

PAVEMENT DESIGNS AND GAME BOARDS FROM PUBLIC SPACES OF ANCIENT ATHENS: A REVIEW ACROSS THE BOARD

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Abstract. The paper aims to offer significant new additions to the record of pavements designs known from archaeological contexts in the ancient Mediterranean, giving an overview of the patterns carved on marble steps and floors in public spaces of ancient Athens. Given the problematic interpretation of carved outlines in ancient public spaces, the contribution focuses on features and locations of these patterns in the attempt to provide identification of actual game boards, contextualize them and propose their plausible chronological setting. The need to more fully understand the social and cultural dimension of play in ancient societies is now crucial to archaeological research; this paper is also offered as a contribution to approaching that understanding.

Graffiti, carved pavement designs, gameboards, Athens, Agora, public space

Περίληψη. Αυτό το άρθρο συνοψίζοντας μοτίβα εγχάρακτα πάνω σε μαρμάρινα σκαλοπάτια και δάπεδα σε δημόσιους χώρους της αρχαίας Αθήνας, σκοπεύει να προσφέρει νέες, σημαντικές προσθήκες στο σύνολο των σχεδίων πάνω σε λιθόστρωτα που γνωρίζουμε από αρχαιολογικές θέσεις στην αρχαία Μεσόγειο. Δεδομένης της προβληματικής ερμηνείας των εγχάρακτων αυτών σκαριφημάτων σε αρχαίους δημόσιους χώρους, το άρθρο εστιάζει στα χαρακτηριστικά και

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την θέση τους επιχειρώντας την ταυτοποίησή τους με πραγματικά επιτραπέζια παιχνίδια, την ένταξή τους στο αρχαιολογικό τους πλαίσιο και την πρόταση μιας εύλογης χρονολογικής τοποθέτησης. Η ανάγκη πληρέστερης κατανόησης της κοινωνικής και πολιτιστικής διάστασης του παιχνιδιού στις αρχαίες κοινωνίες αποτελεί πλέον κομβικό σημείο στην αρχαιολογική έρευνα. Στην προσέγγιση αυτής της κατανόησης συμβάλλει και το παρόν άρθρο.

Εγχάρακτες επιγραφές, σχέδια εγχάρακτα σε λιθόστρωτα, επιτραπέζια παιχνίδια, Αθήνα, Αγορά, δημόσιοι χώροι

Riassunto. Il contributo si propone di integrare il *corpus* dei graffiti pavimentali noti da contesti archeologici nel Mediterraneo antico, fornendo una rassegna dei motivi graffiti su gradini e lastricati marmorei individuati in spazi pubblici dell'Atene antica. Alla luce della problematica interpretazione dei motivi incisi sui piani di calpestio negli spazi pubblici di numerose città del mondo antico, lo studio si concentra sulle caratteristiche e le posizioni di questi schemi, nel tentativo di identificare le tavole da gioco vere e proprie, contestualizzarle e proporre un plausibile inquadramento cronologico. La necessità di comprendere più a fondo la dimensione sociale e culturale del gioco nelle società antiche è oggi cruciale per la ricerca archeologica; questo articolo si offre anche come contributo per avvicinarsi a tale comprensione.

Graffiti, tavolieri incisi, tavole da gioco pavimentali, Atene, Agorà, spazi pubblici

“It is easy to read if you know what it says.”

Eugene Vanderpool¹

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¹ Quoted by LANG 1976, V.

Introduction

Documenting informal life experiences and human creativity within ancient cities, graffiti² in ancient public spaces are being valued as evidence of cultural significance and are gaining increasing attention in archaeological studies.³ Recent work has made important progress in investigating engraved writings, marks and geometrical patterns recorded from all over the ancient Mediterranean. Yet, contextualizing these items, chronologically and culturally, is a critical issue and their interpretation is controversial.

A common assumption in many of the studies dealing with this evidence is that pavement designs especially are to be explained as playing boards and attributed to Classical antiquity, given that the carvings tend to be linked to the period of construction of the buildings; yet, the scarce and contradictory evidence which came to us concerning rules of ancient Greek and Roman games –⁴ as well as the poor preservation of associated finds which could elucidate their function – has made the interpretation of these patterns very challenging;⁵ nonetheless, we currently attain the necessary background in this field to argue that some of these reconstructions and chronological attributions should be revised.⁶

To address this issue, the paper provides a systematic recording of the *corpus* of pavement designs detected on floors, steps and stylobates in some of the key nodes within the urban web of ancient Athens, namely the ancient

² There is no consensus on the definition of the term “graffiti”; cf. ROUECHÉ 2014, 139; LOHMANN 2020, 46. In this work, I refer to the description proposed in FORSTER – VETTESE-FORSTER – BORLAND 2012 as “inscribed or surface applied media, forming writing or illustration, produced without expressed or implied permission”.

³ See, for instance, LANGNER 2001; BAIRD – TAYLOR 2011; KEEGAN 2014; PIEROBON BENOIT 2018. These so called “minor inscriptions” constitute now an important strand of investigation in epigraphic research for reconstructing people’s daily lives; cf. *Ductus – Association International pour l’étude des inscriptions mineures* <https://www.unil.ch/ductus/fr/home.html>. Graffiti in archaeological contexts have been also subject of a recent educational program by the Greek Ministry of Culture; Θ-INK. Το γκράφιτι ως ιστορική μαρτυρία και ως φθορά στους αρχαιολογικούς χώρους της ΕΦΑ Αθηνών: Συντήρηση και εκπαιδευτικά προγράμματα: ΠΑΠΙΔΑ – ΔΑΣΚΑΛΑΚΗΣ – ΜΥΛΩΝΑ – ΠΑΥΛΟΥ – ΚΑΤΕΒΑΣ 2016.

⁴ On this issue, see DASEN 2018; DASEN 2020, 305; SCHÄDLER 2013a; SCHÄDLER 2019; SCHÄDLER 2021 with previous bibliography.

⁵ As BINSBERGEN 1997, 23, warned: “any artefact now risks to be interpreted in ludic terms”.

