

AREA OF THE THOLOS AND METROON (section B, OE)

1938

## AREA OF THOLOS AND METROON

Provisional Historical Sketch, June, 1938

### EARLIEST HABITATION

The area would seem to have been inhabited as early as the Middle Helladic period. Scattered sherds of Gray Minyan and of Matt-painted ware have been found throughout the lowest levels and a thin deposit of pure Middle Helladic material overlay bedrock in a limited area to the northeast of the Tholos. No walls have appeared in association with these earliest ceramic remains.

A shallow and irregular well cut down in bedrock to the northeast of the Tholos, between it and the Great Drain, yielded a single vase, of the latest Mycenaean fabric. Another small pit, perhaps an unfinished well, was found to the southeast of the Tholos, in the very bottom of the valley. Its lowest filling was purely Protogeometric. Enough pottery of the early geometric period appeared in the lower levels to suggest that habitation continued through that age.

### OLDEST STRUCTURAL REMAINS

The earliest foundation walls so far encountered may be dated in the latest geometric period, ca. 700 B.C. They belong to a large structure that adjoined the early thoroughfare to the southeast of the later Tholos. The line of its south wall has been established throughout its

full length of 30.50 m. In addition to the northward return at either end, three intermediate cross-walls have been fixed, but the north wall remains to be found. This structure probably comprised both roofed rooms and enclosures open to the sky. Some indication of its purpose is afforded by a small kiln in one of its middle rooms. Of the kiln there remains the clay-lined wall that enclosed the circular main chamber (1.33 m. in inside diameter); the central column that supported the floor of the upper chamber and traces of the firing room that projected from the west side of the circle. In its dimensions and its scheme this arrangement finds perfect parallels among the potters' kilns represented on the plaques from Pentaskouphia; and it may well be the oldest potters' kiln yet found in Iron Age Greece. Both kiln and house were abandoned already in the second half of the seventh century B.C.

It is to be noted that this earliest surviving building in the area of the Tholos is contemporary with the first enclosure wall of the cemetery to the south of the Tholos; the two structures share a party wall. If that cemetery is a family burial plot, the adjoining structure is conceivably to be regarded as the farmstead of the family.

Very tenuous remains have been found of a couple of smaller houses that occupied the area to the south and to

the east of the Tholos after the destruction of the first large building and before the erection of the next.

#### PRIMITIVE BOULEUTERION

The next substantial building of this general region stood in the middle of the area to be covered later by the Metroon. It comprised two large rooms that faced south on a terrace supported to east and to west by the continuation of the end walls of the building. The overall dimensions of the building proper are ca. 15.00 m. east to west, 6.70 m. north to south. Its walls are built in a rude style of irregular masses of Acropolis limestone bedded in and plastered with brown clay. The east wall still stands to a height of ca. 2.50 m., the north, 1.50 m. The floors of both building and terrace were carefully prepared of clay. A date around 600 B.C. is indicated by the ceramic evidence.

Various considerations suggest that this building served as a primitive bouleuterion, not, to be sure, as the meeting-place of the Council, but as its headquarters. It is, in the first place, a substantial structure for the period, and its plan does not suggest either a private house or a sanctuary. Secondly, it stood on ground that was subsequently occupied by a building which would seem certainly to have served the Council, and it itself dates from a period, about the time of Solon, when a Council

must have existed in Athens and required some permanent office.

At a time toward the middle of the sixth century B.C., a smaller rectangular building rose in the south part of the terrace of the "Primitive Bouleuterion". To the original two rooms, a third was shortly added toward the west. The outside dimensions of the enlarged building are ca. 5.60 X 10.20 m. The placing of the new building in a symmetrical relation to the old, and the fact that its main doorway, in the middle of its north side, faces toward its northern neighbor show that the two structures were intimately related in purpose. Traces of repeated firing on the floor of the lesser suggest that it served some domestic need, conceivably as the kitchen or dining place of the officials.

