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NOTA KOUROU

# Ancestral and chthonic cults at Tenos

## Abstract

This paper presents the material evidence from two neighbouring Early Iron Age sites at Xobourgo on Tenos, identified as sacred places, and comments on their religious character and evolution. The first, conventionally named the Pro-Cyclopean Sanctuary, has a purely mortuary character. It starts in the Late Protogeometric period with an ancestral cult on a pebble platform over an empty grave, continues with a number of pyre pits inside enclosure walls, and ends up with a chthonic cult at an *eschara* in the Late Geometric period to be replaced by a small sacred *oikos* in the 7th century. The second starts as an open-air shrine, named the Pre-Thesmophorion Shrine, with an *eschara* and a protected place for storing pithoi, and it is turned into a Demeter sanctuary, a Thesmophorion, with a small temple in the Classical period. After considering the development and phases of both sites, it is claimed that they have similar, though not identical, cultic roles. Their different architectural and religious evolution is considered as largely dependent on social changes and historical conditions. They are compared and discussed against contemporary archaeological evidence for ancestral and chthonic cults focusing on such evidence from Tenos.*

*Keywords:* Tenos, Xobourgo, ancestral cult, chthonic cult, Thesmophorion

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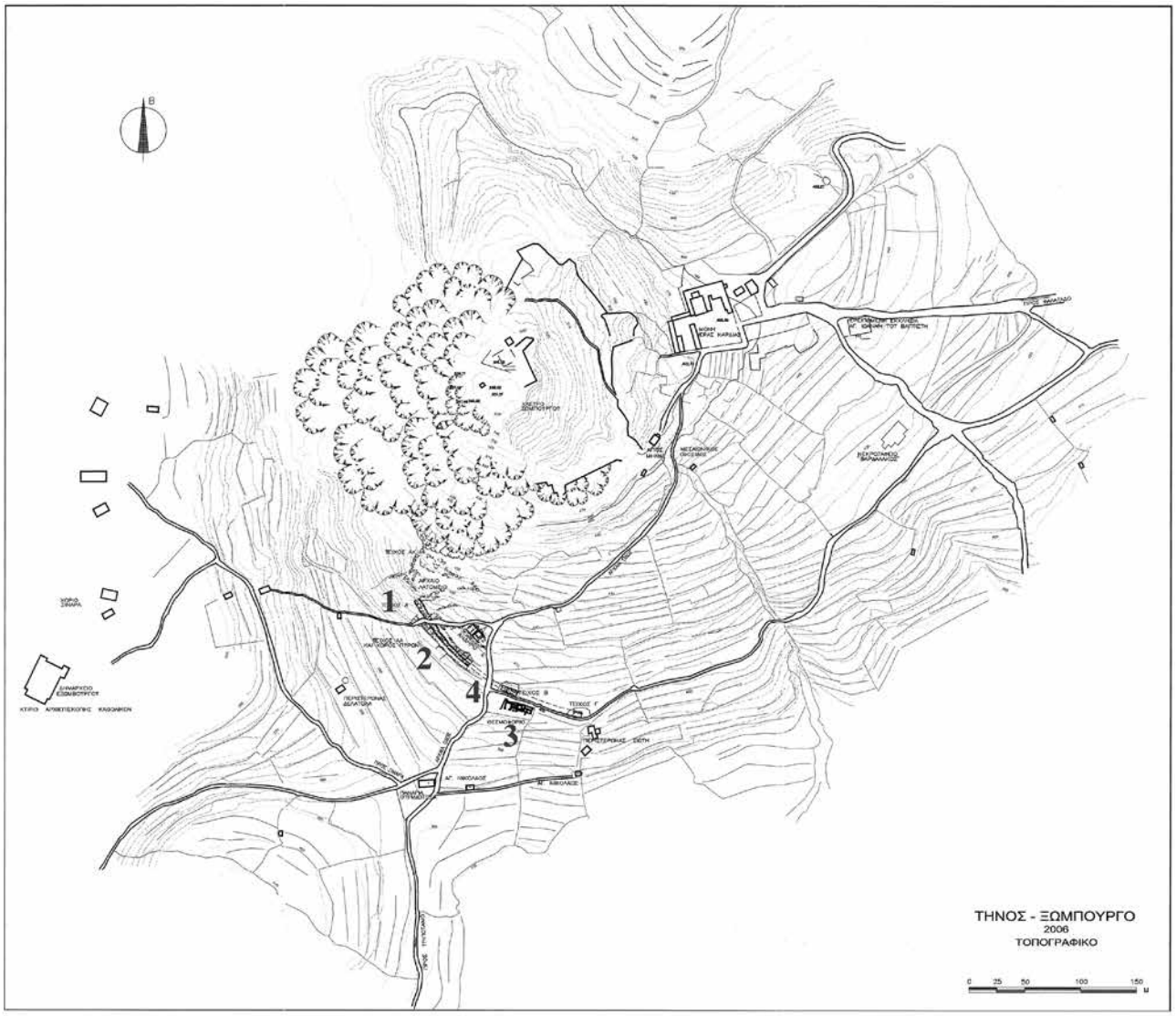
Archaeological evidence for cultic places in the Early Iron Age Aegean is extremely sparse and hazy. The archaeological visibility of anything able to be considered a religious space, let alone practice, is low because most sacred locales of this date are identified on the basis of later material from the site.[1] The question of continuity of Mycenaean religion into this period is very complicated and predominantly localized "either in open-air sanctuaries, or shrines identifiable by specific items, like wheel-made terracottas".[2] The religious landscape is now different from that of the Bronze Age and the presence of cultic buildings is unusual before the end of the 8th century BC.[3] Open-air sanctuaries are indeed more common,[4] but the identification of outdoor spaces used for ceremonies, be they religious or simply social, is not easy as the evidence for such is mostly provided only through the deposition of pottery, occasionally accompanied by animal bones and ashes. The usual absence of other offerings, such as figurines or ritual utensils, in these deposits constitutes a major impediment in the identification of the site as sacred. In this rather opaque and elusive religious landscape, a hearth or an altar potentially constitute more solid evidence for the classification of a site as cultic.

Hearths in Early Iron Age open-air sanctuaries are far from common. This scarcity increases the interest in two neighbouring open-air shrines with hearths that were excavated at the site of Xobourgo on Tenos, and are discussed below. The evolution of each takes a different course, but they have similar, though not identical, cultic roles and character. One was found on a terrace in front of the cyclopean fortification wall that marks the first settlement at the site; hence it has

* I am most grateful to the anonymous reviewers for their comments and suggestions that saved me from many mistakes. The plans are by Thanasis Kouros and their digitalization by Vicky Vlachou; I address my sincerest thanks to both of them.

[1] Cf. Haysom 2019, 53; 2020, 317–318.
[2] Antonaccio 1994, 89. For the complexities of the issue of continuity of Mycenaean religion, cf. recently, Prost 2018, 160–164.
[3] Cf. Mazarakis Ainian 1997, 392 and more recently, Eder 2019, 36–41 for a concise review of early sanctuaries.
[4] Cf. de Polignac 1994, 3–18.




*Plan 1. Topographical plan of the excavated area at Xobourgo: 1. Cyclopean wall. 2. Archaic/Classical wall overlying the Pro-Cyclopean Sanctuary. 3. Thesmophorion. 4. The main gate to the settlement. Drawing: Thanasis Kouros.*

been conventionally named the Pro-Cyclopean Sanctuary.[5] The other has been labelled the Pre-Thesmophorion Shrine, because it was identified inside a later building complex recognized as a Demeter sanctuary, and more specifically as a Thesmophorion (*Plan 1*).[6]

The term *eschara* in the sense of an altar for sacrifices first occurs in the texts of the 5th-century tragedians, while in the Homeric epics it is used exclusively for the household hearth.[7] The potential confusion is further exacerbated by the fact that the word *eschara* is also used for the upper part of the altar. A more clear-cut distinction between altar and *eschara*, however, appears later in some literary sources of the Hellenistic period, when the *eschara* appears linked with a particular kind of hero-cult ("Βωμούς θεῶν φησίν, ἐσχάρας δε ἡρώων").[8] Conse-

[5] Cf. Kourou 2008, 67–69; 2011, 400–401 fig. 2; 2013, 86–94.
[6] Cf. Kourou 2008, 69 n. 28; 2013, 94–97; 2019, 175–209.

[7] For a detailed survey and discussion of the epigraphical and literary sources referring to *eschara*, cf. Ekroth 2002, 23–59.
[8] *FGrHist* 84 F7 (Neanthes of Kyzikos), For this phrase ( "Altars are for gods, hearths for heroes") and its complexities for the issue of a straightforward distinction between *eschara* and altar, cf. Ekroth 2002, 45 n. 109.

