

СТАТЬИ / ARTICLES

THE HOUSES OF PHILOSOPHICAL
SCHOOLS IN ATHENS

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ABSTRACT. In the first and second parts of the article we look at two archaeological sites excavated in the center of Athens, a building, located on the Southern slope of the Acropolis and now buried under the Dionysiou Areopagitou Street, known as House Chi, or the “House of Proclus”, and Houses A, B and C at the slope of the Areopagus overlooking the Athenian Agora. We outline and illustrate the basic finds and reexamine the principal arguments in favor of identifying these constructions as the houses of philosophical schools and, in the third part of the paper, offer a remark on religious practice in the Neoplatonic school.

KEYWORDS: Academy at Athens, Proclus, Damascius, Neoplatonism, classical archaeology.

Proclus was born in Byzantium one thousand six hundred and two years ago (counting from February 7/8, 2014). Should we be astrologists, we would have given hours, although one must remember that the data provided by our principal source, Marinus, is contradictory and does not admit a final solution.¹ Still a child the future phi-

¹ Deliberately choosing ‘pagan’ and symbolic landmarks in his almost hagiographic account, Proclus’ biographer and heir Marinus (*Vita Procli* 35–36, transl. M. Edwards) says that Proclus died at the age of 75 “in the 124th year since the reign of the Emperor Julian” (that is to say in 485, since Julian ruled from 361); “when Nicagoras the younger was archon of Athens” (this is useless for us in the absence of an appropriate archon list), “on the 17th of the Athenian month of Munichion”, “which is also the 17th of the Roman April” (the tenth lunar month of the classical calendar is probably synchronized here with the Roman solar month). Besides, his death – “the eclipse of the light of philosophy” – was surrounded by two more or less complete solar eclipses “so conspicuous that it become night by day... and the stars ap-

philosopher was taken by his parents to Xanthos. Educated in Lycia, Alexandria and Byzantium and when a young man he arrived in Athens, where he spent the rest of his long life, initially as a pupil of Plutarch and Syrianus, and later as the head of the Neoplatonic school.

The biographical evidence is supported by archeological findings, which in turn can be interpreted with the help of the narrative sources. Using this information one can hope to receive a fuller picture of the life and functioning of the Athenian school.

In the first and second parts of the article we will look at two archaeological sites excavated in the center of Athens, a building, located on the Southern slope of the Acropolis and now buried under the Dionysiou Areopagitou Street, known as House Chi, or the “House of Proclus”, and Houses A, B and C at the slope of the Areopagus overlooking the Athenian Agora. We will outline and illustrate the basic finds and reexamine the principal arguments in favor of identifying these constructions as the houses of philosophical schools. In the third part of the paper, we will offer a remark on religious practice in the Neoplatonic school.

I

Marinus tells the story about Proclus’ successful prayer to Asclepius, which resulted in a miraculous recovery of one Asclepigeneia, “the wife of Theagenes our benefactor” (Marinus, *Vita Procli* 29, p. 35, 18–39 Saffrey–Segonds; transl. by M. Edwards):

Taken with him the great Pericles of Lydia, a man who was himself no mean philosopher, Proclus visited the shrine of the god to pray on behalf of the invalid. For at that time the city still enjoyed the use of this and retained intact the temple of the Savior. And while he was praying in the ancient manner, a sudden change was seen in the maiden and a sudden recovery occurred, for the Savior, being a god, healed her easily... Such was the act he performed, yet in this as in every other case he evaded the notice of the mob, and offered no pretext to those who wished to plot against him.

The house in which he dwelt was in this respect of great assistance to him. For in addition to the rest of his good fortune, his dwelling too was extremely congenial to

peared” (scholars generally take them to occur on January 14, 484 and May 19, 486). Therefore, the philosopher died on April 17, 485. Proclus’ birth is coded by Marinus in the form of a horoscope, precise enough to determine (after some correction) the exact date – February 8, 412, which is however not compatible with the age of 75 (must be 74). Did Marinus make a mistake in his calculation? A. Jones (1999) reviews a number of interpretations of the horoscope and various emendations to it proposed by scholars since the seventeenth century. Thus, correcting the interpretation, proposed by Neugebauer and other scholars, Jones calculates that the horoscope was cast for a definite date, three hours before noon on either February 7 or 8, 412, and a place near Rhodes (not Constantinople, the real place of birth; it could well be Xanthos in Lydia, the place where Proclus spent his childhood), and suggests that Marinus could find the horoscope in Proclus’ archive and include it in his biography “without realizing that the precise birthdate was latent in it” (Jones 1999, 87). This explains why Marinus never states the date of Proclus’ birth explicitly: he simply did not know it.

him, being also the one inhabited by his ‘father’ Syrianus and by Plutarch, whom he himself styled his ‘forefather’.

