

THE AREOPAGOS OVAL BUILDING RECONSIDERED*

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Introduction

The Areopagos Oval Building (AOB) provides a rare insight into Athenian architecture during the Geometric period, a time in which the archaeological record is mostly confined to graves. Dorothy Burr's original 1933 publication of the building remains an exemplary and exhaustive presentation of the archaeological evidence (Burr 1933). Burr identified the structure as a house (e.g. Burr 1933, 637). In 1968, however, Homer Thompson suggested that the structure served a cult for the dead rather than a domestic house (Thompson 1968, 58-60; 1978). He based his theory on the seemingly isolated position of the building, its superposition directly over an EG I child's burial, and its proximity to nearby burials (**fig. 1**). Thompson also suggested that "a thin, low stone socle for the bounding wall, a clay floor cobbled in part, and traces of burning on the floor, would be equally and perhaps more appropriate to a temenos open to the sky" (Thompson 1968, 60).

A large PA votive deposit covered much of the building's collapsed remains. This deposit included fine pottery, figurines of horses and chariots, rectangular pinakes, and miniature terracotta shields. Burr suggested that the deposit was not associated with the AOB, but rather was refuse from a nearby sanctuary (Burr 1933, 636-640). For Thompson, the deposit secured the AOB's identity as a shrine, for he considered the votive assemblage "closely matched in the votive deposit found in the dromos of the Mycenaean tholos tomb at Menidhi," and therefore suitable for a "cult of the dead" (Thompson, 1968, 60).

Until recently, most scholars have accepted Thompson's interpretation (e.g. Wycherley 1978, 193; Snodgrass 1982, 678; Whitley 1994, 225; Antonaccio 1995; Parker 1996, 34, n. 20; Coldstream 2003, 30; Papadopoulos 2003, 275). In the past decade or so, however, this standard orthodoxy has come to be questioned (Mazarakis Ainian 1999, 21; Boehring-er 2001, 69; van den Eijnde 2010, 114-16; Laughy 2010, 257-294; Alexandridou forthcom-

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ing). These recent works have raised four main issues concerning Thompson's theory: 1) The surviving architectural features do not accord with an open-air shrine; 2) The chronological relationship between the building and the child grave has never been fully understood; furthermore, a child's burial as the impetus for a full-fledged ancestor cult would be unique to the Greek world; 3) There is no reason to connect the function(s) of the AOB with the PA votive deposit that covered it; and finally 4) There is evidence of domestic use associated with the AOB.

All of these considerations underscore the need for a fresh analysis of the AOB's material remains. Based partly on a re-examination of the pottery lots, the excavation notebooks, and excavation summary reports, we offer here some preliminary conclusions. We have two main objectives. The first is to offer a fruitful contribution to the debate over the chronology and architecture of the AOB. To this end, we incorporate into our discussion an analysis of nearby graves, wells, and other architecture, which, we feel, provides crucial insights into the building's history and the people who used it. Our second objective is to place the building in the context of similar contemporary buildings throughout Attica. Doing so, the unwarranted notion that a black and white distinction between ritual and domestic use of many of these buildings is reinforced; the two functions were, in fact, closely related.

The Areopagos Oval Building: Architecture

The AOB was discovered on the north slope of the Areopagos, overlooking the area that would become the Athenian Agora, which in the Geometric period was used in part as a burial ground.¹ The AOB's location just outside the Athenian Agora, the site of extensive building projects in subsequent periods, was instrumental in the preservation of the building. Although significant parts of it were destroyed by later wells, walls, and Byzantine pithoi, enough of the stone wall socle is preserved to reconstruct a slightly irregular oval plan, measuring roughly 5 x 11 m (**fig. 2**). Patches of an earthen floor surface are preserved in the western apse and in much of the eastern half of the building. The floor appears to have been covered with a layer of fine, white sea-sand (Burr 1933, 546). Burr interpreted a thin layer of burned material, measuring ca. 1.0 x 0.6 m, as the remains of a hearth near the centre of the building (Burr 1933, 546).² This was not the only evidence of burning; the field notebooks suggest that a layer of carbonized material actually extended over nearly the entire preserved floor of the building.³

Along the preserved long walls, low platforms of cobbling stones were set upon the floor. This feature is absent in the western apse. Burr suggested that they served as benches or platforms for beds (Burr 1933, 546-547). Similar benches have been found in many other structures, including the "ruler's dwelling" and the 6th-century BC circular cult building at Lathouriza in Attica, as well as buildings on Mts. Hymettos and Tourkovouni (van den Eijnde 2010, 191-200, 268-277 with bibliography).

A mixed fill with Geometric, PC, and PA pottery was found directly on the floor of the

1. We eagerly await the publication of Papadopoulos, J. & Smithson, E., *The Early Iron Age, Part I: The Cemeteries, The Athenian Agora XXXVI* for a discussion of these graves, as well as those on the Areopagos itself.

2. The "hearth" feature is never discussed, nor featured on any plans, in the field notebooks. It appears for the first time in the 1933 publication.

3. See, e.g., Field Notebook ΣΤ III, 560; ΣΤ IV, 743.

AOB.⁴ This mixed fill was associated with, and in parts covered by, a layer of sterile yellow clay, representing a mudbrick degradation layer (Burr 1933, 547).⁵ Further evidence that the socle of the AOB held a mudbrick superstructure can be found just south of the building; it is to this area that we now turn.

Remains of four additional walls (A-A, E-E, C-C, and B-B) just south of the building show that it was part of two or more agglutinative units (**figs. 2, 4**).⁶ The relative chronology between the walls is suggested by the three levels of greenish gravel, layers that seem to represent rain or water wash upon a court or path between Wall C-C and Wall A-A and its later replacement, Wall E-E (cf. **fig. 6**) (Burr 1933, 549). Fallen mudbrick was found associated with the southern walls, indicating that these structures also supported mudbrick superstructures (Burr 1933, 549).⁷ Interestingly, though the socle of Wall A-A rises to an elevation at least 20 cm above the top of the AOB's southern wall socle; it stops flush with the outer face of the oval building's socle (cf. **figs. 2, 4**) (Burr 1933, 547). This location indicates that Wall A-A ran up to and abutted the upper mudbrick superstructure of the AOB (cf. Laughy 2010, 261-264). Importantly, it also indicates that Wall A-A was built while the AOB was still standing.

