

THE ARCHAIC WALL OF ATHENS: REALITY OR MYTH?

BY

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*To the memory of Jane Harrison,
Armin von Gerkan, and Wilhelm Dörpfeld,
Disbelievers of an Archaic wall*

Abstract

This paper reviews the philological and archaeological evidence for an Archaic, pre-Persian, city wall of Athens, and concludes that there was no Archaic enceinte separate from the fortifications of the Acropolis and Pelargikon. The extant testimonia, primarily Thucydides and Herodotos, can be interpreted in different ways, but there is nothing in these sources to suggest categorically fortifications other than those of the Acropolis/Pelargikon. Previous arguments put forward for the existence of such a putative wall do not stand up to closer scrutiny and, despite extensive excavations in those areas where the wall has been claimed, there is to date no archaeological evidence for an Archaic wall. The wall that the Persians breached in their sack of Athens in 480/79 B.C. was the Mycenaean circuit wall surrounding the Acropolis and Pelargikon; together these walls, built in the Mycenaean period, continued to serve through the Archaic period until 479 B.C. when work was begun on the Themistoklean Wall.

INTRODUCTION

Ancient city walls leave a notable imprint on the landscape; indeed, they determine and define the topography of a city, town or district in major ways. As Yi-Fu Tuan writes, “the wall was the clearest expression of what the city builders took to be the limits of their domain.”¹ It is the border between town and suburb. As Tuan elaborates, the “city is a place, a center of meaning, par excellence ... The traditional city symbolized, first, transcendental and man-made order as against the chaotic forces of terrestrial and infernal nature. Second, it stood for an ideal human community ... It was as transcendental order that ancient cities acquired their monumental aspect. Massive walls and portals demarcated sacred space. Fortifications defended a people against not only human enemies but also demons and the souls of the dead.”² Archaic Athens was no exception.

After the Persian sack of 480/79 B.C. Athens was essentially an unfortified city, but after the battle of Plataia in 479 B.C. Themistokles inspired the Athenians to construct a new city wall, which was completed in record time; at the

same time, he also persuaded the Athenians to complete the fortification of the Piraeus.³ The development of the Piraeus as the main harbor of Athens has been linked with the 493/2 B.C. archonship of Themistokles and was precipitated by the realities of the Persian attack in 480 B.C.⁴ The completion of the Two Long Walls (τὰ μακρὰ τείχη)—that is, the Phaleric and the North Long Walls—was under Kimon, and the plan protected not only the passage to the new harbor of the Piraeus, but also the old harbor at Phaleron.⁵ Slightly later, in 445 B.C., the so-called South Wall (or Middle Wall) was built in between the Phaleric and North Walls, largely on the advice of Perikles.⁶ The result of Themistokles’ insistence on the construction of a new city wall is the early Classical city plan of Athens (*Fig. 1*). Substantial remains of the Themistoklean Wall survive to this day, both in Athens and the Piraeus, while the exposed remains of the Long Walls were, for many years, traffic hazards for drivers speeding from Athens to the Piraeus and back. A section of the Themistoklean Wall in the Kerameikos, west of the Sacred Gate, with repairs, including mud-brick, by Konon and Demosthenes, is illustrated in *Figure 2*.⁷

The sheer physically of the Themistoklean Wall has, in

¹ Tuan 1974, 230. I am grateful to Anne-Marie Leander for inviting me to be part of the gathering in Stockholm on city-walls and for all her hospitality. My thanks, too, to all the participants for making the event such a stimulating experience.

² Tuan 1977, 173.

³ Travlos 1971, 158.

⁴ See Papadopoulos 2003, 285; see further Judeich 1931, 69, 430; *Agora XIV*, 1 n. 3; von Eickstedt 1991, 4.

⁵ The evidence that Phaleron was the principal harbor of Athens during the time of the Persian Wars is laid out in Papadopoulos 2003, 285–288. The harbor was at the protected east end of the bay of Phaleron.

⁶ Travlos 1971, 158.

⁷ A selection of exposed stretches of the Themistoklean Wall are conveniently assembled in Travlos 1971, 172–174, figs. 222–226.

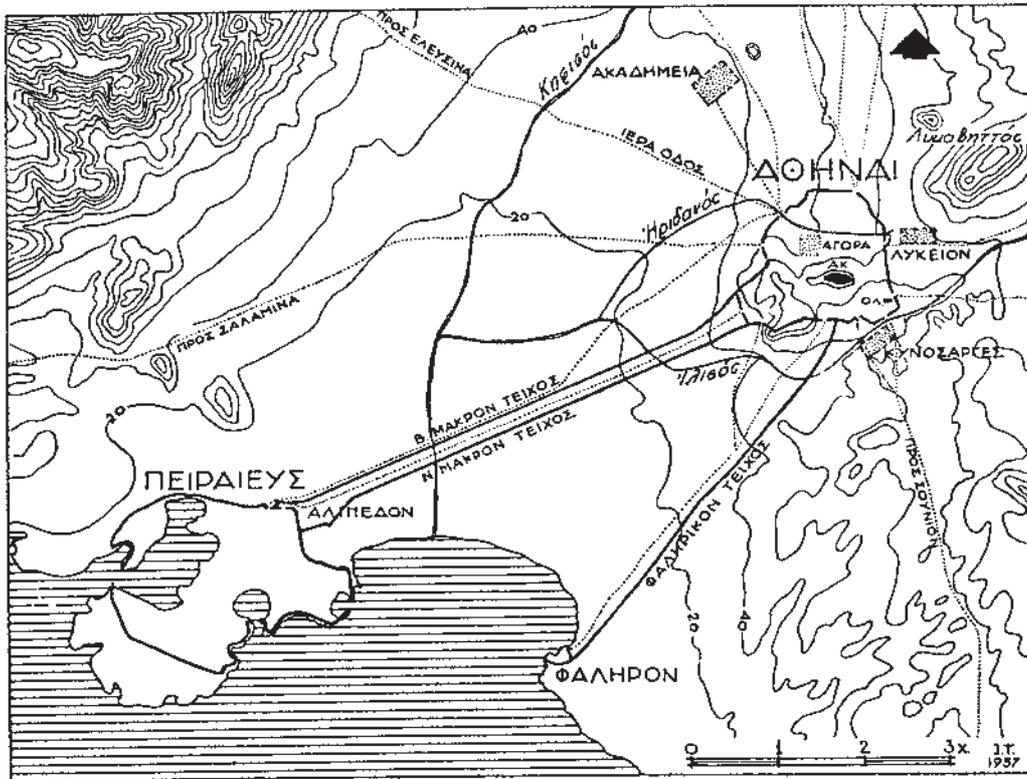


Fig. 1. Plan of Athens with the Piraeus and Phaleron, showing the Long Walls connecting the city with its harbors (Travlos 1960, 49, fig. 19).

many ways, dominated the landscape of later generations in profound ways, sometimes even imposing itself on their consciousness.⁸ Despite the physicality of the wall built in 479/8 B.C.—at the very transition from the Archaic to the Classical period—it comes as a surprise that Robert Weir, in a 1995 article entitled “The Lost Archaic Wall Around Athens” can write: “It is difficult to describe the putative Archaic wall around Athens since not a stone of it has been found.”⁹ Weir goes on to argue that, in the face of absolutely no physical evidence, some scholars—not least among them Wilhelm Dörpfeld, Armin von Gerkan and Jane Harrison¹⁰—have dismissed the possibility that any fortification wall was erected in Athens between Late Helladic III and 479/8 B.C. when the Themistoklean Wall was largely constructed, and he concludes that “the balance of opinion has now reversed itself, and most modern authorities are convinced that a circuit wall of some sort stood around Athens before the time of the Persian Wars.”¹¹ Weir places himself at the head of a long list of distinguished scholars who support the existence of an Archaic fortification wall other than that of the Acropolis and Pelargikon, including Walther Judeich, Heidi Lauter-Bufe and Hans Lauter, John Travlos, Eugene Vanderpool, Otto Walter, Frederick Winter, R.E. Wycherley, and Rodney Young.¹²

The purpose of this paper is threefold: first of all, it argues that, despite the arguments of Vanderpool and well over a century of excavations in all parts of Athens where such a wall has been claimed, there is still no physical evidence for the existence of an Archaic wall. Second, the literary *testimonia* often mustered for the existence of such a wall are far from clear in their meaning and open to various interpretations. In dealing, for example, with the critical testimony of Thucydides, Wycherley cogently writes: “Thucydides’ evidence is crucial but interpreted in different ways.”¹³ Finally, I argue that the wall the Persians breached in their sack of Athens was never “lost”—as some scholars claim—it is there in all its Mycenaean and Heroic glory, partly rebuilt and partly obscured: it is the *peribolos* surrounding the rock of the Acropolis together with the dis-

⁸ For the Themistoklean Wall, see esp. Judeich 1931, 124–144.