⁶ On this topic, see the remarks expressed in ROUECHÉ 2007, 100-105; SCHÄDLER 2021, 79-97.

and Roman Agora and the monumental complex of so called Hadrian’s Library (Fig. 1);⁷ this survey – based on an accurate documentation of the patterns and their exact locations –⁸ is followed by an overview of the existing literature concerning these drawings, in the attempt to gain a better understanding of this kind of evidence.

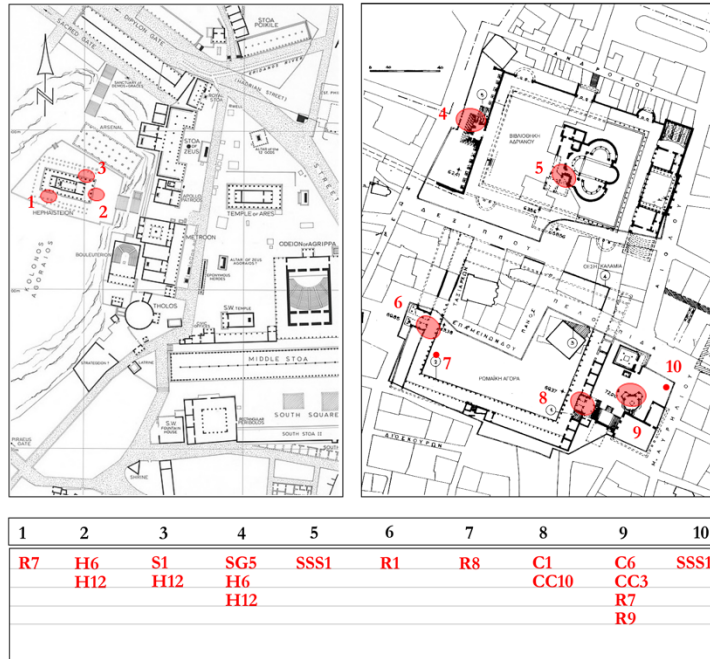


Figure 1: Distribution of the studied pavement designs (elaboration by the Author)

⁷ A catalogue of graffiti and dipinti discovered in the ancient Agorà is provided in LANG 1976; an analysis of funerary graffiti from the Hephaisteion, is offered by MCCABE 2006; evidence for board games located on the three-steps base of the Horologion is published in SCHÄDLER 1995. Evidence from the other contexts is still unpublished.

⁸ For the urgency of a systematic survey of pavement markings based on a common typology providing an accurate and consistent reference *corpus*, see ROUECHÉ 2014, 140. See also COULTON 1915, 61-62. Despite the lack of an agreed typology, literature on pavement markings is vast; I would just mention the survey of boards engraved in the Roman West undertaken in the framework of the ERC Locus Ludi Project (<https://elearning.unifr.ch/ludus/>); for the corpus collected in Roman Britain, see COURTS – PENN 2021; for a survey of Egyptian board games, see CRIST *et alii* 2016; for evidence from Northern Greece and Attica, see IGNATIADOU 2019 and TAYLOR 2011 respectively.

1. The patterns

1.1 *Circles*

Four *Circles* (**C**)⁹ have been detected in the area of the Roman Agora founded between 19-11 BC;¹⁰ they are precisely located at the eastern boundary of the market, on the steps of the eastern Propylon and on the three steps-base of the Horologion or Tower of the Winds, the octagonal tower erected in the middle 2nd century BC.¹¹ Although at times slightly carved or not well preserved, their structure can be defined with detail, given the resemblance with other known specimens. They consist, in the most basic version, in an outer line of variable diameter (range 25 to 40 cm); in more elaborate versions, the inner space can be variously structured (Fig. 2).

- A *single circle* (**C1**) is located on the grey marble slabs of the pavement of the eastern Ionic tetrastyle that opens onto the porticoed agora. It is placed immediately N of the staircase ascended from the propylon to the Agoranomeion, and towards the southern edge of the slab. It consists in a circle (diam. 25 cm) bordered by a single line (Fig. 2a).
- A design consisting in a *circle with 8 spokes* (**C4**) is located on the higher step of the NW Corinthian porch of the tower; it is situated close to the entrance of the tower and approximately in line with it. The drawing includes a circle (diam. about 30 cm) crossed by 4 radial lines (Fig. 2b).
- A *circle with 8 spokes and 8 arcs* (**C6**) is located on the base of the Horologion; it is carved on the higher step of the NE Corinthian porch, adjacent and approximately on axis with the entrance. It consists in a circle (diam. 40 cm) crossed by 4 radial lines so to produce a “wheel pattern”; small arcs connect the radial lines (Fig. 2c).

⁹ In this paper, the description of pavement designs is based on the classification proposed in ROUECHÉ 2012 (*Pavement Signs Typology*), updated in ROUECHÉ 2014, to which I also refer for terminology used. See the open access version: <https://locusludi.ch/game-typology-c-roueche/>

¹⁰ There is a wide literature on the cited monuments and sites; for a comprehensive review, see GRECO *et alii* 2014 with previous references.

¹¹ For a recent re-analysis of the monument and its chronology, see KIENAST 2014.