A large LG I oenochoe was discovered leaning against the western face of Wall A-A (**figs. 3, 4**).⁸ The discovery of this oenochoe has suggested to many that its manufacture post-dates the wall (e.g. Burr 1933, 547). If true, Wall A-A could not have been constructed much after the middle of the 8th century. We must entertain the possibility, however, that the oenochoe was part of a mixed fill that found its way into the area.⁹ The fill accords well with that associated with all of the southern walls: some Geometric, and much PC and PA (cf. Burr 1933, 549).¹⁰ If so, the location of the oenochoe may be of little help in determining the chronology of Wall A-A.

In contrast to the pottery recovered over the floor of the AOB, a substantial amount of the pottery recovered from the southern structures consisted of "household wares" (Burr 1933, 549), and "masses of thin coarse ware often incised".¹¹ Much of the pottery appears to have been pitchers, bowls, and jars (e.g. **figs. 7-10**) (cf. Burr 1933, 597-599). Unfortunately, we cannot examine the quantity or full range of shapes. Most of the area of the southern structures was lost to later intrusions (cf. **fig. 2**); furthermore, while some of the household wares were saved and catalogued as "finds", virtually none were saved in the pottery lots for future study.¹² Though this is a loss for our understanding of the function of the AOB and its

4. See, e.g., pottery lot ΣΤ 145 for the fill above the floor in the east; ΣΤ 165 for fill at the centre (though with 5th-century BC intrusions); and ΣΤ 128-131, 145, 166 for fill in the west.

5. Cf. Field Notebook ΣΤ II, 374; III, 394, 448, 457, 463, 497, 520, 530.

6. Burr 1933, 550, calls the southern area represented by these walls "Area A-C." She does not, however, integrate them in her final analysis of the date and function of the AOB itself.

7. Cf. Field Notebook ΣΤ III, 512, where a "clear line of mudbrick" was found *in situ* over Wall C-C.

8. For the date of the oenochoe, Brann 1962, 35, cat.no. 40, suggests an (early) third quarter of the 8th century BC. Papadopoulos 2007, 112-113 seems to favor a slightly earlier date.

9. The fill associated with the area in which the oenochoe was found contained PA, PC, and Geometric pottery; cf. pottery lot ΣΤ 135. Burr also reports in Field Notebook III, 469, that there was "[n]o apparent strosis under [the oinochoe]." It appears to have rested on fill?

10. Cf. Field Notebook ΣΤ III, 538; IV, 744.

11. Field Notebook IV, 745-746. Burr, Field Notebook III, 538, mentions only one small area within the AOB that had "much hand-made household ware, brownish and non-descript, like that found [among the southern structures]."

12. The pottery lots associated with the southern structures, e.g. ΣΤ 151 162, 163, 167, include almost no

southern structures, the substantial presence of household wares among the southern walls is nonetheless a striking feature of the archaeological record.¹³

Further to the west of Wall A-A, abutting the outer face of the southern wall of the AOB, some Geometric sherds, as well as one or two granite querns were found on top of a floor surface (**fig. 2**) (Burr 1933, 549).¹⁴ It appears that a presumably rectangular room existed immediately south of the western half of the AOB. If Wall B-B, representing an early 7th-century BC rebuilding phase, represents a back wall, then this room must have been very wide and shallow.¹⁵ The area east of Wall C-C likely represents another room or structure. Wall C-C likewise dates to the early 7th century (Burr 1933, 549).¹⁶

Having re-examined the archaeological evidence, it is clear that the AOB was a mudbrick building with a stone socle. Its mudbrick superstructure would have required protection from the elements. A thatch roof not only would have provided this protection, but it would have also been light enough to be sustained by the mudbrick walls (cf. Fagerström 1988, 45; Laughy 2010, 263-264). A possible base structure for an interior wood beam was, in fact, mentioned in the notebooks, but never mentioned in the 1933 publication.¹⁷ The oval building at Tourkovouni provides a parallel. Its walls consisted of a mudbrick superstructure on a stone socle, and it is generally accepted that the Tourkovouni building was roofed (**fig. 5**) (cf. Langdon 1976, 101-02; Lauter 1985; Fagerström 1988, 47; Antonaccio 1995, 191-195; Mersch 1996, 123, no. 23.3; Langdon 1997, 119; Mazarakis Ainian 1997, 87-89, 315, fig. 133; Boehringer 2001, 67-68). If the Archaic building models provide any indication, the roof of the AOB had smoke holes on either side of its semi-conical ends.¹⁸

The Areopagos Oval Building: Chronology

The chronology of the AOB has long been a vexing problem. The sherds from within and under the floor level itself are too scant and battered to be dated more precisely than Geometric (Burr 1933, 555, cat.nos. 8-20, fig. 12). This paucity of period-of-use material is unfortunate, but not unusual. A relatively “empty” floor is a common feature of many mudbrick buildings, and serves as an indication that a building was both frequently cleaned during use, and cleared or cleaned before abandonment (Ault & Nevett 1999; LaMotta & Schiffer 1999; Friesem *et al.* 2014, 45). With little period-of-use pottery to guide us, a wide range of dates

coarse ware. In general, not much pottery has been kept from the excavation of the AOB. Almost every lot could be held in the palm of one or two hands.

13. Cf. the frequent and consistent mention of these household wares during excavation: Field Notebook ΣΤ III, 422, 427, 538; IV, 745-746.

14. Burr mentions two querns on this floor in her publication, but in Field Notebook ΣΤ III, 566, she only records one: ST 32. The find spot for ST 32 is 45/KB on the old grid system; this is located west of the floor surface in question, and in the area between Wall A-A and Wall C-C.

15. On Field Notebook ΣΤ III, 557, Wall B-B is described as overlocking Wall A-A; none of the pottery in this area “is later than Proto-Attic.” Wall B-B likely served double duty, both as the southern wall of a structure, and as a retaining wall.

16. Cf. Field Notebook ΣΤ IV, 745.

17. Field Notebook ΣΤ III, 743: “A few stones at the E end may have supported a post.” These stones are shown on Burr’s state plan of the building (**fig. 2**), precisely on the axial point of the eastern apse. Presumably a similar post would have stood in the western apse, an area that has been greatly disturbed by later pits.

18. Compare two oval building models with such smoke holes: 1) in Samos (Schattner 1990, 78-80, no. 38) and 2) in Smyrna (Nicholls in Akurgal 1983, fig. 8).

for construction of the AOB have been proposed, including EG (e.g. Laughy 2010, 264-267), MG (e.g. Brann 1962, 110, n. 3), and LG (e.g. Whitley 1994, 225).