*Fig. 1. Xobourgo hill. View from the south-west looking to north-east . Photograph: Xobourgo Excavations Archive.*

quently, and on the basis of written sources, the cultic aspects of *eschara* and the distinction of its function from that of an altar, at least for the earlier periods, still remain uncertain in spite of recent detailed analysis. On archaeological evidence, hearths from Early Iron Age contexts are basically known from houses, in which they had a practical purpose as fireplaces for heating and lighting, or from temples, where they were linked with sacrifices or with ritualized forms of communal eating and drinking.[9] A hearth set in the open air is a rarely occurring monument.[10]

In archaeological literature the open-air *eschara* has been traditionally linked with rituals to chthonic heroes and deities, unlike the altar which has been considered as used for offerings to the Olympian gods.[11] A sacrifice on the altar was thought to allow the smoke and the prayers to rise in the air towards the sphere where the Olympian divinities were assumed to dwell. On the other hand, any libation or other offering made at the *eschara*, or occasionally at a kind of pit ("*bothros*") was considered to sink down through the soil directly to the subterranean powers to whom it was addressed, i.e. to those linked with the underworld, the dead and chthonic divinities. But this binary distinction between chthonian and olympian sacrifices has recently been strongly criticized. After reviewing the literary sources in detail, Gunnel Ekroth argues that in written sources a heroic sacrifice was indistinguishable from a divine sacrifice.[12] Others, however, still maintain the division between Olympians and Chthonians, though accepting that "the debate is just opening not closing".[13] Recently, Robert Parker has more accurately argued that "chthonian sacrifice as a single type has vanished"; instead, he recognizes a number of other different forms of chthonic sacrifice because "the divergences from standard sacrificial forms will always have had a meaning, even if one we are often unable to recover. But those divergences obey a more complicated or more fragmented logic than even a sophisticated elaboration of the chthonian/Olympian opposition can capture".[14] Clearly, then, there is space for the archaeological evidence to contribute to the issue.

## The Pro-Cyclopean Sanctuary

The site of Xobourgo at the centre of the southern part of the island of Tenos occupies a naturally defensive locality. The hill is an impressive granite outcrop (*Fig. 1*), which rises to an altitude of 557 m and overlooks important routes across the island, while from its summit most of the coastline can be observed. The site, which spreads in terraces, also has adequate fertile land down its southern slope and a good wa-

[9] Recently renamed commensality, cf. Mazarakis Ainian 1997, 280 and passim. Cf. also, Prent 2005, 447–450 (for Crete). Hearths are also known in the Cyclades, both in houses (cf. e.g. Televantou 2008, 42 figs. 53a–b for Andros, Ypsili or temples, cf. e.g. Cambitoglou *et al.* 1988, 170–171 for the temple at Zagora and Lambrinoudakis 1992, 210 figs. 10–11 for the sanctuary at Yria on Naxos.

[10] Hearths in the open air occur mostly in Demeter sanctuaries, cf. Karatas 2014, 371.

[11] Cf. Burkert 1985, 199–203; Scullion 1994, 75–119; 2000, 163–171; 2005, 23–36.

[12] Cf. Ekroth 2002, 39–59; 1998, 117–118.

[13] Scullion 2005, 23.

[14] Parker 2011, 80–84, 283–286.

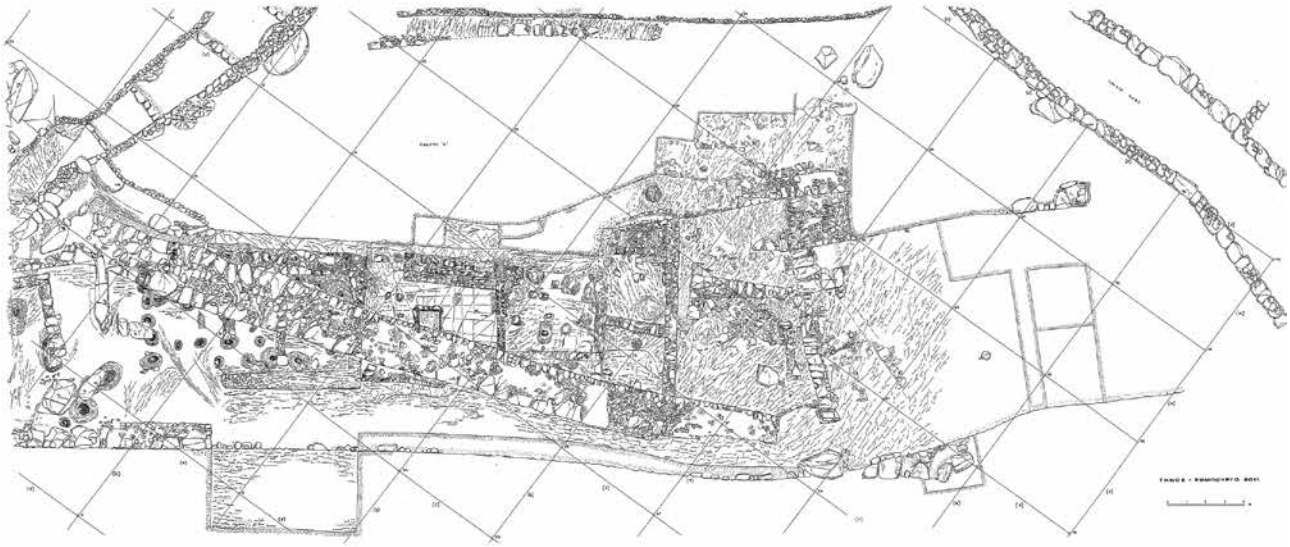

*Fig. 2. Xobourgo, Aerial view of the excavated area: 1. Cyclopean wall. 2. Archaic/Classical wall overlying the Pro-Cyclopean Sanctuary. 3. Thesmophorion. 4. The main gate to the settlement. Photograph: Xobourgo Excavations Archive.*

*Fig. 3. The north-eastern part of the Pro-Cyclopean Sanctuary with the* eschara *and the sacred* oikos *at a lower stratigraphic level than the Archaic wall. View from north-east looking south-west Photograph: Xobourgo Excavations Archive.*

ter supply. It was first inhabited and fortified by a cyclopean wall at the start of the Early Iron Age, when the inhabitants of coastal settlements, threatened by piracy, moved inland to defendable locations. The cyclopean wall, now mostly surviving at the south-west slopes of Xobourgo, extended over two terraces on the highest accessible slope here to encircle a small refuge site.[15]

In time this small early community at Xobourgo grew larger and established itself outside the cyclopean wall, all over the west and south part of the hill. It soon became an extensive settlement, called *Polis* in inscriptions,[16] which seems to have served as the main economic and political centre of the island, although it remained largely unprotected. But at the end of the 6th/early 5th century BC it acquired a new fortification wall as a response to the oncoming threat of a Persian invasion into the Aegean. The new wall, exactly following the edge of the terraces, ran north-west to join the cyclopean rampart, so that the entire settlement was fortified (*Fig. 2*).[17] Anything in its way had necessarily to be overbuilt, to allow the new wall to join the western cyclopean rampart. This explains the perfect

[15] Cf. Kourou 2001; 2002, 256–257; 2005, 24–25 figs. 5–6; 2013, 76 figs. 47–49, 60–61.
[16] Cf. *IG* XII 5, 872, lines 104, 110, 119: "ἐκ Πόλεως" (for a 4th-century BC inscription from Tenos, now in the British Museum, recording property transactions). Cf. also, Kontoleon 1955, 258; Étienne 1990, 22 (for a detailed analysis of the names of localities recorded in the inscription, which are considered to highlight on the tribal system of Tenos).
[17] Cf. Kourou 2002, 257–262 pls. 65–67; 2005, 24–26 figs. 5–8; 2011, 400–403 figs. 1–7.



*Plan 2. The Pro-Cyclopean Sanctuary at a lower stratigraphic level than the Archaic/Classical wall. Drawing: Thanasis Kouros.*

state of preservation of the Pro-Cyclopean Sanctuary on the narrow terrace in front of the cyclopean wall that was then entirely covered by the Archaic fortification (*Fig. 3* and *Plan 2*).

The Pro-Cyclopean Sanctuary has four distinct and successive phases spanning a long period from the Protogeometric period down to the early 7th century BC.

## THE EARLIEST TRACES OF THE CULT AT THE PRO-CYCLOPEAN SANCTUARY

The earliest visible traces of a cult attested in the Pro-Cyclopean Sanctuary indicate a type of ancestral cult, centred on a platform over an empty shaft grave excavated just outside the gate of the cyclopean rampart (*Fig. 4*).[18] The platform is made of small pebbles fixed into a circular clay floor 1.80 m in diameter, which overlies a large shaft 1.80 m long and 0.80 m wide. The shaft was found empty of its original contents and filled with sand that had been brought up to the hill from the coast located six or seven kilometres away. A huge boulder lying over the shaft functioned as its marker. The date of the empty shaft grave is inferred from some Late Protogeometric sherds found in the area (though not in the grave). Two iron swords of the Naue II type, which were bent and had been exposed to fire ("killed swords"),[19] and which were found by the foundation trench of the Archaic wall close to the shaft and the platform, are assumed to have originally belonged to the shaft's first (i.e. funerary) contents.

