

# The North Basilica in Herodes Atticus' Villa at Eva/Loukou

## New observations on the architecture and the sculptural decoration

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### ABSTRACT

*The excavated part of Herodes' luxurious residence at Eva/Loukou of Kynouria, modern Arkadia, covers a surface of 6,500 m<sup>2</sup> and has the plan of a typical roman villa. The original phase of the villa dates to the second half of the 1st century A.D., at the latest, and is connected with the family of the fabulously wealthy Athenian entrepreneur, philosopher and Roman official, Herodes Atticus. The North Basilica, an impressive complex with a surface of approximately 1,000 m<sup>2</sup>, was intensively excavated in the decade of the 1990s by the former E' Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities (E' EPKA – Ephorate of Antiquities of Arkadia). Its preserved ruins date to the second half of the 4th century A.D. at the earliest. Recent investigation has concluded that it consists of an apsidal single storey colonnaded hall with rooms attached against its south and west sides. Our documentation has reconstructed the original height of the columns and identified all the features of the superstructure, allowing for a more detailed reconstruction of the building. It is also firmly confirmed that members of structures that date to the late 1st and early 2nd centuries A.D. have been reused for the construction of the North Basilica in its present state, as hypothesized by the excavators. Other features were made from scratch from fine white marble. The round structure in the north east corner of the compound is identified as a staircase well that led to the upper level. The reconstruction of the architecture is combined with brief comments on the sculpture collection that once adorned this remarkable hall.*

### INTRODUCTION

The villa of Herodes Atticus in Loukou, Kynouria, is the largest and most luxurious building complex of private architecture in Greece. A recent overview is by Papaioannou (2018, 345–54). To date, about 6,500 m<sup>2</sup> of the building complex have been revealed from an initial area which spread over a surface of approximately 20,000 m<sup>2</sup>. Founded at a short distance from the Argolic Gulf, it is the most characteristic and best preserved example of a typical Roman villa in mainland Greece, with a continuous life span from the 1st to the 5th century A.D. The foundation of the monument is due to the family of Herodes Atticus, a *μαικῆνας*, Greek patron of the arts, Roman senator and passionate philosopher, who pioneered the expansion and landscaping of the building complex (on Herodes Atticus and his life, see Tobin 1997; Galli 2002).

**ΥΠΟΥΡΓΕΙΟ ΠΟΛΙΤΙΣΜΟΥ**  
ΕΦΟΡΕΙΑ ΑΡΧΑΙΟΤΗΤΩΝ ΑΡΚΑΔΙΑΣ  
ΑΣΤΡΟΣ ΚΥΝΟΥΡΙΑΣ, ΛΟΥΚΟΥ-ΕΥΑ  
ΕΠΑΥΛΗ ΗΡΩΔΗ ΑΤΤΙΚΟΥ

**1985-2000**

Σ. ΣΤΑΥΡΟΠΟΥΛΟΥ  
Α. ΘΕΟΔΟΡΟΠΟΥΛΟΥ  
Χ. ΓΕΩΡΓΑΚΗ  
Α. ΓΕΩΡΓΑΚΗ

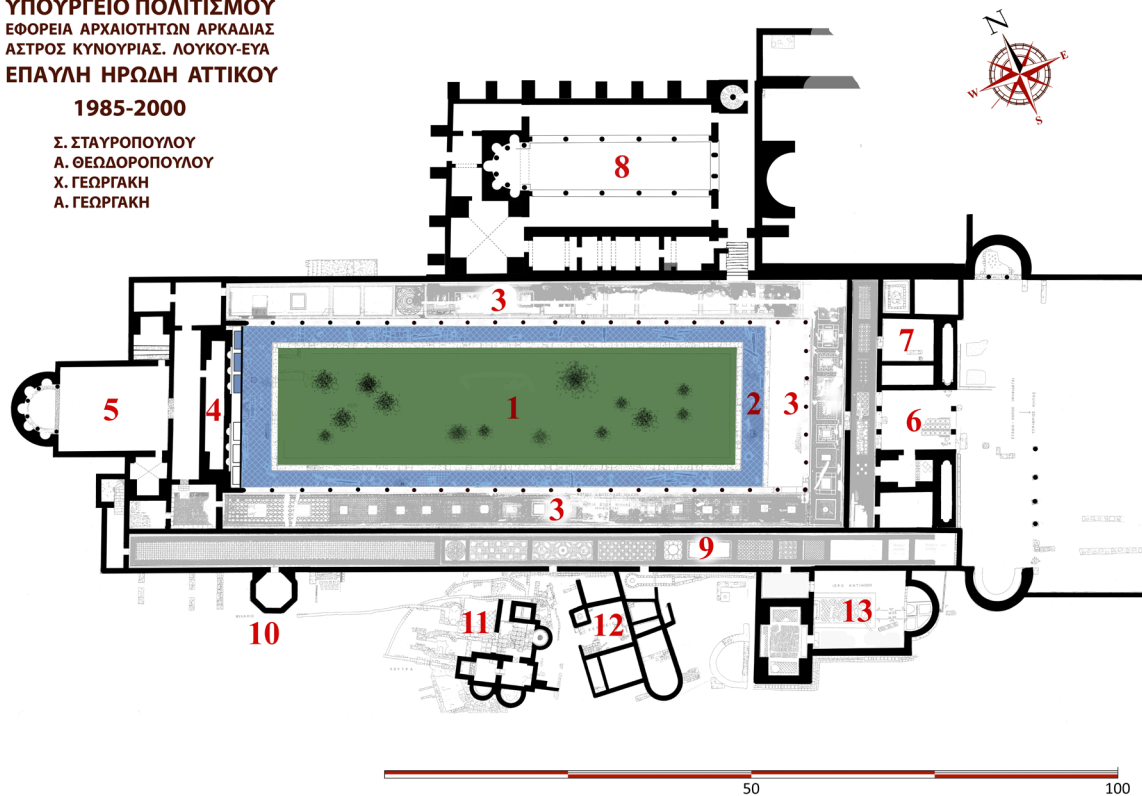


Fig. 1. Reconstructed ground plan of Herodes' villa. S. Stavropoulou, A. Theodoropoulou, C. Georgaki and A. Georgaki, edited by C. Kanellopoulos.