⁹ Weir 1995, 247.

¹⁰ In chronological order: Harrison 1906, 31; von Gerkan 1924, 26; Dörpfeld 1937, 25–29.

¹¹ Weir 1995, 247.

¹² In chronological order: Judeich 1931, 120–124; Young 1948, 378; 1951, 132; Walter 1949, 518–527; Travlos 1960, 40–42; Winter 1971, 61–64; 1982, 199–205; Vanderpool 1974, 156–160; Lauter-Bufe & Lauter 1975, 1–9; Wycherley 1978, 9–11.

¹³ Wycherley 1978, 9–10.



Fig. 2. Section of the Themistoklean Wall west of the Sacred Gate in the Kerameikos, with repairs by Konon and Demosthenes (Travlos 1971, 173, fig. 223) (DAI, Ker. 6006 [I]).

tinctly separate wall that Athenians in antiquity referred to as the Pelargikon. Together, these walls, built in the Mycenaean period, were the Archaic walls of Athens: there was no separate Archaic enceinte.

THE WRITTEN WORD

The philological evidence most often garnered in support of a wall around pre-Classical Athens amounts to three passages in Herodotos, Thucydides, and Andokides.¹⁴ These three passages are worth citing in full. It is useful to begin with Thucydides (1.89.3):

[οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι] ... καὶ τὴν πόλιν ἀνοικοδομεῖν παρεσκευάζοντο καὶ τὰ τείχη τοῦ τε γὰρ περιβόλου βραχέα εἰστήκει καὶ οἰκίαι αἱ μὲν πολλαὶ ἐπεπτώκεσαν, ὀλίγαι δὲ περιήσαν, ἐν αἷς αὐτοὶ ἐσκήνωσαν οἱ δυνατοὶ τῶν Περσῶν.

They [the Athenians] also started on the rebuilding of their city and their fortifications; for only small portions of their surrounding wall were still standing, and most of their houses were in ruins, the few remaining ones being those in which important Persian officers had had their quarters.¹⁵

Among the three authors cited, only Thucydides refers to a *peribolos* wall. It is important, however, not to read this pas-

sage in isolation, out of context as many scholars do when arguing for the existence of an Archaic wall, but against the backdrop of *all* the evidence that Thucydides provides for the topography of early Athens. At 2.15.3, Thucydides states:

Τὸ δε πρὸ τοῦ ἡ ἀκρόπολις ἡ νῦν οὐσα πόλις ἦν, καὶ τὸ ὑπ' αὐτὴν πρὸς νότον μάλιστα τετραμμένον.

Before this [i.e. the synoikismos of Attica under Theseus] what is now the Acropolis was the city, together with the region at the foot of the Acropolis toward the south.¹⁶

At 2.15.6 Thucydides continues:

καλεῖται δὲ διὰ τὴν παλαιὰν ταύτη κατοίκησιν καὶ ἡ ἀκρόπολις μέχρι τοῦδε ἐπὶ ὑπ' Ἀθηναίων πόλις.

And, finally, the Acropolis, because the Athenians had there in early times a place of habitation, is still to this day called by them *polis* or city.¹⁷

¹⁴ Weir (1995, 247 n. 3) lists several other sources, about which he states “they are either too vague or too late to inspire much confidence.”

¹⁵ Trans. R. Warner.

¹⁶ Trans. C.F. Smith.

¹⁷ Trans. C.F. Smith. For Thuc. 2.15.3–6, see further Gomme 1956, 49–61; cf. Harrison 1906, 7–8; Dörpfeld 1937, 5–22. The Acropolis as *polis* is also echoed in Pausanias 1.26.6.

With regard to Thucydides 2.15.3–6, E.A. Gardner states: “In this passage Thucydides makes two distinct statements, and quotes evidence to prove them: (1) that the early city was mainly in the Acropolis; (2) that such portion of it as was outside the Acropolis lay to the south.”¹⁸

The proof cited by Thucydides is straightforward: in addition to the sanctuaries of Athena and other deities on the Acropolis, the primary sanctuaries of the Athenians outside the Acropolis are situated mostly in the southern quarter of the city. Thucydides specifically mentions the sanctuaries of Olympian Zeus, Pythian Apollo, Earth (Ge), and Dionysos en Limnais, in whose honor were celebrated the more ancient Dionysia.¹⁹ In addition to these, Thucydides goes on to state (2.15.5):

ἴδρῦται δὲ καὶ ἄλλα ἱερὰ ταύτῃ ἀρχαία. καὶ τῆ κρήνῃ τῇ νῦν μὲν τῶν τυράννων οὕτως σκευασάντων Ἐννεακρούνηφ καλουμένη, τὸ δὲ πάλαι φανερόν τῶν πηγῶν οὐσῶν Καλλιρρόῃ ὀνομασμένη ἐκείνοι τε ἐγγὺς οὕση τὰ πλείστου ἄξια ἐχρῶντο, καὶ νῦν ἔτι ἀπὸ τοῦ ἀρχαίου πρό τε γαμικῶν καὶ ἐς ἄλλα τῶν ἱερῶν νομίζεται τῷ ὕδατι χρῆσθαι.

In that quarter [i.e., south of the Acropolis] are also situated still other ancient sanctuaries. And the fountain now called Enneakrounos, from the fashion given it by the tyrants, but which anciently, when the springs were uncovered, was named Kallirrhoe, was used by the people of those days, because it was close by, for the most important ceremonies; and even now, in accordance with ancient practice, it is still customary to use waters in the rites preliminary to marriages and other sacred ceremonies.²⁰

As the testimony of an Athenian born before the death of Aeschylus, Thucydides’ account is in this case compelling, as it refers to the topography of the pre-Periklean town in which he was brought up.²¹ Taken in its totality, the most elegant reading of Thucydides 1.89.3 is that there is no Archaic circuit other than the fortifications of the Acropolis built in the Mycenaean period. As for Thucydides’ statement at 1.93.2, which Vanderpool erroneously states as testimony in favor of an Archaic wall, the construction of the new walls following the Persian sack refers to the Themistoklean Wall, which certainly left its imprint on the topography of the city.²²

The second often-cited passage is in Herodotos 9.13; it reads:

Μαρδόνιος ... ὑπεξεχώρηε ἐμπρήσας τε τὰς Ἀθήνας, καὶ εἶκού τι ὄρθον ἦν τῶν τειχῶν ἢ τῶν οἰκημάτων ἢ τῶν ἱερῶν, πάντα καταβαλὼν καὶ συγχώσας.