Cultic platforms, usually circular but occasionally oval or rectangular, and made of stones or pebbles and clay, represent an Early Iron Age ritual tradition of social practice linked with ancestral cult, though not always in direct connection with mortuary rituals.[20] They may occur inside a building or in the open air associated with graves or even a fortification wall. The earliest such platforms have been recently identified at Lefkandi in a Late Bronze and Early Iron Age "ritual zone" not related to a cemetery.[21] But the presence of such a platform in the later Heroon of Lefkandi indicates that by the Late Protogeometric period the mortuary connection had been achieved.[22] It is with this funerary association that cultic platforms are basically known in the Cyclades and Euboea in the Geometric period. The most comprehensible group among them is that at the Metropolis of Naxos, where cultic platforms overlying earlier graves have been excavated by the Mycenean wall.[23] But the closest parallels to the Xobourgo platform over an empty grave is offered by a cluster of stone platforms overlying earlier empty tombs at Kyme-Viglatouri in Euboea.[24]

[18] Cf. Kourou 2011, 411 fig. 5; 2013, 88 fig. 73; 2014–2015, 19 fig. 9; 2015, 96–97 fig. 12; Denti 2021, 990–991 fig. 14.
[19] Cf. Kourou 2011, fig. 4; 2013, 88 fig. 72.
[20] Cf. Hägg 1983, 189–193; Lambrinoudakis 1988, 235–246; Kourou 2014–2015, 19–24; 2015, 92–98.
[21] Cf. Lemos 2019, 75–89.
[22] Cf. Coulton 1993, 51 pls. 7 and 8a–b. For a broader treatment of these platforms in the Aegean and in Central Mediterranean, cf. Denti 2021, 963–1011.
[23] Cf. Lambrinoudakis 1988, 241 figs. 12, 18–20; Kourou 2015, 93 figs. 11a–b. For some less well-known platforms over Geometric graves at Aegina, cf. Klebinder Gaus 2019, 126–129 (with bibliography).
[24] Cf. Sapouna-Sakellaraki 1998, 65–71 fig. 22, figs. 30.3 and 8; Kourou 2015, 96.


*Fig. 4. Ancestral cult over an empty tomb: a. the pebble platform, b. the empty tomb, c. the boulder marker. View from the north-west looking south-east Photograph: Xobourgo Excavations Archive.*

The undeniable similarities between the Xobourgo and the Kyme-Viglatouri platforms over empty graves imply shared religious and social beliefs and a common ideological background for ancestral cult in the Early Iron Age. The removal of bones and grave offerings and the subsequent filling of the shaft with sand seems to have been part of a mortuary ritual to purify the grave and drive away evil spirits and pollution associated with death. Purification rituals, carried out either with fire or with water or sand, are widely attested in the Early Iron Age.[25] For example, at the Tsikalario cemetery on Naxos, sand had been used to fill vases deposited inside or outside the funerary tumuli.[26] Sand, sea water, or pebbles were all thought to have had a purifying quality that was linked to sanctity. A sanctified empty grave covered by a ritual platform cannot be considered as belonging to a simple mortal, but rather to one of special importance, potentially worthy of a communal form of cult and rituals.[27] This is a form of hero-cult "not of the prehistoric, but of the recent dead".[28] To whom the worship at the platform over the empty tomb at Xobourgo was addressed we cannot say, but its location just outside the gate of the cyclopean wall underlines its importance for the community.[29]

## THE SECOND STAGE OF CULTIC ACTIVITY IN THE PRO-CYCLOPEAN SANCTUARY

In the Geometric period a major cultic development took place on the terrace in front of the cyclopean wall, with the establishment of a form of ancestral cult taking place at a number of smaller or larger pyre pits all over the terrace (*Plan 2*). The pyre pits were cut into the bedrock and were set in groups inside a low but well-built enclosure wall.[30] Occasionally two or three pits dug side by side were joined to one another by a narrow channel (*Fig. 5*)[31] and so formed distinct units. The ceremony was based on a fire that was lit in each pyre pit, as implied by traces of burning on the rock. Offerings were thrown into the pit, and the ritual was then completed by casting a heap of stones into it to extinguish the fire. An interesting peculiarity of this practice was the consistent use of a large, coloured pebble at the end of the ceremony; evidently this was the final stone added to the small tumulus built over the fire, thus terminating the ritual in the pyre pit. Some of these tumuli have been nicely preserved below the later Archaic wall that covered them (*Fig. 6*).[32] These small stone tumuli cre-

[25] Cf. Parker 1983, 33–39; Sourvinou-Inwood 1983, 38; Paoletti 2004, 3–34.
[26] Cf. Zafeiropoulou 2001, 290–292.
[27] Snodgrass 1988, 23. Mazarakis Ainian 2016, 102–103 refers to this kind of ancestral cult as that of "Prominent individuals who were honoured after their death". For hero cults, cf. Mazarakis Ainian 2004, 131–140 (with bibliography).
[28] Cf. Kourou 2014–2015, 10–11.
[29] Cf. Lambrinoudakis 2000, 307–310 for the role of hero cults in the development of the community and consequently of the *polis* state system.
[30] Cf. Kourou 2013, 87 fig. 70.
[31] Cf. Kourou 2002, fig. 5 and pl. 66A; 2013, 89 fig. 74.
[32] Cf. Kourou 2014–2015, 16 fig. 5.

*Fig. 5. Two pyre pits linked by a narrow channel. View from the west looking towards the foundations of the Archaic wall further east. Photograph: Xobourgo Excavations Archive.*

*Fig. 6. Pyre pit with persisting stone tumulus surviving below the Archaic wall. View from the west looking east. Photograph: Xobourgo Excavation Archive.*

ated above the pits were afterwards covered by earth and the pyre pit itself was marked either by a large boulder or by a flat and usually circular stone that functioned as an offering table in future rites, as indicated by the presence of gifts on or by them.[33] Pottery from the pits consists mostly of sherds from local handmade vases, but fine painted wares, not only local but also Attic or Euboean, are also present: they date mainly to the Geometric period. Other offerings include loom weights, bone rings, or metal objects, such as bronze knives or jewellery such as pins or fibulae. Animal bones, mostly parts of sheep and goats' long bones including thighbones and occasionally bones of cattle, were also found in the pyre pits.

Among the pyre pits there was a small cist grave,[34] which indicates that the ritual activity in this area was directly related to the world of the dead and had a mortuary character. The structure of a double pyre pit (*Fig. 7*) on the eastern edge of the terrace by the retaining wall presents elements that further imply a funereal ideology. The two pits were originally cut into the rock next to the retaining wall, while the area in front of them was paved with schist slabs to create a kind of passageway to them.[35] A cutting at the centre of this paved area contained a large circular stone, which must have been used as an offering table to judge from a heap of broken *Murex trunculus* shells that were found near it.[36] Each pyre pit was covered by a small stone tumulus, which contained a large pebble, white for one, black for the other. This twin pyre pit went out of use for some time, since over both pits there formed a layer of earth about 40 cm deep. Then the area was reused for another pair of pyres, again set side by side. But this time both


*Fig. 7. The double pyre pit. View from the west looking east. Photograph: Xobourgo Excavations Archive.*

pits were treated as individual monuments, as is shown by a low wall surrounding each of them. One of these enclosures had an offering table set in front of it, the other a stone stele, thus hinting at its mortuary character. But otherwise the pits, which had a range of offerings as do the other pits on the terrace, must have had a similar function.

The number of pyre pits on this terrace indicates cultic activity shared by many people, while the enclosure walls and the composite pits indicate that this activity was conducted by families of a complex society of a tribal system in which families constituted the main body of social structure.[37] Each

[33] Cf. Kourou 2014–2015, 17 fig. 6.
[34] Cf. Kourou 2008, 75 fig. 9.
[35] Cf. Kourou 2005, 27 fig. 9; 2008, 72 fig. 6; 2011, 401 fig. 3; 2013, 91 figs. 78–79.
[36] Cf. Kourou 2013, 92 fig. 80.

[37] For the tribal system of Tenos, based on territorial divisions rather than political, and the problems concerning the number of tribes, cf. Étienne 1990, 22, 45–47.


*Fig. 8. The area of the* eschara*: 1. The* eschara*, 2. The area of ash deposit (now removed), 3. The bench, 4. The sealed pyre pits. View taken from the north-west, looking south-east Photograph: Xobourgo Excavations Archive.*

cluster of pits inside an enclosure served part of this society, a family rather than tribe, more than once, as most pits had been used several times. There must have been a periodic veneration of ancestors through a ritual based on fire and accompanied by a ceremonial meal, as indicated by the animal bones. Similar pyre pits on other islands, like Naxos,[38] indicate that this type of ancestral cult was common in the Cyclades throughout the Geometric period.

## THE THIRD STAGE OF CULTIC ACTIVITY IN THE PRO-CYCLOPEAN SANCTUARY

Towards the end of the Late Geometric period, the use of pyre pits was abandoned and the terrace was reorganized. A large *eschara* measuring 1.10 x 1.18 m (*Fig. 3*) and lined by four monolithic slabs of schist was established at about the centre of the terrace. The retaining wall just opposite the *eschara* was reshaped into a long spacious bench to better serve the ceremonies centred at the *eschara*. The area between bench and *eschara* was paved; the existing pyre pits were sealed. The *eschara* itself was constructed above a former large pyre pit. Next to the *eschara* by the rising bedrock a huge deposit of ashes and sooty earth was found, full of burnt bones and pottery sherds in six layers, each covered by a layer of schist plaques (*Figs. 8–9*).

In an Early Iron Age open-air sacred place an *eschara* or an ash deposit are not unexpected features. But outdoor benches remain unknown, though they occur in houses or in temples where they were used for the positioning of votive offerings and occasionally of the cultic image.[39] The bench in the Pro-Cyclopean Sanctuary located in the open air and next to the ash deposit seems to be a significant architectural element with a role to play for the rituals at the *eschara*; but it constitutes a unique case in Early Iron Age Aegean.