At a slightly later date, though still close around the middle of the century, the "Primitive Bouleuterion" was damaged and then rebuilt on the same lines. Its terrace, however, was enlarged by the construction of a new eastern retaining wall that swung out at a slight angle from the south<sup>ea</sup>west corner of the building. At a point near the middle of the east side of the open area between the two buildings the line of the new wall was broken by a stairway that gave access to them both. The wall itself continued south in a straight line, dividing the ancient north-south thoroughfare from a still larger open-air enclosure between the compound of the "Primitive Bouleuterion"

and a large building that now rose to the south. The southward continuation of our terrace wall served as the eastern or street wall of this new building, and so definitely links the two. We must turn next to the south building, the building of the colonnaded court.

BUILDING OF THE COLONNADED COURT AND ITS ENVIRONS

Beneath the Tholos and in the area immediately to the east and southeast of the Tholos, at an average depth of ca. 1.00 m. below the ground level of the round building, have appeared extensive remains of the walls and floors of a large rambling structure that consists essentially of three blocks of rooms to the north, west and south of a colonnaded courtyard. Its overall dimensions are ca. 18.50 X 27.50 m. The north wing comprises a single row of rooms, one large and three small; the south range is again but one room deep, with a large chamber toward the west, a smaller toward the east. The western block of four rooms appears to form a more independent unit; no certain trace has yet been found of doors giving direct communication between it and the court. In the court, two column bases remain in position for the eastern porch, one for the western and one for the southern. There is no positive evidence for a porch across the north side, which would perhaps have limited too greatly the open area. A broad doorway through the northern range of rooms gave ready access to the courtyard from the area

between the present building and the Primitive Bouleuterion. Other doorways perhaps opened on the streets to southeast and south.

In construction the Building of the Colonnaded Court resembles the Primitive Bouleuterion, with walls of loosely jointed polygonal limestone and floors of hard-packed clay. Its columns were presumably of wood.

A narrow alley separates the Building of the Colonnaded Court from a closely contemporary neighbor to the south. This lesser building (4.80 X 17.00 m.) is long and narrow in plan and originally comprised two rooms: the northern with an open front supported on two columns, the southern entered through a broad door at its northwest corner.

In the angle between these two buildings a small isolated structure, apparently of but a single room, was inserted. Another single room filled the angle between the long archaic building and the north end of the cemetery; a tiny cell was crowded close against the south side of the west block of the Building with the Colonnaded Court.

At the innermost angle of the alley that separates the two blocks of buildings, on the contemporary ground-level, stands a carefully cut drum of poros (0.77 m. in diameter, 0.545 m. high). It apparently supported some object of considerable interest, for, after the construction of the Tholos and the consequent raising of the ground

level, it continued in use through the superposition of a second drum.

These buildings were served by wells of which two have been found immediately to the west, near the middle of the later Tholos. Of these, one had been rendered useless by the caving in of its side walls, probably in the third quarter of the sixth century; its successor was painstakingly curbed with stone and continued in use until the Persian sack.

Another domestic need was met by two long, clay-lined pits just outside the northwest corner of the Building with the Colonnaded Court. They lie parallel to one another and are sunk to their full depth in the archaic ground level (length ca. 4.35 m.; width ca. 0.60 m.; depth ca. 0.60 m.). The abundance of ash, charcoal and animal bones that overlay their floors, combined with modern analogies, suggests that these pits were intended for the broiling of meat which could have been supported conveniently on spits above the glowing coals of fires kindled in them. The pits continued in use until the erection of the Tholos, when they were filled. It seems probable that the rectangular annex set against the north wall of the Tholos immediately above the pits assumed their function and served as the kitchen of the Tholos.

This group of buildings was erected within a short period around the middle of the sixth century. They suffered severely from the Persians, perhaps also in the late



sixth century, but were extensively repaired and remodelled and continued to be used until the Tholos was built in the second quarter of the fifth century.