The first investigations at the site began as early as the first decade of the 1800s, continued in 1977, 1984–1987, 1989, and were resumed with extensive excavations in the decade of the 1990s by the Greek Archaeological Service (Faklaris 1990, 96–104; Spyropoulos 2006a). Konstantinos Rhomaïos (1906, 1950, 1953) was the first to identify the building complex with the –unknown from literary sources– villa of Herodes Atticus at Loukou, based on epigraphic evidence revealed at the site.

The uncovered part of the villa is developed in three tiered terraces along the south (highest) – north (lowest) axis (Fig. 1). The main architectural element of the villa, like in most compounds of this category, is the inner garden with peristyle that occupies the middle terrace of the entire area, around which the other buildings were built. It is, uniquely to the Greek Mainland, a large oblong garden 60 x 15 m with a West–East Axis (Fig. 1.1), which was surrounded by a canal 3 m wide and 2 m deep, originally filled with water (Fig. 1.2), emphasizing the liquid element and creating the illusion of a natural landscape containing an island. The north, east and south sides were surrounded by widely spaced colonnades with 20 or 21 columns on the long sides and 7 columns on the east narrow side (Fig. 1.3). The floors of the galleries were decorated with mosaic pavements bearing mythological and allegoric representations. Both the garden and the roofed spaces were additionally decorated with sculptures of high quality, such as marble and bronze statues, imperial and private portraits, votive and funerary reliefs etc., which in certain cases repeated the themes depicted on the mosaic floors. In addition, walls of selected edifices were adorned with wall paintings.

On the west side of the garden rose an impressive multi-storeyed structure, a nymphaeum (Fig. 1.4), which included a fountain with water tanks. Its facade was articulated with rectangular and apsed niches, which were decorated with statues and imperial portraits. This is where the water –carried through a sophisticated water supply system from the nearby spring– was eventually poured into the surrounding ditch. Behind the nymphaeum, a small complex consisting of a central apsidal building (the so-called Western Basilica) with a



Fig. 2. Rectified aerial view of the North Basilica. Photograph by L. Tsatsaroni and E. Spyropoulou.

north–south axis and dimensions of 19 m x 11 m is symmetrically developed (Fig. 1.5). On each side are three rooms, connected by a corridor. The main entrance to the garden was located at its eastern end and included an imposing Propylon, a corridor (Fig. 1.6) and a series of rooms, one of which is identified as a triclinium for the banquets provided by the owners (Fig. 1.7).

The south part of the villa is separated from the garden-peristyle complex by the South Corridor (a *cryptoporticus*), (Fig. 1.9), 100 m long and 3 m wide, decked with aniconic mosaics. Though Spyropoulos (2022) denies the existence of *cryptoportici* at Loukou, this corridor gave access from the middle terrace to the buildings of the South-tallest terrace – and at the same time connected them with the West Wing of the villa. At the southwestern end of this Wing are the remains of an octagonal tower (Fig. 1.10), which was part of the defensive security system of the villa, located in an isolated, rural environment. To the east of the tower are the baths (Fig. 1.11–12). No Roman villa lacks bath facilities. It was the place of physical care but also served social interactions. The number and layout of the rooms of the small bathroom of the villa, measuring 16 x 16 m approximately, follows the typical layout of a locker room, a cold water room (*frigidarium*), a lukewarm water room (*tepidarium*), and a hot water room (*caldarium*). Under the bath, the hypocaustus is preserved, where the hot air from the fuel circulated. The last building of the south wing is the so-called “Antinoion” (Fig. 1.13). This structure is also apsidal, with the apse in the east. The structure acquired this name following the discovery of an oversize statue of Antinous, the favorite companion of Emperor Hadrian, worshipped after his death in A.D. 130 as a god throughout the Roman Empire.

In the lower terrace, north of the garden complex, lies an impressive building of approximately 940 m<sup>2</sup>, known as the North Basilica (Fig. 1.8). It is an imposing rectangular hall, which ends on the west in an inscribed apse. As demonstrated below, the building dates to the late 4th – early 5th century A.D. The North Basilica’s ruins are known since the early 20th century as “Kolones” and this is the very spot where the first archaeological investigations began. Almost all the features of the nave and apse (columns, wall crowns, piers of windows, lintels, arch voussoirs) were discovered *in situ* or lying inside the basilica hall (Fig. 2).





Fig. 3. View of the basilica's interior from the northeast. Photograph by C. Kanellopoulos.



Fig. 4. View of the apse from the east. Photograph by C. Kanellopoulos.



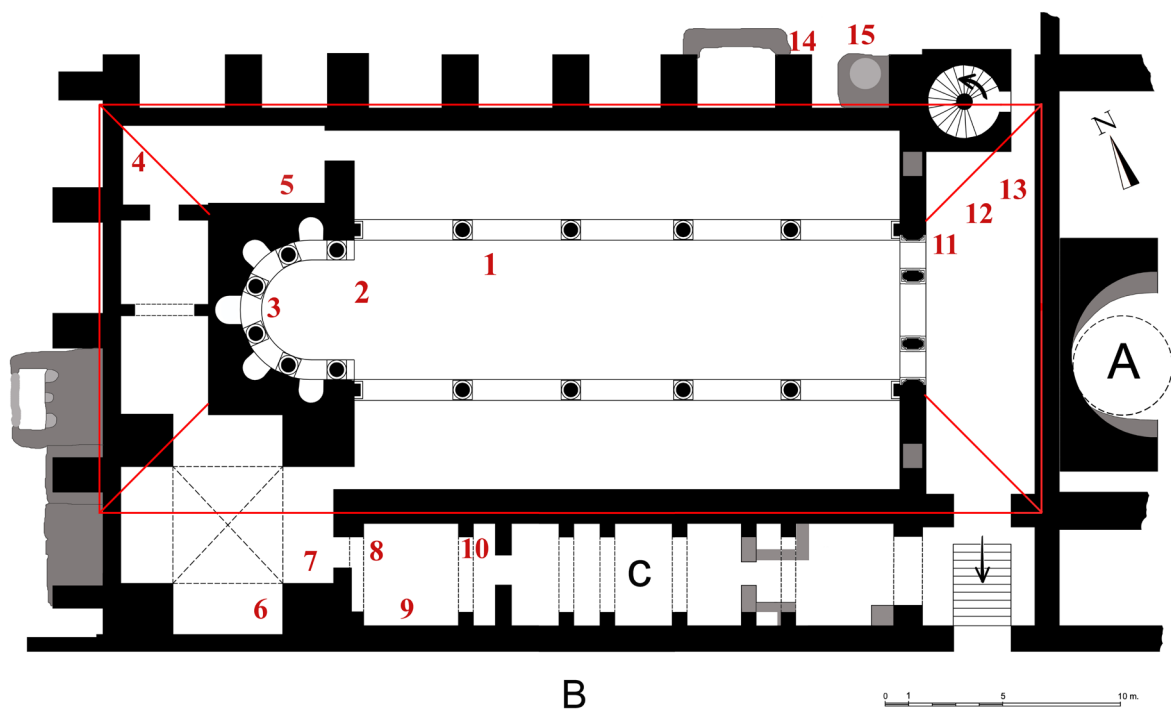


Fig. 5. Reconstructed ground plan of the North Basilica. With grey the later additions; with red the main lines of the hip roof; diagonals are at 45 degrees. A: limestone kiln; B: north wing of the peristyle; C: cryptoporticus. C. Kanellopoulos.