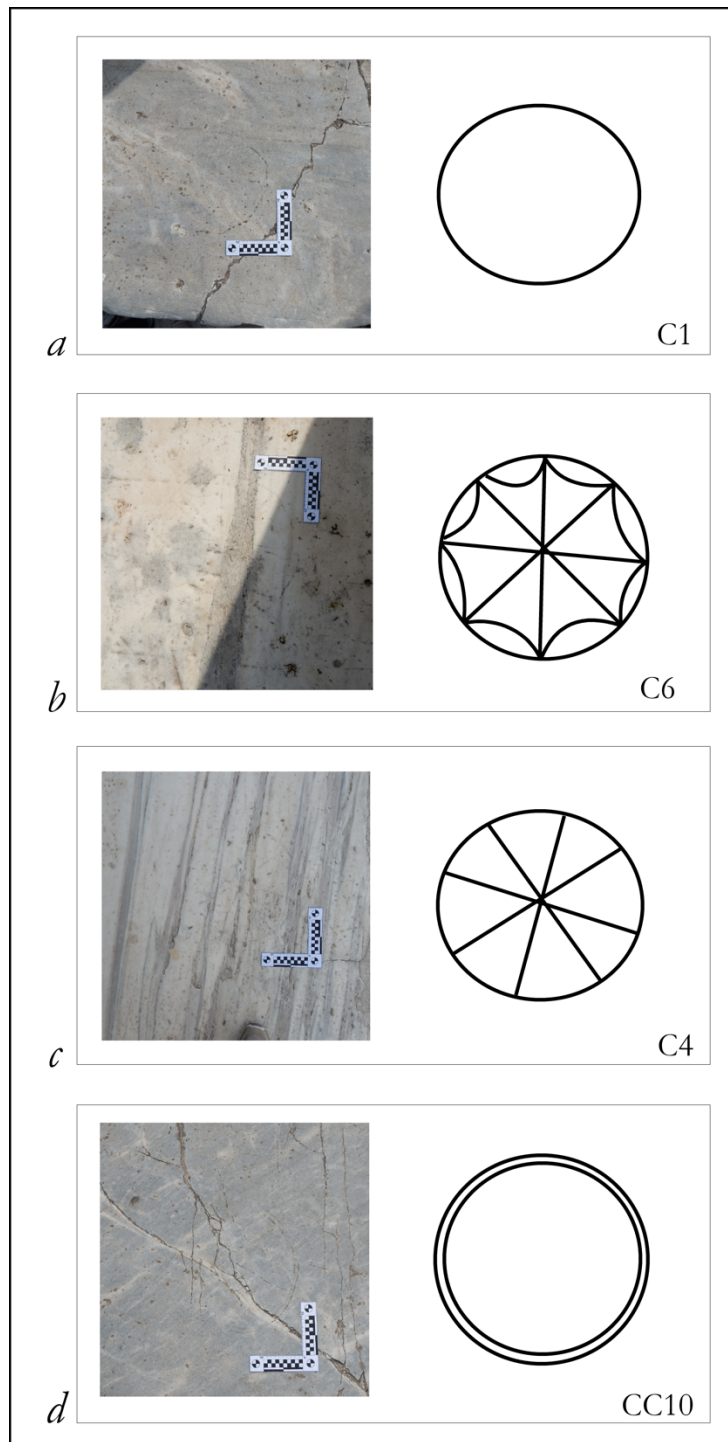


Figure 2: Pavement designs typology: circles (Courtesy of the Ephorate of Antiquities of the city of Athens – photo and drawing by the Author)

- Another circular pattern (diam. 35 cm) is engraved on the steps of the propylon, S of the staircase; it is positioned near the N edge of the slab, towards the staircase. It consists in two tight-fitting concentric circles, and it can be added to the group of *two concentric circles* of the PST by Charlotte Roueché, representing the new type **CC10** (Fig. 2d).

1.2 Squares

Patterns consisting in *squares* (**S**) are attested in proximity of the ancient Agora, engraved on the stylobate of the middle 5th century BC temple of Hephaistos erected on top of the Agoraios Kolonos hill,¹² as well as in the area of the commercial centre of Roman times, spotted on the upper surface of an erratic capital; another square design is carved on the ruins of the so called Tetraconch Church, which occupied in the middle 5th century AD the peristyle of Hadrian's Library.¹³ Characteristics of this group of drawings is a four-sided figure of variable size, with sides of different length, whose internal space can also be variously portioned by intersecting lines, so to originate grids, or patterned with some additional internal attributes (Fig. 3).

- A *single square* (**S1**) is engraved on the northern stylobate of the temple of Hephaistos, at the first intercolumn space from the NE corner, closed to the edge of the block; the design consists in a small-size square (12 x 8 cm), without any additional attributes (Fig. 3a).
- A design consisting in *three concentric squares* of different size (**SSS1**), the largest measuring 19.5 x 21 cm, is located on a block pertaining to the threshold of the tetraconch building, carved towards the edge of the slab. The squares are connected by intersecting lines and some additional attributes are likely engraved in the internal square (Fig. 3b).
- A similar design (**SSS1**) is carved on the top and in the mid of an erratic fragmentary capital, probably belonging to a 2nd-3rd century AD architecture: the motif consists in a regular square

¹² For the extensive scholarship on the Hephaisteion, see STURM 2016 with previous reference.

¹³ KARIVIERI 1994. Also, BRENK 2001, 153-157 for a summary of the discussion and references about the problematic function of this building.

measuring 16 x 16 cm, encompassing other two squares of different size, connected by intersecting lines (Fig. 3c).