A close analysis of the field notebooks reveals that there is positive archaeological evidence for a LG date of construction. During a reinvestigation of the area of the AOB in 1968, C.G. Thomas chanced upon a simple trench cremation of an adult male (H 17:8).¹⁹ The grave, measuring ca. 0.60 x 0.70 m, was cut into the bedrock. Based upon the burial goods – including an amphora, a krater, pyxides, several cups, an oenochoe, an oenochoe-lekythos, a few skyphoi, a bowl, and a kantharos – the grave dates to the MG II period.²⁰

Unfortunately, the precise location of the burial was not recorded on any maps or top plans at the time of its discovery.²¹ The written accounts of its location in Thomas' field notebook and excavation summary, however, do provide important clues.²² Thomas reports that the grave was found “at the southwest corner of the house, just north of Pit H”.²³ This location places the grave within one or two meters of the southwest wall of the AOB. In fact, it is possible that the grave was situated directly below the wall. Though Thomas encountered no wall above the grave, the original socle at the southwestern corner of the AOB would not have been there, having been previously destroyed by the installation of a Byzantine pithos (**fig. 2**).²⁴

Even if the burial was located just outside of the wall circuit of the AOB, the burial remains chronologically noteworthy for two other reasons. First, the ground level into which the grave was sunk appears to have been 0.10-0.35 m below the bottom of the AOB's wall socle, suggesting that the building was constructed on a higher, and therefore later, ground level.²⁵ Second, we note that the grave was a simple cremation, in which the burning was done at the site of the trench (cf. Smithson 1974, 332-333). It is doubtful that a simple cremation would have been practiced so close to a standing building. The cumulative evidence, therefore, suggests that the building post-dates the MG II burial, and was constructed at the very end of the MG or, more likely, in the LG period.²⁶

As discussed above, the construction of the southern structures may have begun by the LG (Wall A-A), and certainly continued into the early 7th century (Walls C-C, E-E, and B-B).

19. Field Notebook ΣΤ VI, 953.

20. Most of the pottery was fairly battered. For other sherds from the grave, see pottery lot ΣΤ 179.

21. A suggestion for the precise location of Grave H 17:8 is given for the first time in J. Papadopoulos and E. Smithson, *The Early Iron Age, Part I: The Cemeteries (Agora XXXVI)*. Unfortunately, the volume remains unpublished. However, Papadopoulos, p.c. July 15, 2014, generously shared with us the location proposed in the volume: “under the restored wall of the oval building.” Based upon this suggestion, we independently re-examined the evidence for the location of the grave. The result of our analysis is as follows.

22. Field Notebook ΣΤ VI, 952-953; Excavation Summary Section K: 1968.

23. Excavation Summary Section K: 1968, 34; cf. Field Notebook ΣΤ VI, 953. Thomas makes clear in her excavation summary that Pit H (Well G 17:1) is the same Pit H identified on **fig. 2**, Burr's state plan. The grave is located in Agora's new grid H 17, which begins at the western wall of the AOB. Pit H is located just to the west and outside of H 17; as such, the burial must have actually been northeast of Pit H for it to be in H 17.

24. The cistern was cleared by Burr during the 1932 excavation season; cf. Field Notebook ΣΤ III, 411. Interestingly, Thomas could not find most of the walls of the AOB during her re-excavation of the area, and concluded in her Excavation Summary Section K: 1968, 34, that they were “no longer in evidence.” Thomas was only able to find a bit of the southern wall of the AOB, for which see Field Notebook ΣΤ VI, 957.

25. The highest elevation for the top of the grave is 65.150 m above sea level (masl); Field Notebook ΣΤ VI, 953. The top of the wall socle for the AOB at the west and south – the area of the burial – is 65.500 masl; cf. **fig. 2**. The wall socle varies in height from 0.10 to 0.25 m; cf. Burr 1933, 545. Accordingly, the bottom elevation of the socle varies from 65.400-65.250 masl.

26. This construction date contradicts that proposed by Laughy 2010, 264-267, but such is the life of an archaeologist.

Roughly half a century later, the AOB and the southern structures had collapsed. A deep deposit of small stones and gravel was then set directly over the building's collapsed remains (Burr 1933, 549-550). The intent of this renewed activity was not to cover the entire complex; the deposit appears to have been restricted to a three-meter wide strip along Wall D-D, a late Hellenistic retaining wall that cut through the deposit in the eastern part of the AOB (Burr 1933, 549-550; cf. **fig. 2**). The same fill extended into the area of the southern structures. Included within the stone and gravel packing were a large number of PA votives and pottery (Burr 1933, for catalogue and discussion). The vast majority of the pottery within the deposit is PA, dating to the first half of the 7th century (Brann 1962, 128); the date of its deposition over the AOB is ca. 630 BC, or possibly a little later (Burr 1933, 640).

Burr suggested that the stone and gravel layer represented a road or path that was set over the ruins of the AOB to facilitate traffic in this area (Burr 1933, 636-640). Until recently, this suggestion lost favour to Thompson's theory that the AOB and the PA deposit were functionally related to one another. Subsequent excavations in the Athenian Agora have made it clear that Burr's original theory is correct: the stone and gravel layer is indeed road fill, and the votives within the fill came from a nearby, but as yet unidentified, sanctuary (Laughy 2010, 288-293, with bibliography; cf. Laughy 2013).

Although the votive deposit sheds no light on the original function(s) of the AOB and its southern structures, the deposit is important in establishing the chronology of the abandonment of the complex. Within the area of the AOB itself, the road layer was set directly upon the yellow clay layer of mudbrick degradation (Burr 1933, 549-550).²⁷ As noted above, this clay layer was associated with, and partially covered, a mixed Geometric and PA fill that lay upon the floor of the AOB. Recent geoarchaeological studies have shown that once a mudbrick building is abandoned, it regularly takes decades for the walls to collapse and degrade (Goodman-Elgar 2008; Friesem *et al.* 2011; 2014). During this long process, the interior of these abandoned structures often accumulate refuse from the surrounding area (LaMotta & Schiffer 1999; Friesem *et al.* 2014, 74). Assuming the same process occurred with the AOB, the mixed Geometric and PA fill found directly over the floor is explained: it represents the gradual, decades-long accumulation of material from the surrounding area. When the mudbrick superstructure finally collapsed, it formed a degradation layer over and among much of the accumulated fill. The abandonment and subsequent gradual collapse of the AOB likely began by the end of the first or into the second quarter of the 7th century, well before the road construction of ca. 630 BC.

