1
Hippokrates Alkmeonidou	13
Kallixenos Aristonymou	5
Kydrokles Kriothen	1
Limos	1
Nikias	1
Themistokles Neokleous	65
Xanthippos	95
Fragmentary/Uncertain	79
Total	277

Xanthippos is by far the most popular candidate, appearing on more than one-third of the new ostraka. Second to him is Themistokles, named on roughly one quarter. Other intended victims include Aristeides son of Lysimachos, Hippokrates son of Alkmeonides, Kallixenos son of Aristonymos, and Habron son of Patrokles. The same names appear together in other early groups of ostraka from the Agora and reinforce the dating of most of the new pieces to the 480s. The two ostraka for Eukrates and Nikias, which belong in the second half of the fifth century, were excavated apart from others.

The ostraka typically identify individuals by name plus either a patronymic or demotic. The patronymic predominates, especially on sherds for Xanthippos, where it outnumbers the demotic by more than two to one. The patronymic also occurs more frequently on ostraka for Aristeides, Hippokrates, Kallixenos, and Habron, although not exclusively: a small number of voters preferred to identify each candidate with the demotic. Only on ostraka for Themistokles does the demotic appear in slightly larger numbers, a phenomenon familiar from previous finds. Ballots for Themistokles are almost equally split in their use of either patronymic or demotic.

Unusual names also appear. Acharnion, previously known from three ostraka from the Agora, is now present on a fourth (Fig. 9). Another ostrakon (Fig. 8) targets Aristeides son of Charops (ΑΡΙΣΤΕΙΔΕΣ ΧΑΡΟΠΙΟΣ), a name tentatively suggested for a fragmentary ostrakon found in the 1930s (*Agora* XXV, no. 19). The word χαροπός can serve as an adjective, and conceivably it is so used here for the better-attested Aristeides son of Lysimachos. But a Charops is named as "kalos" on a red-figure vase of the late sixth century, and there are no obstacles to taking the form here as a genitive of the patronymic.

More striking is another ostrakon cast against ΤΟΝ ΛΙΜΟΝ, "Hunger":



Epithets of this sort are rare on Agora ostraka, but at least six ballots for Limos were found in the Kerameikos in the 1960s. What these voters had in mind when they cast their ballots for "Hunger" is uncertain, but the discovery of an ostrakon for Limos among the new Agora ostraka is significant. Those from the Kerameikos are dated to the late 470s, while the context of the single Agora example falls firmly in the 480s. The idea of banishing "Hunger," whether metaphorically or in reference to a real person, was not isolated to a particular year or decade.

## Letter Forms and Spellings

Letter forms on the new Agora ostraka are characteristic of the Attic alphabet of the early fifth century. Three-barred sigma is most common, as are tailless rhos and thetas with upright crosses. Phi typically displays a single upright stroke. The sign H always designates a rough breathing, and never eta, but omega occurs once (incised upside down), and a few sherds show the Ionic forms of lambda and gamma.

Spellings also vary. Themistokles is often spelled Themistokles (ΘΕΜΙΣΘΟΚΛΕΣ). The initial rho of Ariphron is often doubled in the the patronymic of Xanthippos (ΑΡΡΙΦΡΟΝΟΣ), but the demotic of Themistokles, Phrearrios, usually has only a single rho in its medial syllable (ΦΡΕΑΡΙΟΣ). Xi is usually written as chi-sigma, although both sigma and double-sigma do occur. Metathesis and omissions are not uncommon, but some voters took care to correct mistakes (see Fig. 6)

## Future Work

Study of the Agora ostraka is ongoing, and those found in deposit K 2:7 will appear in the fall 2017 issue of *Hesperia*. Future work will be devoted to additional unpublished ostraka, and to reexamination of older examples from the Agora in light of more recent scholarship. Application of digital methods, including Reflectance Transformation Imaging (RTI), to sherds with worn and battered surfaces is also planned, with the goal of clarifying or confirming uncertain readings. Equally important, the contexts in which older ostraka were unearthed require restudy, as does the relationship between the vessels used as ballots and the names incised on them.