Then he briefly describes its location as follows:

...γείτονα μὲν οὖσαν τοῦ ἀπὸ Σοφοκλέους ἐπιφανοῦς Ἀσκληπιείου καὶ τοῦ πρὸς τῷ θεάτρῳ Διονυσίου, ὀρωμένην δὲ ἢ καὶ ἄλλως αἰσθητὴν γιγνομένην τῇ ἀκροπόλει τῆς Ἀθηνᾶς.

Apparently he chooses the surrounding religious constructions as the appropriate landmarks and states, that “...it was a neighbor to the shrine of Asclepius celebrated by Sophocles, and [the shrine] of Dionysius by the theatre...” This is understandable since the purpose of Marinus is to emphasize Proclus’ intimate relations with the deities, especially Athena and Asclepius.

But what the last clause is about? Rosán (1949, 30) renders it thus: “...it could be seen or otherwise perceived from the Acropolis of Athena.”

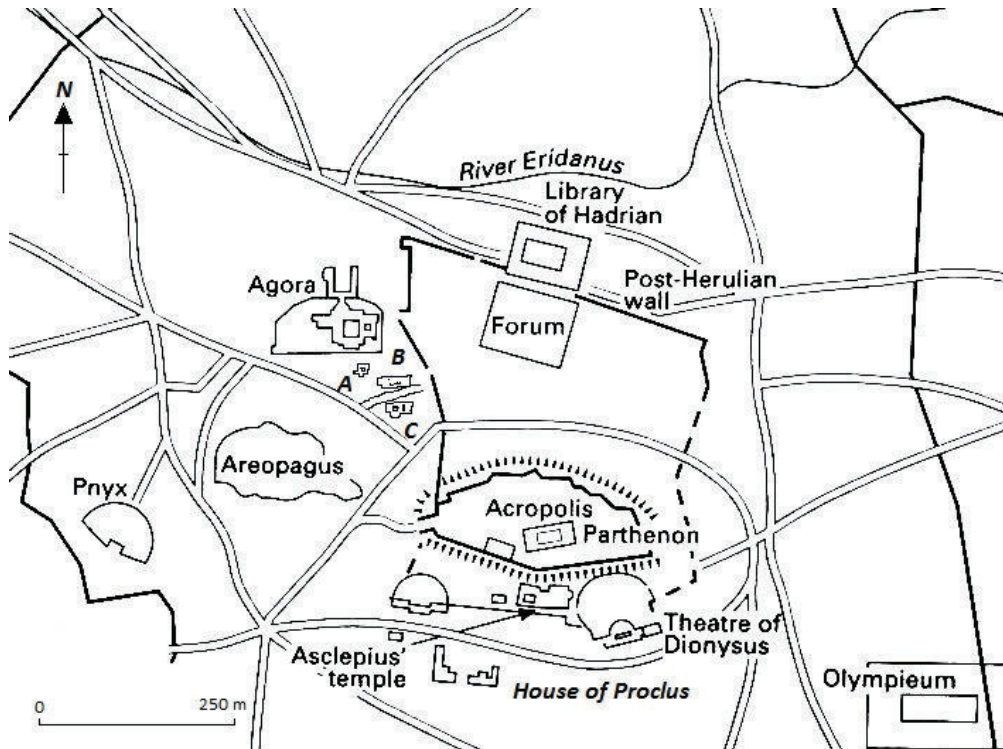
Frantz (1988, 43) thinks that Marinus wanted to say by this phrase that the house “...could be seen, or at least discerned, by someone standing on the Acropolis of Athena”, writing that “Professor Harold Cherniss, who kindly looked at the passage with me, suggested that the dative, unless it is simply bad grammar, is used to emphasize the fact that the viewer is standing *on* the Acropolis. ‘Or at least discerned’ limits the preceding ‘visible’, rather than offering a senseless alternative ‘otherwise perceived’ (Rosán’s translation), and implies that someone standing on the Acropolis could see it with some difficulty. Homer Thompson, who happened to be in Athens at the time the problem arose, responded to a query whether the facts justified this interpretation with the following: ‘Looking over the present top of the south wall of the Acropolis one has no difficulty in seeing the supposed site of the house; but in Late Antiquity one would presumably have had to climb up to a sentry walk’” (1988, 43, n. 169).