Later constructions reveal a period of abandonment and the activities of looters. After the basilica went out of use, lime and pottery kilns were added against the walls of the compound. The marble material, which was apparently burnt in the later lime kiln (A in Fig. 5), was removed thoroughly, while the walls, columns and clerestory of the abandoned basilica still stood. This explains the detachment of the revetment and floor slabs, the removal of the stylobate slabs of the intercolumnia (that were not engaged by standing columns) and the demolition of the features of the *tribelon*; the latter must have stood independently under a large relieving arch in the east wall. On the contrary, all stylobate blocks under the columns, the pedestals, bases and capitals of the latter, along with all the marble caps from the nave's window piers are preserved in the ruins (Figs. 3, 4).

Our recent (2020–2021) research in the North Basilica involved photogrammetric documentation, survey and detailed measuring of *in situ* and scattered architectural features; this was followed by research in the archives of the Ephorate of Antiquities of Arkadia (ground plans, photographic documentation and excavation diaries). The present contribution presents the first results of our investigation, aiming to introduce a broader and more thorough study; the latter is scheduled to follow soon. In the current report, available data offer a sense of the building's space, its function and date. It is hoped that our research will a) offer a new reconstruction proposal of the structure, b) will present aspects of the North Basilica's design, and c) will briefly comment on the sculptural decoration of the basilica, based on the available data.

## THE ARCHITECTURE

The compound of the North Basilica lies in the lowermost part of the villa; its floor lies approximately 2 m below the floor level of the central garden and peristyle. Ground plan of the actual state of the entire villa is found in Spyropoulos (2006b, 19, fig. 1). The outer dimensions of the construction are 23.08 m and 40.65 m, including the antechamber and the south rooms (save the buttresses). The interior dimensions of the colonnaded hall are

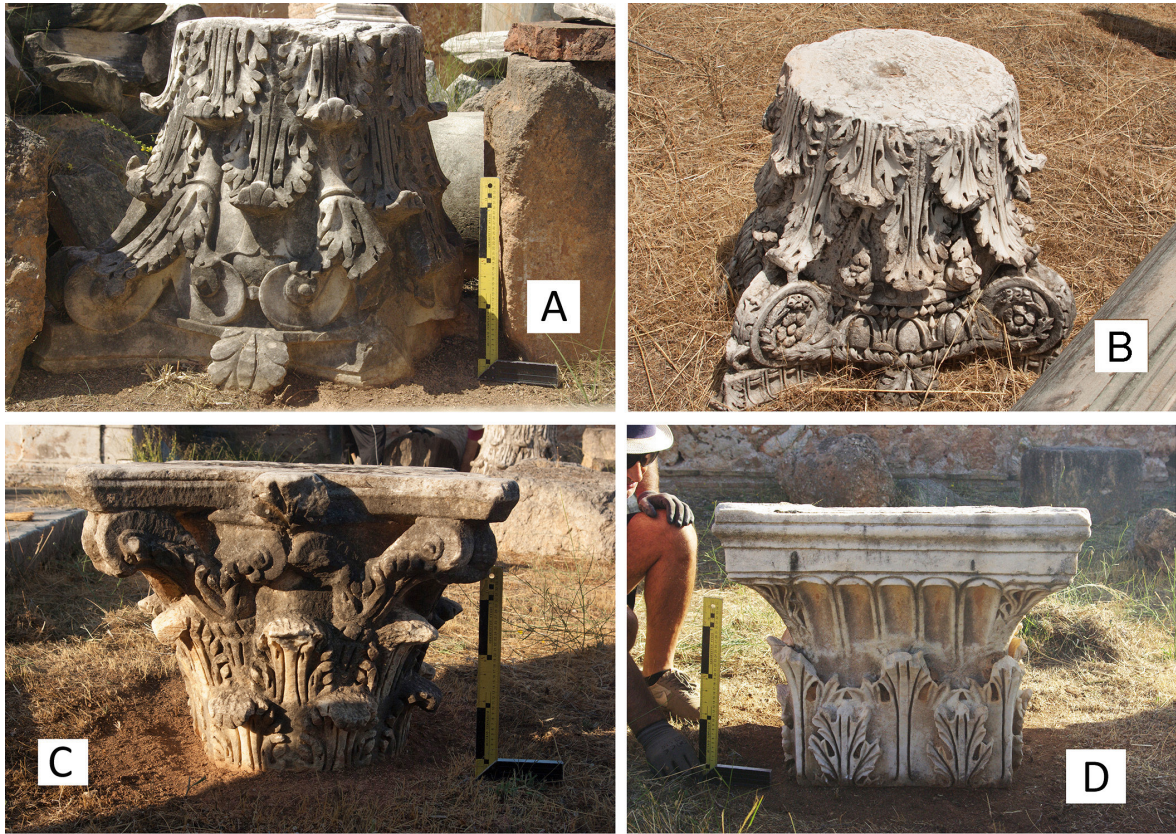


Fig. 6. Capitals from the basilica. A: columns in the apse; B, C: colonnades of the nave; D: anta capitals. Photographs by L. Tsatsaroni.

15.50 m x 23.45 m on masonry surface with an antechamber width of 4.78 m. Mortar and revetment slabs would have reduced these dimensions by approximately 0.10–0.15 m. The axial distance between the two colonnades is 6.80 m (Fig. 5).

