

## *Topography and structures at the area of the Academy in the time of Plato*

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to thank the organizers, Chloe Balla, Efi Baziotopoulou, and Paul Kalligas, for the invitation to this conference. It was a great opportunity to meet together scholars very known to me from their publications, and to attend to their lectures. I just dealt with the subject in a forthcoming book, which investigates the spaces used by Platonic philosophers of Athens from Plato to Proclus' time, In this regard I'd like to thank again Pavlos Kalligas and Efi Baziotopoulou, with whom I discussed in the previous months some specific questions, and prof. Panos Dimas, to which I am indebted of philosophical and historical explanations.

My contribution of today is focused on the most ancient period, cent. 4th – 1st BC, when Platonic School is attested in the area of the Academy. I'll present first the literary sources that provide information regarding the topography and the facilities, then I'll discuss the architectural evidence in the site.

### THE STORY

According to literary sources, we can reconstruct the history of Platonic school as follows:

In 387 BC, returning to Athens from Italy, Plato started to teach in the gymnasium dedicated to the hero Akademos:

D.L. III 7: Ἐπανελθὼν δὲ εἰς Ἀθήνας διέτριβεν ἐν Ἀκαδημίᾳ. Τὸ δ' ἐστὶ γυμνάσιον προύστειον ἀλσῶδες, ἀπὸ τινος ἥρωος ὀνομασθὲν Ἑκαδήμου.

There were perhaps not regular courses, but just occasional lessons, held in the same manner in which other philosophers, like Socrates and Antisthenes, did before in Athenian gymnasia.

Later, Plato bought a land in the same Academy area. Sources are very clear regarding this point:

- Plu. *Exil.* 10, 603b-c, who provides even the price of the sold land:

Ἡ δ' Ἀκαδημία, χωριδίον τρισχιλίων δραχμῶν, οἰκητήριον ἦν Πλάτωνος καὶ Ξενοκράτους καὶ Πολέμωνος, αὐτόθι σχολαζόντων καὶ καταβιούντων τὸν ἅπαντα χρόνον [...]

- D.L. III 20: ἔνιοι δὲ καὶ Δίωνα ἀποστεῖλαι φασὶ τὸ ἀργύριον καὶ τὸν μὴ προσέσθαι, ἀλλὰ καὶ κηπίδιον αὐτῷ τὸ ἐν Ἀκαδημίᾳ πρίασθαι.

Beside that of Plutarch and Diogenes, a much earlier testimony is also attesting the buying of the land by Plato. It's a 1<sup>st</sup> cent. BC papyrus found in Herculaneum and currently attributed to Philodemus from Gadara:

*PHerc* 1021, II 32-34 (Gaiser): [πρίασθαι μήτη]ν' ἐν[δεῖ] ἐ[γ]ῶμαι τὸ μ[ο]υσεῖον, [ἀ]λ[λ]ὰ Κολλυτεὺς ἦν τῶν δῆ[μ]ων.

According to J. Glucker's reconstruction, Plato moved the school from the Academy to his private land in the Kolonos Hippios; later, in the time of Carneades (2nd half of the 2nd cent. BC), the school returned to the Academy gymnasium again. It seems to me, however, that the school never moved from the gymnasium. Apart from several literary sources (the 4<sup>th</sup> cent BC comic poets Epikrates and Ephippus; the Herculaneum Papyri; Diogenes), there is an interesting historical document, that is attesting the location in the Academy, at the end of the III cent. BC: this is an inscription, *IG* II2 1276, dated to BC 167/166. The inscription was decorating the funerary monument of Telekles from Phokea, who was scholarch after Lacydes, *i.e.* around BC 215:

[— — —] βιο [- - -] – – αι σοφίης πείρατ' ἐφιέ[μ]ενοι· | [ἐκ δ' Ἀκα]δημείης, Τηλέκλεες, οὐκ ἀβόητο[ν] | [σὸν κλέος] ἰφθίμοις ἔπλετο Κεκροπίδα[ς]· | [καὶ νῦν τῆιδ]έ σε κοῦρος ὑπὸ χθονὶ θῆκε Σέλευκος | [δακρυχέων, ἐσθλ]ῆν δ' ἐσθλὸς ἔτεισε χάριν.

Telekles is said to be “from the Academy”. In epigraphic and literary sources from that period the term “Academeia” indicates only the north-west area of Athens, while the philosophical school will receive this denomination after the 1<sup>st</sup> cent. BC.