In his review of Frantz’s publication Castrén (1991, 475) takes this to mean that “the House of Proclus was visible from the Acropolis and *also otherwise* somehow manifest, obviously because of the considerable bulk of construction immediately below the eyes of the spectator”.²

More recently M. Edwards (2000, 104, n. 329) suggested it to mean that the house became visible from the acropolis only when the shrine of Asclepius was destroyed (“seen, or if not it became visible, from the acropolis of Athena”). The idea is attractive because it could be used for indirect dating of the temple’s destruction. But if this really be the case, why did Marinus, having mentioned the demolishing of the temple a few lines before the passage in question, not simply state this? Therefore it

² Karivieri (1994, 116–117, n. 11) also quotes Rosán and writes: “Frantz (1988, 43) has missed out the word καὶ from between ἢ and ἄλλως in her reference to Marinus’ text, which, according to Castrén, changes the meaning of the phrase quite considerably.”

likely means that “someone standing on the Acropolis could see the house with some difficulty.”³



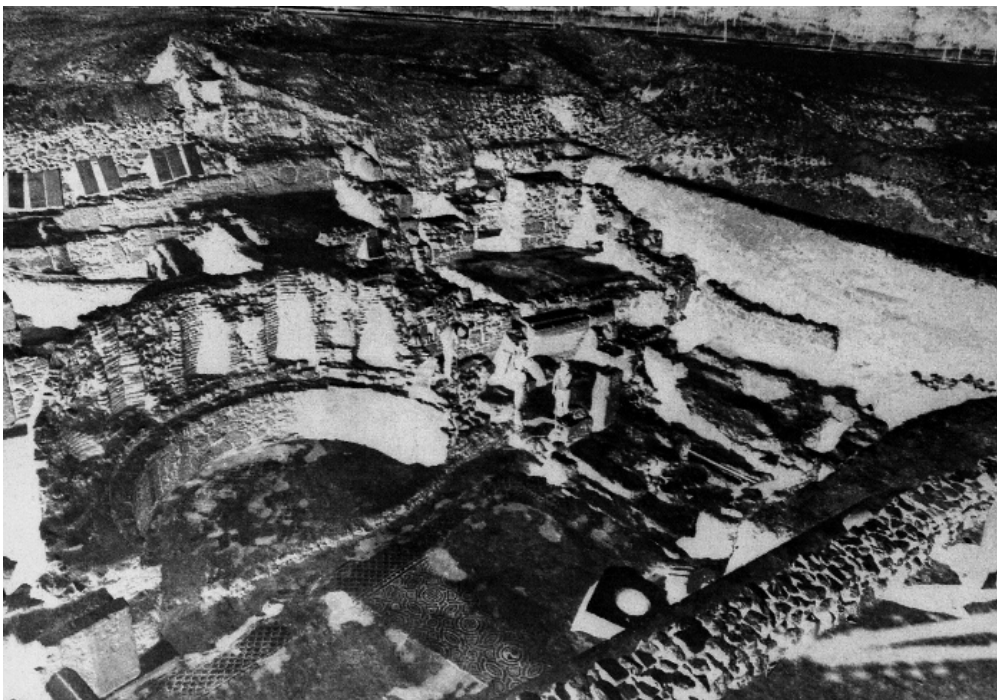
A Plan of Athens in the 5th century C. E.⁴

Interestingly, a large building complex on the southern slope of the Acropolis, located between the Odeum of Herodes Atticus and the Theater of Dionysus, was excavated in 1955 and matches this description. Unfortunately, the work was accomplished only partially and under extreme time pressure, before the Dionysiou Areopagiu Street was constructed over the site (Meliades 1955).

According to Dontas (1956) the building in its final form was constructed in the period between the end of the fourth and the beginning the fifth century C. E. Only the northern part of the area was excavated because “the rest expands under the area occupied by modern houses, in the back-yards of which could be observed its traces and floor-mosaics” (his article in: *Ergon tes Archaialogikes Etaireias kata to 1955* (Athena) 5–14, quoted in Oikonomides 1977: 11–12).

³ Saffrey and Segonds (2001, 34) chose to translate it in a similar way: “...et que d’autre part elle était vue ou du moins pouvait être vue depuis l’acropole d’Athéna.”

⁴ Illustrations and photos are prepared by the authors unless otherwise indicated.