The carbonized layer directly on the floor of the AOB may be related to its collapse. Experimental archaeology has shown that when the thatch roof of a mudbrick building catches fire, it falls to the floor, while still ablaze; the result is a layer of ash and carbonized material throughout and upon the floor (Friesem *et al.* 2014, 74 with bibliography). A conflagration event accords well with the burnt layer found across the AOB's floor.²⁸

The abandonment of the southern structures would have accompanied that of the AOB. Intriguingly, a layer of carbonized and burnt material, similar to that found on the floor of the AOB, was found among the southern structures. In this area, however, the layer was found directly over the masses of household wares.²⁹ It is tempting to assume that this burnt lay-

27. Cf. Field Notebook ΣΤ IV, 746-747.

28. Some of the burnt layer may also represent hearth use, as Burr suggests. The fact that the floor of the AOB was "empty," however, indicates that it was regularly cleaned. It would be striking that regular cleanings would have left such extensive hearth debris on the floor.

29. Field Notebook ΣΤ III, 427, 450, where some of the carbonized matter is "probably wood." There is no

er also represents a roof conflagration, presumably part of the same event that afflicted the AOB. In this scenario, the burnt layer directly upon the floor of the AOB suggests that the building was empty at the time; in the southern structures, however, the household wares under the burnt layer would seem indicate that the structures were not empty, but stored with wares until the time of the conflagration.

Here caution is needed. Due to the later intrusions of pits, pithoi, and wells, much of what we know about the southern structures, including the predominance of household wares, is restricted to excavations conducted between Wall A-A and C-C. As discussed above, this area was likely an open-air courtyard or path. We can only conclude that the concentration of household wares among the southern structures strongly suggests that they wares were associated with these small rooms.

To recap, our preliminary findings are that the AOB was a mudbrick structure with a thatch roof. The building was constructed in the LG period (or slightly earlier). Sometime later in the LG period (or slightly later), the first of a series of small rooms was built against the southern wall of the AOB. In the first quarter of the 7th century, there was a renovation of the southern structures. In the second quarter of the 7th century (or slightly earlier), the AOB suffered a fire that resulted in the loss of its roof, and was subsequently abandoned; the southern structures perhaps suffered in the same conflagration, but in any event, were also abandoned. While the mudbrick walls of the AOB, now exposed to the elements with the loss of the roof, began their gradual fall, Geometric and PA material accumulated within the abandoned site. By the third quarter of the 7th century, the mudbrick degradation process was complete, forming a layer over the Geometric and PA fill. Soon after, the area was given over to the construction of a new road or path that facilitated traffic.

From the evidence presented above, we may cautiously reconstruct the functional use of the AOB. It is clear that the building was used in such a way that it was deemed necessary to keep it clean. Outfitted as it was with benches, this space seems best interpreted as a banqueting hall. The household wares associated with the southern structures suggest that they were annexes, likely used for storage and perhaps food preparation. The discovery of a granite quern and a strainer among the southern structures would seem to support this interpretation (for the strainer, cf. Burr 1933, 562, fig. 21, no. 74).³⁰ Let us now consider the wider setting of the building on the Areopagos, and indeed its significance within the wider context of contemporary Attic architecture.

Habitation on the Areopagos?

In the EIA, the north slope of the Areopagos was consistently used as a burial ground. This practice is attested from the SM through the Geometric period. The practice of burying in the area of the later Classical Agora dropped significantly from the Geometric to the EA period. While the cause of this drop is beyond the scope of this study, it is useful to note that by the beginning of the 7th century, burial activity generally ceases in the central area of the

mention of an ash and burning layer under the household wares in the excavation diaries.

30. The quern found within the AOB (ST 31) and the one found among the southern structures (ST 32) are oval and made of the same type of granite. Perhaps they are contemporary. Each is only half-preserved, indicating that they were not found *in situ*, though they may not have “travelled” far. Two grinders “of green stone” were also found just north of the AOB in mixed fill below a modern foundation; cf. Field Notebook ΣΤ III, 394. The stones do not seem to have been kept.

Agora (Brann 1962, 111-113). On the north slope of the Areopagus, the situation is much the same, with no new burials after the close of the Geometric period.

On the north slope of the Areopagos, this situation is even more dramatic, with no new burials after the close of the Geometric period. The immediate vicinity of the AOB had been used as a burial ground in the EG and MG period, as is attested by the child's grave underneath the building floor and the simple adult cremation at the southwestern corner of the building. Other nearby burials include the grave of the Rich Athenian Lady, dated ca. 850 and located about 15 m north of the building, and the so-called Areopagos Geometric Lot, which contained EG to MG I burials of both children and adults (Smithson 1968, 1974). The area presumably contained many more burials that were disturbed by later activity, as is evidenced by the presence of burned EG and MG pottery inside later pits dug into the area of the AOB (Burr 1933, 561). With the construction of the AOB in the MG II or LG period, burial activity was moved to two separate lots ca. 30 and 60 m southwest of the building.

If we may cautiously take the presence of EIA wells as evidence for domestic activity, we may infer a cluster of habitation in the area defined as the saddle in between the Areopagos, the Kolonos Agoraios and the Pnyx. Perhaps significantly, no contemporary wells have been found in the immediate vicinity of the AOB. LG and PA wells were discovered further away at a distance of ca. 50 m east, west, and north of the building, suggesting that the AOB may have been positioned in the middle of – yet somewhat removed from – other structures. Furthermore, the building is placed prominently at the junction of roads or paths that lead to the Pnyx, the Acropolis, and the area south of the Areopagos. It seems, then, that the construction of the AOB was part of a larger spatial reconfiguration of the north slope of the Areopagos, with burial activity moving to the western slope. The building now commanded the northern ascent toward the cluster of hills framing the Agora valley and the small hamlet that spilled down the lower slopes of the Areopagos. Stretching the equation of wells with domestic or industrial activity a bit further, it is interesting to note that it has been difficult to find any houses or shops associated with them. Perhaps the construction of the AOB, with its stone wall socle and bench platforms, was something out of the ordinary. Indeed, judging from its prominent and central position, we may infer that a special significance was attached to the AOB – although there is admittedly little doubt that later construction must have demolished some contemporary remains in the immediate vicinity.

Attic Comparanda

Zooming out further still, the AOB may be viewed in the context of other exceptional contemporary buildings in Attica. This is not the place to get into an in-depth discussion of the many problems facing the individual parallels that are to be found, nor is there time to analyse all available comparanda. We will focus only on the direct relation of some of the most significant buildings with nearby burials.