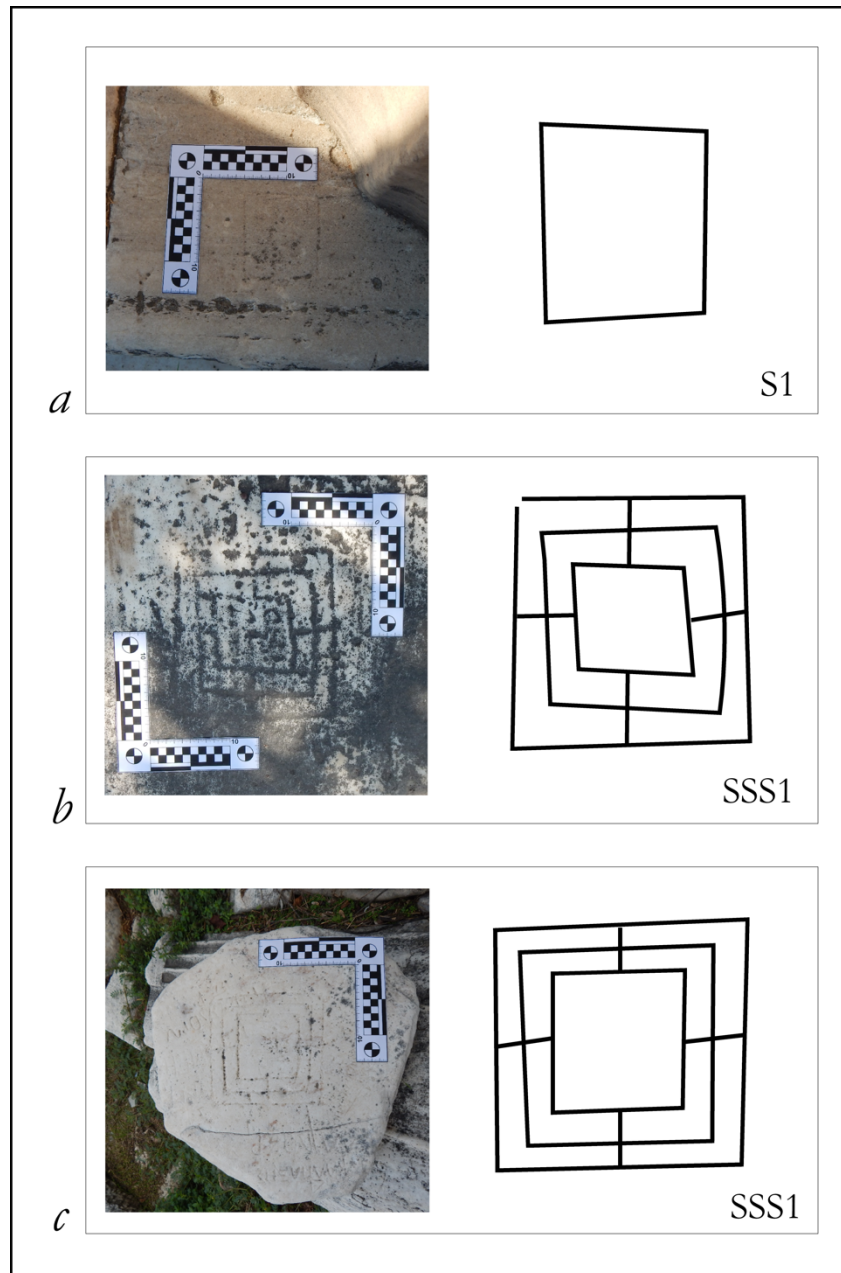


Figure 3: Pavement designs typology: squares (Courtesy of the Ephorate of Antiquities of the city of Athens - photo and drawing by the Author)

1.3 *Square grids*

The patterns consisting in *square grids* (**SG**) are normally variable in size, made of a varying number of square-shaped spaces laid out in rows (Fig. 4). This design is attested by a unique example, detected on the Western Propylon of Hadrian's Library, built in 132 AD.

- The *square grid* pattern is engraved on a step of the propylon, close to its edge. The grid, measuring 15 x 14 cm, bears 4 rows of 4 squares; it incorporates another square diagonally placed and connected to the external one through intersecting lines. The motif is not present in the PST: it can be added to this type of drawings as **SG5**.

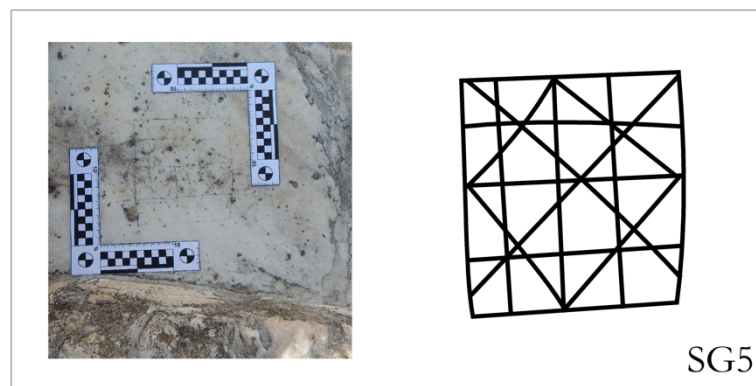


Figure 4: Pavement designs typology: square grids (Courtesy of the Ephorate of Antiquities of the city of Athens – photo and drawing by the Author)

1.4 *Rectangles*

Rectangles (**R**) are attested by several designs traced on the ruins of the temple of Hephaistos as well as in the courtyard of the Roman Agora. The drawing consists in a rectangular-shaped figure whose internal space is divided by perpendicular lines resulting in patterns of identical squares arranged in a rectangular array of rows and columns; size and number of the squares are variable (Fig. 5).