Mardonios ... burnt Athens and reduced to complete ruin anything that remained standing—walls, houses, temples, and all.²³

Herodotos’ testimony seems clear-cut: the temples must include those on the Acropolis (indeed, the destroyed unfin-

ished column drums and triglyphs and metopes of the pre-Parthenon were built into the north wall of the Acropolis after the Athenian victory over the Persians as a war memorial and as testimony to the Persian atrocities).²⁴ As for the houses, if we are to believe the testimony of Thucydides already cited that the primary habitation of early Athens was on the Acropolis and immediately around it, especially to the south, then what Mardonios burnt was the heart of the citadel and its surrounds. Be that as it may, there is nothing in Herodotos to suggest any walls other than those of the Acropolis. Indeed, in this passage “the walls” referred to by Herodotos may very well mean the fortifications of the Acropolis. Indeed, a further passage in Herodotos, often overlooked, clearly refers to walls on the Acropolis. At 5.77.3 Herodotos writes:

τὰς δε πέδας αὐτῶν, ἐν τῆσι ἐδεδέατο, ἀνεκρέμασαν ἐς τὴν ἀκρόπολιν· αἱ περ ἔτι καὶ ἐς ἐμὲ ἦσαν περιεούσαι, κρεμάμεναι ἐκ τειχῶν περιπεφλευσμένων πυρὶ ὑπὸ τοῦ Μήδου, ἀντίον δὲ τοῦ μεγάρου τοῦ πρὸς ἐσπέρην τετραμμένου.

The fetters they were bound with, the Athenians hung up in the Acropolis; they were still there in my day, hanging on the walls which the Persian fire had scorched, opposite the shrine which faces westward.²⁵

As with most passages referring to the topography of Late Archaic and Classical Athens, this too remains a matter of interpretation, but Herodotos in this passage does not mince his words, as he refers as a matter-of-fact to walls on the Acropolis that were still standing in his own time—and, more importantly, *after* the Persian Wars and *before* Thucydides—with traces of fire. What the Medes torched was the fortification wall on the Acropolis.

The third passage often cited in support of a wall is in Andokides (*On the Mysteries* 108); it provides nothing that does not accord with the testimony of Thucydides and Herodotos:

τοιγάρτοι διὰ ταῦτα, τὴν πόλιν ἀνάστατον παραλαβόντες ἱερὰ τε κατακεκαυμένα τείχη τε καὶ οἰκίας καταπεπτωκυίας, ἀφορμὴν τε οὐδεμίαν ἔχοντες, διὰ τὸ ἀλλήλοισ

¹⁸ Gardner 1902, 141.

¹⁹ For these, see generally Travlos 1971; for the sanctuaries on the South Slope of the Acropolis, see, in particular, Beschi 1967–1968a.

²⁰ Trans. C.F. Smith. For the Enneakrounos, see esp. Levi 1961–1962; cf. Levi 1930–1931; see also Beschi 1967–1968a; 1967–1968b; Dörpfeld 1894.

²¹ Cf. Cornford 1907, viii–ix; see further Papadopoulos 2003, 301.

²² Vanderpool 1974, 157, with n. 3.

²³ Trans. A. de Sélincourt, revised by J. Marincola.

²⁴ For war memorials on the Acropolis, see Ferrari 2002; cf. Pakkanen 2006.

²⁵ Trans. A. de Sélincourt, revised by J. Marincola.

ὁμοσεῖν τὴν ἀρχὴν τῶν Ἑλλήνων κατηγάσαντο καὶ τὴν πόλιν ὑμῖν τοιαύτην καὶ τοσαύτην παρέδωσαν.

And that is how men who found their city a waste, her temples burnt to the ground, and her walls and houses in ruins, men who were utterly without resources, brought Greece under their sway and handed on to you the glorious and mighty Athens of today—by living in unity.²⁶

Andokides is referring to Xerxes' sack of Athens and, once more, there is nothing in his language to indicate walls other than those of the Acropolis and Pelargikon; like Herodotos, Andokides refers to the burnt *sanctuaries and walls*, as well as houses.

In the late Archaic period, in order to take and sack Athens, the Persians had to take the Acropolis; without it there would be no victory. Similarly, when Kylon, in 632 B.C., attempted to seize control of Athens and rule as tyrant, his strategy was straightforward: in order to command Athens, one had to command the Acropolis, though his strategy backfired as the *basileus*, Megakles, together with the indignant archons, barricaded Kylon and his supporters and thus thwarted his designs on ruling Athens.²⁷ Indeed, *no* city wall is ever mentioned in our extant sources on the Kylon affair other than those of the Acropolis.²⁸ In a similar vein, no enceinte is referred to in our sources in several other recorded events in the Archaic period. For example, Hippias and his supporters in 511/10 B.C., like Kylon over a century earlier, took refuge within the Acropolis walls from Kleomenes the son of Anaxandrides.²⁹ Furthermore, the victorious Athenians at Marathon in 490 B.C., when they returned with all possible speed back to Athens, fixed their camp on ground sacred to Herakles at Kynosarges, just as they had their camp at Marathon on ground sacred to Herakles.³⁰ As at Marathon, so too in Athens, the Athenian army in order to face the Persian threat camped in open ground, not behind a city wall. With regard to the latter, some scholars have argued that it is possible that Herodotos, like other authors, did not see fit to mention such a detail, “perhaps because it was considered common knowledge.”³¹ With their stunning victory at Marathon, there may be good military reasons why the Athenians preferred to face the Persians on open ground rather than defend their fortifications, but the fact of the matter is that, throughout the Archaic period, the Athenians, on the basis of our literary testimonia, never once relied on any fortifications other than those of the Acropolis.

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

So much for our primary literary testimonia, at least for the time being, but if we turn to the archaeological record, the existence of an Archaic wall becomes all the more problem-

atic. The only material “evidence” ever put forward in support for the existence of an Archaic wall is, in fact, not hard archaeological evidence, but a most indirect argument. It has to do with the remains of an Archaic retaining wall on the west side of the Acropolis, a part of which is directly in line with the entrance of the Mnesikleian Propylaea, another part of which is at a slight angle, first noted by Antonios Keramopoulos, and thought to serve as a retaining wall for an Archaic ramp giving access to the Acropolis.³² The same retaining wall was again uncovered in 1965 by Nikolaos Platon, who was cleaning rubbish that had gathered in the area of the Beulé Gate since the 1930s.³³ Vanderpool, who studied the pottery associated with an abandoned Archaic house uncovered by Platon that had been destroyed by the construction of the retaining wall, dated it to the second quarter of the 6th century B.C.³⁴ The width of the ramp was calculated by Platon to be about 12 m, and as Vanderpool argued, the character of the earlier approach was thus radically changed. By providing a broad and open approach to the Acropolis, evidently for ceremonial use, the “defensive” character of this approach was compromised, because, as Weir adds, the Athenians “now felt secure behind a proper city circuit.”³⁵ The general argument is that such an approach to the Acropolis presumes a lower defensive wall.³⁶

There are two problems with this line of reasoning: First of all is the nature of the Old Propylon and the entrance to the west side of the Acropolis; indeed, Vanderpool goes to great lengths to disconnect the ramp and the Old Propylon, but he presents no archaeological evidence to support or negate the contemporaneity of the two. What is also overlooked is the clear evidence put forward since by Ione Mylonas Shear and Michael Djordjevitch in the late 1990s, independently of one another, that the west Cyclopean wall of the Acropolis, which was certainly standing in the Archaic period, was both multi-phased and more substantial than previously assumed and that it must be factored into any Ar-

²⁶ Trans. K.J. Maidment.

²⁷ For the Kylon affair and the topographical ramifications for Archaic Athens, see Papadopoulos 1996; 2003, 313; Robertson 1998; Harris-Cline 1999. See also Ober 1989.