This new configuration of space at the Pro-Cyclopean Sanctuary represents a shift in the character of the cult and a new stage in the evolution of ritual practices at the site. The large size of the ash deposit and the considerable number of fragments of cooking pots found in the *eschara* imply repeated sacrifices of a large scale, performed not just for the ancestors of a single family, but rather on behalf of the entire community using the site. The new ritual involving a large sacrifice and a communal meal introduces a different type of ancestral cult now intended for both the broader audience of the entire community and possibly the veneration of ancestors *in toto*. Yet, its function does not endure for long. In the

[38] Cf. Lambrinoudakis 1988, 238. For their postulated existence at Amorgos, cf. Marangou 2002, 224.

[39] Mazarakis Ainian 1997, 280–281; Prent 2005, 424–441.


*Fig. 9. Section of the ash deposit in six layers, each covered by a flooring of schist plaques. View taken from the west looking east. Photograph: Xobourgo Excavations Archive.*

early 7th century BC another shift in the cultic practices on the terrace occurs.

## THE FOURTH STAGE OF CULTIC ACTIVITY IN THE PRO-CYCLOPEAN SANCTUARY: THE SACRED *OIKOS*

The late 8th century BC, and at some places the early 7th, represent the period that the newly instituted *polis* system was fully implemented in the Greek world. This involves a number of major political and social transformations that affect religious practices as well. A significant change at the Pro-Cyclopean Sanctuary is that the use of the *eschara* was abandoned and a small sacred building, an *oikos,* (*Fig. 10*) was built to replace it as the focus of the cultic practices. This is not simply an architectural renovation of the sanctuary, but a significant shift in the character of the cult and the rituals. The *oikos* is a small rectangular building, built east of the *eschara* and the ash deposit. It was constructed over a number of pyre pits that had pre-existed in the area; the lower part of its walls was of stone. Entrance to this *oikos* was at its eastern part through a wide door that was provided with a monolithic threshold, which is a typical element of the early Archaic Cycladic architecture.[40] Among the finds from the *oikos* are included two handmade figurines that can be dated to the first half of the 7th century

*Fig. 10. The sacred oikos. View from the south-east looking north-west. Photograph: Xobourgo Excavations Archive.*

BC. Of the same date are fragments of a large clay frieze, richly decorated in relief, that was found at the site (*Figs. 11a–b*).[41] A procession of chariots was depicted in the frieze from which one chariot driven by winged horses and carrying two female figures (the Hyberboreans?) survives. The high artistic quality of the frieze, which is perhaps the earliest surviving clay frieze

[40] Cf. Lambrinoudakis 2005, 82 (with further bibliography).

[41] Cf. Kourou 2008, 77–78 fig. 11; 2013, 93 fig. 82.

*Fig. 11a. Fragment of the clay frieze found by the sacred* oikos. *Photograph: Xobourgo Excavations Archive.*

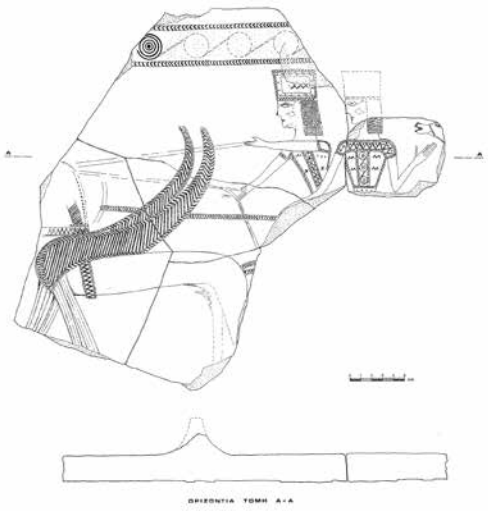


*Fig. 11b. The clay frieze. Drawing by Thanasis Kouros.*

in the Greek world, and its date imply that the building was important and set up by the newly instituted *polis* system. It also indicates a radical shift in the cult, which no longer takes place simply in the open air, nor does it have a mortuary character. Two large pithoi each standing on a well-built stone base in the north-east corner of the *oikos* suggest a cult possibly associated with *aparchai* (ἀπαρχαί), the yearly offerings to a divinity related to nature, earth, and fertility. This was another form of cult, distinct from the previous one on the same terrace, but still related to earth though now in a way that suited better the new political system of the *polis*, while the erection of a building was also in accord with current trends elsewhere for small sacred *oikoi* or temples.

### THE PRO-CYCLOPEAN SANCTUARY AND SOCIAL CHANGE AT XOBOURGO

The impressive cultic complex in the Pro-Cyclopean Sanctuary, created by the people that relied on the cyclopean wall for protection, represents one of the most vivid religious activities preserved in the Cyclades. The evolution of the cult on this exceptional sacred place is an example of stable adjustments to social change.[42] Originally the pebble platform over the empty tomb served an ancestral cult of an important individual, which seems to have been established in a prominent position in front of the main gate of the cyclopean fortification as a kind of hero cult. This was succeeded by pyre pits protected in groups by enclosure walls that created small family shrines for an ancestor-based cult. Then ceremonies at the pyre pits in turn gave way to larger-scale rituals at a sizeable hearth and also utilizing a large bench opposite; a meal on a grand scale was conducted, as is evidenced by a large ash deposit, which implies that the cult must have served the entire community. The next and final step was a radical updating of the sanctuary with the abandonment of the ancestral cult on the terrace and the construction of a small building, a sacred *oikos*, in line with current trends elsewhere in the Aegean.

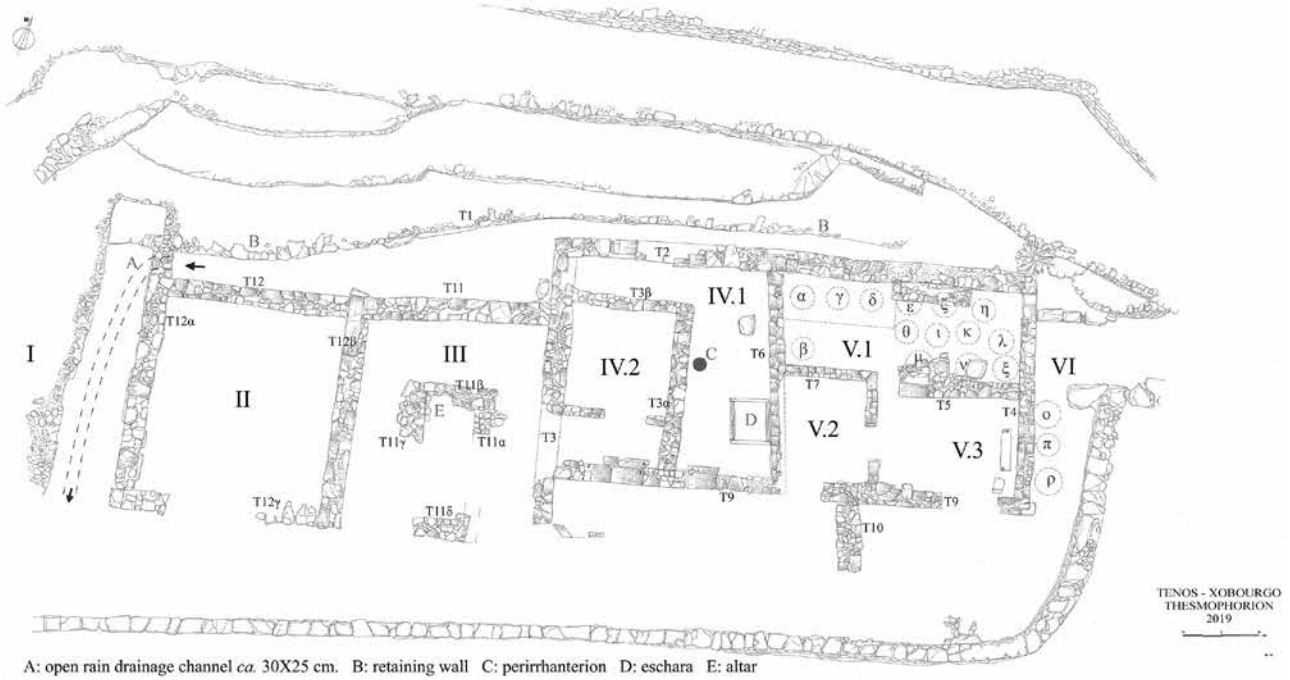
## The Pre-Thesmophorion Shrine and the building complex of the Thesmophorion

A parallel phenomenon, operating at a different rate of evolution, is attested at another sanctuary on Xobourgo, which lies about 300 m south of the Pro-Cyclopean Sanctuary (*Plan 1* and *Fig. 2*). The first shrine attested here dates to the Late Geometric period, but it continues to function, possibly with an interlude in the 6th century BC, down to the end of the 4th century BC. In its present state the sanctuary consists of a long building complex (*Fig. 12* and *Plan 3*), the components of which are set in a row on a small terrace facing south–south-east. It was unearthed in a relatively good state of preservation in 1952 and 1953 by the late Pofessor Nikolaos Kontoleon.[43] The stone parts of its walls were preserved up to 30–40 cm high. But the surviving tiles and remnants of sun-dried bricks, visible in the area until much later,[44] indicate that the upper

[42] Cf. Kourou 2011, 403.