*Above: the Dionysiou Areopagiou Street, present view (photographed by the authors in 2009);
below: the area in the period of excavation in 1955 (after Frantz 1988)*

“This was no ordinary house by Athenian standards, – writes Frantz (1988, 43). – A large room opens into a wide apse (6.60 m. wide, 4.40 m. deep); the lower part of

the wall of the apse was surfaced with marble revetment slabs. Above the revetment the thickness of the wall diminishes, and in it were seven niches suitable for sculpture (as in the Areopagus houses). The floors of both parts of the room were covered with mosaics in elaborate geometric patterns, the apse being emphasized by having the floor laid at a slightly higher level. Against the outer face of the east wall of the apse was a small shrine of Cybele, identified by a statuette of the goddess in a niche in the wall. A statue base with a funerary relief carved on the front served as an offering table. Both pieces of sculpture were re-used in these positions..."

The excavators were the first to suggest that the building (now labeled as House Chi) can be identified with the one owned by Plutarch's family and associated with the names of the founder of the Athenian school of Neoplatonism and his closest associates, Syrianus and Proclus. Indeed, in addition to the fact that it perfectly matches Marinus' description, it clearly belongs to the type of buildings used in Antiquity. As Frantz writes, "for the gathering of audiences and accommodating lectures and called generally 'philosophical schools'." It is equally important that the building seems to be used continuously during the fifth century, but was abandoned in the sixth century C.E. The hypothesis has now been materialized in the form of a memorial plate hung *in situ*.⁵

The identification is also confirmed by the reach finds (artistic works and an inscription), illustrating religious and intellectual interests of its inhabitants. Apart of the shrine of Cybele and various religious objects (even a sacrificial knife in the neck of the piglet!), and numerous objects of everyday use (lamps, vases, etc), have been excavated in the building itself. Within a close vicinity were as well discovered numerous statues of the gods (including a statue of Isis); a portrait, tentatively identified as this of a philosopher; and an inscription with the words σοφίης and βίον. The head of a philosopher (some speculate of Plutarch) dated to the fifth century is also said to come from the vicinity.⁶

II

According to Agathias Scholasticus (*On the Reign of Justinian*, 2.30.3) the last head of the Academy, Damascius (c. 458–after 538) managed to revitalize the school and to assemble in Athens the best philosophers 'from all over the domain of Hellenism.' But the philosophers had already been driven from the 'House of Proclus' by Plutarch's relatives (the legal owners of the building) and the house itself was extensively rebuilt or even abandoned (Karivieri 1994), so he had to find another location for

⁵ "The house in question fits all the topographical specifications in the *VP*, and furthermore, its site, as far as it could be estimated from its scattered known parts, precludes the existence of anything comparable in the area..." (Frantz 1988, 43).

⁶ The objects are mostly kept in the Agora and Acropolis Museums; numerous illustrations are readily found in Frantz 1988 and Camp 1994.

his school.⁷ An attractive hypothesis, now widely accepted, is that by P. Athanassiadi who suggested that he may well have established his school “in a superb building complex on the northern slope of the Areopagus, which must have functioned for many years as living quarters, as a teaching and research center, and as a place of worship” (Athanassiadi 1999, 47; Appendix I; PhH 145 and 151E with footnotes).

Look at the plan of Athens above: the Areopagus Houses A, B and C are found between the Areopagus and the Forum (the Roman Agora). Frantz (1988, 38) describes their location and major features as follows:

“The four buildings constituting the Areopagus group stood on the lower slopes of the hill, on terraces leveled for their predecessors. Their sitting and plans were conditioned by the two east-west streets that ran through the area and by the terrain itself. The northernmost, House A, was contiguous to the South Road, which forms the southern boundary of the Agora, but with a very slight difference in orientation so that its northwest corner encroaches on the road by about a meter. House B is about 15 meters to the southeast, a little farther up the hill; the eastern half was built against the remaining wall of the Upper South Road. House C lies still farther up the slope, directly across the road from House B. The south edge of the road therefore determined the line of its northern wall while a scrap in the hard rock of the Areopagus limited further expansion to the south. Of House D only the apse remains ca. 35 meters west of House C...”

The northern slope of Areopagus was inhabited from the classical times, and the houses were constantly rebuilt. Constructions visible now are mainly dated to the period after the Herulian attack in 267 C.E. and up to the sixth century. An example of longevity is a construction on the slope of Areopagus, west of House A, which was built in the fifth century B.C.E. and still occupied in the fifth century C. E. A few small marble figures were found here, including a statuette of Asclepius, a head of Sarapis, and a statuette of Tyche (Frantz 1988, 36ff).