²⁸ For which, see Herod. 5.71; Thuc. 1.126.

²⁹ Herod. 5.64–65; *Athenaion Politeia* 19.5–6. A generation earlier, in c. 552/51 B.C., when Phya in the guise of Athena was bringing Peisistratos home to her own Acropolis, there is no mention of a wall (Herod. 1.60; *Athenaion Politeia* 14.4).

³⁰ Herod. 6.116.

³¹ Weir 1995, 251 n. 15.

³² Keramopoulos 1934–1935, 87; it is well-illustrated in Vanderpool 1974, 158, fig. 1.

³³ Platon 1966, 42; Vanderpool 1974, 158–159; Weir 1995, 249.

³⁴ Vanderpool 1974, 159 (not “second half of the 6th century” as stated by Weir 1995, 249).

³⁵ Weir 1995, 249; Vanderpool 1974, 157–159.

³⁶ Weir 1995, 249.

chaic approach to the citadel from the west.³⁷ Indeed, their arguments suggest that any ramp leading to the Archaic Propylon would face a most imposing Mycenaean Cyclopean wall. More to the point, both Vanderpool and Weir completely overlook the fact that in the 6th century B.C. the Pelargikon was still a viable line of defense, so a new and much wider entrance to the Acropolis on the west side did not necessarily compromise the defensive character of the Acropolis. I will return to the Pelargikon below. The important point here is that the existence of a retaining wall for an Archaic ramp providing access to the Acropolis is not evidence for the existence of an Archaic fortification wall.

Given the dearth of evidence for the existence of an Archaic enceinte, few scholars have ventured a reconstruction as to where that wall might be. Perhaps the boldest attempt to do just this was made by Travlos (*Fig. 3*).³⁸ The plan shows clearly the Acropolis fortifications, the extent of the Pelargikon and Eleusinion—both the Acropolis and Eleusinion could be closed off—and a fortification wall with no fewer than seven gates/entrances/exits, hypothesized presumably by the existence of ancient roads. Travlos proposed an oval-shaped enceinte with perhaps a total length of about 2.6 km, and which he thought may have been built in the time of Solon.³⁹ Travlos's wall encloses the Areiopagos, but not the higher ground to the west and southwest, that is, the Hill of the Nymphs and Pnyx, as well as the Mouseion (Philopappos) Hill. The Eridanos river lies outside, skirting the northern face of the wall. Not only does this wall leave outside the city the Archaic Agora, which is located on the level ground to the east of the Acropolis, but it traverses, more or less, the Kolonos Agoraios Hill, which dominated the area of the Classical Agora, the marketplace that was constructed in the early 5th century B.C. after the Persian sack.⁴⁰ This is not the place to rehash the evidence that the Archaic Agora lay to the east of the Acropolis. The point is clear: no city-planners would leave the heart of the administrative and civic center of Athens outside the walls.

As for the Kolonos Agoraios, this hill has been extensively excavated by the American School of Classical Studies at Athens beginning in the early 1930s. Cut into bedrock were, among other things, an Archaic foundry and numerous tombs of the Protogeometric and Geometric periods, but no fortification wall.⁴¹ Whereas comparative ephemera like small pits for Early Iron Age burials survived in the bedrock, some smaller than 30 cm in diameter and only a few centimeters deep as preserved, the construction of a fortification wall did not.

A number of scholars immediately saw problems with Travlos's presumed line of the Archaic enceinte. Winter, in his volume on Greek fortifications, refers to the line of Travlos's wall as "rather implausible," though he never doubted its existence.⁴² In a more recent and fuller discussion of the presumed line of the wall, Winter argues that

Travlos's enceinte made little military sense, and, despite the fact that there was still no hard evidence for the existence of such a wall, Winter presented his arguments for where the Archaic wall *should* be; at the same time, he followed Vanderpool's chronology, already referred to, for the construction of the wall (i.e. Peisistratid rather than Solonian).⁴³ What is perhaps most surprising about Winter's reconstructed trace of the wall is that it is a good deal less extensive than Travlos estimated; so much so, that any wall so close to the Acropolis and Pelargikon makes little sense from a military perspective. Unfortunately, Winter never illustrated his idea of where the Archaic wall should be, but his written description is certainly very clear:

Rather than including Kolonos Agoraios and the Agora, the northern line of the wall would probably have kept to a level somewhere between those of the late 5th-century South Stoa I and the Eleusinion. Southeast of the Acropolis, the southern part of the site of the Odeion of Perikles, together with the area of the later stoa and temenos of Dionysos, may have lain outside the defensive system. To the southwest and west of the Acropolis–Areopagus massif, the builders of the new walls would surely have been careful to keep well away from the rising ground of Mouseion-Pnyx-Hill of the Nymphs chain; to have drawn the trace partly along the foot of these slopes would have been an invitation to disaster. Thus the intersection of the modern Street of Dionysos the Areopagite and of the Apostle Paul, and probably all of the area of Dörpfeld's excavations below the Areopagus, would no doubt have been excluded; further to the northwest the defensive line must have been some 25 to 30 meters uphill from Young's Archaic cemetery, in which burials continued to be made until ca. 500 (and perhaps even into the early 5th century).⁴⁴

Winter's arguments are based on two different lines of reasoning: the first is what makes sense from a military perspective. To the south and southwest of the Acropolis, his reconstructed trace would more or less be right next to the Pelargikon, which creates all sorts of problems, and the en-

³⁷ See Mylonas Shear 1999a, 1999b; Papadopoulos 2003, 301–302. The evidence published by Mylonas Shear and that presented by Djordjevitch (personal communication) has important ramifications for the west entrance and approach to the Acropolis before the construction of the Mnesiklean Propylaia. Among other things, it makes the bastion of the Athena Nike temple an integral part of the Mycenaean fortification, and it avoids the necessity of restoring extramural terraces. Moreover, it brings the actual Mycenaean entrance system more in line with that of Tiryns. For the Nike Bastion and an overview of past literature and recent work, see Mark 1993 and 1995.

³⁸ Travlos 1960, 44–45, pl. II.

³⁹ Travlos 1960, 33–34, 40–42.

⁴⁰ For the location of the Archaic Agora, see Papadopoulos 1996, 2003; see also Robertson 1996; 1998.

⁴¹ Papadopoulos 2003, esp. 272–275, fig. 5.1.

⁴² Winter 1971, 63.

⁴³ Winter 1982.

⁴⁴ Winter 1982, 202–203.