The walls stand an average 3 m tall and are built of roughly hewn poros ashlar fit loosely, in certain areas with lime mortar and with the aid of plugs and bricks, especially in the inner skin of masonries; the inner surfaces of the walls were dressed with revetment slabs. Members of at least four structures that date between the Flavian era and the early 2nd century A.D. have been reused in the columns and antae. This becomes obvious from the variety of column pedestals and bases, and the four types of column and pilaster capitals (Fig. 6). The composite Corinthian capitals (Fig. 6.B) rather resemble the corresponding features in Titus' Apse in Rome (A.D. 81; Strong 1960, 121–22; Spyropoulos 2006a, 36) than the capitals in the Tetragonos Agora at Ephesus, which dates to the second half of the 1st century A.D. The six composite capitals from the theater of Sparta (cf. with fig. 6.C) also date to the second half of the 1st century (Doulfis 2019, v. A 240, v. B 674–76), whereas the Corinthian capitals of the apse (Fig. 6.A) find parallels in Sparta of the 1st or early 2nd century A.D. (Doulfis 2019, v. A 239, v. B 664). Spyropoulos (2006a, 42, 45) erroneously dates the capitals of the basilica's apse in Hadrian's reign. The monolithic column shafts are constructed of cipollino verde, while the pilaster jambs (width of 0.51 m) of blue Hymettian marble come from another architectural composition (Figs. 3, 4). Dowel holes on the upper surfaces of the acanthus-and-lotus pilaster capitals reveal that the original monument had architrave beams instead of arches, which must have spanned over the intercolumniations of the late roman basilica (Fig. 15.B). Indeed, a large number of poros voussoirs is preserved in the ruins. Other members of the basilica, such as the column pedestals, certain column bases, crowns in the apse and caps of clerestory piers, have been constructed afresh from fine white marble. Spyropoulos (2006a, 44) argues that the marble is Parian; a petrographic analysis is required. Apparently, the marble features of the entire composition of the *tribelon* were also hewn from scratch during the construction of the basilica. Both side openings in the east wall of the



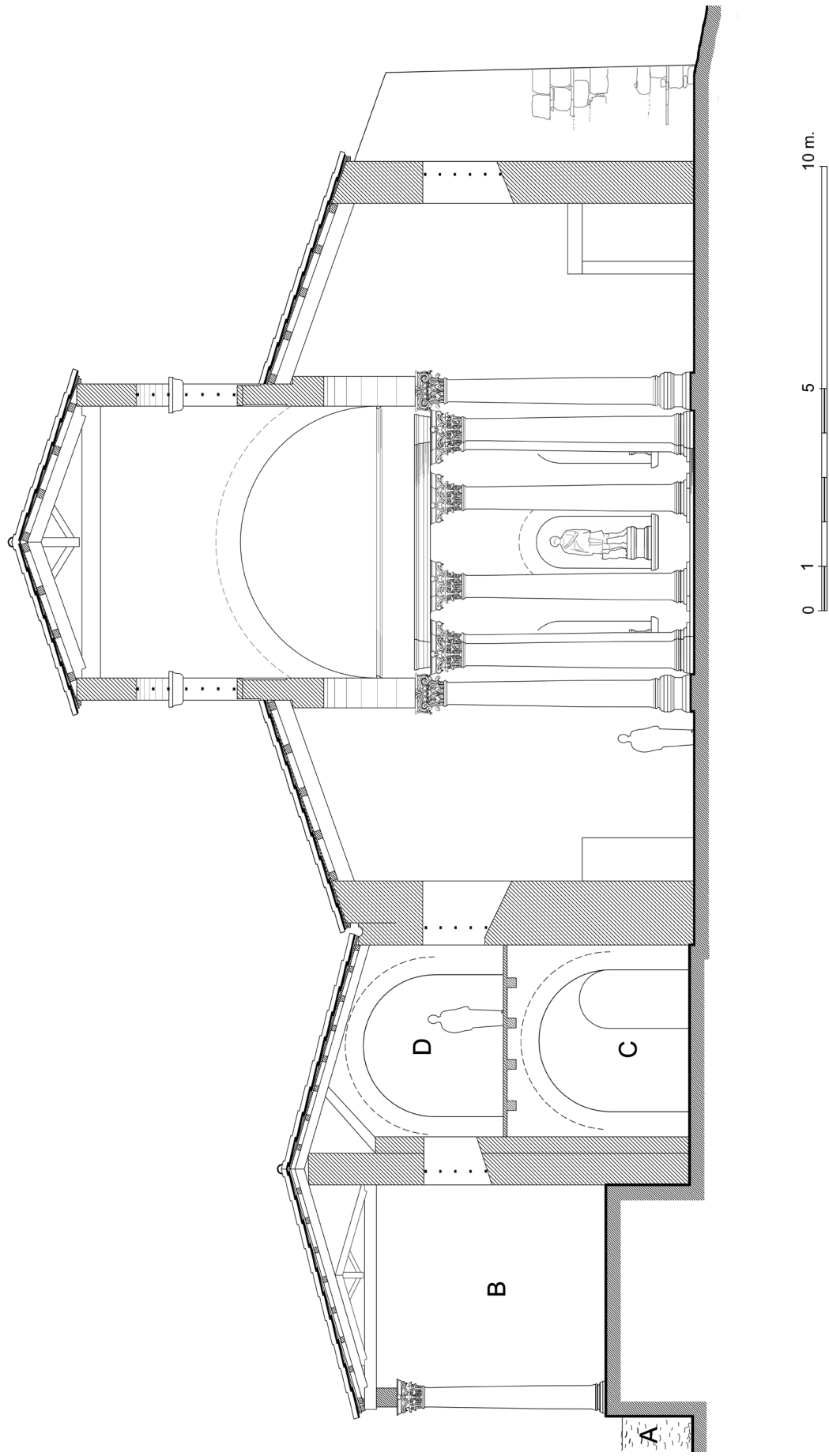


Fig. 7. Reconstructed S-N section through the canal of the garden (A), the north portico of the peristyle (B), the cryptoporticus (C), cubiculum (D) and the basilical hall. C. Kanellopoulos.

