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THE PNYX IN THE HISTORY OF ATHENS

Edited by
Björn Forsén and Greg Stanton

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Pnyx III: Pottery and Stratigraphy

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The chronology of the third period of the Pnyx assembly place presents problems that have never been satisfactorily solved: despite careful excavation and extensive study, there still remains doubt whether the monument is to be dated in the 4th century B.C. or the 2nd century after Christ. In the course of their excavations, Konstantinos Kourouniotes and Homer Thompson extracted 150 baskets of pottery from the fill of Pnyx III. Among a majority of pottery dating to the 4th century B.C., they found a substantial minority (12 baskets) of Roman material, mostly from the northern ends of their trenches, behind the enormous wall that retains the fill. On the basis of this later material, the excavators initially dated phase three of the monument in the reign of the emperor Hadrian.[1] Eleven years later, however, Thompson revised this dating. His work on the terrace south of the assembly place had revealed well-dated 4th-century buildings that he felt certain were a part of the same project as the third period of the Pnyx. In his 1943 joint article with Robert Scranton, which presented the results of those excavations, Thompson abandoned a Roman date for the third phase of the Pnyx and placed the monument instead in the 4th century B.C.[2] He pinpointed the latter years of the régime of Lykourgos (330-326 B.C.) as historically the most likely time for the monument's construction. He reiterated support for a 4th-century date in 1982, but argued then for a slightly earlier date, in the 340s.[3]

Most scholars have found a 4th-century Pnyx more palatable than a Roman one, but rather, I think, because it places the great monument in a period when Athens was still an independent political power than for any compelling archaeological reason. The stratigraphical situation and the ceramic evidence, however, have never been satisfactorily accounted for. If the monument dates in the 4th century, the substantial bulk of Roman pottery requires explanation. If, on the other hand, the monument is Roman, the isolation of the Roman sherds in only a few places rather than throughout the fill equally needs elucidation. This classic stratigraphical problem — how to tell the intrusion from the latest sherd that truly dates the monument — can be solved only by returning to the ceramics themselves and to the original records of excavation.

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1 Kourouniotes and Thompson (1932), 180-188. There is a discrepancy here between the published account and the excavation notebooks. The notebooks list a total of 124 baskets of pottery for the 1930-31 excavations: 105 from the auditorium itself (10 described as mostly Roman); three from clearing the top of the retaining wall; ten from below the retaining wall; six from elsewhere. Possibly some of the excavated baskets were combined before the notebook analysis was made. Further statistics in this paper are drawn from the notebook accounts.

2 Thompson and Scranton (1943), 297-301.

3 Thompson (1982), 141-145.

The Roman Material — A Later Intrusion in the Fill

Homer Thompson's notes, which are housed in the Stoa of Attalos, run to four volumes, written with good ink and in a clear hand, with sketches of finds, plans, and stratigraphic sections. While lacking the details and statistics we are accustomed to nowadays, they give a clear picture of the work as it proceeded day to day. Thompson's notes confirm the published account that there was, indeed, a remarkable amount of Roman pottery in the fill. It is difficult to extract figures, but perhaps about 8% of the sherds and 13% of the lamps were Roman in date. This material came from three areas:

1. On top of the monumental wall built to retain the auditorium fill. The material is described as "almost solid Roman." This was the source of the five Roman pots that the excavators illustrated in their 1932 *Hesperia* article.[4]
2. The slope below, or north of, the auditorium. Over half of the ceramics are described as Roman.
3. Within the auditorium, concentrated in the northern ends of three trenches: A (the big trench almost on the axis of the auditorium), C, and D.[5] Roman material was found at all depths, sometimes on bedrock, and sometimes lying *under* the large limestone blocks that form part of the fill there. Amounts were fairly modest in trenches C and D, but Thompson described ten of the twelve baskets from the northern end of trench A as almost purely Roman.

The excavators apparently identified deposits from locations 1 and 2 (on top of the retaining wall and below it) as fill from the auditorium that had washed down the hill. Whatever it might be, however, it is not auditorium fill *in situ*, and it is therefore relatively easy to dismiss it as evidence for the date of the monument. The material from location 3, however, comes from within the auditorium, deep below the surface and against the retaining wall; it must either be contemporary with that wall or be accounted for as an intrusion.