[43] Cf. Kontoleon 1952, 531–540 figs. 2–5; 1953, 265 figs. 1–2.

[44] Cf. Themelis 1976, 6–12; Mazarakis Ainian 1997, 177.




*Plan 3. The building complex of the Thesmophorion. Drawing: Thanasis Kouros.*

*Fig. 12. The building complex of the Thesmophorion, View taken from the south-west looking north-east. Photograph: Xobourgo Excavations Archive.*

parts of the walls were not of stone and the roof was composed of Corinthian-type ceramic tiles. But in 1995, when our project on the site started, the entire building complex was found in a very poor state: most of the walls had collapsed and weeds had grown among the joints. Following a detailed study of the architectural remains and a restoration programme undertaken by an interdisciplinary team, the walls were repaired and restored, where necessary, and the entire building complex was cleaned and brought back to its original state of preservation.[45]

The excavated part of this large building complex consists of four compartments (cf. units II–V on *Plan 3*), but the original number remains unknown.[46] The wall of the unexcavated

[45] Cf. Kourou & Bournia 2001, 117–118 figs. 1–2; Kourou 2005, 28.
[46] Cf. Kourou 2002, 262–266; 2005, 28–29; 2013, 94–97; 2019, 179 fig. 3.

unit I on the north-west end and the partially excavated unit VI at the south-east end suggest that the complex certainly continued further in both directions. Kontoleon dated the establishment of the sanctuary on the evidence of the earliest finds to *c*. 700 BC and claimed that the existing Classical walls of this large construction were a simple replacement of the decaying original ones.[47] But the inconsistent arrangement of spaces, the heterogenous masonry of the walls, and their differing widths rather indicate that this large building complex of open and closed spaces was created progressively and piecemeal.

In the absence of any stratigraphical evidence and excavation records, the dating of the compartments and of the structures inside them is still largely based on masonry and finds. The latter give a range from the late 8th century down to the end of the 4th century BC, but the masonry and the various constructions, in so far as their dating can be trusted, offer information for a number of distinct architectural phases of the site. An early one would run from the late 8th century down to about the end of the 7th century BC. The lack of black-figured pottery from the terrace implies that activity in the sanctuary had somehow declined during the 6th century BC, but it was revitalized at the end of the century down to the time of the Persian Wars, when we can distinguish a second architectural phase. The floruit of the sanctuary was certainly the third phase, when a small temple was built at a time just after the Persian Wars, as marked by the presence of Attic red-figured pottery. A possibly final architectural phase can be claimed in the late 5th century BC, when more closed and open spaces were created, although this may have had a considerable overlap with the third phase.

The lack of any inscription from the sanctuary or of information from written records restricts the possibilities of its attribution on the evidence of archaeology alone. On the basis of the architectural arrangement of the spaces and the finds, Kontoleon identified this large building complex as a sanctuary for a female deity with an element of a chthonic cult implied by the *eschara*; thus, he explained it as a Demeter sanctuary and more specifically as a Thesmophorion.[48] Another attempt made much later to explain this building complex as a funerary monument after Carian models is not substantiated by the finds reviewed below. However, at the heart of this interpretation too lies the chthonic cultic character of the sanctuary.[49] Another interpretation of this building complex, which lies outside the settlement and the fortification walls, as a domestic construction of the Archaic and Classical periods[50] cannot be accepted as valid now, as the finds clearly define it as a public and religious building.

## THE EARLIEST ARCHITECTURAL PHASE ON THE TERRACE

The earliest architectural phase of this building complex is defined by the richly decorated relief pithoi (*Figs. 13a–b*) to a period from *c*. 700 BC to about the end of the 7th century BC.[51] The single architectural element on the terrace that can be linked with this phase is a stone-lined *eschara* in unit IV (*Fig. 14*), almost at the centre of the terrace, which implies an open-air shrine and practice. Measuring 1.10 x 1.18 m and made of four monolithic schist plaques rising 0.10 m above the soil, the *eschara* was found full of ashes implying burnt sacrifices, but there is no mention of other finds. Thus, the only element to define its date remains its striking resemblance in its manufacture to the Late Geometric *eschara* of the Pro-Cyclopean Sanctuary.

The large relief pithoi that date the phase were excavated almost exclusively very close to the *eschara* in space V.1 (*Plan 3* and *Fig. 15*), named by the excavator the Pithoi Hall ("Ἡ αἴθουσα τῶν πίθων").[52] Thanks to Alfred Mallwitz's detailed original plan we know their exact find-spots.[53] Whether space V.1 had been a rectangular room or perhaps a roofed shed cannot be said with any certainty. In either case it was a place specifically kept for storing these huge vessels, that sometimes reach 2 m in height. Each pithos was set in a shallow pit and occasionally supported by a small stone,[54] one of which, that of the Late Geometric amphora b, was found still standing near the north-west corner of space V.1 (*Fig. 16*) and is still preserved *in situ*.[55]

Consisting at least of an *eschara* in the open air and the Pithoi Hall, the shrine should probably have an enclosure wall to delineate the sacred area. To such a *peribolos* only the lower parts of the northern wall T2 can be attributed with some certainty, but the walls T3 and T4 that survive in a 5th-century BC form probably represent a later version of the origi-

[47] Kontoleon 1953, 263.
[48] Kontoleon 1952, 540.
[49] Themelis 1976, 88: "*... im Kultraum wurde eine chthonische Gottheit verehrt, die auf Tenos mit den mythischen Stammesheroen identisch gewesen sein könnte*".
[50] Hoepfner 1999, 190.
[51] For the pithoi, cf. Kontoleon 1969; Caskey 1976; Simantoni-Bournia 2001; 2004; Kourou 2008.
[52] Cf. Kontoleon 1953, 260.
[53] Cf. Kontoleon 1953, 265 pl. 1: The pithoi a–g were found in a line across the northern wall (T2), another one (pithos b) stood in front pithos a, while two smaller lines of pithoi (pithoi h, i, k, l and m, n, o) completed the corpus on the eastern side. Fragments of two more pithoi are mentioned as having been found in unit III, while the positions of a number of pithoi noted in compartment VI is for the moment unexplained—the possibility remains that they represent simply dispersed fragments of the vessels found in compartment V1.
[54] Cf. Kourou 2019, 181 fig. 6.
[55] Kontoleon 1952, 538.

*Figs. 13a–b. Decorated relief pithoi from the Pithoi Hall: a. of the Geometric period, b. of the Archaic period. Photographs: Xobourgo Excavations Archive.*

nal. In this form (cf. *Plan 4*, *phase 1*) the Pre-Thesmophorion Shrine operated for about a century. Then activity in the sanctuary seems to have declined for some time, until in the late 6th/early 5th century BC it started up again, though now in another architectural form and evidently new cultic practices.

## THE SECOND ARCHITECTURAL PHASE

This second architectural phase of the Pre-Thesmophorion Shrine (*Plan 4*) entailed some necessary additions, like the retaining wall T1, built in view of the new fortification rampart on the terrace above, but also a few religious and architectural innovations, such as the addition of a Π-shaped altar in unit III (*Fig. 17* and *Plan 4*, *phase 2*). The establishment of this large altar represents not only a major architectural updating, but also, and especially, a big step in the religious evolution of the sanctuary. The introduction of an altar in a shrine with an *eschara* implies a major shift in the character of the cult. The absence of a temple at this phase is not strange because, as Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood has shown,[56] altars and hearths preceded the appearance of temples in sanctuaries. In the Early Iron Age altars were either simple improvised constructions without any particular architectural shape or they were merely ash altars.[57]