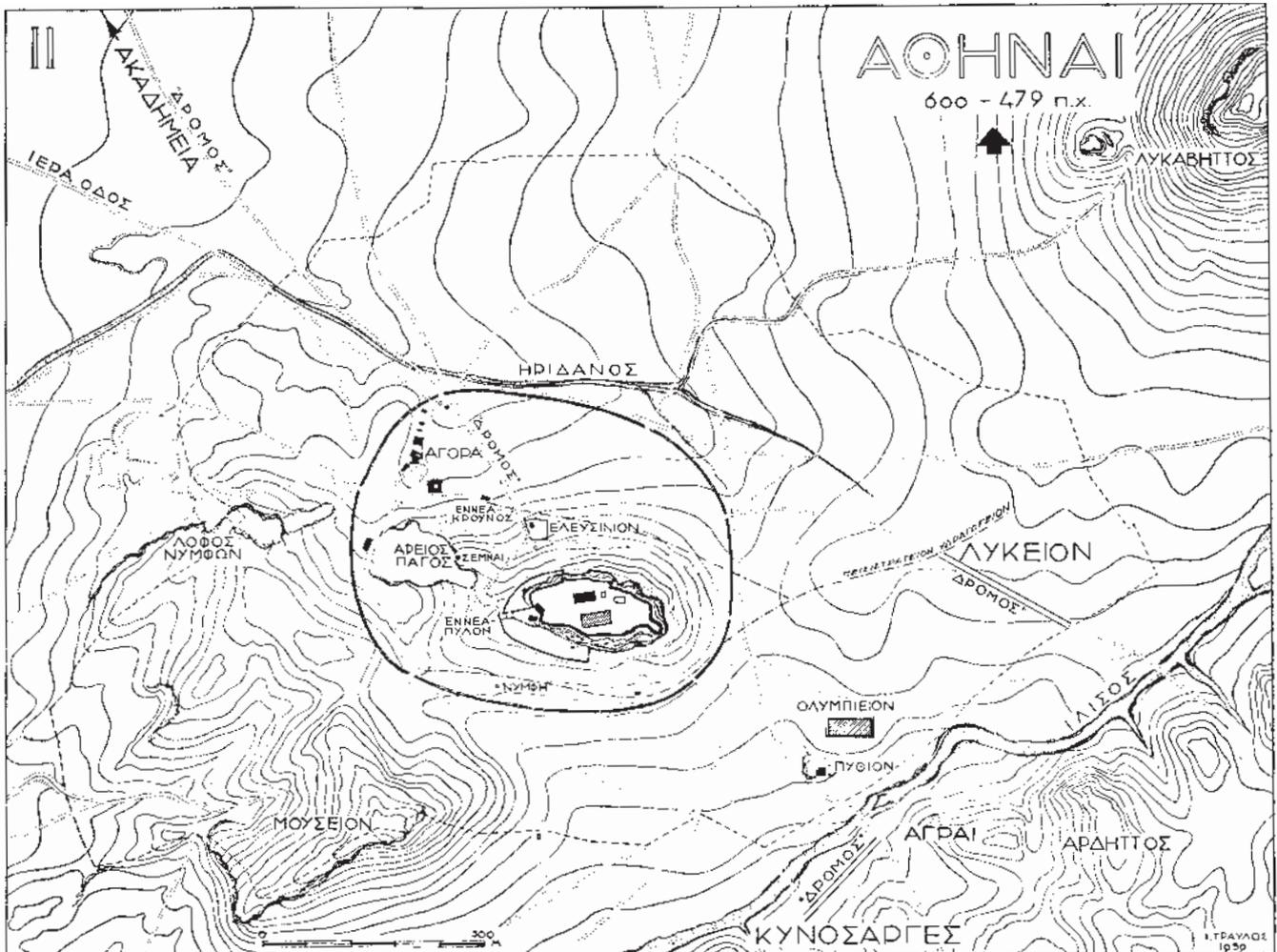


Fig. 3. Hypothetical reconstruction by John Travlos of the putative Archaic fortification wall around Athens (Travlos 1960, 44–45, pl. II).

ture enceinte, apart from enclosing the Areiopagos, would hug the contours of the Acropolis, the top of which was already heavily fortified. From a military perspective, a well fortified Acropolis and Pelargikon seems a much more viable and realistic line of defense, particularly given the fact that it was there and fortified for a long time, rather than a more ephemeral wall that on the south was hard-up against the Pelargikon and, to the north, lay between the Eleusinion and South Stoa I. What is worth stressing, once more, is that significant parts of the very area where Winter traces his putative wall have been excavated—not least of which is the area between South Stoa I and the Eleusinion—and once more there is no trace of such a wall.

Enclosing the Areiopagos within the enceinte certainly seems to make good sense from a defensive point of view, but Herodotos' account (8.51–53) of the Persian Sack shows how unnecessary the Areiopagos was, or rather

proved to be, and how successful the Bronze Age fortifications of the Acropolis were in the end, even though the Persians managed to scale the citadel. Having found Athens abandoned, the Persians occupied the Areiopagos and from there laid siege to the Acropolis, which was being defended not by able-bodied Athenian men, but, as Herodotos tells us, mostly temple-stewards and needy folk and those who misunderstood the “wooden wall” oracle.⁴⁵ In fact, so successful were the Acropolis fortifications against the might of the Persian military machine that, even occupying the Areiopagos, the Persians only managed to breach the Athenian defenses by means of a few soldiers who had scaled the cliff on the east side of the Acropolis, on the side of the Acropolis *opposite* the Areiopagos—the east side was always considered the “front” of the Acropolis—above the Shrine of

⁴⁵ Herod. 8.51; cf. Camp 1984, 41; Robertson 1998, 284.

Aglauros.⁴⁶ In this way, Noel Robertson correctly interprets Herodotos' words "in front of the Acropolis, but in back of the gates and the usual ascent."⁴⁷

Winter's second line of reasoning has to do with the arguments initiated by the letter written by Servius Sulpicius to Cicero (*Ad fam.* 4.12.3) in the 1st century B.C. where it is noted that at Athens *sepulturae intra urbem* had long been forbidden. Following the earlier papers of Young, Winter deftly weaves his imagined trace of the Archaic wall some 25–30 m uphill from Young's Archaic cemetery in order to leave no *sepulturae intra urbem*.⁴⁸ Winter, like many others before him, assumed that *intra urbem* is synonymous with *intra muros*, and he also compared the concept of *intra urbem* or *intra muros* in Athens to that of the Roman *pomerium*, though he was careful to note that there is no evidence in Greek cities for the existence of legal/religious "city limits" that correspond to the Roman *pomerium*.⁴⁹ It is worth noting that one of the first scholars to compare the Roman *pomerium* to the topography of Athens, was the great Swedish archaeologist, Sam Wide, who wrote a paper entitled "Il Pomerium e il Pelargikon."⁵⁰ But whether or not *urbem* = *muros*, and whether or not Sulpicius' statement can be carried back in time to the Archaic period, if the Athenian fortifications of the Archaic period only comprised the Acropolis and Pelargikon, then there is no reason even to bring up the argument of *sepulturae intra urbem*, for all burials—apart from those of infants/children—were outside the Archaic walls of Athens.⁵¹ That is to say, if the Acropolis wall together with the Pelargikon were the only walls defending Athens in the Archaic period, than the argument of burials within the city is irrelevant.

ACROPOLIS AND PELARGIKON: THE ARCHAIC FORTIFICATIONS OF ATHENS

I want to return to the Athens that Thucydides knew as a boy. Most scholars agree that, despite the total lack of hard archaeological evidence and the fact that the extant sources can be interpreted in different ways, there was an Archaic circuit wall other than that of the Acropolis and Pelargikon. This is perhaps most emphatically stated by Wycherley, who wrote: "It is somewhat perverse to take the view that Thucydides has in mind the primitive fortifications of the Acropolis and its immediate appendages, and not an outer circuit."⁵² At the risk of sounding perverse, I think the *evidence* is far from clear-cut and, if anything, speaks otherwise.

The Athens that Thucydides knew as a boy was remarkably prehistoric in its overall appearance. As Harrison (Nick) Eiteljorg reminds us, the Athenian Acropolis before the Periklean building program that truly transformed it was remarkable in neither size nor grandeur.⁵³ In his study of the

west end of the citadel, Eiteljorg also points out how "Mycenaean" the Acropolis was in its appearance as late as the first half of the 5th century B.C.⁵⁴ In the words of Jeffrey Hurwit, "there is no question that the massive Cyclopean wall of the citadel survived the end of the [Mycenaean] era more or less intact, and that it would have been the most formidable and striking feature of the Acropolis throughout the Dark Age (and beyond)—a colossal and still very functional relic."⁵⁵ Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that both the Mycenaean fortifications and the Pelargikon were still viable defensive systems in the 5th century B.C. Using the testimony of Herodotos (9.13) and Thucydides (1.93.1–2), John Camp has argued that whatever remained of these early fortifications, particularly the Pelargikon, may have been included in the complete and deliberate destruction of the walls of Athens after the Persian capture of the city. Alternatively, the Athenians themselves may have used the wall as a quarry for the hastily built post-Persian circuit.⁵⁶

Much of the discussion of the topography of Athens in

⁴⁶ Herod. 8.52–53. For useful commentary, see Camp 1984, 41; Robertson 1998, 284; Papadopoulos 2003, 302–304. The cliff on the east side of the Acropolis is, in reality, not as difficult to scale as many commentators seem to think. The approach to the prominent cave is straightforward, and immediately above the cave the bedrock forms a small saddle. This area was protected by the massive wall on the east side of the rock, which is at this point at its highest (see Papadopoulos 2003, 283, figs. 5.3 and 5.4). There are also rock-cut steps north of the entrance to the cave, discussed and well illustrated in Broneer 1936, 252–253, fig. 4.