Of the original 150 baskets of material recovered from the fill, about 1,600 fragments of pottery and lamps and two trays of loomweights are extant. Just 39 fragments of pottery and 11 lamps remain of the Roman objects found within the auditorium — rather than on top of the wall or to the north. Sketches in the notebooks illustrate more objects of the same types, however, suggesting that the surviving collection is indeed representative.

At the time of the excavation, very little was known about local Roman pottery. Oscar Broneer's study of the lamps from Corinth, however, had just appeared, in 1930, and Kourouniotes and Thompson therefore relied heavily on the lamps for their dates. The latest lamps in the fill belong to the distinctive class known as Broneer Type XXVII, recognisable from their crisp outlines and their fine, pale fabric (Figs. 16-17). The excavators published five of these,[6] and, following Broneer's new chronology, they dated them in the early 2nd century.[7] It followed that the monument must have been constructed some time in the first half of the 2nd century; the reign of Hadrian,

4 Kourouniotes and Thompson (1932), 182-183, nos. 1-5, figs. 52, 53.

5 For a plan of the trenches see Kourouniotes and Thompson (1932), pl. II (reproduced at the end of this volume as Plan 2).

6 Kourouniotes and Thompson (1932), 184-185, nos. 2-6, fig. 54. Thompson's notebooks preserve sketches of at least 19 more lamps of the same type.

7 Broneer (1930), 90-102.

sometime archon of Athens and a prodigious philhellene, seemed an obvious suggestion.

More recent studies, however, have precipitated considerable revision in the chronology of Roman lamps. Judith Binder, in her work on lamps from the Agora, was the first to point out problems in Broneer's dating of Type XXVII.[8] Subsequently other scholars have followed her lead, with the result that lychnologists now suggest a much lower dating for the type. Manufacture of the earliest variety, Group A, is thought to have begun in the late 1st or early 2nd century. The Pnyx fill, however, contained at least two lamps of Group B, characterised by a vine pattern on the rim (Fig. 17; for a complete example compare Fig. 22, from the Athenian Agora). This variety seems not to have been made before the *end* of the 2nd century and flourished in the 3rd century, substantially later than Broneer's original estimate.[9] If this dating is correct, the fragments of Type XXVII lamps are fatal for a Hadrianic dating for the third period of the Pnyx.

Well-developed chronologies for Roman ceramics, lacking in the 1930s, now make it possible to date the pottery from the fill with some accuracy. Among the 39 Roman sherds[10] are three pieces of Western Sigillata dating to the 1st century after Christ and seven fragments of Eastern Sigillata B dating to the 1st and 2nd centuries. Among the 15 pieces of local red ware, however, is at least one fragment that dates to the 3rd century: a flat-bottomed bowl with overhanging rim (Fig. 18), which finds a parallel in a bowl from Robinson's Group K (cf. Fig. 23).[11] A fragment of a large vessel with a painted inscription (Fig. 19) resembles Athenian "motto mugs" of the 3rd century (cf. the two pots in Fig. 24, from Group M in the Athenian Agora).[12] A distinctive moldmade fragment (Fig. 20) comes from a jug of the so-called "oinophoros" variety.[13] These are generally dated in the 3rd century: Fig. 25 shows a more complete example from the Athenian Agora, found with material of the 3rd to the 5th century. A related piece, somewhat different in detail, has been found intact in Herulian destruction debris at the Agora.[14] A toe from a micaceous water jar (Fig. 21) has the profile characteristic of the mid-2nd to early 3rd century (cf. Fig. 26, a detail from a complete jar from the Athenian Agora).[15] In short, the latest pottery, like the latest lamps, dates to the 3rd century after Christ.

This rather surprising discovery — that the latest pottery and lamps date well after the reign of Hadrian — puts the dating of the third period of the Pnyx in a completely new light. It seems beyond the realm of possibility that anyone, either Athenians or

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8 Perlzweig (1961), 8.

9 For recent discussions of the dating see Williams (1981), 39-40 and Slane (1990), 13-17. In the latter volume, Kathleen Slane (1990), 16, writes, "Early variants of vine-and-ray lamps (subgroup B) appear in the late 2nd century, but the type is probably not fully established before the beginning of the 3rd century."