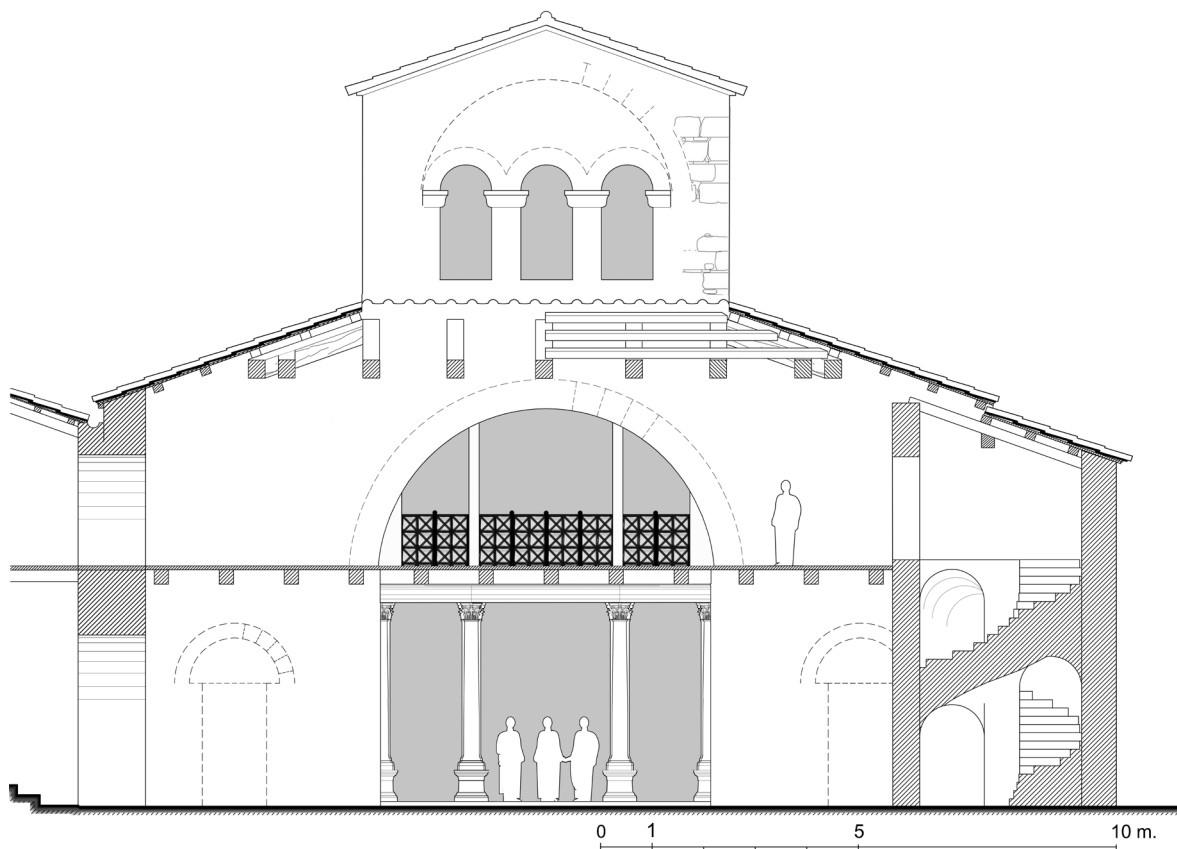


Fig. 8. Reconstructed section S–N through the antechamber and the staircase with the elevation of the basilica's east wall in the background. C. Kanellopoulos.

basilica were blocked with masonry and the screening walls were subsequently dressed with revetment slabs (Fig. 5); these were probably service doorways, useful during the construction stage of the basilica.

With column shafts that are 4.71 m tall and Corinthian capitals with a height of 0.56 m (Fig. 6.C), the overall column height is calculated + 5.648 m, or 9.45 times the shaft's lower diameter of 0.599 m. Indeed, this is a common proportion for Corinthian columns of the Roman period (Kanellopoulos 2019, 180). The column pedestals in the west part of the basilica are 0.50 m tall, with shorter attic bases that are 0.275 m tall; these should be combined with the taller composite capitals with a height of 0.64 m (Fig. 6.B). The overall height of the columns, including the pedestals, bases and capitals is calculated 6.20–6.26 m. Interaxial column spaces measure 4.60 m, with a middle space of 4.78 m.

The reused column bases of the apse are made of fine white marble (height 0.300 m) and their profile is a Roman combination of asiatic and attic base with a double scotia (Fig. 15.A). This type, quite popular in Rome, appears almost throughout the Mediterranean (Rome, Nîmes, Leptis Magna, Galilee and Tivoli) from the Late Republic to the Severan period. From the 12 known examples seven are located in Rome (Meritt 1969). The width of each niche in the apse would be approximately 1 m, with a corresponding width of 1.20 m for the central niche. Five life size statues, together with their pedestals, fit inside the elevated niches of the apse. Our team also documented the marble fragments of the crowning course (height of 0.27 m) in the apse wall and fragments of the horseshoe-shaped architrave with three fascias (height of 0.345 m).

The correspondence of the columns with the enormous buttresses and the arches in the south rooms reveals that each of the large sloping rafters in the slanting roofs of the aisles spanned above a column. The axial distance between the buttresses is quite large (4.61 m and 4.78 m), though not unparallel. Indeed, the buttresses and, therefore, the corresponding trusses are axially spaced 5 m apart in Galerius' basilica in Thessaloniki



(Misailidou-Despotidou 2013, 40), 4.40 m in the Library of Hadrian in Athens (Kanellopoulos 2020, 129, fig. 5) and 4.80 m in the Odeion of Epidauros (Aslanidis 2003, 308, fig. 9). It appears that the enormous buttresses and the arches in the South corridor (*cryptoporticus*) resisted the lateral thrusts from the sloping rafters over each column, due to the lack of trusses over the aisles (Fig. 7). Quite interestingly, the fact that all spaces around the nave have the same width indicates a hip roof around the elevated clerestory (Fig. 5; Aslanidis 2003, 307). This hypothesis is further supported by the existence of buttresses also in the west side of the basilica. The roofs of the aisles would have abutted up against the outer side of the window balustrades in the clerestory, in the common manner for basilicas (Stinson 2016, 7, fig. 5). A gutter on top of the thicker south wall of the basilica would have collected rainwater from the roofs of both the south aisle and the south compartment (Fig. 7). Almost all the marble caps over the piers of the clerestory's windows are located on the site; these include the four corner members (Fig. 15.D). Their width varies (0.78 m, 0.84 m, 0.88 m and 0.98 m) in such a way that makes possible the arrangement of two windows above each of the intercolumnar spaces, with a uniform window width. Apparently, the variations in the length of the piers would even out the differences among intercolumniations, as described above. Quite possibly, piers with different widths suggest the existence of windows of the same type, though narrower, over the narrow sides of the clerestory (Figs. 8, 9). Furthermore, holes on arch voussoirs indicate metal grills in certain openings (Fig. 15.E).