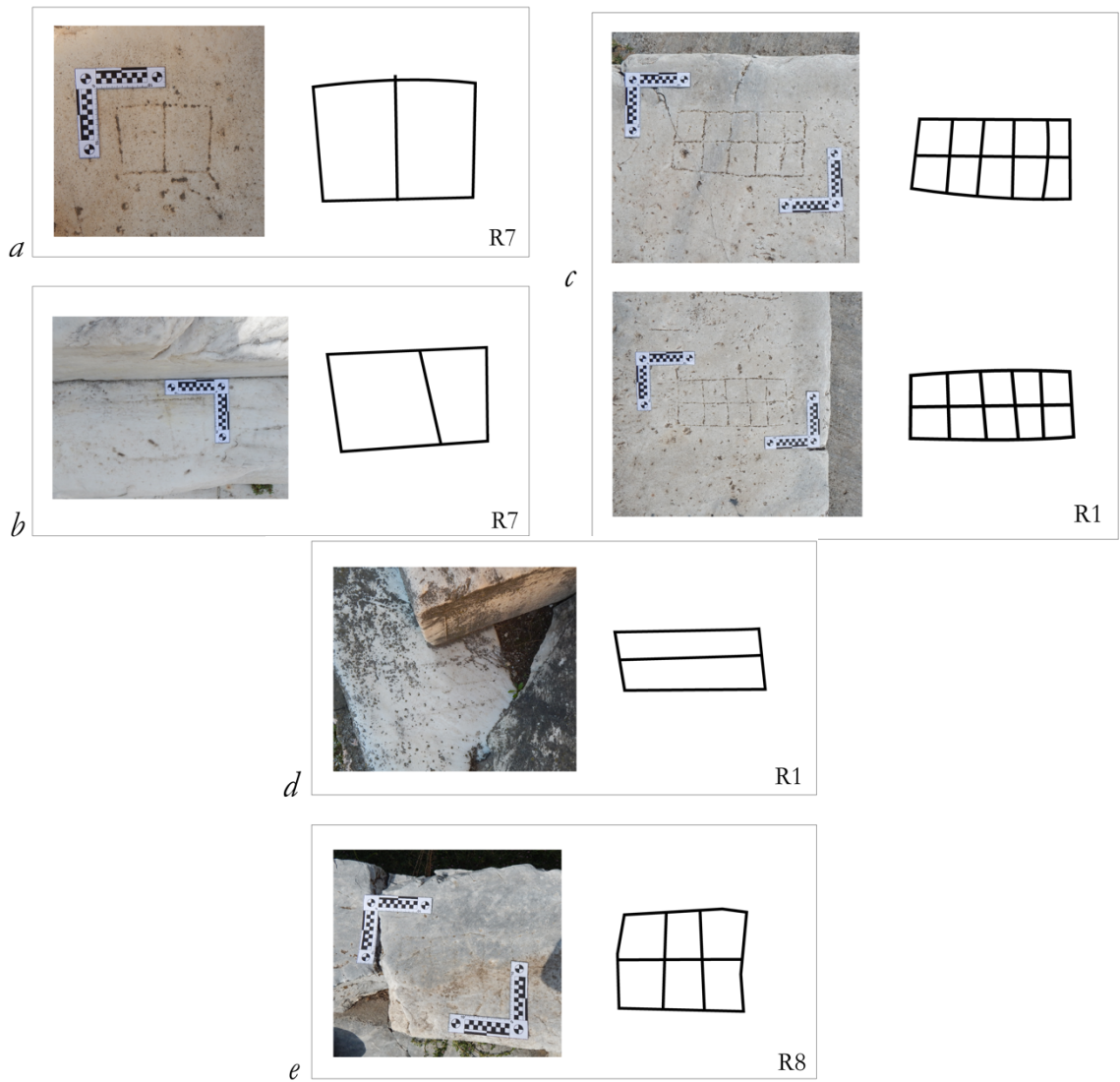


Figure 5: Pavement designs typology: rectangles (Courtesy of the Ephorate of Antiquities of the city of Athens – photo and drawing by the Author)

- A rectangular grid made of a row of two even squares is located on the S side of the stylobate of the temple, at the second intercolumn space from the SW corner, approximately placed in the middle of the slab. It measures 13-13.5 x 18-29 cm. A similar drawing has been located on a step of the NE Corinthian porch of the Horologion; it

is measuring 27 x 15 cm and consists likewise in a row of two squares, but different in size. The motif is not present in the PST: it can be added to these series of patterns as **R7** (Fig. 5a-b).

- Two rectangles consisting in two rows of 5 squares (**R1**) are carved on a block of the peristyle that enclosed the central open space of the Roman market, precisely in front of the gate of Athena Archegetis. The patterns measure 16-17.5 x 36 cm (N) and 15 x 32 (S) respectively, and they are engraved on the same slab, orthogonally arranged (Fig. 5c).
- A similar design (**R1**) is probably located on a step of the stereobate of the temple of Hephaistos, on its N side, on a gap in the stylobate block at the second intercolumn space from the NE corner; the rectangle measures 19 x 40 cm; the design is too faint to distinguish the internal pattern (Fig. 5d).
- A rectangle consisting in two rows of 3 squares has been detected on a block of a marble *exaedra*, now placed in the area of the courtyard of the Roman agora. It measures 10 x 15 cm. The motif is not present in the PST: it can be added to this type of drawings as **R8** (Fig. 5e).

1.5 Rows

3 Rows (3Rows) are documented by designs traced on the first step of the NE Corinthian porch of the Horologion. The motifs – of variable size – consist in three rows of parallel lines, divided into two groups of six squares

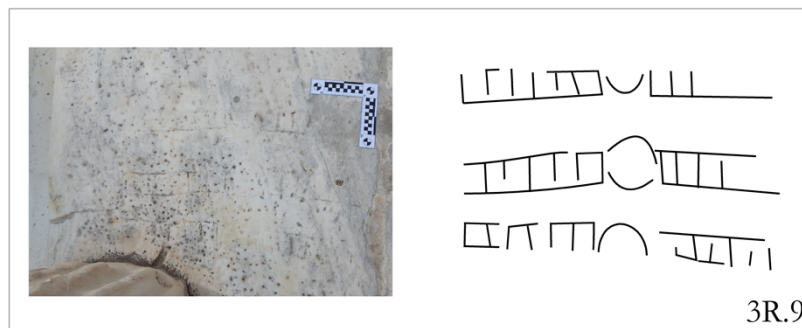


Figure 6: Pavement designs typology: three rows (Courtesy of the Ephorate of Antiquities of the city of Athens – photo and drawing by the Author)

each, thus forming six groups of six squares, the centre being marked by a different graphic element (Fig. 6).

- Three drawings consisting in 3 parallel rows of regular squares have been discovered on the first step of the porch, two carved at the S edge and one scratched on the N side. The groups of six square are divided by empty spaces (**3Rows.9**) or, in one specimen, by semicircles with bases on the outmost lines and a circle in the middle line (this pattern should be added to PST as **3Rows.13**). They are not all complete, but dimensions are manifestly variable (60 x 37 cm; 55 x 39 cm; 53 x 37 cm).

1.6 Holes

Holes (H) – that is to say rows of pits or shallow cavities variously arranged – have been identified on the stylobate and the steps of the stereobate of the Hephaisteion as well as on the steps of the propylon of Hadrian’s Library. Some of them display a regular arrangement, with holes lined up in regular rows and with a consistent diameter; other patterns show a rough and asymmetrical layout of cavities of variable size. Their dimensions are very different (Fig. 7).