10 There are also 20 Hellenistic objects ranging in date from the 3rd to the 1st century B.C.

11 PN III 31. Cf. Robinson (1959), 60, K 5, pl. 68: first half of 3rd century. The type is described by Robinson (*loc.cit.*) as "a group of stamped plates, apparently of local fabric, which occur commonly in 3rd century pre-Herulian fills."

12 PN III 45. Cf. Robinson (1959), 64, K 58, pls. 13 and 97-98, M 145-147, pls. 24, 57: mid-3rd century.

13 PN III 37. Cf. Hausmann (1954-1955), 137, nos. 9-11, pls. 43-44 for complete examples closely similar to the Pnyx fragment.

14 See Thompson (1948), 183-184, pl. 64 (P 17877).

15 PN III 39. Cf. Robinson (1959), 55-56, J 46, pls. 11, 41. The piece does not come from Group J, but rather from deposit B 12:1, at a level dated generally to the 1st to 3rd century. It is illustrated by Robinson as a complete example comparable to fragments from levels I-III of his Group J, dating from after 138 to the mid-3rd century.

imperial donors, would have constructed anything as monumental as the Pnyx auditorium in the middle of the 3rd century after Christ. One is forced, then, to view the Roman material as intrusive[16] and to fall back on the only other date that is likely from the point of view of archaeological evidence. The third phase of the Pnyx must be a monument of the 4th century B.C.

The source of the later pottery and the mechanism whereby it was deposited remain a matter of speculation, but some suggestions may be made. This part of Athens was not deserted in the early centuries after Christ. The sanctuary of Zeus Hypsistos flourished there from the 1st to the 3rd century. Well-to-do patrons left stone inscriptions as votives, but the less-well-heeled (or less generous) would have left simpler gifts, like pottery or lamps, which then washed down the hill to furnish some of our Roman material. The Roman pottery, however, also includes coarse wares that are unlikely to have been votive gifts. These are more difficult to account for, but may have come from houses in the area. Both Curtius and Thompson report that they encountered "late walls" during their excavations, and these might have been the remains of such structures. The fact that the latest pottery dates to about the time of the Herulian raid of 267 is itself suggestive, for it is just at this point that we would expect habitation in this area to have been abandoned.

How did the pottery find its way from shrines and homes into fill along the inner face of the Pnyx retaining wall? The Pnyx auditorium is so designed that water drains towards the center of the area, then down the hill, emerging at a point near the center of the retaining wall. This pattern of drainage was well established in the 19th century, as is clear from two early plans of the Pnyx: that of Ernst Curtius, published in 1862, and the more accurate survey published by John Crow and Joseph Clarke in the *Papers of the American School of Classical Studies* in 1888.[17] Both show a substantial gully located at about mid-point, slightly to the east of the north end of Trench A, where the bulk of the Roman pottery was found. The position of this gully probably did not remain constant throughout the centuries, and what Kourouniotes and Thompson found in Trench A may have been deposited by runoff washing material down the hill.

Human agency may well have initiated or encouraged this process. During the reign of Valerian (253-260) the Athenians undertook the rebuilding of the walls of the city, following, it seems, the old Themistoclean circuit. Part of these defenses ran across the Pnyx, and indeed a tower there shows traces of extensive rebuilding in the 3rd century.[18] The old retaining wall of the Pnyx would have been a convenient source of building stone, and explorations along its line might have introduced some of the intrusion described above — although the size of the stones may ultimately have defeated the quarrymen's efforts.

A brief history of the Roman Pnyx, then, might run something like this. The sanctuary of Zeus Hypsistos is established in the 1st century, at a time when the area no longer functions as a meeting place. It continues to attract the faithful for the next two

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16 The invocation of "intrusion" is always suspect in a stratigraphical account, and one would be more comfortable with some observation in the written record to support it. As it happens, Thompson's notes *do* provide some support. On a section drawing of the north end of trench D, the deep auditorium fill is clearly labeled "Fill of Period IV" (a term equivalent to the Period III of the published sequence). The northernmost eight or nine meters — approximately the area where Roman pottery was found — is hatched differently from that further south (see Rotroff and Camp [forthcoming]). Although Thompson makes no comment in his notes, this drawing suggests that he observed some difference between these two areas of the fill.