The reconstructed longitudinal section through the compound (Fig. 9) demonstrates the cipollino lintels (dimensions 2.30 m x 0.85 m) over the windows of the north wall, the location of the corner windows relative to the walls, a window pier with its cap over each column, and the upper storey of the antechamber (*chalcidicum*, Vit. 5.1.4). In the triple arcaded opening of the latter, the attached semi columns of the composite piers (with a lower diameter of approximately 0.40 m, Fig. 15.C) can reach an overall height of 4 m; a maximum height of 5 m, including their pedestals and architraves. The upper storey of the antechamber, with a height of approximately 4 m, can fit conveniently between this level and the hipped roof. Thus, the northeast round structure with a spiral stairway built of bricks can be safely recognized as a staircase well that provided access to the upper level above the antechamber. Spyropoulos (2006a, 41; 2022) erroneously identifies this structure as a portman's guard house or an observatory tower – “*turris*” roofed with a dome.

It appears that the triple arcaded composition (*tribelon*) in the opening between the nave and the antechamber would have stood independently under a large relieving arch in the east wall of the basilical hall (Fig. 8). The same solution, with a large relieving arch over the columns of the entryway, was given in the façade of the basilica at Piazza Armerina (Pensabene and Sfameni 2006, 42, fig. 6.B). During later times it was, therefore, possible to thoroughly demolish and burn in the adjacent lime kiln all of the marble supports, together with the architraves, without causing the demolition or collapse of the east wall of the basilica. The above hypothesis explains the general absence of *tribelon* members among the excavated ruins. Had the space under the relieving arch not been filled with masonry, the floor above the antechamber would have functioned as a gallery/vista that would have offered a view of the remarkable interior of the basilica.

The remains of the south compartment/corridor are recognized as an infrastructure with successive arches (*cryptoporticus*) that allowed unobstructed circulation around the basilica (for the discreet connection of various quarters of a villa via a *cryptoporticus* (whether an “above ground or a semi-underground covered passageway against a slope”), see in Zarmakoupi 2011, 53, 56–8). The identification of Herodes' library and *lalarium* in the *cryptoporticus* (Spyropoulos 2006a, 45) is unsubstantiated; such facilities, however, are possible in the rooms of the upper floor. It appears that the walls and arches, which are not aligned to the columns (and the corresponding rafters), supported screen walls of an upper floor above the *cryptoporticus*. These upper level rooms, with a space of ca. 200 m<sup>2</sup>, suitable for most private activities, would be accessed via the staircase and the upper level of the antechamber. Indeed, taking into consideration the rooms in a typical Roman villa, the spaces above the *cryptoporticus* can be identified with *cubacula*, used for relaxation –however not exclusively as bedrooms– private dining, personal meetings and literary activities. Except for *cubiculum* 8 in the upper floor of Livia's villa in Rome, a *superius cubiculum* is known from Apuleius (*Met.* 4.12; Nissinen 2009, 90–5; Jansen 2022, 85). Moreover, the elevated chambers carried on arches are a unique example of a *cubiculum suspensum*

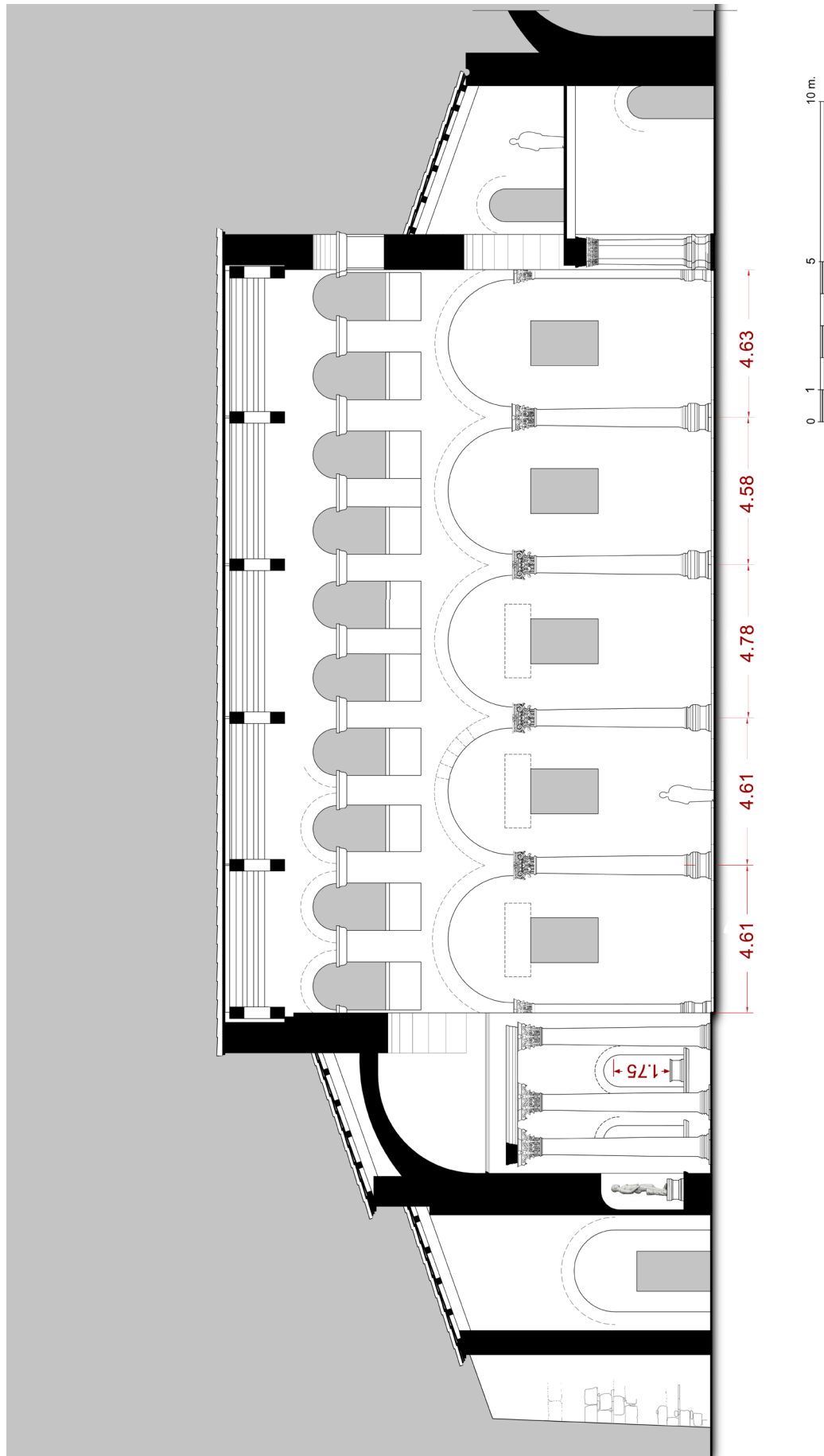


Fig. 9. Longitudinal section (W-E) through the basilica and the antechamber. C. Kanellopoulos.