The oval building on the northern summit of Tourkovouni is the closest architectural parallel for the AOB (**fig. 5**). The building was outfitted with similar benches along its interior walls, and appears to have been used from the late 8th to the late 7th century (van den Eijnde 2010, 268-277, with bibliography). The pottery associated with the oval building includes virtually the entire repertoire of ordinary household ware. The assemblage is dominated by drinking vessels, such as skyphoi, kotylai, and cups. These vessels indicate that symposiastic feasting played an important role. Simple household vessels such as pitchers, bowls, oen-

ochoai, and cooking pots complete the assemblage. In fact, the recovered cooking pots may indicate that a *panspermia* festival, which focused on the offering of boiling seeds in pots, was celebrated at this building (cf. Lauter 1985, 133-134; Antonaccio 1995, 194; Mazarakis Ainian 1997, 89). No other buildings or graves were found in the vicinity of the building, although much of the hillside still awaits investigation. On the southern summit, however, a large circular stone foundation, previously identified as a cenotaph contemporary to the oval building (Lauter 1985, 127), is probably best identified as a burial tumulus dating to the EH period (cf. Mazarakis Ainian 1997, 89; van den Eijnde 2010, 279-280). The EH tumulus may have functioned as a ritual focal point for the feasting that took place on the northern summit in the oval building, though this must remain speculative (van den Eijnde 2010, 285).

Like the AOB, there is no evidence for specific ritual activity at the Tourkovouni oval building other than a special emphasis on commensality and symposiastic feasting. After the building went out of use in the 7th century, the area continued to exert a special interest to local inhabitants, as is evidenced by the construction of a small altar with a 5th-century *temenos* over the building's remains.

A recent analysis of the excavations and finds at the Academy has shown that the multi-room structure known as the "Sacred House" was used from the middle of the 8th to the transition of the 7th century BC (**fig. 11**; cf. Mazarakis Ainian & Livieratou 2010; Mazarakis Ainian & Alexandridou 2011; Alexandridou forthcoming). The study also shows that the ashy layers, long characterized as "pyres," in fact represent the depositional remains of banquetting (rather ashes from hearths). Skyphoi, kotylai, and kantharoi are well-represented among the drinking shapes, as are multiple fragments of large kraters; other vessels firmly belong in the range of household wares. No vessels with a specific ritual use other than feasting could be identified. Furthermore, the earliest graves found in the vicinity post-date the construction of the building, strongly suggesting that the deceased were directly connected with the building, presumably because they once lived there. After the building went out of use, the area was used for a little while as a burial ground for children. The find of a pierced plate, dated the third quarter of the 7th century and presumably used for libations, shows that the site retained some significance in the decades after the abandonment of the building (Mazarakis Ainian & Alexandridou 2011, 184, fig. 12).

A building in the West Cemetery at Thorikos provides a third parallel for the AOB (**fig. 12**). Here an EG building was rebuilt in middle of the 8th century.³¹ A square, stone-lined hearth, within which were found ashes, was recovered inside the anteroom (Bingen 1969, 104). Finds inside Room XXVI include an almost complete louterion found *in situ* against the eastern corner of the doorway leading to Room III (Bingen 1967b, 48), two skyphoi, an oenochoe, and a one-handled cup. In addition, three coarse vessels were found in such a position as to suggest to the excavators that they might have fallen from a shelf (Bingen 1969, 105). A black layer covers the level of use and is suggestive of destruction by fire (Bingen 1969, 102). A little after the building was constructed, the area just to the east began to be used as a burial ground, and it has been claimed that the building served as a place of worship for

31. In the LG period, Room III of the now defunct building was repaired and provided with an anteroom, Room XXVI, to the south, measuring ca. 9 x 6 m. combined; cf. Bingen 1969, 102-106. The excavators raise the possibility that Room III was a court, since no floor levels were found; see Bingen 1967b, 31; cf. Fagerström 1988, 52, who also believes the building was open-air. However, a floor level was found in Room XXVI (Bingen 1969, 102), and the megaron-type layout of the building seems to speak against this. A skyphos fragment dating to the middle of the 8th century BC or slightly later appears to mark the initial stages of use. Bingen 1969, 109, dates the pottery, and therefore the building, to the second half of the 8th century.

the dead (Themelis 1976, 53-54; cf. Lauter 1985, 163).³² The building seems to have been abandoned by the end of the Geometric period, before a child burial destroyed the south-eastern corner of Room XXVI (Grave 87, cf. Bingen 1969, 107-108).

This begs the question, however, of why the building antedates the earliest LG graves. As with the earlier buildings, there is no conclusive proof of any ritual practice other than feasting; the find of several course jugs and the loom weight supports a combined function, domestic and feasting, for this building (cf. the domestic interpretations of Mussche 1974, 25; Fagerström 1988, 52). It has been argued that the louterion found *in situ* in the anteroom was part of a ritual involving cleansing or libation (suitable activities in the West Necropolis), but it is not inconceivable that these vessels were used as kraters, the spouts serving as useful pouring devices during a banquet.³³ Some of the banquets may have commemorated dead ancestors, but it cannot be proven that this was their exclusive function.

The final parallel for the AOB is the so-called “Sacred House” at Eleusis (**fig. 13**; cf. Lauter 1985, 163-69; Mazarakis Ainian 1997, 150-153, 317, figs. 172-180; van den Eijnde 2010, 171-88). Here a male was buried in the LG period. Soon afterwards, a four-room building was erected in ca. 700 BC to host this cult, as is evident from a large bothros with a drain in Room II, which may have been used for communal libations. During the second half of the 7th century, a wide range of pottery shapes was deposited in Rooms II, III, and IV; the larger vessels were filled with ashes and animal bones (Travlos 1983, 334; Lauter 1985, 167). Furthermore, the floor surface in Room III showed signs of burning, suggesting that additional pyres were lit within the building as well as outside (Mazarakis Ainian 1997, 153). A small rectangular enclosure in the southeastern corner of Room I may have been used as a hearth. It is possible that the larger vessels were used to contain the ritual remains of the pyres that were lit inside and outside the building. This practice of storing the pyre residuals shows a certain degree of sacralisation that goes beyond the type of feasting that has been attested in the other buildings discussed in this paper. The practice continued until the destruction of the building toward the end of the 7th century. The cult survived the building, however, and beginning in the 6th century, several sacred enclosures were built to accommodate sacrificial rituals (Travlos 1983, 333-336; Mazarakis Ainian 1997, 152-153).

Conclusion

This short overview of contemporary buildings serves to present the variability of the archaeological record at each site. Still, there are a few recurring themes within the narra-

32. Note that the wider area shows signs of earlier burial activity, cf. MG Grave 58 (Bingen *et al.* 1967b, 38-42; cf. Coldstream 2003, 70, who dates the grave to the last quarter of the 9th century), as well as the find of a pedestalled krater with prothesis scenes, and perhaps the adult burial to the west of the LG building (Grave 90); cf. also Mazarakis Ainian 1997, 147. For the LG graves, see Bingen 1969, 71-101; 1984, 72-150; Whitley 1991, 200. The earliest grave in the eastern section is Grave 56. Its alignment, as well as some of the other LG graves, corresponds to that of the building.