⁴⁷ Robertson 1998, 284 n. 12. For the Persian ascent of the Acropolis, see further Jeppesen 1979, 391; 1987, 40; see also Jeppesen 1983, for further clarification of his ideas concerning the location and identification of the Erechtheion.

⁴⁸ Winter 1982, esp. 203–204; Young 1948; 1951.

⁴⁹ Winter 1982, 199.

⁵⁰ Wide 1912.

⁵¹ There are graves on the Acropolis and, as the recent work of Walter Gauss and Florian Ruppenstein (1998) has established, there are 19 graves in all, one a pithos burial, the others cist graves. Of these, seven can be dated Submycenaean with confidence and a further four are likely to be of that date, hence 11 Submycenaean tombs. Four of the remaining tombs are assigned to the Middle Helladic or Shaft Grave period, as is, in all probability, the pithos burial. The three remaining burials cannot be dated. Most important, all the graves but one of those assembled by Gauss and Ruppenstein are burials of children or infants, and it was customary at various times in the Bronze and Early Iron Age periods to bury children within a settlement. For a general discussion of intra- as opposed to extramural burial in the Greek world, and the reasons for it, particularly in the case of infants/children, see Young 1951; Nilsson 1955, 175; Burkert 1977, 295; Sourvinou-Inwood 1981, 36; 1983, esp. 43, 47; 1995, 433–439; Jordan & Rotroff 1999.

⁵² Wycherley 1978, 10.

⁵³ Eiteljorg 1993, esp. 85–86.

⁵⁴ Eiteljorg 1993, 85–86; cf. Vermeule 1986, 78. See further Stevens 1946, esp. 73–77; Iakovides 1962; 1973; Bundgaard 1974, 1976; Wright 1980, esp. 64–65, n. 18; 1994.

⁵⁵ Hurwit 1999, 88.

⁵⁶ Camp 1984, 41.

the Early Iron Age, Archaic and Early Classical periods has focused on the meaning, exact size, and location of the *Pelargikon/Pelasgikon*, as well as its relationship to a real or mythical Archaic peribolos wall.⁵⁷ Luigi Beschi's seminal restoration of the Telemachos stele and relief (*IG II²* 4960–4961), depicting a stork (πελαργός) in a tree—a straightforward pictorial reference to the Pelargikon—coupled with the evidence mustered by Camp concerning the defense of water supplies within the circuit of the fortifications, is persuasive.⁵⁸ Originally built in the Mycenaean period as a further line of defense, the Pelargikon not only extended to the west and northwest of the entrance to the Acropolis, but swung around to the south, as far east as the Asklepieion. For Camp, who argues that one of the most important functions of the Pelargikon was to ensure a secure water supply, the collapse of the Mycenaean fountain and the continued use of the Klepsydra cuttings suggest that the Pelargikon be dated to the early years of the 12th century B.C. Camp goes on to provide evidence that eight Archaic wells immediately to the northwest of the Acropolis “suggest its [i.e. the Pelargikon] use by the Peisistratids in the 6th century, before it ceased to function as a viable fortified area in the fifth.”⁵⁹ If, as Camp clearly shows, the Pelargikon was still viable in the 6th century, then there is no need for an additional Archaic enceinte, and especially for one so close to the Pelargikon as Winter would have us believe. Moreover, the 12 m wide Archaic ramp providing passage to the west side of the Acropolis would have been fortified not only by the Pelargikon, it would have been additionally protected by the Mycenaean wall that now has to be reconstructed on the west side of the Acropolis thanks to the work of Mylonas Shear.

The plan of the Mycenaean fortifications of the Acropolis together with the Pelargikon most often illustrated is that prepared by Travlos (*Fig. 4*).⁶⁰ Although the trace of the Mycenaean circuit around the Acropolis presented in Figure 4 is relatively clear and, in parts, well preserved, little can be said with absolute certainty about the exact location, extent, date, and even the name of the Pelargikon.⁶¹ Travlos refers to the Cyclopean wall around the citadel itself as the Pelargikon, and to the lower wall protecting the west entrance of the Acropolis as the Outer Pelargikon.⁶² As Camp has shown, however, part of the controversy stems from the ancient testimonia: “... for it is clear that the term was applied both to the early fortifications of the citadel (Herodotos 6.137, Pausanias 1.28.3), and also to a separate area, distinct from the Acropolis itself. Thucydides (2.17) records that the Pelargikon lay ὑπὸ τῆν ἀκρόπολιν and that it was inhabited by squatters during the Peloponnesian War, in defiance of an oracle. ... Similarly, *IG I³* 78.54–57 refers to the Pelargikon as a well-defined separate entity: the Basileus is ordered to mark off the sanctuaries in the Pelargikon with boundary stones; no further altars are to be established

without permission of the council and people; and no quarrying of stone or removal of earth and stones is to be permitted.”⁶³

The exact line of the Pelargikon cannot be established with certainty, but the probable line, as presented by Travlos (*Fig. 4*) cannot be too far from the mark. By securing perennial water supplies both to the northwest and south of the Acropolis, the Pelargikon is paralleled by developments at both Mycenae and Tiryns, where additional fortifications were added to secure water supplies: at Mycenae a secret cistern, at Tiryns an underground spring.⁶⁴ Beschi's work on the South Slope of the Acropolis—particularly his restoration of the stele with the stork already referred to—has shown that the Pelargikon extended to the south of the Acropolis, as far east as the Asklepieion, and thus included within its circuit the natural spring that was a fountain house in the Archaic period.⁶⁵ To the northwest, both Kratinos (fr. 321) and Lucian (*Bis acc.* 9) associate the Pelargikon with the cave of Pan on the northwest slopes of the Acropolis, and it is in this same area where the Klepsydra is located.⁶⁶ Further evidence for the line of the Pelargikon, including actual cuttings for a wall running along the northwest slopes reported by Spyridon Iakovides, is assembled by Camp.⁶⁷ Whereas there is clear physical evidence for the trace of the Pelargikon, including cuttings, there is none for a separate Archaic enceinte.

There is general consensus among scholars that the Pelargikon does not extend around the entire Acropolis. It is

⁵⁷ Among earlier writers, see, in particular, Curtius 1891, 47; Harrison 1906, 22–36; Dörpfeld 1937. Among more recent contributions on the Pelargikon, see esp. Iakovides 1962, 179–199, 231–235; 1973, 113–140; Beschi 1967–1968a, esp. 390–397 (with references to earlier literature); Beschi 1967–1968b; Travlos 1971, 52, 55–56, 91; Camp 1984; Robertson 1998.

⁵⁸ Camp 1984, esp. 37; for a summary of earlier literature and the consensus that the Pelargikon served a dual function as an additional line of defense *and* securing the water supply, see Iakovides 1962, 179–181. For the waterworks at the northwest end of the Acropolis, see, most recently, Tanoulas 1997.

⁵⁹ Camp 1984, 41.