mentioned by Apuleius (*Met.* 3.21).<sup>1</sup> Consequently, the two-storeyed south compartment could have been accommodated under the roof of the peristyle's north portico (Fig. 7). Among the architectural decoration of the *cubicula* a fragment of a colonnette decorated with an incised cross between letters A and Ω is of particular importance, the only indication so far of Christian conviction (Spyropoulos 2006a, 49). Indeed, during the 4th and 5th centuries A.D. *cubicula* were still used as spaces of study and meditation/contemplation. One famous such space of this period is Constantine the Great's *cubiculum*, inside which, according to the *Actus Silvestri*, Constantine first learned of Christianity and fasted before his baptism (Sessa 2007, 172). A groin vault would have sprung over the massive piers in the square southwest space (Fig. 5). Spyropoulos (2006a, 40) reconstructs a dome over the same space (though, due to an oversight, this is termed a vault). In our opinion, this sturdy construction of the 4th century A.D. basilica may have supported an elevated cistern that collected water from the roofs of the basilica and the south compartment.

## SCULPTURAL DECORATION

The following comments on the North Basilica's sculptural adornment are based on the archives of the Ephorate of Antiquities of Arkadia and on relevant recent publications (Spyropoulos 2006a, 48–58). Taking into account the above observations on the building's architecture, this preliminary report aims to shed light on aspects of the multi-level functions of the Basilica and reveal the aesthetic preferences of the villa's last owner. One should bear in mind that the site “Kolones”, where the first excavation trenches were opened back in the 1970s, is identified with the antechamber of the North Basilica.

As stated above, five life-size statues would have fit in the five elevated niches of the apse, offering the visitor a magnificent view when approaching from the eastern entrance.

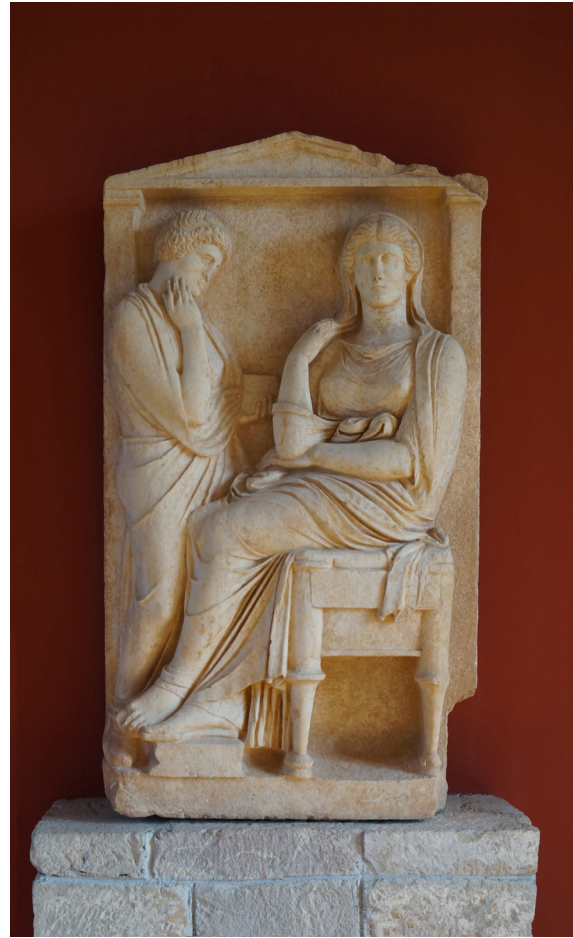
The statue of young dressed Dionysos was probably on display in the central niche (Fig. 5.3). It has been restored from three pieces, unearthed in different spots within the monument during the 1998 campaign (Archaeological Museum of Astros (henceforth AMA) 545; H. 1.80 m; Spyropoulos 2006a, 48; 2017, fig. 5). Namely, the head was found a few meters east of the central niche, the torso not far away from the later kiln and the panther in the so-called Giannilos plot, east of the agricultural road that marks the eastern border of the villa's excavated section. Documentation is based on the ground plan of the 1998 excavation (archive of the Ephorate of Antiquities of Arkadia). The youthful beardless god, wearing a short chiton with a nebris over it, shares typological similarities with the Dionysos-statue leaning with his left arm on an archaistic female figure today in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the latter being an early roman adaptation of a 4th century B.C. Greek statue (Waywell 1986, 72–3 no. 6 pl. 49.1; Piçon et al. 2007, 369 fig. 429, 489–90 no. 429: Augustan or Julio-Claudian). The subject depicted as part of the Basilica adornment was particularly popular among sculptural decorations of temples, baths and private edifices during the Roman period. An under life-size statue of youthful Dionysos with a panther cub adorned the central niche of Room 1 in the Villa “of Augustus”, at Somma Vesuviana, south Italy (on this roman villa and its decoration, see recently Aoyadi et al. 2018, esp. 146–47 fig. 9.7 on the Dionysos statue). A classicizing naked Dionysos statue with nebris was exhibited in the Villa Hadriana at Tivoli (Zanker 1974, 103 no. 5, pl. 77.2).

To pinpoint the exact original exhibition area of the life-size statue of a naked youth, identified by Georgios Spyropoulos as Hermes-Mercury, is a difficult task (Fig. 10, AMA 361–62; H. 1.70 m; Spyropoulos 2001, 159–71, pls. 10–2, 22; Spyropoulos 2006a, 48, 80–3 fig. 9 [advanced 2nd century A.D.]). Once again, the statue was reconstructed from several fragments discovered in different spots of the villa in 1998. The torso was found

1 Accordingly, the “west corridor” against Galerius' basilica (Stefanidou-Tiveriou 2006, 168, fig. 3; Misailidou-Despotidou 2013, 40, 44; Chrysafi 2021, 73, fig. 10) can be identified as a *cryptoporticus*, which also included a two storied structure with accommodation in the upper level.



10.



11.