33. The find of the louterion in the doorway between Rooms III and XVIII, has been adduced to support such an interpretation. Louterion: Bingen 1967a, 48, figs. 57-58; 1969, 104-105. Cf. Mazarakis Ainian 1997, 147: the louterion is “a vase which often turns up in chthonic contexts.” The fact that it was found *in situ*, resting on near virgin soil, indicates that it had been a fixed feature within the house for much of its existence. Furthermore, the quality of the louterion’s decoration and its lack of comparanda at Thorikos have been cited in favor of ritual use; cf. Alexandridou forthcoming. The traditional view is expounded by Callipolitis-Feytmans 1965, 41-43; Kurtz & Boardman 1971, 151; Hägg 1987.

tives of all five buildings. The first common element is the pan-Attic tendency during the LG period to construct relatively spacious and well-built edifices with the primary aim of staging banquets that appear to transcend the consumption of everyday, a hallmark of feasting practices (cf. Dietler & Hayden 2001). The likely feasting groups were kinship-based, perhaps gene. Whether these banquets were at any time meant to commemorate the dead is difficult to answer. In some cases, such as Eleusis, the connection with the deceased was explicit and led to the adoption of an array of ritual practices. In addition, the tentative connection with the EH tumulus at Toukovouni suggests that establishing a connection with tangible burials of the recent or ancient deceased in the vicinity was instrumental in the formation of local identities.

If the abundance of drinking and cooking vessels in all buildings discussed in this paper may be explained by the emphasis on banqueting, the presence of grinding stones in some of them tends to emphasize a domestic aspect of these buildings. The evidence from the AOB complex clearly indicates that both functions were at play. The building was kept meticulously clean, while a separate storage space was used to store all necessary utensils for banqueting. This, then, was a comparatively lavish building, presumably serving an important family or *genos*. Its choice of location was clearly meant to impress.

There is one final clue deriving from our survey of some of early Attica's finer dwellings: their post-collapse fate. The remains of both the Eleusis and Tourkovouni buildings were later demarcated as sacred spaces. Something similar happened at Lathouriza, where the abode of a chieftain was commuted to a shrine (Mazarakis Ainian 1995; cf. also van den Eijnde 2010, 210-17). This process did not take place at either Thorikos or the Academy, unless we take the find of a pierced plate in the latter instance as a tenuous and ultimately unsuccessful attempt at sacralisation.

So how does this pertain to the AOB? Here we find no *temenos* superseding the oval structure. Perhaps we may take the construction of the 7th-century road as a sign that this area was marked out for different purposes. Two simultaneous occurrences that happened as the building went out of use are of note, however. First is the fact that, with the demise of the building, all burial activity on the north slope of the Areopagos ceased. This would seem to indicate that the social unit that occupied the hill dispersed the area. The second possibility is that the AOB did find a successor, if not on the exact spot. Ca. 20 m to the west of the building, a small altar was constructed in the early years of the 7th century, about the time that the AOB went out of use (**fig. 1**). The modest votive material from this altar includes two terracotta horses and 12 cut disks (Lalonde 1968, 130-131, pls. 36e, 37b). We thus come to the thesis, formulated nearly 20 years ago by Mazarakis Ainian, of ruler's dwellings turning into sacred spaces (Mazarakis Ainian 1997). While the observation that these buildings were somehow "sacred" certainly overstates the evidence, they were certainly used for festive gatherings establishing and maintaining the status of local elites and connecting them with one another. When these buildings went out of use, however, the ritual feasts may have continued in a different form. No longer centred on the dwelling of a ruler, they now emphasized the worship of a hero or deity, transposing the context of the rituals to the social realities of the Archaic period.³⁴

34. For a discussion of the social implications of the changes that occurred in feasting practices at the turn of the 8th to the 7th century, cf. van den Eijnde, forthcoming.

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THE AREOPAGOS OVAL BUILDING RECONSIDERED

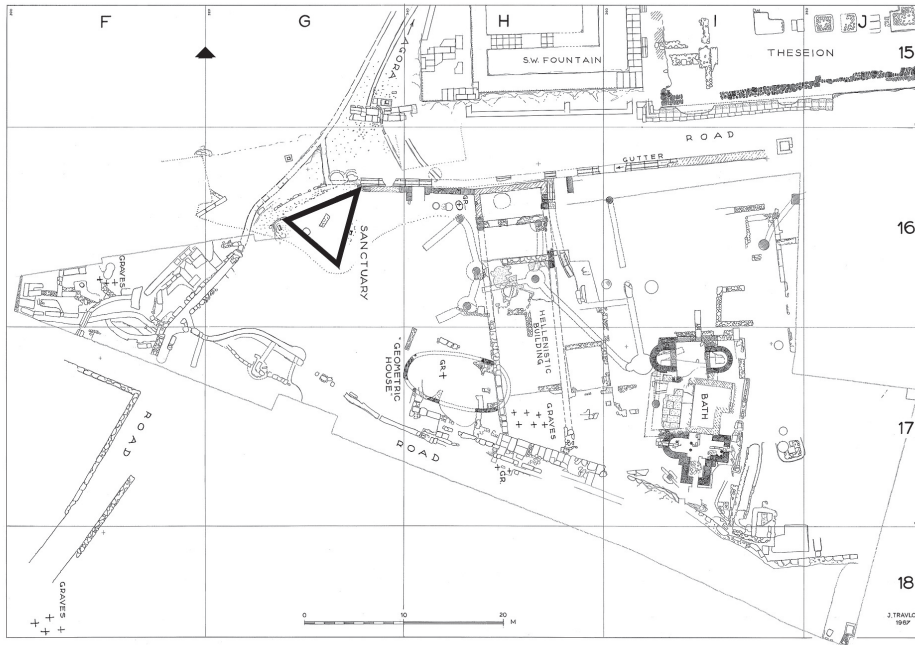


Fig. 1. State plan of the Areopagus North Slope (Courtesy of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens).



Fig. 2. Original state plan of the Areopagus Oval Building (Courtesy of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens).



Fig. 3. LG I oenochoe (P 532) found alongside Wall A-A (Watercolor by P. de Jong; courtesy of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens).