- A drawing consisting in two regular rows of almost identical holes (diam. 3.5-4 cm) is engraved on the E side of the stylobate of the temple (**H6**), at the third intercolumn space from the SE corner. It measures 12 x 42.5 cm. The same motif – although barely legible – has been identified on the third step of the propylon of Hadrian’s Library. It measures 10 x 20 cm (Fig. 7a).
- On the same side of the stylobate, at the fourth intercolumn space from the SE corner, is a cluster of 12 small holes (about 15 x 25 cm), arranged in a sort of circle, but without any visible layout. A small hole is isolated and set at a certain distance (Fig. 7b). A similar drawing consisting in a cluster of irregularly placed holes is located on the bottom step of the stereobate of the temple, on the N side. It has an elongated shape, extended for about 50 cm, and includes 8 holes of about 4 to 8 cm in diameter, one being isolated and set at a certain distance (Fig.7c). Other two comparable designs are carved on the first and second steps of the propylon of Hadrian’s Library;

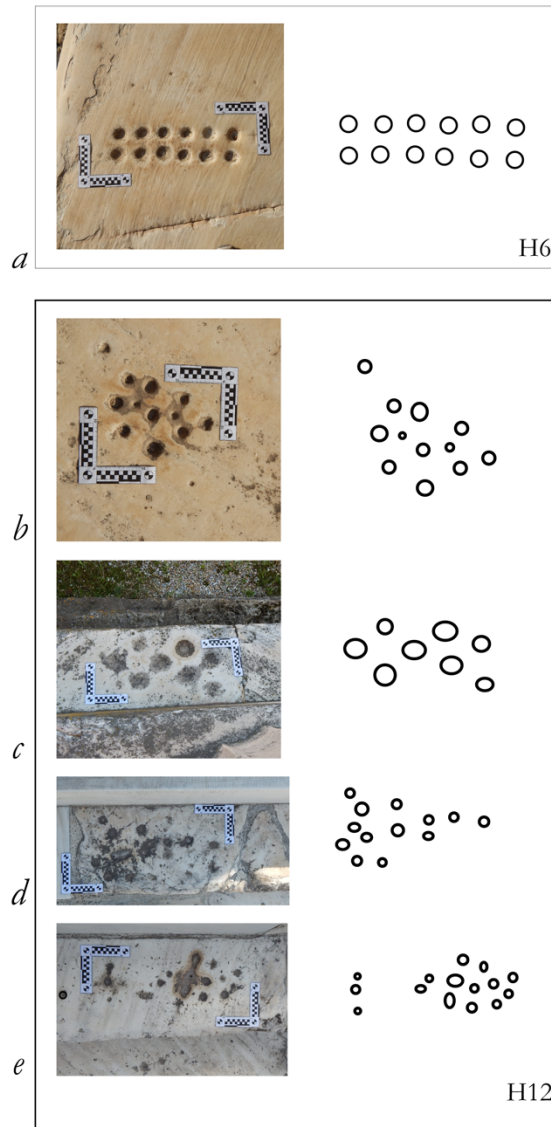


Figure 7: Pavement designs typology: holes (Courtesy of the Ephorate of Antiquities of the city of Athens – photo and drawing by the Author)

they include 13 holes and 15 holes respectively (diam. 3.5-4 cm) irregularly placed, but mostly concentrated in a sort of circle, while some others are isolated and set at a certain distance. Similar

patterns are not recorded in the PST: this type of drawings can be added as **H12** (Fig. 7d).

2. Identifying game boards: a difficult story

In her essay published in 1999, Leslie Kurke¹⁴ claimed the reconstruction of ancient board games extremely difficult and inconclusive, given the paucity and vagueness of contemporary sources and the chronological gap in the more detailed information in our possession – offered mainly by lexicographers and commentators – which undermines its reliability.¹⁵ Since then, significant progresses have been made and the overall picture is becoming progressively richer.¹⁶ Yet, exhaustive descriptions of the relevant boards in ancient sources are deficient; likewise, material record in context (such as movable game boards or their figured representations) seems rather exceptional.¹⁷ In this context, chronology and meaning of many of the patterns recorded from archaeological sites should be still described as rather “ambiguous” and cannot be attributed easily;¹⁸ this also applies to some of the drawings presented in this catalogue.

At the present state of research, firm evidence exists to connect patterns like rectangles parted in two rows of five squares (**R1**), 3 rows of squares (**3R**), three concentric squares (**SSS1**) and square grids (SG5) to board games. Indeed, the first drawing has been proved to function as a Roman adaptation of the board designed for the Greek game of *Pente Grammai* (Five Lines), still played in Roman times.¹⁹ Similarly, designs of three rows of 12 squares, each arranged in two groups of six squares divided by a symbol in the middle, functioned as board for Backgammon-type games, such as *Ludus duodecim scriptorium* and *Alea*.²⁰

Moreover, the concentric squares can be attributed to the so called “Nine men’s morris”, a variation of the “Three men’s morris” (Merels or

¹⁴ KURKE 1999, 252. For an overview of earlier studies, see SCHÄDLER 1995.

¹⁵ For similar observations, see SCHÄDLER 2009.

¹⁶ See, for instance, the several recent publications under the ERC *Locus Ludi* project: <https://locusludi.ch/team-publications/>

¹⁷ See the contributions by V. Dasen in this volume.

¹⁸ These drawings could have also detained different functions in space and time.

¹⁹ SCHÄDLER 2009.

²⁰ For further details about the two games and features of the relevant boards, see the contribution of U. Schädler in this volume (for the analysis of the boards from Athens in particular, see SCHÄDLER 1995).