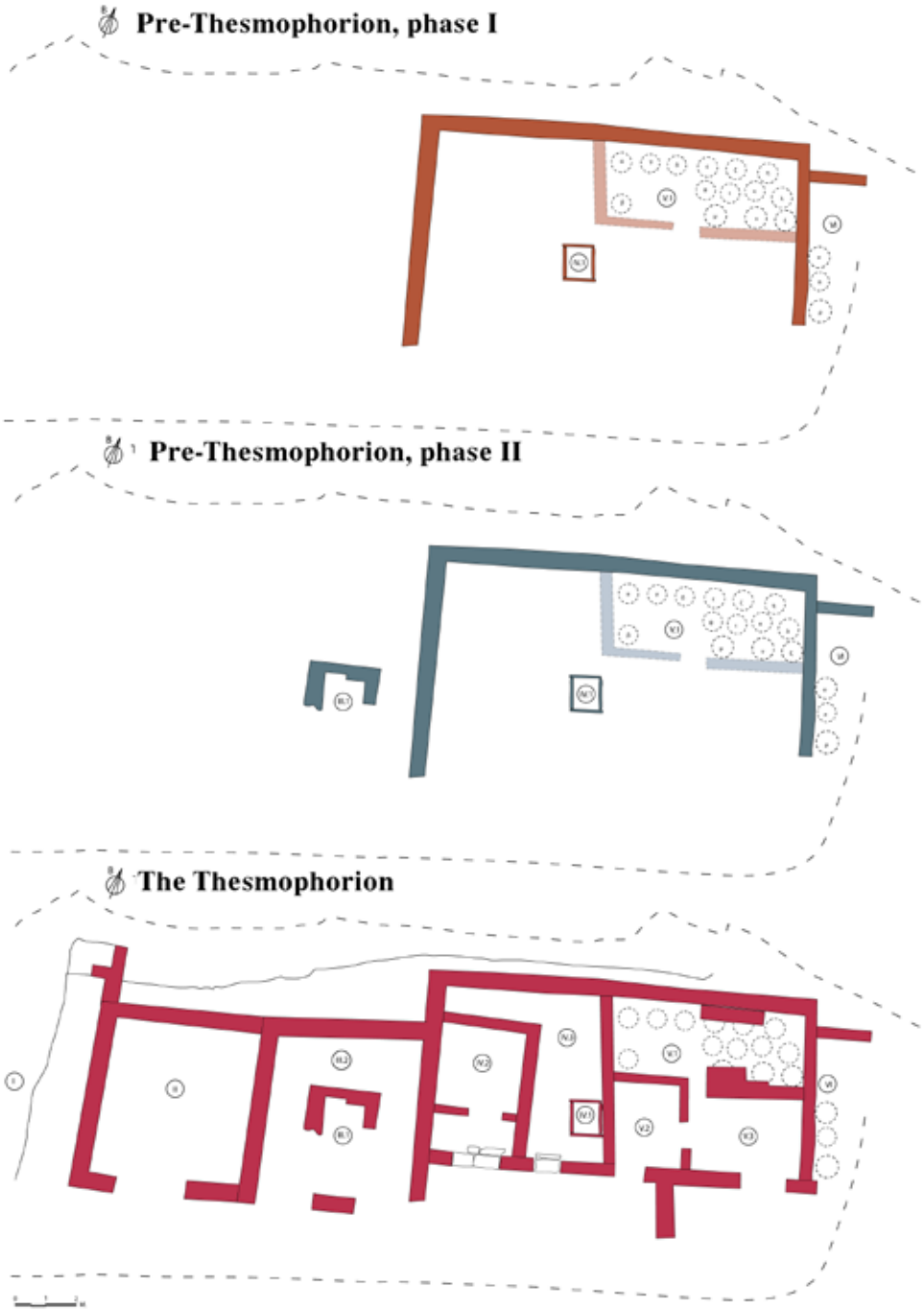
*Fig. 14. Thesmophorion: The area of the* eschara *and the temple. View from the east looking west. Photograph: Xobourgo Excavations Archive.*

The Π-shaped type represents one of the most elaborate altar forms, which first appeared late in the 7th century BC; by and in the 6th century they had spread widely and sometimes achieved a monumental size, especially in Ionia. The adoption of the type on Tenos in the late 6th/early 5th centuries BC in an open-air small shrine is a great advancement architecturally and religiously.

[56] Sourvinou-Inwood 1993, 11.
[57] Cf. Yavis 1949, 88–89; Rupp 1983, 101–107.


*Fig. 15. Thesmophorion: The Pithoi Hall (compartment V.1) with adjacent compartments V.2 and V.3. View from the east looking west. Photograph: Xobourgo Excavations Archive.*


*Fig. 16. Thesmophorion: The northern part of the Pithoi Hall with the pits for the pithoi. View from the south looking north. Photograph: Xobourgo Excavations Archive.*




*Plan 4. Schematic drawing of the Pre- and Thesmophorion phases. Drawing: Vicky Vlachou.*

## THE THIRD AND FOURTH ARCHITECTURAL PHASES

A small temple, that marks the third architectural phase of the sanctuary, was installed in the Xobourgo sanctuary at the centre of the terrace in unit IV (*Fig. 14*, *Plans 3* and *4*, *phase 3*), between the *eschara* and the altar: this happened only later in the early 5th century BC, just after the Persian Wars. It consists of a small cella (2.80 x 2.75 m) with a large door opening and a shallow porch (2.60 x 1.10 m). Both door openings, that of the cella (1.10 m wide) and the other of the porch (1.28 m wide), were not designed in the usual way, i.e. placed on the central axis of the temple, but a little to one side. The floor of the entire structure was cobled (i.e. covered by small stones), still surviving at parts. In front of the external door of the porch a number of local marble plaques were found, which

*Fig. 17. Thesmophorion: The altar. View from the west looking east. Photograph: Xobourgo Excavations Archive.*

according to Kontoleon had possibly decorated the front wall of the temple.[58] The excavator mentions that the inner walls of the temple, when excavated, still preserved traces of a substantial white coating (*c.* 1 cm thick) made of lime, soil, and pebbles, which further underlines the importance of the structure, one which changes the entire meaning and function of the sanctuary.

The establishment of this small but elaborate temple was followed by a sweeping rearrangement of the spaces on the terrace and some important modifications for its safety. The entire building complex on the terrace was supplied with a necessary drainage system, because it lay lower and outside the main gate of the fortification walls (*Plan 1*, *no. 4* and *Fig. 2*, *no. 4*). A large water-pipe or conduit was placed along the northern wall of the building complex (T2) to carry rainwater through a small opening to a channel that ran north–south by the wall T12a, following the slanting slope level.[59]

The Pithoi Hall in V.1, which remained in use, underwent major changes too. Two of the old, large pithoi lining the north-eastern wall T2 had deteriorated and were out of use;[60] they were replaced by an imposing bench (*Fig. 15*), measuring 2.05 m in length, 0.45 m wide, and 1.50 m in height, that was added at the about the centre of the northern wall T2. Still standing on site, the bench reveals that it was built in the place of the two pithoi, as having been smashed on the spot they were then covered by a hard-beaten floor soil. The transverse wall T5 was built (or rebuilt) and on its inner side a two-stepped construction was added. A large opening in the wall T5[61] suggests that there was provision here either for the removal of rainwater, if the area was a shed, or for any liquids kept in the pithoi, if compartment V.1 was roofed. Parts of a stone drainpipe lying in compartment V.2 found in front of the opening on wall T5 (but now removed) imply another form of high-quality drainage arrangement that enlarged and improved upon the original drainage system of the Pithoi Hall.[62] The thinner transversal walls T7, and T8 in unit V that create smaller enclosed spaces (V.2 and V.3) may belong to this phase, or they could have been built a little later. The same holds good for the walls of units II and III that created two more enclosed spaces.

Throughout the 5th century BC the entire terrace of the Thesmophorion Sanctuary was reorganized with a number of sweeping changes and constructions that changed its religious profile and improved its functioning. In this the influence of Athens was of paramount importance.[63] The establishment of the temple and the construction of the other structures be-

[58] Kontoleon 1952, 535.
[59] Cf. Bournias 2017, 76.
[60] One of them was the famous birth pithos, cf. Kontoleon 1953, 265 fig. 9; Simantoni-Bournia 2004, pl. 39.
[61] Cf. Kourou 2019, 194 fig. 13.
[62] Cf. Kourou 2019, 194 fig. 13.
[63] For the role of Athens in the shaping of a new profile in the Cyclades in the Classical period, cf. Constantakopoulou 2007, 62–73; Bonnin & Le Quéré 2014, 57–68.

gan at the time that Athens had started rebuilding its monuments, while at the same time the Delian League was created (478 C) under Athenian leadership as a defensive organization of Greek cities against Persia. The temple renewed the sanctuary both architecturally and religiously: it also introduced a new type of cult, distinct from that that had been taking place before at the *eschara*. At this phase, in the 5th century, both these major architectural elements, the temple and the *eschara* in the open air, appear together. Such a coexistence is not entirely unheard of. It appears in a number of Demeter sanctuaries,[64] where it is explained as due to the chthonic aspect of the goddess and rituals for the promotion of the fertility in the fields. This distinctive feature led to the excavator's explanation of this building complex as a Demeter sanctuary and as a Thesmophorion. The identification is also strengthened by the presence of the additional secondary spaces in the sanctuary (units II and III), as well as the smaller enclosed spaces (V2 and V3), not necessarily roofed.[65] The location of the sanctuary in front of the main gate of the settlement adds yet another argument in favour of Demeter.[66] Thesmophoria are usually situated near the city walls or just outside the settlement probably for the performance of sacred rites in seclusion.[67]

## CULT AND FINDS AT THE THESMOPHORION SANCTUARY

A significant development in the Pithoi Hall during the Classical period is the addition of a bench (*Fig. 15*), which could serve for the deposition of objects used either for filling or emptying the large pithoi or perhaps in rituals. Evidently it was considered necessary as for its construction two large and old pithoi were sacrificed to make room for it. Other major changes in the same space include the two-stepped construction attached to the inner side of the wall T5 and the provision of a drainage system for the room. The excavator related the Pithoi Hall with the *adyton* (ἄδυτον) mentioned in a scholion to Lucian for the Thesmophoric cult of Demeter where ritual practices related to agrarian fertility took place.[68] Independently of such a connection and its symbolism, however, the need for a bench, a stepped construction, or for an extra drainage system in this space imply a particular function and possibly the performance of rituals related to the sowing and reaping of cereals.