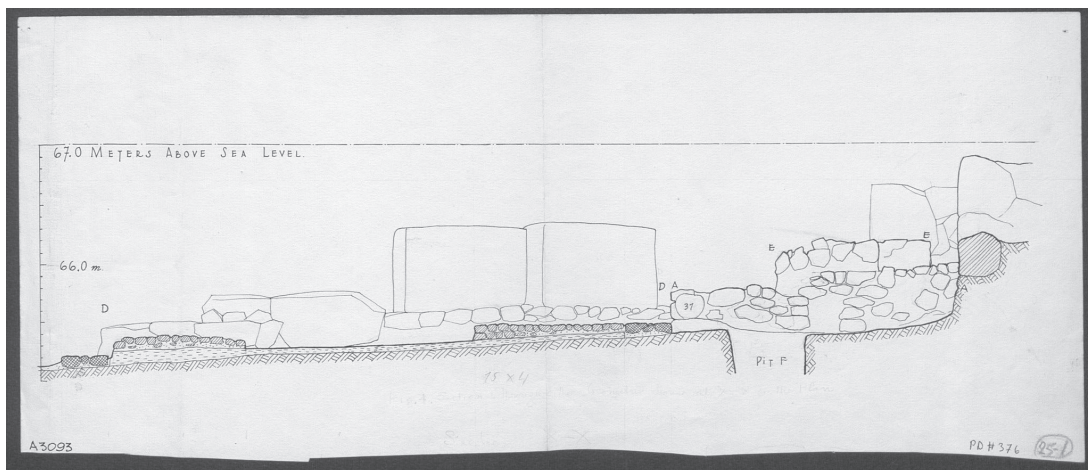


Fig. 4. Cross-section, facing east, of the Areopagus Oval Building and the walls of the southern structures. Pot 37 is a LG I oenochoe; cf. Fig. 3 (Courtesy of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens).

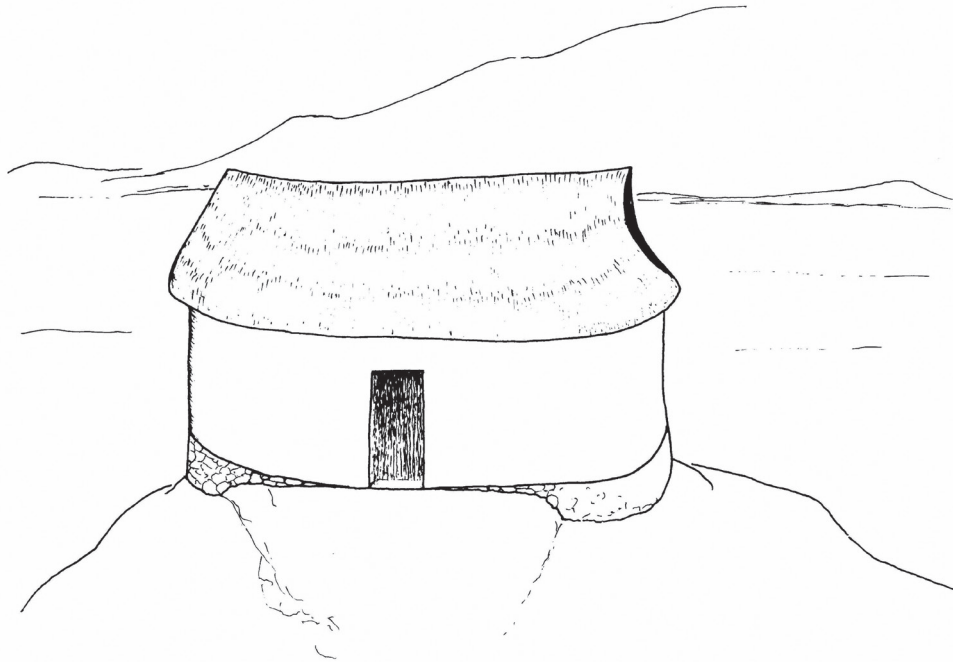


Fig. 5. The oval building on Tourkovouni (Lauter 1985, fig. 20).

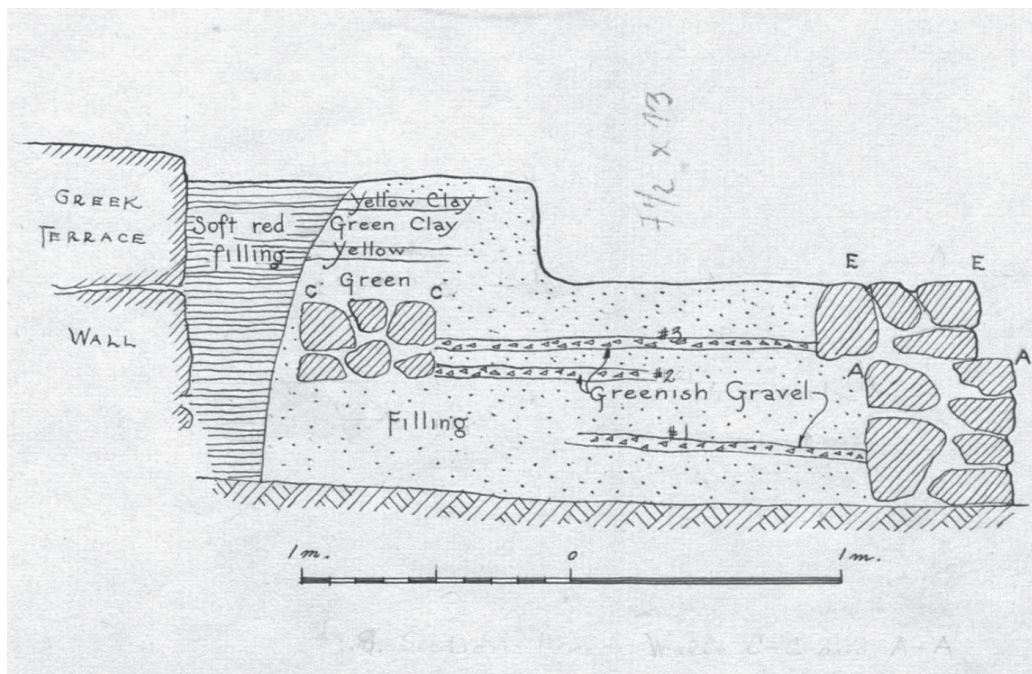


Fig. 6. Cross-section through courtyard or path between Walls A-A/ E-E, and C-C (Courtesy of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens).



Fig. 7. Fragments of household ware from the southern structures
(Courtesy of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens).



Fig. 8. Fragments of household ware from the southern structures
(Courtesy of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens).



Fig. 9. Household jar from from the southern structures
(Courtesy of the American School
of Classical Studies at Athens).

