GUY SANDERS ON THE EXCAVATIONS AT CORINTH

A few days ago I took Guy Sanders, Director of excavations in Corinth, to task about a recently reported story of enormous sarcophagi at Corinth, complaining that there was so much more to the early city of Corinth than this supposed and amazing technological first [Link]

He posted a comment explaining that, as we might have guessed, the story was the result of the (Greek) press picking up on a superlative (the biggest stone sarcophagi …).

I thanked him for this and he amplified with a fascinating glimpse of what new is actually happening in the excavations of Corinth:

What we are actually doing at Corinth is trying to turn a curve by implementing methodologies now standard in non-classical lands. We have been introducing an electronic archive for current and future finds in the hope that we can find the funds to retro-convert. We have started transcribing old notebooks into electronic form with the idea that several can be posted on the web with illustrative material. We have a growing digital plan of the village and the entire Corinthia incorporating topographic maps, air photos, GIS data and excavation plans. We have replaced baulk-debris with open-area, single-context excavation with excellent results that are helping us to identify gaps

in our knowledge and to address old assertions and assumptions. I hope this work will make for a mine of potential new work on old Corinthian material. For the first time we have excavated methodically a section of the village c. 1830 to 1858 overlying 18th century pits. We have an Ottoman cemetery c. 1600-1660 with mixed Moslem and Christian burial styles and, I believe, Catholic vs Orthodox burials as well. The pathologies are interesting. There is a disproportion between females (older) and males (younger) and several individuals buried after rigor mortis had set in – a couple of these individuals were executed, one by hanging and one using an iron spike in the neck. This is a period when the village is known to be small and we seem to have a very representative sample of the total population. We have Late Antique phases and remote sensing data that have caused us to redraft the history and archaeology of Corinth c. 400 to 700; a much smaller city enceinte to east of the ancient city showing that burials in Forum were outside the city wall, new much later pottery chronologies that show no barbarian and earthquake demise, much slower and later introduction of Xtianity with very late expression of faith in the form of monumental buildings and burials

and extension of material remains, including imports, into the “dark age”. We also have Hellenistic deposits that show we have to reconsider everything written to date on Hellenistic Corinth. Although the evidence is patchy, maintenance of the Geometric graves seems to have continued well into the 4th century when attitudes changed and perhaps the city centralized the annual mnemosia rites. The pattern emerging is that the whole huge area in and around the later forum was burial related memorial liturgy until c. 300 BC. Similarly it seems that from the Demeter sanctuary down to Hadji Mustapha was an enormous field of dining rooms, far more extensive than previously thought. This invites the questions if the dining area was for D and K alone or for other Hellenic deities as well and who built and maintained the dining rooms. With the intramural cemeteries, I get the impression that much of the walled city was devoted to very extensive areas of special use and wonder where on earth the population actually lived.

Corinth – remains of the 1940s excavations