⁶⁰ Travlos 1971, 57, fig. 67.

⁶¹ Camp 1984, 37; Iakovides 1962, 179–199, 231–235; Beschi 1967–1968a, 390–397; Travlos 1971, 52, 55–56, 91, 93, 127; see also Smithson 1982, for the prehistoric Klepsydra.

⁶² Travlos 1971, 52–67, esp. fig. 67. Among earlier contributions, see, in particular, Robert 1880, 173–194; White 1894; Köster 1909; Heberdey 1910; Wide 1912; Dörpfeld 1929; Keramopoulos 1932; 1934–1935.

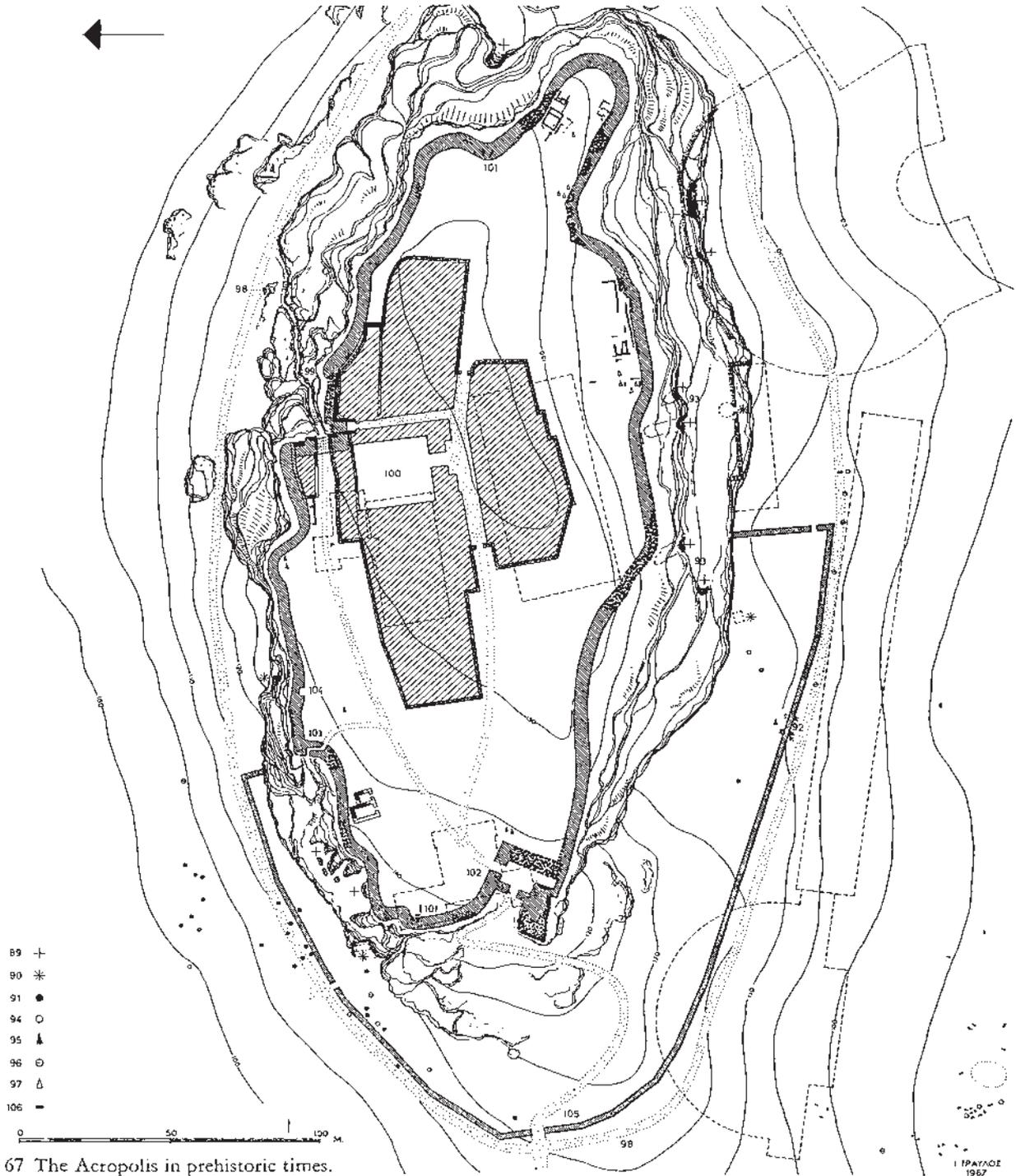
⁶³ Camp 1984, 37. The date of *IG I³* 78.54.57 is about 422 B.C., though Camp (1984, 37 n. 4), citing Cavanaugh, notes the possibility of a date closer to 430 B.C.

⁶⁴ Camp 1984, 37–38; for Mycenae, see further Karo 1934.

⁶⁵ Beschi 1967–1968a, 390–397; Camp 1984, 38, with n. 8.

⁶⁶ Camp 1984, 38, with n. 9.

⁶⁷ Camp 1984, 39–41; Iakovides 1962, 189–199; for the Mycenaean fountain house, see also Broneer 1939.



67 The Acropolis in prehistoric times.

- | | | |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------------|--|
| 89. Caves | 95. Middle Helladic graves | 101. Pelargikon Wall |
| 90. Springs | 96. Late Helladic wells | 102. Acropolis entrance |
| 91. Neolithic wells | 97. Late Helladic graves | 103. Postern gate |
| 92. Neolithic house | 98. Peripatos | 104. Stairway to the Mycenaean spring |
| 93. Caves with Early Helladic pottery | 99. Mycenaean ascent | 105. Probable line of the Outer Pelargikon |
| 94. Middle Helladic wells | 100. Mycenaean palace | 106. Geometric graves |

Fig. 4. The Athenian Acropolis in prehistoric times (Travlos 1971, 57, fig. 67).