Mills), a game whose rules are known from ancient sources, although its original name eludes us;²¹ nevertheless, beyond this, the age of this variant is unknown, leaving us with speculations, and there is no conclusive data to support the hypothesis of this variation being contemporary to the basic version of the game, for – as remarked by Ulrich Schädler – this design does not appear in the record until Byzantine times. The square grids drawing – somehow similar in configuration – is to be intended as an alquerque-type board (used for two different kinds of games), whose origins also go back no earlier than late antiquity.²²

The circle with spokes and arcs or “wheel pattern” (**C6**, **CC3**), interpreted as a round board for “Three men’s morris” (also known as round Merels, or Rota), is an especially problematic kind of evidence. Despite Florian Heimann’s warning²³ concerning a misreading based on a recent conjectural reconstruction by Carl Blümlein²⁴ – without any ancient evidence in support of this assumption – the understanding of this design as functional to a popular Roman game whose rules are known from antiquity²⁵ is still consolidated in literature. The suitability of this pattern to a ludic practice might be not completely ruled out, as recently emphasized by Claudia-Maria Behling; yet, it is based on totally different rules and seems to involve particularly circles of larger size.²⁶ However, a wide range of other meanings could be reasonably assumed for circles – also depending on the design’s dimension – such as the function of “topos marker”, as argued by Charlotte Roueché, to indicate where groups or individuals

²¹ SCHÄDLER 2012; SCHÄDLER 2018.

²² SCHÄDLER 2012 (also SCHÄDLER 2021, 79 for the genesis of the misconception of these games as dating back to the 14th century BC). Nevertheless, the same designs appear frequently also in vertical positions, on walls and columns (the concentric squares design is visible, for instance, on the western façade of the Church of Agia Pantanassa, in Monastiraki square at Athens); a function other than play must be admitted (for the symbolic value of these drawings, see BERGER 2004; moreover, see the contribution of F. Muscolino in this volume).

²³ HEIMANN 2014; for a recent review of the different interpretations, see SCHÄDLER 2018, also for the state of art about this topic.

²⁴ BLÜMLEIN 1918, 101 (for the rules, see also <https://locusludi.ch/play-ancient-online-games/>). A reconstruction of game procedures was already proposed in MERRILL 1916.

²⁵ LAMER 1927.

²⁶ BEHLING 2013. Another hypothesis is advanced in BELL 2007, 98, n. 3.

might be located for public events;²⁷ also, this pattern seems to accompany inscriptions with apotropaic or propitiatory values²⁸ or serve as device for oracular practices;²⁹ again, it can also be read as one of the possible combinations of the monogram of Christ or as graphic adaptation of the acrostic “*χθς*”.³⁰

Pavement markings like *Holes* may fulfil other functions too, but their assessment in the context of gaming equipment is rather well founded. Clusters of holes arranged in varying settings (**H12**) can be understood as marble lanes, and they are documented in several Roman cities.³¹ With regard to the designs recorded here, this interpretation seems reasonable, although the cavities are quite dispersed and a finishing point is not always clearly defined; yet, this may be explained due to a poor state of preservation. More controversial is the interpretation of the pattern with two rows of cup-shaped cells (**H6**), despite them being suitable for different board games. Boards with 2 rows of 5 holes are known from Roman Asia Minor and explained as a later adaptation of the standard design for Five Lines (dating not earlier than 2nd century AD), played on points instead of lines;³² yet, boards with a double row of 6 – like the one recorded here – would be not functional for this game, which requires an even number of cells. Nevertheless, a similar design might be related to Mancala-type games, which could have replaced the older Greek-Roman game, sometime between the 6th and 8th centuries AD;³³ as remarked by U. Schädler, “this would provide a context for the otherwise isolated evidence for the game being played in Greece”, recorded in modern times.³⁴

Not much can be said for certainty about a possible correlation between the other designs presented here, like single circles or simple rectangles and

²⁷ ROUECHÉ 2007, 100-105.

²⁸ KAVAJA 2007, 130.

²⁹ For the correlation of this design to oracular practices at Didyma, see HÖCKMANN 1996, 257-262.

³⁰ LANGNER 2001, 33.

³¹ BRUZZA 1877; SCHÄDLER 1994; SCHÄDLER 2013b, 55. See, also, CRIST *et alii* 2016, 144-146.

³² SCHÄDLER 1998, 18-19.

³³ SCHÄDLER 17 (also for differences and similarities between the two games and the relevant rules). On origin and distribution of Mancala, see also DE VOOGT 1999; DE VOOGT 2021.

³⁴ See SCHÄDLER 1998, 21. Also, MURRAY 1952 and ΛΟΥΚΟΠΟΥΛΟΣ 1926, 137-139 for a game based on a similar mechanism recorded in Crete.

known play activities, although it cannot be excluded that some of these drawings are incomplete or re-elaborations of standard designs, thus, more difficult to identify. Besides, some game boards may have been used for multiple games and some games may have been played on boards with different configurations.³⁵

3. Pavement designs in context: Some remarks

The survey of features and distribution of pavement designs in Athenian public spaces offered the chance to acquire a detailed record of all of them as well as to gain substantial new information on a wide spectrum of ancient social practices.

Firstly, when analysed along with associated architectural and archaeological finds, these designs can provide additional evidence for the use of space.³⁶ The distribution of the patterns discussed here – either functional to games or intended for other uses – proves once again the correlation between material culture and public space users, revealing their crucial connection with movement and access roads, consequently, with visibility. This association is revealed, for instance, by the drawings carved in the Roman Agora, linked to the walkway connecting the Western Propylon and the Eastern access to the market, leading also to the neighbouring Agoranomion (Fig. 8), or by the patterns disclosed on the steps of the Propylon giving access to the complex of Hadrian's Library. Furthermore, along with the function of fostering networks and social interactions, pavement markings are known to play an important role in appropriation and redefinition of public spaces.³⁷ Remodelling of the urban landscape is manifestly proved by the emergence of evidence of leisure activities and forms of entertainment in spaces once regarded as consecrated

³⁵ SCHÄDLER 1998, 10-11.

³⁶ On the other hand, we have to take into account in this regard the nature of the material remains, and bear in mind that much of the archaeological record may have been lost and the body of evidence we dispose of nowadays may represent an arbitrary selection.