As already pointed out by Glucker, the school was in the Academy until 88 BC, when the scholar Philon of Larissa went to Rome, during the Mithridatic war. Two years later general Sylla came to Athens and besieged the site (Plutarch; Appianus); shortly after, in 79 BC, Cicero visited the place and described the school of Plato as desolated and ruined (*Fin.* V 2-4):

*Venit enim mihi Platonis in mentem, quem accepimus primum hic disputare solitum; cuius etiam illi propinqui hortuli non memoriam solum mihi afferunt sed ipsum videntur in conspectu meo ponere. Hic Speusippus, hic Xenocrates, hic eius auditor Polemo, cuius illa ipsa sessio fuit quam videmus. [...] ego illa moveor exhedra; modo enim fuit Carneadis, quem videre videor (est enim nota imago), a sedeque ipsa tanta ingenti magnitudine orbata desiderari illam vocem puto.*

At that time Cicero was attending courses of platonic philosophy held by Antiochus of Ascalon inside the Ptolemaion gymnasium. As Glucker fully demonstrated, Antiochus can't be considered as the scholar after Philon of Larissa, since he was not elected to that position. With the departing of Philon to Rome the first phase of Platonic school ends.

#### SCHOOL'S FACILITIES ACCORDING TO LITERARY SOURCES:

Plato's school represented something completely new in the intellectual life of Athens: it was the first organized community of philosophers, with several members who lived together in a particular place and under a specific regulation for a period of 3 centuries.

After a re-examination of all literary sources, I list the following as Platonic school facilities:

- the **gymnasium** at the very early (Cic. *Acad.* IV 17; D.L. III 20; 40-41);
- a **Muses temenos** (*PHerc* 1021 T 12-14; D.L. IV 1, 8-9; Olymp. *In Alcib.* II 145-146; *Prol.* I 4, 18-19; 29-30);
- a **Muses altar** (*PHerc* 1021 VI 60-63; D.L. III 25);
- an **exedra** (*Acad. Ind.* XXIX 39-42; XXXII 10; *PHerc* 164 XXIX 40-43; Cic. *Fin.* V 2 e 4; D.L. IV 19);
- a **garden** (*PHerc* 1021 XIV 36-41; Cic. *Fin.* V 2; Apu. *De Plat. Dogm. eius*, I 4; D.L. III 20; IV 19; Ael. *V.H.* III 19);
- a **very small house**, where Plato, Xenocrates and Polemo lived (Plu. *Exil.* 603b-c; Porph. *De abst.* I 36).
- the students **huts** (*PHerc.* 1021. col. 14, 36-41; D.L. IV 19);
- **library?**

The question whether there was a library in the premises is open. Even though it is never attested, we may suppose there was use of written texts, at least from Plato's successors onwards. It is also reasonable to suppose that these were also kept somewhere, so that members could have access to them. With respect to the student's huts (*kalubia*), however, it is vain to look for them, since they were made of quickly perishable material.

The *mouseion* appears to be the most important element among the school's facilities. The term properly means: sanctuary dedicated to the Muses. The preeminence of it inside Plato's school is supported by a strong evidence. **There are several occurrences of the term 'mouseion'** in the sources, even in very ancient ones, as synonymous with 'Platonic school'. Here are some such occurrences:

- Plato could buy the *mouseion*:

*PHerc* 1021, col. 2, 32-35 (Gaiser): [πρίασθαι μήτ]ιν' ἐν[δεῆ ἐ][γ]ῶμαι τὸ μ[ο]υσεῖον, [ἀ]λ[λ]ὰ Κολλυτεὺς ἦν τῶν δῆ[μ]ων.

- Speusippus was leading the *mouseion*:

*PHerc* 1021, col. 6, 30-33 (Gaiser): [Σπεύ]σιπ[ο]ν [δὲ] [Χάριτας ἀ]τοῦ [τότ' ἀναθεῖναι φησ]ι Φιλ[ό]χορος ἤδη κατ[έ]χο[ν]τα τὸ μουσεῖ[ο]ν].

- Speusippus was teaching in the *mouseion*:

*PHerc* 1021, col. T, ll. 12-14 (Gaiser): εἰ μὴ τὴν διατρι[βή]ν ἐποιήσατ[ο ε]ἰς τὸ μου[σεῖ]ον π[έ]ραν τ[ῆ]ς Ἀκ[α]δημείας [...].

- Plato founded a *mouseion* in the Academy:

D.L. IV 1, 8-9: Χαρίτων τε ἀγάλματα ἀνέθηκεν ἐν τῷ μουσειῷ τῷ ὑπὸ Πλάτωνος ἐν Ἀκαδημίᾳ ἰδρυθέντι.