The finds from the Classical phase of the Xobourgo sanctuary present a wide variety of ritual objects and utensils. Among them is a stone *perirrhanterion*[69] made of local marble from the nearby Koumaros area. *Perirrhanteria* were popular at sanctuaries, as they were filled with water that was used for sprinkling, for the symbolic purification achieved by wetting one's hands and sprinkling water. For this reason they were usually placed either at the sanctuary's entrance or near an altar or an *eschara*,[70] as evidently was the case at Xobourgo. It was found in the area of the *eschara* (*Plan 3*, *Fig. 18*), which probably remained in use along with the temple and the altar. The *perirrhanterion* was found standing and intact but because of the very poor quality of the marble, it has survived badly and in two fragments (*Figs. 19a–d*). It consists of a columnar shaft, which is slightly expanded at the base, while forming a deep, dished receptacle with a ridged neck band on top, all carved from the same single piece of marble.[71] Its total height is 55 cm, its upper diameter is 26 cm, that of its shaft 30 cm, while at base it is 40 cm. A fragment from the dish basin of another *perirrhanterion* (*Fig. 19e*), again of local marble,[72] was found near it. Both date to the 5th century BC and were found near the *eschara*, which possibly continued to function at the same time with the temple, as implied by the presence of outdoor *escharae* in several Demeter sanctuaries.[73]

Another interesting find is a small pyramidal object in black granite, probably local (*Fig. 20*), that measures 7 cm in height and has a splayed form with a slightly curved base.[74] Its shape is that of a well-known type of loom weight.[75] However, its considerable weight (299 g) and the absence of a hole in its upper part rules this identification out. It is, in fact, a pestle for crushing cereals in a mortar. Termed a *doidyx* (δοίδυξ) as such, it occurs at various sites.[76] Though certainly from the Thesmophorion, its exact find-spot is not

[64] Cf. Karatas 2014, 371 table 4.17, with a list of Demeter sanctuaries having a hearth in the open air (and sometimes more than one): "Abdera, Eretria, Tenos, Pergamon, Iasos, Mytilene, Myrmekeion, Locri Epizephyrioi, Vasta (Piazza Dante), Selinunt, Himera".

[65] Cf. Kontoleon 1953, 262.

[66] Cf. Volonaki-Kontoleondos 1992–1998, 489.

[67] Cf. e.g. Karatas 2014, 241 fig. 2.17.2 for the Demeter sanctuary at Kos situated just outside the city walls. Petzl 1990, 655 for an inscription from Smyrna recording a Thesmophorion "πρὸ πόλεως".

[68] Scholion to Lucian, *Dialogi Meretricii*, II,1. (Jacobitz, 1966, III). For a recent analysis and discussion of this scholion to Lucian, cf. Lowe 1998, 149–173; also, Stallsmith 2009, 4. Cf. also, Kontoleon 1953, 260; Harrison 1962, 121 n. 3.

[69] For *perirrhanteria*, cf. Kerschner 1996, 59–131; Pimpl 1997; Poupaki 2001–2002, 273–306; Kourou 2019, 196–198.

[70] Burkert 1985, 77. Cf. also, Karatas 2014, 380.

[71] *Perirrhanteria* first appear in the middle of the 7th century in a very characteristic form, consisting of a shaft encircled by karyatids that supported the basin. The simpler form with a simple shaft and integral or separate basin appears around the middle of the 6th century or perhaps a little later, but remained popular throughout.

[72] Cf. Kourou 2019, 200 figs. 17–18.

[73] For hearths in the open air at Demeter sanctuaries, cf. Karatas 2014, 735–739.

[74] Cf. Kourou 2019, 186–187 fig. 10.

[75] Cf. example Popham *et al.* 1979, pls. 64p–q; Vlachou 2019, 254 fig. 14b.

[76] Cf. e.g. Davidson & Thompson 1975, 98 fig. 44.4 (from the Pnyx).

*Fig. 18. Thesmophorion during the 1953 excavation. The* perirrhanterion *is discernible in the area of the* eschara*. View from the south-east looking north-west. Photograph: Xobourgo Excavations Archive.*

*Fig. 19. Marble* perirrhanterion*: a. as found, b, c. as surviving (in two fragments), d. its deep dish basin on top, e. fragment of a dish basin from another* perirrhanterion*. Photograph: Xobourgo Excavations Archive.*

known. However, it would have been closely associated with what was stored in the pithoi, some of which still retained their lids when excavated. From its shape it should belong to the Pre-Thesmophorion Shrine, but its very worn surface allows for the possibility of belonging to the Classical period of the Thesmophorion, still employed as a pestle. It might too have been votive or a ritual utensil in some other way.

Votives include Attic red-figured painted vases, simple or multi-nozzled lamps,[77] clay figurines (*Fig. 21*) and clay plaques

[77] Cf. Kourou 2013, 96 fig. 87; 2019, 199 fig. 16.


*Fig. 20. Pestle in black granite. Photograph: Xobourgo Excavations Archive.*

(*Fig. 22*) with a female protome,[78] and spindle whorls or loom weights:[79] all basically implying a female deity or activity. Clay plaques occur in sanctuaries, houses, and cemeteries from the Archaic to the Roman period and they are common in Macedonia, where they are frequently attributed to a female cult.[80] Lamps and mostly multi-nozzled lamps imply nocturnal activity and they occur widely in Demeter sanctuaries, mostly Thesmophoria.[81] Graffiti of "ΔΗ" (ΔΗΜΟΣΙΟΝ or ΔΗΜΗΤΗΡ) (*Fig. 23*) or "ΠΟ" (ΠΟΛΕΩΣ) (*Fig. 24*) on vases or spindle whorls and loom weights,[82] and in one case on the base of a small Attic black-glazed cup "ΠΟΛΙ" followed by some more erased letters apparently from an unsuccessful attempt to complete the inscription as "ΠΟΛΙΟΣ" (*Fig. 25*),[83] point to the public character of the site and as it seems to the goddess Demeter.

The establishment of a cult of Demeter a little before the middle of the 5th century BC on Xobourgo is a drastic

[78] Cf. Kourou 2013, 96 fig. 88; 2019, 201 fig. 22.
[79] Cf. Vlachou 2019, 245–249 figs. 6–10.
[80] Cf. Tzanavari 2014, 340; Lilibaki-Akamati *et al.* 2011, 196. Clay plaques with a female protome are known in the Cyclades from the Heraion of Delos, cf. Xatzidakis 2003, 344–345 figs. 670–671.
[81] Cf. e.g. Pinyiatoglou 2005 (Dion); also, Mitsopoulou 2010, 45–46 with bibliography.
[82] Cf. Kourou 2002, pl. 68B; 2019, 201 figs. 19, 21.
[83] Kourou 2019, 201 fig. 20. For this type of small cup known from the Agora of Athens, cf. Sparkes *et al.* 1970, 136–138.

*Fig. 21. Head of a clay figurine. Photograph: Xobourgo Excavations Archive.*

*Fig. 22. Clay protome of a female figure in himation. Photograph: Xobourgo Excavations Archive.*

*Fig. 23. Clay loom weight with graffito "ΔΗ" (ΔΗΜΟΣΙΟΝ or ΔΗΜΗΤΗΡ). Photograph: Xobourgo Excavations Archive.*

*Fig. 24. Graffito "ΠΟ" (ΠΟΛΕΩΣ) on the base of an Attic black glazed cup. Photograph: Xobourgo Excavations Archive.*

*Fig. 25. Graffito "ΠΟΛΙ" (followed by some erasures) on the base of an Attic black glazed cup. Photograph: Xobourgo Excavations Archive.*

change. It also shows that it took a very long time for the cult of some Olympic deities to be established in some areas. In the Cyclades, sanctuaries securely attributed to Demeter are few, and in none of them is the cult of Thesmophoria evidenced earlier than the middle 5th century BC; the Xobourgo Thesmophorion is one of the earliest.[84] The decisive factors for its development must have been, in addition to Athenian influence, the character of the earlier cult that had existed in the first open-air Pre-Thesmophorion Sanctuary, which had also a basically agrarian character. Its replacement the 5th century BC by another version of agrarian cult, that of Demeter and Thesmophoria is no surprise.[85]

## THE CHARACTER OF THE PRE-THESMOPHORION CULT

For defining the character of the cult that had preceded that of Demeter in the sanctuary our data set are confined to the *eschara* and the Pithoi Hall. Yet, the later finds of the

[84] Cf. Mitsopoulou 2010, 54–55 for Thesmophoria in the Cyclades. For earlier sanctuaries in the Cyclades which in the Classical and later periods function as Demeter sanctuaries, cf. Gounaris 2005, 24–25.

[85] On agrarian rituals and Thesmophoria, cf. Muller 2020, 91–94.

Thesmophorion assessed retrospectively do enable a better understanding of the site, which is further enhanced by the iconography of the relief decoration on the pithoi. The Pre-Thesmophorion *eschara*, constructed in the open air at the closing years of the 8th century BC, is almost contemporary with the *eschara* of the Pro-Cyclopean Sanctuary, where an ancestral cult with chthonic character was conducted. The strong morphological similarities between the two *escharae* imply, beyond their chronological correspondence, also the possibility of some sort of link in their cultic profile.

*Escharae* in the open air occurring in later sanctuaries are almost exclusively associated with Demeter. Occasionally a sanctuary of Demeter and Kore could have more than one hearth in the open air and also an altar.[86] Evidently, they belong in the same tradition of chthonic cults centred on subterranean powers and deities related to the underworld, cultivation, and farming.[87] The role of Demeter as protector of land and fecundity is clearly hinted by her festival of Thesmophoria that was the most widespread celebration event to ensure fertility in the fields.[88] Demeter was a vegetation goddess and she indeed represented a liaison between life and death, though she also had many other roles.[89] In Thebes there was a temple of Demeter Thesmophoros on the Kadmeia and her cult combined agricultural and socio-political functions,[90] to which Euripides is clearly referring by recognizing the goddess as a land protector and identifying her with Ge (Γῆ).[91] This association implies that Demeter identified with Ge could have been potentially considered a version of the old Bronze Age vegetation goddess, the defender of nature and earth.