Considered by itself, the building with the colonnaded court might be taken for a private house. It is, however, clearly only a part of a compact complex which would seem to be too extensive for a private dwelling of its time. The fact that this southern complex is linked by the long north-south wall with the "Primitive Bouleuterion", which appears on independent grounds to have been of a public character, suggests strongly that the southern complex also served some public purpose. In this connection, its relation with the Tholos is significant. The archaic complex would seem to have been the immediate predecessor of the Tholos in time, place and function. Apart from the more general indications, this relation is illustrated by the persistence of the round monument and of the "kitchen". We may then conjecture that the archaic complex served the domestic needs of the prytaneis as a lodging and dining place in the earlier period, as the Tholos did in its time. And we may count its construction in the Peisistratid period as a logical enlargement of the "Solonian" complex of the "Primitive Bouleuterion" and its neighboring building.

#### THE OLD BOULEUTERION

A limited amount of additional exploration around the foundations of this building has permitted of greater

precision in restoring its plan. The general scheme remains as previously suggested: a square auditorium facing south. The most probable date for its construction still seems to be the very end of the sixth century. In this connection it may be noted that by then the north wing of the Building with the Colonnaded Court had been demolished, leaving a larger open space in front of the new building.

#### THE THOLOS

For the history and scheme of the building, little need be added to the sketch of last season. The decorated eaves tiles and antefixes which seem certainly to derive from the original construction find their best parallels among roof tiles on the Acropolis and among red-figured vases of the period 470-460 B.C. A date in this decade would be consonant with the evidence of the stratification, the pottery and the ostraka found around the building, so far as that material has been considered. The Tholos was seriously damaged by fire at the turn of the fifth and fourth centuries, but was speedily rebuilt. It was injured once more, perhaps not so seriously, around the middle of the fourth century B.C. It suffered disastrously in the Sullan disturbance and again in the Herulian sack of 267 A.D. Thereafter it was rebuilt and continued in use for a short time before its final abandonment.

A closer examination of a couple of blocks of a marble

string course that was inserted in the building after its first serious damage shows that from then at least the upper wall was of crude brick, and that it was pierced by windows with sills above eye level.

It has been possible to fix more closely the lines of the original peribolos wall of the Tholos. They appear to have followed closely the outline of the underlying archaic complex. In the first century B.C. the enclosure was extended toward the southeast, to permit of the erection of a small fountain house within the enclosing wall.

ROADS, DRAINS, ETC.

The archaic complex, like the Tholos after it, lay in the bend of the ancient thoroughfare which led up from north to south along the east foot of Kolonos and then swung slightly westward in order to follow the bottom of the valley between Kolonos and the Areiopagos. The main north-south roadway had, however, continued southward in a straight line toward the north slope of the Areiopagos and the archaic fountain house, so that a fork occurred directly east of the Tholos. At this point was placed a boundary stone to mark the official limits of the Agora. Its lettering may be paralleled in inscriptions of the late Peisistratid period and it is perhaps to be associated with the extensive reorganization of the public square that involved also the levelling of a large area along its west side,

and the laying of the Great Drain. To the very turn of the sixth and fifth centuries may be dated the polygonal retaining wall that was carried up against the back of the boundary stone and that for centuries afterwards served to delimit both branches of the roadway.

The west branch of the Great Drain appears to be not earlier than the late third or early second century B.C. In the post-Sullan reorganization of the area its course was shifted slightly toward the south over a length of 30 m. to permit of the enlargement of the Tholos enclosure. This change also facilitated the erection of a propylon to the south of the Tholos: a simple Doric structure with a four-columned prostyle scheme facing toward the southeast. It gave a more monumental aspect to an important east-west thoroughfare that led out from between the Middle and South Stoa, passed between the Tholos and the large poros building to the south of it and so afforded ready access to the New Bouleuterion and to the hilltop above.