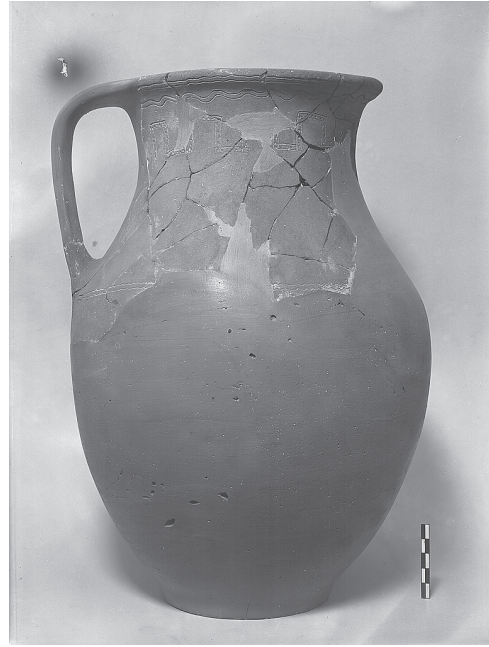


Fig. 10. Incised jug from the southern structures
(Courtesy of the American School
of Classical Studies at Athens).

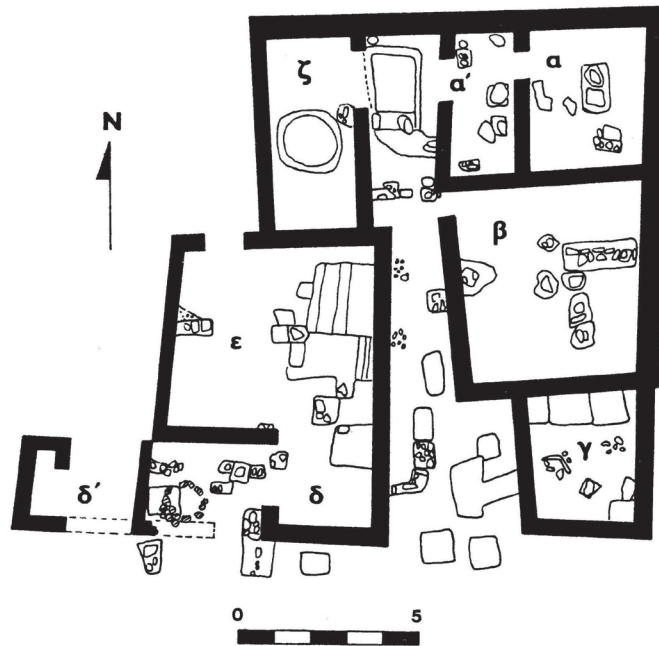


Fig. 11. LG building at the Academy (Mazarakis Ainian 1997, fig. 132).

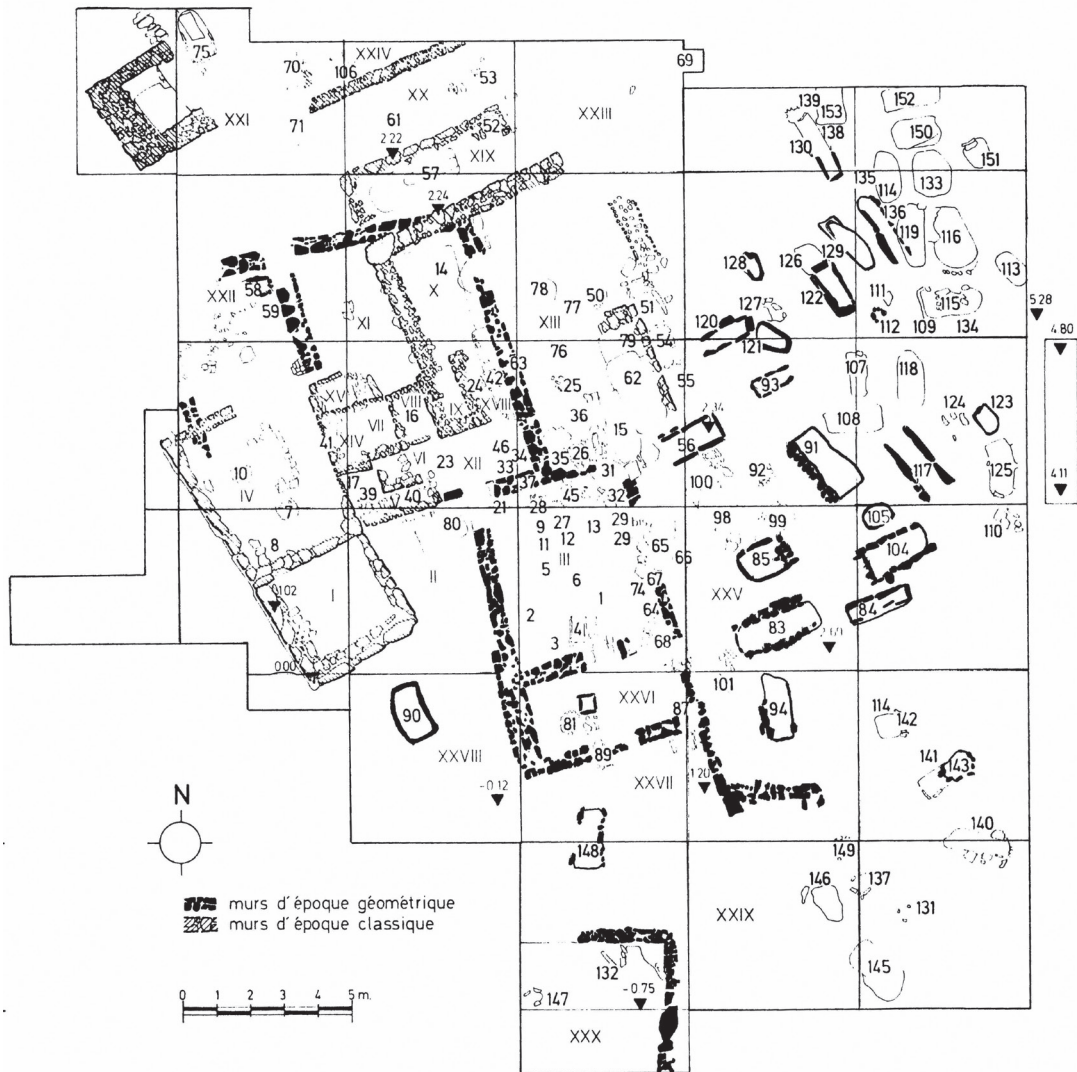


Fig. 12. Thorikos West Necropolis (Courtesy of the Belgian School at Athens).



Fig. 13. The "Sacred House" at Eleusis (adapted from Travlos 1988, fig. 119).