### ARCHAEOLOGICAL DATA

In the current topographical map of the Academy, which was edited by I. Travlos in 1971, only two buildings inside the perimeter are marked: one on the southern-east corner, the so-called gymnasium and one further to the north, generally called *Tetragonos Peristylos*.

A more detailed map of the architectural evidence and a new interpretation of the topography of the whole area is possible after the examination of the excavators' diaries and of all excavation reports published. Here I would like to express my gratitude to the Akadimia Athinon and to the Archaeologiki Etaireia for the permission to access to them and the kind assistance during the examination.

On the map red color marks Classical and Hellenistic architectural remains, while green indicates Late Roman ones. The remains we take to be Classical-Hellenistic are (1) a T shape altar, in the east edge of the area, (2) foundations of 2 supposed temples (?), and, of course, (3) the *Tetragonos Peristylos*.

The building to the south-east, the so-called gymnasium, is not marked, since it seems to me that its dating and interpretation are in need of revision. The identification of the gymnasium building is the first point we must deal with, since, as we have seen, it was here Plato started to teach when he returned from Italy in BC 387.

Against the *communis opinio*, I take the gymnasium of the Akademy to be the northern building, generally called *Tetragonos Peristylos*. The south-east building is very complicated, absolutely different in plan and function from typical gymnasia, as we are going to see in a bit.

The *Tetragonos Peristylos* is a square court (40 x 40 m), normally dated to the second half of 4<sup>th</sup> century. The peristyle is made of blocks of conglomerate and limestone (how we can see along the north and west sides moreover. Scholars don't recognize rooms beyond the peristyle, but it's quite possible there are such rooms beyond its northern edge, where a classical wall, made of limestone blocks, follows the same direction of the Peristyle's northern side. From a general view, even the square court seems to be a typical, comparable to known gymnasia, of 4<sup>th</sup> cent BC, as it is shown by that one of Lykeion, discovered by Effie Lygouri Tolia in 1996. The strongest opposition to consider this as the building used by Plato at the beginning is the dating, since the building technique, i. e. the combination of conglomerate and limestone blocks, moves the dating to the 2 half of the 4 cent. It's possible to presume an earlier date, since there is an example showing the same technique in the early 4<sup>th</sup> cent. This is the basement of Dexileos funerary monument in the Keramikos, where the two materials are employed together. As known from the dedicatory inscription the monument was erected in 390 BC.

The forthcoming publication of the several inscriptions found in connection with the building will be a fundamental to understand.

As already mentioned, Plato used the gymnasium of Akademos for a short period. Very soon he moved to the land acquired in the same area, where he placed his house and the school.

Regarding the facilities belonging to the Platonic school, at the moment it seems impossible to establish any connection with the buildings attested in the sources and the architectural remains pointed out in the area; we can just make a hypothetical description of their appearing, and reflect on previous views.

The architecture of the Muses *temenos*, the altar, the *exedra* and the *oikiterion*, can be only supposed, in the light of other known examples. *Temenos* is normally a precinct, a surrounding wall or an enclosure made of natural elements (trees, plants, river), which limits the sacred area; inside it there is always an altar. Since the temple is not a necessary element inside *mouseia*, while the altar is, we can imagine a precinct, with the altar in prominent position, and used for the rituals due to the goddesses.

We don't know the shape of the Muses altar (if it is rectangular, squared, in U or T shape), but we may suppose that close to it were the statues of goddesses, as for instance of the Charites, as well as the portrait of Plato (statue?), as we may infer from certain testimonia.

*Exedra* could be the lesson room, as (we may infer from the sources. In architecture *exedra* is the gymnasium space used for the lessons of ephebs : a room with seats, beyond a colonnade, or a building in the open, in  $\Pi$  or hemispherical shape. Here we suppose an *exedra* in the *frei stehenden* typology (of those studied by Susanne Thungen). These are very well attested in the 4<sup>th</sup> cent. BC, and employed for different purposes, public, sacred and private contexts. In the case of Plato, we think about a semi-circular bank, where the teacher and the students could have a seat, like it is represented in the 1<sup>st</sup> cent. BC mosaic, the so-called "of the Academy".

It is impossible to determine the architecture of the *oikiterion*: it was a small *oikos*, perhaps made of a only one room, used for many purposes: head-quarters, scholar's house and meeting room for the performing of rituals (like feast and banquets well attested).