A large central hall – the common feature of all the Areopagus houses as well as the House of Proclus (House Chi) – clearly indicates that the buildings served some public purposes. The halls and adjacent peristyle courts are admittedly perfect places for educational or religious gatherings, conducted privately. The chambers that surround the central hall could be used as “seminar rooms”, some sort of cabinets or

⁷ The story is thoroughly analysed by P. Athanassiadi (1999, 42 ff.). Marinus, the direct successor of Proclus, died in the early 490s. Since Isidore, whom Proclus himself listed among the successors, left Athens, the school was headed by Zenodotus or Hegias (or both) and started to decline (cf. *The Philosophical History*, 145 A: “We had never heard of philosophy being so despised in Athens as we saw it dishonored in the time of Hegias”; transl. Athanassiadi). According to Damascius, Isidore was then “elected a *diadochus* of the Platonic school in honorary rather than real terms” (*The Philosophical History*, 148 C). What concerns us here is that, having received the title from Isidore in c. 515, Damascius had to rebuilt the school and needed a new place for it. For this purpose, as Athanassiadi rightly suggest, he could explore some old connections and turn to relatives of Theagenes (cf. *The Philosophical History*, 100) or Hegias, or any other wealthy Athenian of pagan sympathies.

private dwellings. At any rate, a building of this type, too spacious for private quarters and not suitable for official use could be well suited for hosting a private educational institution.

A perfect example of a similar type has been relatively recently uncovered in Aphrodisias. It is the so-called North Temenos House – a large building complex located near the temple of Aphrodite on the edges of the city-center (cf. picture below). This spacious construction with large apsidal halls and other rooms suitable for public use resembles the Areopagus houses in many ways and could also host a philosophical school.⁸ The houses feature elaborate mosaic pavements and were adorned with sculpture. Some perfect specimens produced locally, including the marble paneling that decorated the walls, and a number of plaster capitals carved with Aphrodite, Eros and similar images, were found during the excavation and can now be seen in the museum. The houses were abandoned after the seventh century's earthquake.



*The historians of ancient philosophy are visiting the 'House of Damascius'.
March 2009, a conference "Iamblichus: his sources and influence"
(organized by The Irish Institute of Hellenic Studies at Athens and
the Centre for Ancient philosophy and the Classical tradition,
Novosibirsk University, Russia)*

⁸ Erim 1989, 17 (a map) 65–67 (illustrations).



*House C, Nymphaeum; above: its present condition;
below: its state in the time of excavation in the 1970s (after Frantz 1988)*

“The most important feature of House C is a nymphaeum leading down from the southeast corner of the central peristyle by two marble steps flanked by marble col-

umns to a small triclinium (ca. 3 x 3.50 m.). On its east side this looked into an apsidal room housing a semicircular pool... The motivation for this construction was obviously the ready availability of water from a fine fountain house into which the water from a spring higher up the hill had been channeled since the second or third century..." (Frantz 1988, 38)



A part of a large building complex in Aphrodisias, North Temenos House, which is labeled as the school of philosophy residence