³⁷ For the relation between board games and visibility and “manipulation” of public spaces, see the contributions published in LAURENCE – NEWSOME 2011; in particular, TRIFILO 2011, for the use of space in the Roman Forum; furthermore, for shaping of urban spaces at Sagalassos, LAVAN 2008.

to divinities and inviolable, as in the case of the temple of Hephaistos,³⁸ although this transition cannot be timed precisely.³⁹

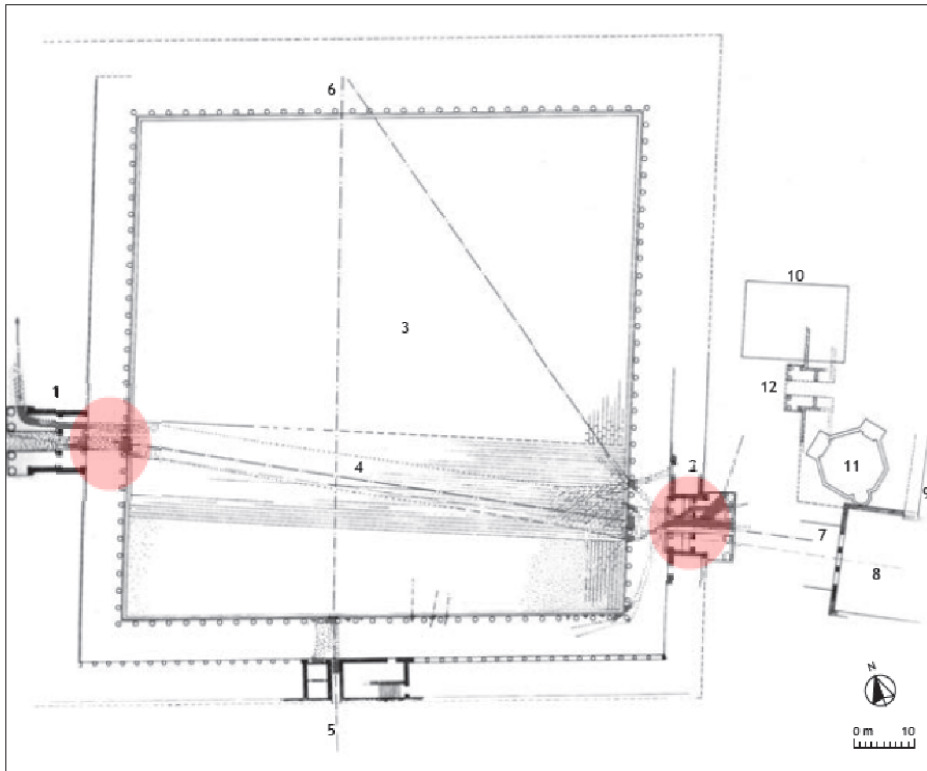


Figure 8: Location of pavement designs in the Roman Agora (elaboration by the Author after KORRES M. 2009. (ed), *Αττικής οδοί. Αρχαίοι δρόμοι της Αττικής*, Athina).

The presence of the circles divided into eight spokes may also be attributed to the same phenomenon of remodelling. Carving of Christian subjects on architectural elements was a common practice in the Byzantine

³⁸ Evidence of the same phenomenon is discussed by KARAKITSOU 2018 about the Athenian Acropolis. For the presence of abaci in sanctuaries, which may have been used also to play, see the contribution by V. Dasen in this volume.

³⁹ As all the major Athenian temples, the temple of Hephaistos was converted into a church and suggested dates for this event range from the 4th to the 7th century (FRANZ 1988; STURM 2016, 800). Epigraphical evidence in the area of the temple is rich and heterogeneous (varying from obituary notices to travellers' graffiti). Many inscriptions are middle Byzantine, but none can be securely dated to earlier than the 10th century (KIILLERICH 2021, 199-201); it wouldn't be implausible to date these engravings to the same period or later.

world, with the aim of decorating, sacralising, perhaps even de-paganising pagan buildings;⁴⁰ and Christian symbols carved on the walls of the Horologion/Tower of the Winds have been already explained as evidence of this process, when the area (also including the converted Agoranomion and the neighbouring Basilica) gained a more formal place in the Christian city.⁴¹ The interpretation of the drawing as a “visual evocation” of Christ’s monogram or acronym symbol,⁴² would bring new light to the meaning of two circles with eight spokes just in front of the two accesses to the tower, converted in religious building in the Early Christian period.⁴³

Advances in understanding of ancient board games concerning chronological issues are rather limited. As a matter of fact, carved pavement designs are not necessarily datable to the same time the monument was built; buildings provide only a *terminus post quem* for the boards which could have been engraved any time after their construction. What is worth mentioning is that the Late antique chronology of the “Nine men’s morris”’s board is proved by its location on the ruins of the tetraconch church, which was destroyed in the 6th century AD.

To conclude, there is much to be gained from approaching ancient graffiti and pavement designs in context; by recognizing these patterns as archaeological artifacts, we might be able to use the still large body of material not properly recorded nor published yet as evidence of numerous social activities in the ancient world.

⁴⁰ Cf., among others, RUGGERI 2009, 215-216; CABIALE 2010, 43; SERVADEI 2016, 19-20.

⁴¹ FRANZ 1988, 71-72 (who also mentions Christian symbols which can be seen on the doorway of the converted Hephaisteion; for the analysis of these symbols and marks, also KIENAST 2014, 146-155). A survey of the changes in urban topography and architectural landscapes deriving from Christianisation in the Aegean is offered in VIONIS 2017.

⁴² Circles with 8 spokes are to be intended “als Kryptogramm für das Chi-Rho” in Early Christian period according to HÖCKMANN 1996, 257 (Even without any Christon or letters, the wheel pattern became an image of sacredness projected on the outside of the building according to DEBIAIS 2016; for the several forms of the monogram of Christ, see HÖRANDNER – WEYL CARR 1991; on the origin of Early Christian graphic signs, GARIPZANOV 2018).

⁴³ FRANZ 1988, 71-72.

Cf. STERN 2018, 39 for graffiti as marks of devotion and for patterns emerging in their spatial contexts (dominating stairwells leading to shrines).

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