A cult addressed to the Goddess of Earth, Ge Chthonie (Γῆ Χθονίη), is not unknown in the historical period, though such is far from common. A worship of Ge Chthonie is recorded in a 4th-century BC inscription from Apollonia,[92] while offerings made to Ge by a certain Phanes and his sons are mentioned on an early 4th-century BC inscription from Tenos.[93] The inscription of Tenos, found at the site of Evangelistria Grammatikou in the northern part of the island, implies that this rare cult was still current at a time that the Olympian pantheon was dominant and the role of land protection had been officially undertaken by the goddess Demeter.[94]

According to the archaeological record some Olympian cults, including that of Demeter, are not attested as officially installed in sanctuaries in the new post-Bronze Age religious landscape before an advanced date in the Archaic or even in the Classical period. Thus it has been argued that the exact character of several divinities during the Early Iron Age right down to the end of the 7th century BC was not exactly personalized.[95] This allows the hypothesis that at some remote places cultic rituals were still being addressed to deities that had survived the Bronze Age and that the roles and attributes of the old vegetation and fertility goddess had been undertaken by a divinity that on the basis of the archaeological record cannot be precisely defined.

The cult of a deity that was still in the 8th and 7th centuries BC not fully identified with one of the Olympian goddesses, suits perfectly well the situation of the Pre-Thesmophorion, a remote sanctuary on Tenos. The cult was addressed to an indefinable figure, a *Potnia*, an old Bronze Age divine power that represented the vegetation goddess and that did not exactly match any of the female figures of the Olympian pantheon; only later she became identified with the goddess Demeter. The fact that the Pre-Thesmophorion remained an old-type, open-air sanctuary until the 5th century is not surprising as even in Athens the Eleusinion, built after 550 BC, was established as an open-air sanctuary with an enclosure wall, while the temple of Demeter in it was only built later in the early 5th century BC.[96]

The huge storage vases lined up in the Pithoi Hall of the Pre-Thesmophorion reinforce this interpretation and suggest a cult involving the deposition of offerings, as happened later in Demeter sanctuaries when the first cereals and other products of the harvest, the *aparchai* (ἀπαρχαί), were offered to the deity that protected agriculture.[97] The pithoi from this sanctuary represent the largest amount of the "Euboeo-Cycladic" class of richly decorated relief pithoi surviving from the late 8th and 7th centuries BC. The earliest are simply decorated

[86] An exceptional sanctuary of this type is that of Demeter and Kore at Abdera, established in the 6th century BC and still functioning until the end of the 4th century BC, cf. Samiou-Lianou 2005. Another Demeter sanctuary with more than one hearth was that of Demeter on the acropolis of Mytilene, cf. Cronkite 1997, 42–47; Karatas 2014, 739.

[87] Burkert 1985, 201: "The worship of chthonic powers undoubtedly contains much that is very ancient".

[88] For the festival, cf. Nilsson 1906, 313–325; 1955, 463–466; Deubner 1932, 50–60.

[89] Cf. Simon 1969, 91–117.

[90] Cf. Cole 1994, 210.

[91] Euripides, *Phoin*. 683–688: "*πάντων ἀνασσα, πάντων δε Γᾶ τροφός*".

[92] Cf. Volonaki- Kontoleondos 1992–1998, 475; *IG* Bulg2 398, see Mikhailov 1956–1957.

[93] Cf. Despinis 1979, 228; Étienne 2020, 513–520.

[94] For Demeter Chthonie, cf. Burkert 1985, 17, 135; Simon 1969, 97; Parker 2011, 76; also, Ekroth 2002, 322 n. 57 (for sacrifices to Zeus Chthonios and Demeter Chthonie in the Mykonos calendar). For mentions of Demeter Chthonie, cf. *SEG* 55, 612 (4th–3rd centuries BC); for an inscribed gold lamella of an initiate into the cult of Demeter Chthonie at Pherrai of Thessaly, cf. Karatas 2014, 722, 725. For a sanctuary with a temple of Demeter Chthonie at Hermione in the Argolid, cf. Pausanias 2.35. 5–10 mentioning also a rock shelter with a chasm behind the temple.

[95] Cf. Étienne 2017, 26; Kourou 2017, 25–27.

[96] Cf. Broneer 1942, 250–261; Travlos 1960, 33–35 fig. 14; Miles 1998, 16–21.

[97] Cf. Jim 2014, 97–116 for *aparchai* not as a simple reciprocity action for the gods but also as an act of gratitude and thanksgiving.

in the Geometric style, but those of the 7th century are all elaborately adorned in a pictorial style with narrative scenes seemingly referring to myths and legends current and popular on the island at the time.[98] The iconography of these scenes implies that it is probably safe to assume that the ideology of Tenian potters, and consequently their religious orientation, was in the main directed by aspects of myths referring to old beliefs and cosmology, serving in a way as a link with the past.

The pursuit for a systematic cosmology in the Cyclades reaches its peak only in the 6th century BC with the poet and philosopher Pherekydes of Syros, who composed a cosmology of which only fragments survive. According to the extant cosmology, the philosopher's main point was that Zeus, Cronos, and Chthonie-Ge had always and constantly existed from the beginning.[99] This is a statement that further reflects the importance of these deities still in the Archaic period and allows the assumption that cult, rituals, and religious symbolism remained closely related to those of the past. For instance, one of the commonest subjects in the iconography of relief pithoi is that of a female figure with upraised arms, sometimes winged, and frequently flanked by animals, which is a version of the old vegetation goddess, a *Potnia*.[100] These images suggest that the attribution of the first cult in the open-air Pre-Thesmophorion Shrine was to a divinity that was considered the protector of agriculture and fecundity and her cult must have had a largely chthonic character.

## Ancestral and chthonic cults at Tenos

The two cults identified in close proximity on Xobourgo, the ancestral cult at the Pro-Cyclopean Sanctuary and the chthonic cult at the Pre-Thesmophorion Shrine, are not identical but for both the focus of worship is to divine powers of the underworld, whether dead ancestors or old deities related to earth and fecundity.

If Xobourgo started as a refuge site, as I believe, then there was a need to create a cultural identity based on the past: the successive stages of ancestral cult in the Pro-Cyclopean Sanctuary served exactly this social demand. The inner dynamics of the growing and developing community are reflected in the sequential changes and shifts in ancestral cult and ritual practices that ended up to a fully formalized chthonic cult with an *eschara*. On the other hand, the economy of this inland site depended entirely on agriculture. Therefore, when the settlement reached the point of being institutionalized, a need for a cult related to the divine powers of fertility and agriculture was paramount. Set beyond the settlement and out in the fields the rural Pre-Thesmophorion Shrine fully answered to the needs of the community for religious and social practices related to agriculture. In time this chthonic cult gave way to an Olympian cult, yet closely linked with chthonic rituals.

In traditional societies changes are slowly adopted, while the initial religious concepts remain deeply rooted in the popular mentality acquiring a form of collective consciousness. The Mycenaean culture is barely represented on Tenos by a tholos tomb found at Aghia Thekla in the northern part of the island,[101] but echoes of Bronze Age beliefs are lucidly reflected in the iconography of the relief pithoi. The old iconographic pattern of the epiphany goddess with uplifted arms is widely attested, though adapted to enhance mythical and legendary scenes and suit the new social forms and current artistic trends.[102]

Evidently then tradition remained strong in the local Tenian pantheon even down to the 4th century BC, as it is implied by the cult of the goddess Earth Ge (Γῆ), identified in northern Tenos. This rare cult, in which "the double aspect of earth as home of the dead and the source of growth" was involved,[103] epitomizes the resilience of the chthonic tradition on the island, all the more so in the Late Classical period when the Panhellenic Olympian Pantheon reigned supreme. All three, the exceptional cult of Ge (Γῆ) at northern Tenos and the two neighbouring cults related to the powers of underworld at Xobourgo, seem to intensely reflect the power of popular tradition.

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[98] Cf. Simantoni-Bournia 2004, pls. 39–51; Kourou 2008, 83 fig. 14.
[99] Fragment preserved by Diogenes Laertius, I, 119: "Ζὰς μὲν καὶ Χρόνος ἦσαν ἀεὶ καὶ Χθονίη· Χθονίηι δὲ ὄνομα ἐγένετο Γῆ, ἐπειδὴ αὐτῆι Ζὰς γῆν γέρας διδοῖ" ("Zas and Chronos and Chthonie existed from start; the name Chthonie was later turned into Ge because Zas offered her earth as a prize"). For Pherekythes, cf. Mermoz 2010, 562–593.
[100] For the various uses of the term "*Potnia*" in general, cf. Laffineur 2001, passim.
[101] Cf. Despinis 1979; Aggelopoulou 2019, 40–52 figs. 2–8.
[102] Cf. Kourou 2019, 180 fig. 5, 186 figs. 8–9.
[103] Parker 2011, 82.

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