## Cent. 1st - 4th AD and 5<sup>th</sup>

### HISTORICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERARY SOURCES

Glucker demonstrated persuasively that there is no evidence to support the view that a Platonic school was in operation in Athens in the centuries 1-4 AD. We know of a few Platonic philosophers (L. Calvenus Taurus, Atticus, Severus, Plutarch, Ammonius), but no one is connected with a school, nor with the site of the Academy. This fits well the history of the site: Philon's move to Rome in 88 BC; Sylla's siege in 86 BC; the state of abandonment witnessed by Cicero in 79 BC.

In support we add a long inscription, IG II2 2776, dated at AD 138-143, and found in the agora, which records, among other lands, those sold "in the Academy" to private citizens for private use. Regarding the topography of the site, the only architectural remains datable to this period in the place are the numbers 8, 14, 16, 17: they probably belong to a rich house and to a bath complex.

The 5<sup>th</sup> cent. AD is the period of platonic renaissance in Athens, when the *diadoche* is restored: Plutarch appoints Syrianus as his *diadochus*; and Syrianus does the same with Proclus.

In spite of the renaissance, no literary source offers indications about the place used by Platonic philosophers in the 5<sup>th</sup> cent. AD; neither Marynus' Proclus life is helpful about this point.

As in the period before, Platonic philosophers are not in connection with the site of the Academy. The only concern is Marynus', who describes the visits to the site by Proclus.

As pointed out from Glucker and Saffrey, Proclus visits were in order to greet the memory of past philosophers: he was visiting once per year, on specific days, and he was not staying there.

## THE AKADEMY SITE IN THE 5<sup>TH</sup> CENT. AD.

What happened to the Akademy area in this period? The main architectural works concern the building which till now has been regarded as the gymnasium. Some scholars thought it was renovated in the 5th century AD, in order to be used by neo-platonic philosophers, until the closing of the school by the Justinian edict of 529.

I do not believe the literary sources or the archaeological remains support this interpretation. I would like to make a suggestion is based on the identification of at least 4 building phases:

- Phase 1 is an unknown building from which only the material employed in Phase 2 survives.
- Phase 2 is represented by a rectangular oikos (8.80 x 13.60 m), made completely out of materials recycled from the 1 phase building. They are white and soft limestone blocks, well squared. The double T grapes and anathyrosis marks go up to the archaic or classical age for the 1 phase building.
- Phase 3: similar white blocks foundations are added on the south-west corner. They run at least 7 meters towards the west. It is impossible to say if the same arrangement was on the eastern side, because of the lack of evidence, but I think it's very probable. In the same period, 4.50 meters south, a six columns portico is arranged just in front of the oikos. We can still see the foundations, with columns at the distance of 2 meters from each other.
- Phase 4: enlargements on the two sides of the oikos. Three rooms are made with recycled blocks. At this stage the previous portico is covered, probably in order to make it higher and longer, or in order to change it into a long basement.

Now the building reaches its monumental shape: two long wings are attached to the side rooms. Another one is added to the south, in order to close a big rectangular court (44.40 x 23.40 m). Inside the east, west, and south sides are no rooms, only pilasters at the distance of 2.50 m each other. Perhaps in contemporary a rectangular basin is arranged along the northern edge, while a squared one is created at the center of the courtyard.

According to the excavator and to the building technique, this final plan was conceived in late roman time (4-5<sup>th</sup> cent. AD); when gymnasia are not existing anymore in Athens, since the last documents concerning them are from AD 265 (the last paidotriba and cosmetes appear in inscription of 263 o 267 AD).

So In the 4-5<sup>th</sup> century the building is widely enlarged. We can understand how, but we can't say why. We can only hypothesize what the building looked like. I believe the building must be considered in connection with the remains on the western and eastern sides of it, which are roman and, most importantly, follow the same orientation. Perhaps those ones are further additions, but they seem to complete a big complex realized in Late Antiquity in this part of the city.

In the same period, or little after, a cistern is made in the eastern of the building, at the end of a sequence of nine tombs. Tombs must be prior to the cistern; they are located along a retaining wall, built with reemployed material, among which we can see a late roman column. Beyond the wall, on the south of it, are quadrangular rooms. Scanty remains of paintings are visible on some of them.

To conclude, we can't consider the final building as a gymnasium, for reasons both historical, since gymnasia are not existing anymore in Athens at that time, and architectural, because of the peculiarity of the plan. An updated architectural relief is necessary for a correct interpretation; but it's also important to look at the building from a wide historical prospective, and consider the whole area in Late Antiquity, by investigating also the demographical indexes, and the relationships among other settlements in the area.

The wish is that new systematic excavations could take place in the site, to clarify many important questions.