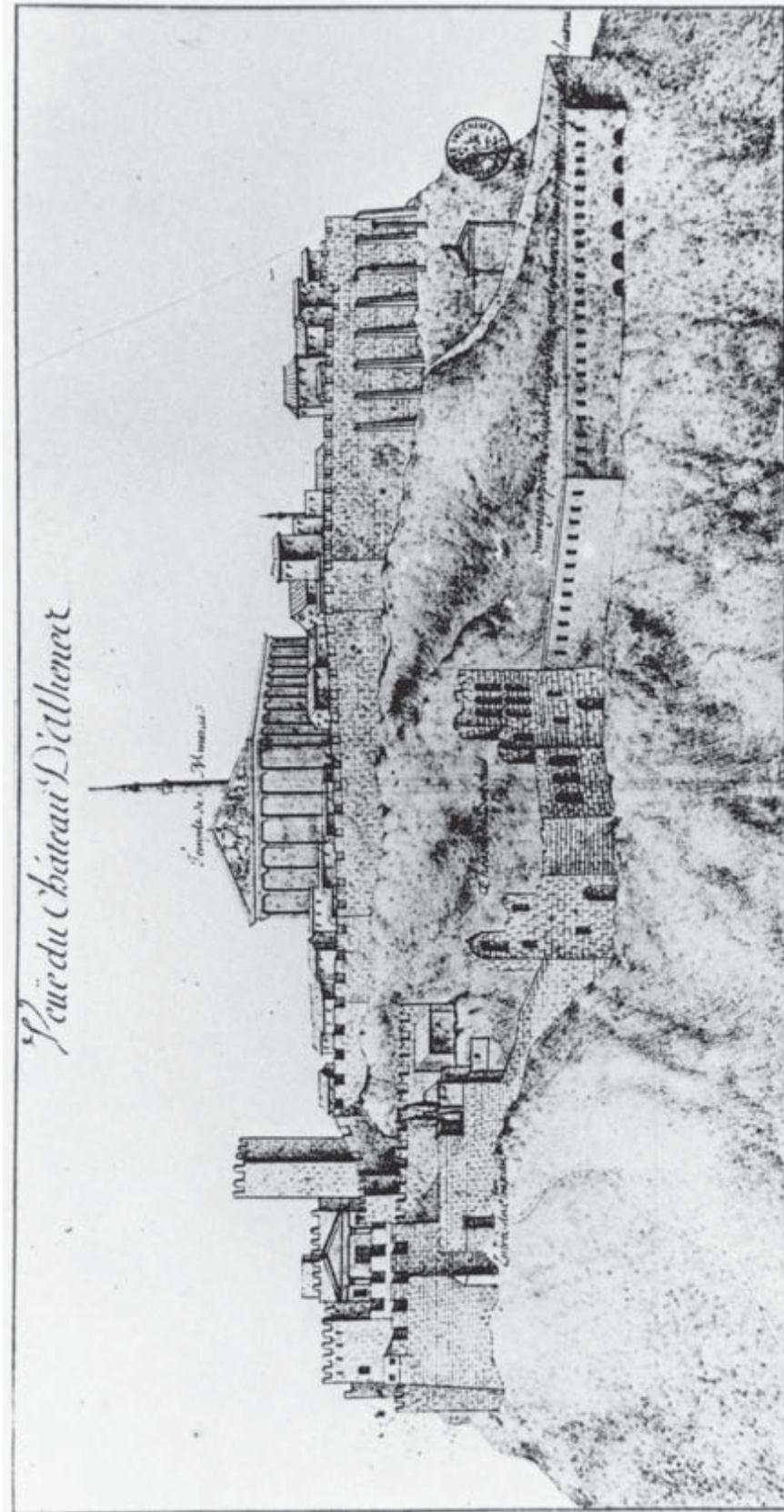


Fig. 6. The Acropolis of Athens from the southwest. Engraving dated 1687. Département des Manuscrits, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris (Papadopoulos 2003, 308, fig. 5.19).

possible, however, that it may have extended farther east, along both the north and south sides. Kevin Glowacki has intimated (personal communication) that the Pelargikon may have enclosed the entire Acropolis, more or less following the line of the Peripatos along the North Slope (the line of the Peripatos is clearly marked on *Fig. 4*). Indeed, there are possible surface indications at the east end of the Acropolis that may suggest the existence of a substantial wall or other constructed feature at this point. The latter, whether defensive in character or a terrace retention wall, can only be established with further excavation.

With the caveat that the Pelargikon may have extended farther east, the fortified citadel presented in *Figure 4* was also the fortified *polis* of Athens, as Thucydides tells us. The effectiveness of these fortifications in 480 B.C. against the Persians has already been noted. The Bronze Age citadel on the Acropolis is similar in size to other Mycenaean centers, including Mycenae and Tiryns, and is considerably larger than the citadel at Midea.⁶⁸ It is larger, often much larger, than most known Early Iron Age settlements in Greece and the Aegean.⁶⁹ Moreover, in its overall layout, the Bronze Age through early 5th-century B.C. Acropolis bears a striking resemblance to that of the citadel at the time of the Greek War of Independence in terms of its defensive principles, as I have outlined elsewhere (*Fig. 5*).⁷⁰ The so-called *τείχος τῆς Ὑπαπαντῆς*, for example, essentially follows the presumed line of the Pelargikon on the north and northwest of the rock, and encloses not only the Klepsydra (*ντάπια τοῦ νεροῦ*),⁷¹ but another spring to the north and east, not far from the church of Agios Nikolaos. In the Ottoman period, the Klepsydra is both fortified in its own right and equipped with a set of stairs allowing access to the top of the hill, in a manner not unlike the Mycenaean fountain excavated by Oscar Broneer.⁷² In a similar vein, the *τείχος τοῦ Σεραπευτζέ*, on the south side of the Acropolis, not only mirrors the presumed line of the Pelargikon, but also brings within the defenses an increased water supply, including the prominent well marked on the plan (*Fig. 5*), the Ottoman successor to the Asklepieion spring house.⁷³ Camp's arguments with regard to water and the Pelargikon are as cogent in the prehistoric period as they are in Ottoman times. In the same way that the Turkish builders exploited substantial earlier structures, such as the remains of the Stoa of Eumenes, particularly its great retaining wall, and the Odeion of Herodes Atticus,⁷⁴ as part of their own fortifications, so too did Classical, Hellenistic and Roman builders conceivably use earlier fortification lines like the Pelargikon.

The Ottoman fortifications in Athens are depicted in a splendid engraving found among the papers of Gravier d'Ortières, showing the Acropolis in 1687 only months before the explosion that destroyed part of the Parthenon in September of that same year (*Fig. 6*).⁷⁵ In addition to show-

ing the extent of habitation on the rock in Turkish times, the engraving shows the importance of the fortification that extended from the northwest of the citadel, along the west, to the south, more or less following the line of the earlier Pelargikon. By reconstructing a less grandiose, more Mycenaean, fortification along a similar line, we may visualize what the Pelargikon may have looked like: striking and formidable.

CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, I have attempted to do three things. First of all, by reviewing the extant literary sources, particularly the evidence of Thucydides and Herodotos, but also that of other authors, I try to show that the extant testimonia usually mustered for the existence of an Archaic wall can be interpreted in different ways, and that their meaning is far from being clear-cut. In the case of Thucydides, in particular, if we read him "holistically" for what he has to say about the topography and fortifications of Athens, then, if anything, the existence of such a wall becomes all the more problematic. Moreover, in the entire corpus of Greek literature, the Athenians are never once referred to as defending, or in any way using, an Archaic wall, though this in itself does not constitute proof. All of the passages that have been garnered in support for an Archaic enceinte refer to the inadequate state of the wall following the Persian sack of 480/79 B.C., and there is nothing in the extant literature to suggest that these fortifications were not those of the Acropolis/Pelargikon. Indeed, the walls burned by the Persians referred to by Herodotos at 5.77, and still standing in his day, are the very walls of the Acropolis.

Second, by reviewing the recent archaeological literature, I show that there is, to date, absolutely no archaeological evidence for an Archaic enceinte. Moreover, what arguments as have been put forward for the line of such a putative wall do not stand up to closer scrutiny, both in terms of

⁶⁸ See Iakovides 1973; cf. also Iakovides 1999. In comparison to Tiryns (citadel and *Unterburg*), for example, the Acropolis of Athens is both longer and considerably wider.

⁶⁹ See discussion and references in Papadopoulos 2003, 303, with n. 189.

⁷⁰ Papadopoulos 2003, 305–309.

⁷¹ Travlos 1971, 323–331.

⁷² See Travlos 1971, 72–75; Broneer 1939.

⁷³ For the latter, see Travlos 1971, 138–142.

⁷⁴ For the Stoa of Eumenes, see Travlos 1971, 523–526; and 378–386 for the Odeion of Herodes Atticus.

⁷⁵ Now in the Département des Manuscrits, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris; see further Papadopoulos 2003, 307–308, fig. 5.19. For further discussion of early representations of Athens, the Acropolis, and the ramifications for the topography of the early city, see Papadopoulos 2005.

defensive principles and by the fact that extensive excavations in those areas where the wall has been claimed have failed to produce even the slightest evidence for its existence.

Finally, I argue that the wall the Persians breached in their sack of Athens in 480/79 B.C. is the Mycenaean circuit wall surrounding the rock of the Acropolis together with the distinctly separate wall that the Athenians knew as the Pelargikon, the existence of which is verified by archaeological evidence. Together, these walls, first built in the Mycenaean period, continued to serve through the Archaic period until 479 B.C. when work was begun on the Themistoklean Wall.

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