Delos and Rheneia Underwater Survey, 21 May – 9 June 2018
Ephorate of Underwater Antiquities (EUA), French School of Athens & Institute of Historical Research (IHR) of the National Hellenic Research Foundation (NHRF)

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During the 2018 fieldwork season, the Delos and Rheneia Underwater Survey project conducted a targeted excavation of the submerged area of the so-called “magasins du front de mer” (i.e. shops at the maritime front of the island) to the south of the main harbour of Delos in order to clarify the extent of these shops, their chronology and their function for the operation of the Delian emporium. These shops form a continuous maritime façade to the south of the main harbour of Delos and the aim of the excavation was to complement our understanding of the main harbour area. In particular, our aim was to better understand the topography and maritime coastline at the south of the main harbour of Delos, the relationship between the buildings in this area and the sea and, consequently, further define their function.

Fig. 1. Plan of the “Magasins du front de mer” with indications of the three planned sections.

Three sections were planned of which the two were conducted (fig. 1). The first (fig. 1, carré de fouille 1), measuring 10 by 6,5 meters, was delineated in front of Va and Vb rooms of Magasin “Group e”. The aim was to determine whether the construction in front of the rooms of this complex was a road or a waterfront, to investigate the vertical affixed stones, which were considered as mooring stones, and to find the ancient coastline. The second (fig. 1, carré de fouille 2), measuring 8 by 8 meters, was demarcated at the entrance of the “Magasin à la baignoire”. The aim here as well was to determine whether there was a road or a waterfront in front of the building, investigate the vertically positioned stones, which were considered as mooring stones, and to find the ancient coastline.
Work in Section 1 began with the cleansing of the surface of the section and the removal of stones in it (fig. 2). We encountered the practical difficulty of lifting large-scale stones along the road or the waterfront at the eastern part of the section. It was decided to open a smaller section (section 1a), measuring 2 by 1.5 meters, at the southeast end of the initial Section 1 around the south vertically affixed stone. In section 1a, it was possible to proceed with the excavation at a depth of approximately 1.20 meters. Five blocks from the maritime façade of the road or quay were revealed, but its foundation lay deeper (fig. 3). Due to the existence of large-scale stones, it was impossible to proceed safely in depth in section 1a, unless the stones delineating its sides were previously removed. To do this, the section had to be widened to the west. This was not possible due to the presence of a well-cemented sedimentary rock – conventionally called beach rock. This material, which contains sand, small pebbles and ceramic shells, was so hard that it prevented the continuation of work in section 1a. At the northeast end of Section 1, the bottom part of the vertical affixed stone was revealed. Its height was only 93 centimetres and was fixed between three irregularly shaped granite stones, as the first excavators had noticed. The foundation of the vertically set stone at the southeast end of the section is deeper but the presence of beach rock prevented us from finding it (fig. 4). The cleansing continued throughout the section down to the level where we found beach rock.
Fig. 3. The maritime façade of the road or quay at the southeast end of Section 1.

Fig. 4. The vertically set stone at the southeast end of Section 1.
Research in Section 1 has led to the following preliminary conclusions. It is unlikely that the vertically set stone at the northeast of the section was a mooring stone. There are no traces of rope on the stone for attaching a boat and, above all, the stone does not have an appropriate foundation for such use. Finding the foundation of the southeast affixed stone may help us to further clarify the use of these stones. The large concentration of irregular stones, mainly of gneiss and granite, in the eastern part of the section is problematic. Many come from the collapse of the foundations of the adjacent building’s maritime façade (Magasin “Groupe ε”) as well as the street or quay in front of it. But these stones could also be part of a breakwater, which would explain the large amount of material, especially if it goes deeper, something we could not possibly verify due to the presence of the beach rock. In the west part of Section 1, the stones were smaller and more regular in shape, leading us to the conclusion that they came from the upper storeys of the structures of magasin “Groupe ε”.

Fig. 5. Section 5 (Photo by L. Fadin).

Less work was done in Section 2 (fig. 1, carré de fouille 2) – again due to the beach rock formation (fig. 5). The surface of the section was cleared down to the point where the beach rock formation was discovered. The removed stones come from the upper storeys of the structures of the adjacent building. Large-sized slabs were found very close to the foundation of the maritime façade of the “Magasin à la baignoire”. Further away, smaller in size stones were found, which belong to the upper part of the building. Porous stones were also found in the trench and these come from the partition walls of the building. It is obvious that the building material comes from the collapse of the adjacent building. It was not possible to examine the vertically set stones in this section.
In both sections, very few pottery fragments were found, and they were mostly undiagnosed. We do not collect these fragments as they belonged to disturbed surface layers, which also contained modern material. Instead, samples were taken to analyse the different layers of sand as well as material conventionally called beach rock. The excavation allowed the completion of the plan of the road or quay in front of Magasin “Groupe ε”. We also conducted an elevation of the maritime façade of the quay, which was revealed during the excavation in section 1a.