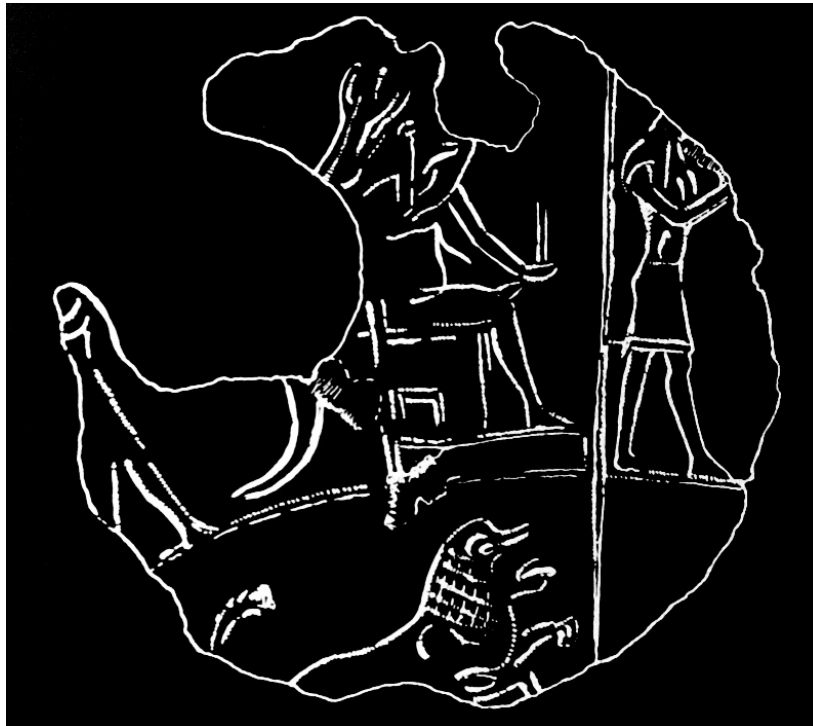
Various sculptures, some in an excellent state of preservation, were found hidden in wells⁹ and in the destruction debris over and around the houses. The most important are those found in two wells in House C. Some sculptures, like a superb head of Nike or a portrait bust of Antoninus Pius (both are on display in the Agora museum; S 2354 and S 2436), are more or less conventional, while the others, like small statues of Herakles and Hermes, heads of Nemesis and Helios, a statuette of a seated philosopher, and statuettes of Tyche, Serapis and Asclepius (S 871, 885, 875, etc.) represent religious and intellectual preferences of the Last Hellenes rather well.¹⁰

Reflecting the syncretic religious situation of Late Antiquity, the houses on the north slope of Areopagus seem to be hedged in by various public and private places of worship. For instance, three large blocks of Egyptian granite and an engraved bronze disk with Egyptian motives, found on the hillside, could indicate that a shrine of Isis was located somewhere in the area; a Mithraeum could be colated nearby,

⁹ Did the inhabitants hope to return and recover their 'pagan' sculpture?

¹⁰ The illustrations are found in Frantz 1988 and Camp 1994.

since two pieces of sculpture, associated with Mithras have been discovered in the vicinity; and a head of Selene in relief, which could somehow be related to a shrine dedicated to Hecate or Cybele, was found in a well down the hill (Frantz 1988, 37).



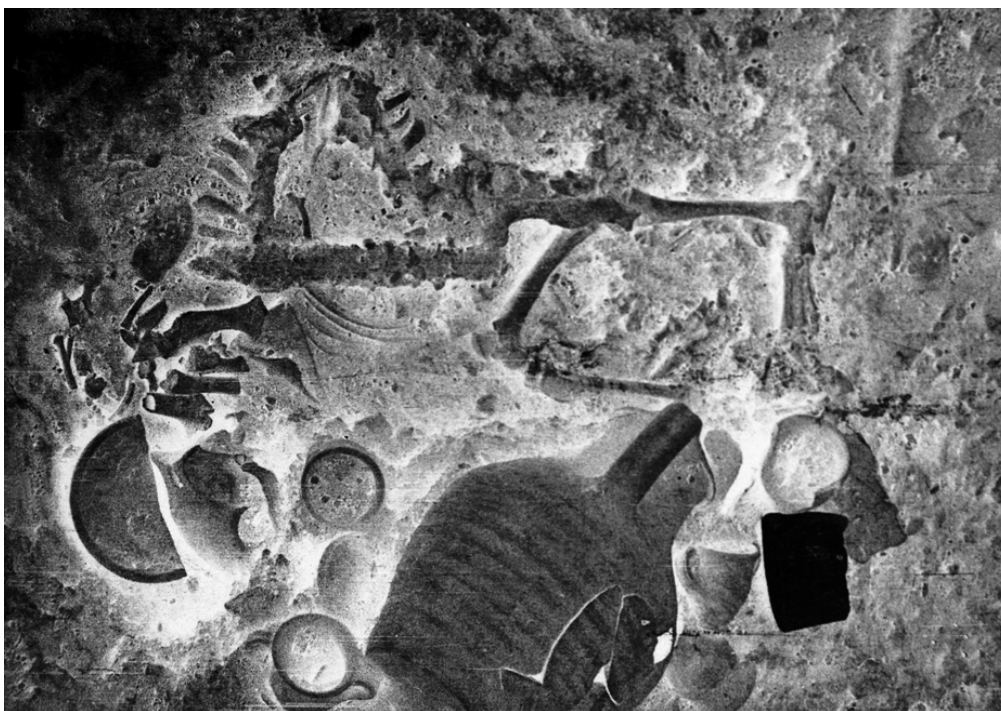
Bronze Disk, Agora Museum B 904, after Frantz 1988

We do not know what happened to the buildings after 529, when the Academy was closed and its members immigrated to Persia.¹¹ Quite probably that afterwards the building continued to be used as a school, since in the seventh century it was still possible to study philosophy in Athens, as did Theodorus of Tarsus, before becoming Archbishop of Canterbury in 669 (Frantz et al. 1988, 33, n. 120; DOP 19, 1965).