17 Curtius (1862), pl. I; Crow and Clarke (1885-1886), plan facing 207.

18 Frantz (1988), 1, 11, pl. 4; Thompson and Scranton (1943), 366-372.

centuries, accumulating the clutter of offerings characteristic of Greek shrines. Meanwhile, houses are built on the nearby slope; possibly the area is even farmed, as it was in the 19th century. In the mid-3rd century, workmen searching for convenient building material to repair a nearby tower dig behind the retaining wall, leaving behind the kind of messy hole that attracts unwanted refuse the world over. The Herulians ravage the area in 267, and surviving householders abandon the neighborhood, moving to safety within the new, smaller city wall. Houses fall into ruin, the shrine of Zeus Hypsistos is untended, and winter storms wash whatever objects have been left behind down the hill, concentrating them in ditches left by the quarrymen and in gullies created by natural erosion.

The Fourth-Century Material — Evidence for the Dating of Pnyx III

We may now return to the 4th-century B.C. material and examine it for clues to a more precise dating for the monument. Such an undertaking, however, must be prefaced by a host of warnings. Ceramics and, at this period, even coins can offer only a rough chronological yardstick. Their dates are relative, not absolute, and they shift as new dating points are discovered and developed. Except for fine painted wares, pottery can rarely be dated to closer than a quarter of a century. And, perhaps most importantly, the fill in question was never sealed in by any impermeable covering and was always open to intrusion — as has been demonstrated emphatically above. It is easy enough to spot the much later intrusions, but there is no way of knowing whether any single coin or potsherd is certainly a part of the original fill rather than a later addition. This said, however, there are four classes of objects that can be helpful in pursuing a date for the final period of the Pnyx: red-figured pottery, lamps, the stamped handles of transport amphoras, and coins.

Red-figured pottery. In an article in *Hesperia* Supplement 10, Lucy Talcott and Barbara Philippaki published the red-figured pottery from the Pnyx excavations, including both the auditorium material and pottery from excavations on the terrace to the south. According to their analysis, all but a single sherd dates before the middle of the 4th century. The exception is a small fragment of a bell-krater, only 4.6 cm. in height, near the Filottrano painter and dating early in the third quarter of the 4th century.[19]

Lamps. A selection of the lamps from the Pnyx excavations was published in *Hesperia* Supplement 7. The publication does not specifically state the provenience of each piece, a fact that has led to confusion about which types were actually present in the fill.[20] Re-examination of the lamps themselves reveals that most find parallels at Olynthos, where the bulk of the objects date before the destruction of the city by Philip II in 348. There are, however, seven fragments of lamps of types that are not present at that site and should therefore be dated after 348: two fragments of type 25B, four of

19 Talcott and Philippaki (1956), 6, 64-65, no. 312, pl. 31.

20 For a complete list of lamp fragments from the fill, based on the original excavation records and on autopsy of the context material, see Rotroff and Camp (forthcoming).

type 25B′, and one unusual fragment that is perhaps a variant of type 25D′.[21] This suggests a date somewhat, but not too much, later than 348.

Transport amphoras. The fill contained a large number of Thasian amphora handles, published in detail by Virginia Grace in *Hesperia* Supplement 10. The early history of Thasian containers is marked by a major change: the two names that appear on almost all of the earliest stamps are replaced by a single name. All of the over 50 Thasian handles in the Pnyx fill pre-date this development. In an article published in 1946, Virginia Grace estimated that this change occurred around the middle of the 4th century.[22] On the basis of the date for the Pnyx fill suggested by the red-figured fragment mentioned above, however, Grace subsequently adjusted this estimate downward, to 340. This was the year when Philip II added Thasos to his kingdom, and Grace connected the change with this event, arguing that the conquest would have been likely to bring administrative reorganisation in its wake.[23] Although French scholars working on Thasos no longer insist on a connection with Philip, in a recent discussion of Thasian amphora chronology, M. Debidour still accepts a date of approximately 340 for the changes in question.[24] Since the Pnyx fill has been used as evidence for dating the amphoras, to turn around and use the amphoras to date the fill is perhaps a dubious process. The chronology is, however, supported by subsequent finds from dated contexts, particularly by amphoras from Alexandria, and cannot be far off the mark.[25]

Coins. Possibly the most useful information comes from the coins, which were published by Kourouniotes and Thompson and have been discussed more recently by John Kroll. The most closely datable of the eight Greek coins from the fill is an Athenian bronze with a double-bodied owl reverse.[26] Minting of the double-bodied owl, a very prolific emission, must have begun after *ca.* 350, the earliest likely date for the pi-style silver coins it imitates. Kroll favors a date after 338 and places the bulk of the coins in the 330s and 320s.[27] If this dating is correct (and if the coin is not intrusive), the double-bodied owl coin is the latest datable object in the original fill; Kroll prefaces his date with a *circa*, however, and an initial date in the later 340s is presumably not impossible.