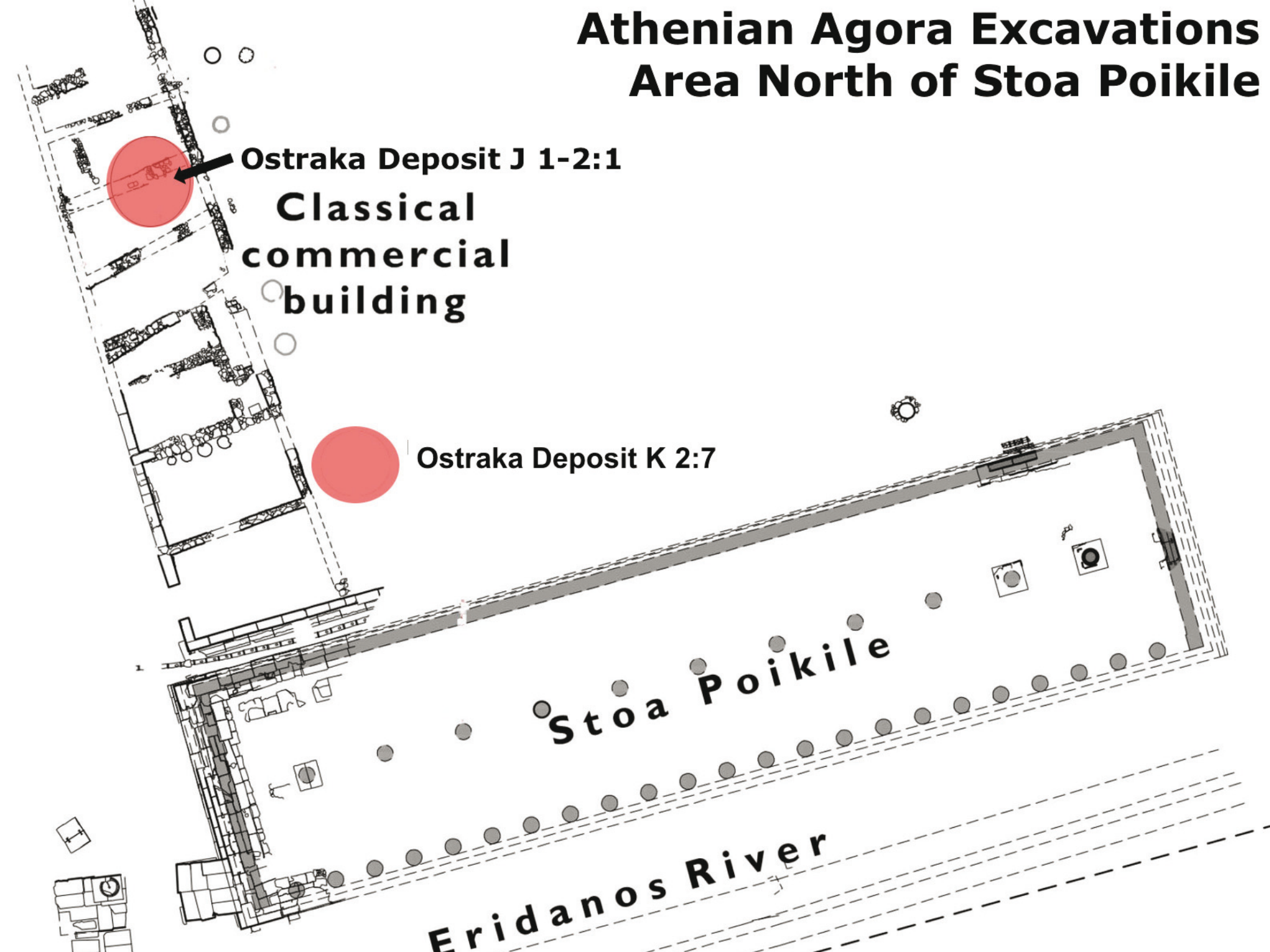


Fig. 1. Location of Ostraka Deposits K 2:7 and J 1-2:1  
Courtesy of Athenian Agora Excavations, American School of Classical Studies at Athens



Fig. 2. Ostrakon of Xanthippos  
Courtesy of Agora Excavations

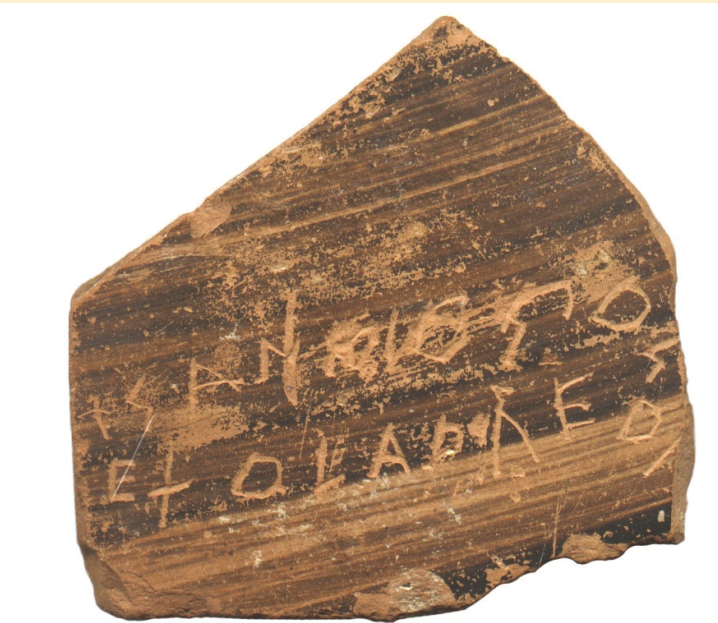


Fig. 3. Ostrakon of Xanthippos  
Courtesy of Agora Excavations



Fig. 4. Ostraka of Themistokles  
Courtesy of Agora Excavations



Fig. 5. Ostrakon of Hippokrates Alkmeonidou  
Courtesy of Agora Excavations



Fig. 6. Ostrakon of Aristeides Lysimachou  
Courtesy of Agora Excavations



Fig. 7. Ostrakon of Habron  
Courtesy of Agora Excavations



Fig. 8. Ostrakon of Aristeides Charopos  
Courtesy of Agora Excavations

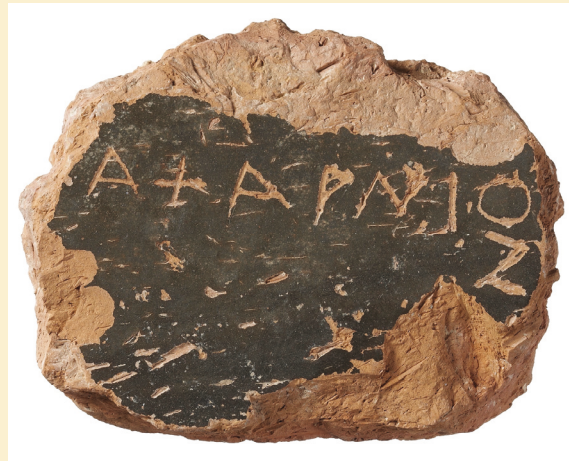


Fig. 9. Ostrakon of Acharnion  
Agora Excavations

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