¹¹ For excellent accounts of the event cf. an article by Cameron 1969 and a more recent contribution by Hällström 1994. P. Athanassiadi (1999, 345 f.) speculates that the Church authorities could literally take revenge and, having confiscated House C, which she takes as the most probable place for the Academy, thus labeling it “the House of Damascius”, gave it to the local bishop. The idea is substantiated by the fact that the building continued to be used until the end of the sixth century while other houses on the slope of the Areopagus decayed, and that it was rebuilt to meet the needs of its new owners; the pagan elements of decoration (a fourth century votive relief of the cave of Pan; a statue of Athens) were deliberately damaged and a wall of the triclinium was ‘adorned’ with a coarse cross of inferior workmanship.

III

We will conclude with a note on blood sacrifices. The most intriguing discovery in this respect is a grave of a year-old piglet, found in the ‘House of Proclus.’ For an unidentified reason the sacrificial knife was left in the neck of the victim and the grave was filled with other offerings, such as a lamp with a running Eros on the disk and vases. The find is variously interpreted by scholars. It could simply be related to the Roman ceremony of *Terminalia* (a ritualized setting boundary to the building). Also in the Roman context it could be an offering to the local *genii* on the occasion of, say, an important event or a safe return from a long journey. But it could well be a part of a rite dedicated to the Mother of the Gods, performed privately (or even secretly!), since an appropriate shrine is found in the house and, according to Marinus, the Neo-Platonists worshipped the Mother of the Gods in her various hypostases (cf. *Vita Procli* 19). The blood of an animal was also a proper offering to the moon-goddess or Hecate,¹² while according to Julian’s *Oratio* 5.177B–C a pig could be an appropriate offering for the gods of the underworld.



The House of Proclus: the famous ‘piglet grave’ (after Frantz 1988)

Our narrative source could perhaps elucidate this last point. Although no instance of a piglet (or any other animal) sacrifice is recorded, Marinus inform us that

¹² For details cf. Karivieri 1994, 135f.

Proclus personally experienced “the fiery apparitions of Hecate” (having learned the rituals from Plutarch’s daughter Asclepigeneia)¹³ and

...actually caused rains by an apposite use of a iunx (ἰυνγὰ τινα), releasing Attica from a baneful drought. He also laid down defenses against earthquakes, and tested the power of the prophetic tripod, and produced verses on its decline (Marinus, *Vita Procli* 28, p. 33, 19–26 Saffrey–Segonds; transl. by M. Edwards)

Marinus mentions other sacrifices practiced in the Neoplatonic school, and constantly emphasizes Proclus’ intimate relations with the gods, especially Asclepius and the female generative principle, which extends from the Moon to Hecate and Cybele.¹⁴

The *Iunx* (ἰυνξ, wryneck) is a bird (in mythology, a daughter of Pan and Echo) which has long been associated with love-spells in magic. In order to influence an unfaithful lover the sorcerer would catch a wryneck, fix her to a wheel and rotate it.¹⁵

¹³ Marinus, *Vita Procli* 28 (p. 33, 17–18 Saffrey–Segonds; transl. by M. Edwards). Apparently this Asclepigeneia introduced Proclus to special rites (in the manner Dyotima in Plato’s *Symposium* introduced Socrates to the ‘knowledge’ of Eros) and passed to him some sort of secret (theurgic) knowledge, learned from her father and Proclus’ spiritual ‘forefather’ (προπάτωρ, *Vita Procli* 29; p. 35, 35 Saffrey–Segonds, quoted above) Plutarch, who, in his turn, acquired it from his father Nestorius. By the way a daughter of this Asclepigeneia, Asclepigeneia the younger, – the one saved by Asclepius after Proclus’ prayer! – married the benefactor of the school archon Theagenes and became the mother of the future scholarch Hegias. The name Asclepigeneia hints at some ties which existed between the family and the cult of Asclepius, and it is not altogether trivial that Plutarch had chosen to pass his knowledge of religious rituals not to his son, but to his daughter (probably, as suggests J. Dillon (2007, 123, n. 16), because his son, Hierius, although a philosopher and a student of Proclus, was not, for some reason, a very satisfactory person for this purpose). Cf. Athanassiadi 1999 (*The Philosophical History*, 63B).