A final important hint comes from the extremely fragmentary condition of the pottery and the lamps. There are almost no complete vessels; the fragments are small and do not mend up into whole shapes. Even if the latest of the amphoras was manufactured before 340, it had to be transported to Athens, broken, and reduced to small fragments before making its way into the fill. It is a process that could have taken some time. This and the double-bodied owl coin argue for a terminal date of not before *ca.* 335 for the fill of Pnyx III and thus favor the Lykourgan dating advocated by Thompson in 1943.

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21 25B: e.g. Davidson and Thompson (1943), 52, no. 42, fig. 19. 25B′: e.g. Davidson and Thompson (1943), 55-56, no. 67, fig. 24. 25D′: Davidson and Thompson (1943), 58, no. 87, fig. 19. For the types, see Howland (1958).

22 Grace (1946), 31, 35.

23 Grace (1956), 119, 122-123 and pers. comm. of July 1992.

24 Debidour (1986), 311, 313.

25 Debidour (1986), 313, comments: "Il est frappant de voir combien la datation traditionnelle de 340, proposé par V. Grace, peut, avec le minimum de distorsion, répondre aux témoinage des timbres d'Alexandrie." See also Garlan (1985), where hypothetical acceptance of 340 for the change produces a chronology for a Thasian deposit that is in close accord with the chronology of coins and other pottery from the same deposit.

26 Kourouniotes and Thompson (1932), 211, no. 1.

27 For Kroll's dating, see Kroll (1993), 31-32, 41-42 (varieties 41-43), and, for further comments on coins from the fill, 299-300.

General Bibliography

References to ancient authors in the Proceedings follow the abbreviations of *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*[2], with occasional expansion for clarity. The references to modern literature follow the Harvard system, giving only the author's name and the date of publication in the footnotes, whereas the full bibliographical references are printed in this bibliography. All abbreviations of serials in this bibliography follow the system used in *The American Journal of Archaeology* 95 (1991), 1-16.

In addition the following abbreviations have been used in the Proceedings:

IG = *Inscriptiones Graecae*, Berlin 1873-
I.Iasos = *Inschriften griechischer Städte aus Kleinasien* 28.1-28.2. *Die Inschriften von Iasos* I-II, Bonn 1985.
I.Ephesos = *Inschriften griechischer Städte aus Kleinasien* 11.1-17.4. *Die Inschriften von Ephesos* I-VIII, Bonn 1979-1984.
SEG = *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum*, Leiden 1923-

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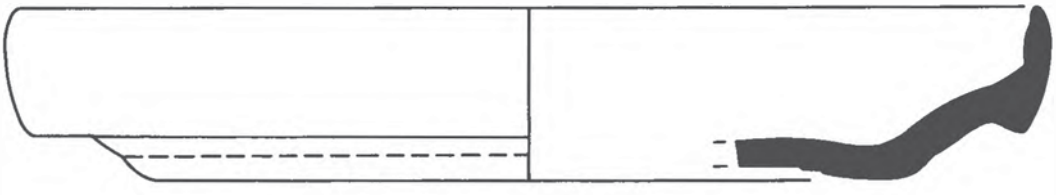


Pnyx (PN III 31)