¹⁴ For a recent account of Proclus’ religiosity cf. Dillon 2007. According to Marinus (*Vita Procli* 16), the young Proclus, just arrived from Alexandria to Athens, surprised his future teacher Syrianus by his devotion to the cult of Selene. Actually, as John Dillon convincingly shows, his prayer to the moon-goddess went far beyond a traditional religious observance, since the Moon for the Neo-Platonists represented the celestial level of the highest female principle of the Chaldean theology, Hecate. Besides, “if one turns to the Emperor Julian’s *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods*”, one finds another deity also, Cybele, the Mother of the Gods, identified as the highest member of the chain of which the Moon is the lowest (*Oratio* 5.166 AB)... So when the Neoplatonic philosophers saluted the moon, they were in fact doing reverence to the whole chain of generative female principles descending from Hecate or Cybele” (Dillon 2007, 118–119). Concerning Asclepius one may note an instance of miraculous recovery of the young Proclus, when the son of Asclepius, Telephorus, appeared to him in a dream (*Vita Procli* 7); his visit to the temple of Asclepius in Athens on the occasion of Asclepigeneia’s illness (30, quoted above); or a story about Proclus’ recovery from arthritis, also in Marinus (31).

¹⁵ In Pindar, Pythian 4.213–220 (transl. Steven J. Willett) the rite is described as introduced by Aphrodite and the wryneck is poetically called “the maddening bird”: *But the sovereign of swiftest darts, / Cyprogeneia, binding / the dappled wryneck / four-spoked upon an in-*

Later the term *iunx* and the magical procedures associated with it underwent some evolution. In the domain of love-magic it started to designate an appropriate instrument – the wheel – itself, while in the Platonic tradition it was understood symbolically as an Erotic binding force which links men to the gods. This interpretation is most famously found in the *Chaldean Oracles*, where the *iunges* ('the magic wheels of Hecate,' fr. 206 Des Places) are identified with the ideas (or thoughts) of the highest divine entity, the Father, while Eros ('the first to leap from the Paternal Intellect,' fr. 42 Des Places) is understood as a cosmic force which binds the worlds together and harmonizes the universe with the soul. The *iunges*, the lowest entities in the chain of being, acting as messengers and constantly moving from the Father to the material world, help the theurgist to connect the Primordial Triad of the Chaldeans with the rest of beings. Besides, the *iunges* are associated with some planetary forces, the 'Intellectual pillars' which support an ordered movement of the planets. The *iunges*, invoked by a theurgist, were thought to move physically to an appropriate planetary sphere and to provide a contact with the material world (fr. 77–79 Des Places).¹⁶

Rotating the wheel in the process of a theurgic rite, the sorcerer receives certain magical 'names' (fr. 87 Des Places), also called *iunges* (the divine messengers therefore are symbolically identified with the messages they brought from above). An *Oracle* states that the names, pronounced by those who understand the divine utterance, reveal to the theurgist their extraordinary powers (cf. fr. 150 Des Places).

According to Marinus, Proclus from time to time busied himself with practical religion, usually upon the request of others. His prayer "in the ancient manner" to Asclepius helped a woman to recover, and certain rites saved Attica from a drought and earthquake (*Vita Procli* 28–29, quoted above; cf. 17). We cannot be sure from the text whether Proclus performed the rites in a physical or a symbolic manner, but the instance of the piglet's sacrifice definitely suggests that the real animal sacrifices were normal for the period and could be a part of the religious practice of the Neoplatonic school. Marinus seems to confirm this, saying that Proclus, otherwise a strict vegetarian, ate meat 'for the sake of a rite' (*Vita Procli* 12 and 19). It is quite possible therefore that in order to influence weather the Neoplatonic philosopher "in the ancient manner" had used a real bird rather than a clever planetary device of a sort described by Psellus as "a sphere embedded with sapphire and swung around by means of a leather strap" (PG 122.1133 A 8–9; Majercik 1989, 30).

dissoluble wheel / first brought the maddening bird / to human kind and thus taught Aeson's son / skill in invocations and incantations, / that he might strip Medea of all reverence / for her parents and that Hellas, fiercely desired, / might set her whirling, as she blazed in spirit, / with the scourge of Persuasion.

¹⁶ For more details cf. Majercik 1989, 9–10, 16, 29, 171–172.

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