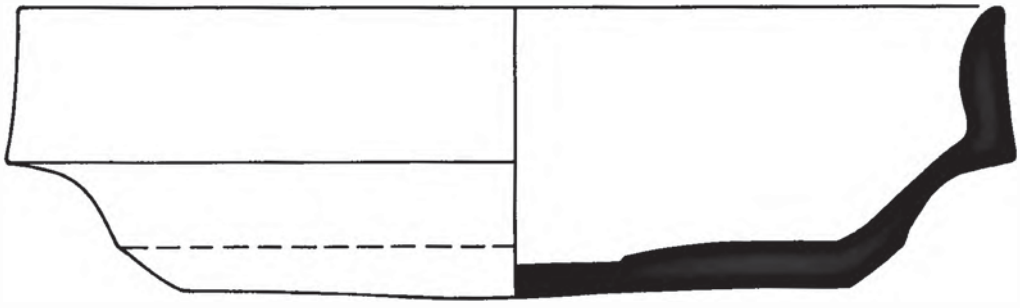
Fig. 18

Fig. 19

Fig. 20

Fig. 21

Fig. 22



Agora V, K5

Fig. 23

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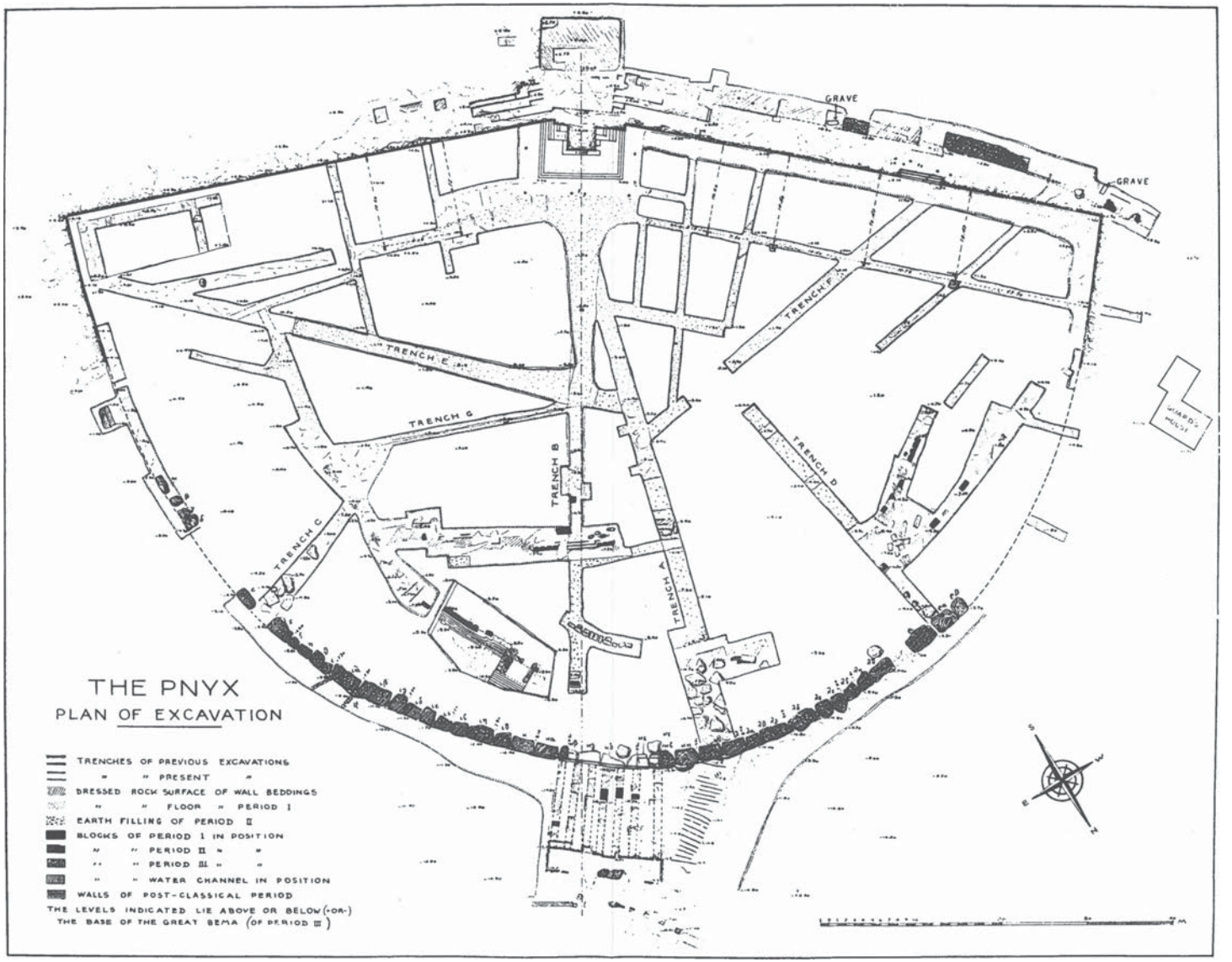
Fig. 26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GRAVE
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TRENCH E
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