Fig. 10. Statue of a naked youth (Hermes?); height: 1.70 m. AMA 361–362. Copyright: Ephorate of Antiquities of Arkadia. Photograph by A.V. Karapanagiotou.  
 Fig. 11. Grave relief; height: 1.57 m. AMA 179. Copyright: Ephorate of Antiquities of Arkadia. Photograph by A.V. Karapanagiotou.

in the nave of the Basilica (Fig. 5. 1), the head in the so-called Western Basilica (Fig. 1.5) and the rest of the fragments on the west side of the canal. Except for the attributes, and despite the poor condition of the head, the Loukou youth recalls the statue of a naked youth –formerly identified as Antinoos– from the sculptural decoration of the Hadrian’s villa at Tivoli (Zanker 1974, 101–2 no. 3 pl. 75.5–6, 78.6 [A.D. 150].

The embellishment of the Basilica’s nave most likely included –among other works– a bronze statue of a human figure and a marble bust of a togatus. This is evidenced by the discovery of a bronze human finger and a headless bust of a togatus inside a pit in front of the apse area (Fig. 5.2; Spyropoulos 2006a, 48). The bronze finger has not yet been located in the storage rooms. The togatus’s bust has been inventoried under no. AMA 538 (H. 0.34 m). The male bust is almost identical with another headless bust of a togatus uncovered at the site of the Basilica during the 1989 campaign (AMA 230; H. 0.38 m; Ntatsouli-Stavridi 1993, 39 fig. 38 [period of Hadrian]; 1999, 39, fig. 38). Both bearers wear the toga –and not the himation as recorded by Ntatsouli-Stavridi– in a version for the representation of eminent Romans that came into fashion from the 130’s onwards (Goette 1990, 65–7, 148 no. 11, 12, pls. 48.4, 49.1–2). By the end of the 2nd century A.D. this arrangement was abandoned in favor of the *toga contabulata*, the so-called “banded” or “stacked” toga, the most complex style of the category (Goette 1990, 67–70). In the long series of roman portraits that once adorned the Loukou villa, a remarkable portrait bust of the Emperor Septimius Severus depicted with *toga contabulata* was included (AMA 375; Spyropoulos 2006a, 103–4 fig. 15).

A larger than life headless marble Athena-statue –preserved height 1.75 m– was discovered in the west section of the north aisle (Fig. 5.5) during the 1998 excavation campaign and was also part of the sculpture

collection of the Basilica (AMA 527; Spyropoulos 2006a, 48; 2017, fig. 3). The goddess, identified by the *aegis*, is portrayed standing in a Polykleitan stance, dressed in chiton and *diplox* and wearing sandals. The work is inspired by the Athena Hope-Farnese type (Leventi 2003, 41–2, pls. 2–3, 5–6). The bronze prototype, of an estimated height between 2.00 and 2.20 m, was a 420's B.C. creation and has been earlier identified as the cult-statue of Athena *Itonia* by Agorakritos (Despinis 1971, 146–55). Recent studies assign the original to Pyrrho's Athena Hygieia, which stood on the Athenian Acropolis just inside the Propylaia (Leventi 2003, 39–45). A large number of over life size roman copies of Athena/Farnese have existed, still the three fragments from a statue of the same type from the Athenian Acropolis, dated to the 1st century A.D., represent the only other known copy of the Athena Hope/Farnese type in imperial Greece (Leventi 2003, 43 n. 30). However, the Loukou better preserved example could not have been exhibited in one of the niches of the apse, as Spyropoulos (2022, 94) argues, due to its great size.

The decoration of the Basilica with marble statues of Dionysos and Athena is of prime importance for the aesthetic preferences and the intellectual interests of the last owner. Marinus (*Vita Procli* 29. 18–39), commenting on the choice of Proclus –the well-known founder of the Neoplatonic School of Athens in the early 5th century A.D.– for his Athenian residence, cites: “... γείτονα μὲν οὖσαν τοῦ ἀπὸ Σοφοκλέους ἐπιφανοῦς Ἀσκληπιδίου καὶ τοῦ πρὸς τῷ θεάτρῳ Διονυσίου, ὀρωμένην δὲ ἢ καὶ ἄλλως αἰσθητὴν γιγνομένην τῇ ἀκροπόλει τῆς Ἀθηνᾶς”.

The sculptures nos. 6–10 in Fig. 5, found during the 1995 excavation in the arched infrastructure (*cryptoporticus*), must have fallen from the elevated floor/*cubiculum* above, which they originally adorned. They mainly include portraits.

The only one identified so far is the marble portrait head of Herodes Atticus, the heir of the villa in the 2nd century A.D. (Fig. 12; AMA 562; H. 0.315; Spyropoulos 2006a, 49, 108–11 fig. 19 [A.D. 140–170]; 2006b, 27–8, 29 fig. 6; Goette 2019, 251 no. 1 (wrong inv. no.); Fittschen 2021, 44 no. 22a, pl. 22.1 [A.D. 150–160]. Another almost identical portrait of Herodes, preserved with its bust, was found in the villa during the 1990's campaign (AMA 381+516; H. 0.73 m; Spyropoulos 2006b, 25–6 fig. 5; Goette 2019, 251 no. 2). These two portraits belong to a series of ten up to now known replicas, all of which conform to a single portrait type of the famous Athenian and are all products of Attic workshops (Goette 2019, 226–35 for a recent overview). Among them an excellent in quality and preservation himation-clad portrait bust, today in the National Archaeological Museum, Athens (inv. no. 4810), was originally displayed in his villa in Kephisia (Goette 2019, 251 no. 5 with previous bibliography). In the preserved examples with bust, Herodes always wears the chiton and himation and never the toga. The portrait type depicts an elderly man with signs of ageing emphasized by the furrows across the forehead, the sunken cheeks and the rich long beard. As Goette (2019, 235) points out, this particular creation of Herodes Atticus' portrait type highlights the aspect of his personality as a scholar of Greek education and language rather than a holder of Roman citizenship and senatorial rank.

The identification of a little girl's marble head found in the same assemblage remains problematic (Fig. 5.10; AMA 541a; H. 0.15 m; Spyropoulos 2006a, 49 [Antonine period]). The girl's hair, in a braided coil towards the back of the head, resembles the hairstyle worn by a girl shown reclining on the lid of her sarcophagus, today in the Getty Museum, dated to the second quarter of the 2nd century A.D. (Frel 1981, 64–5 with photos). The identification with Athenais –Herode's youngest daughter– as suggested by Spyropoulos (2006b, 28), is not supported by the known portraits of the young girl (Goette 2019, 252).

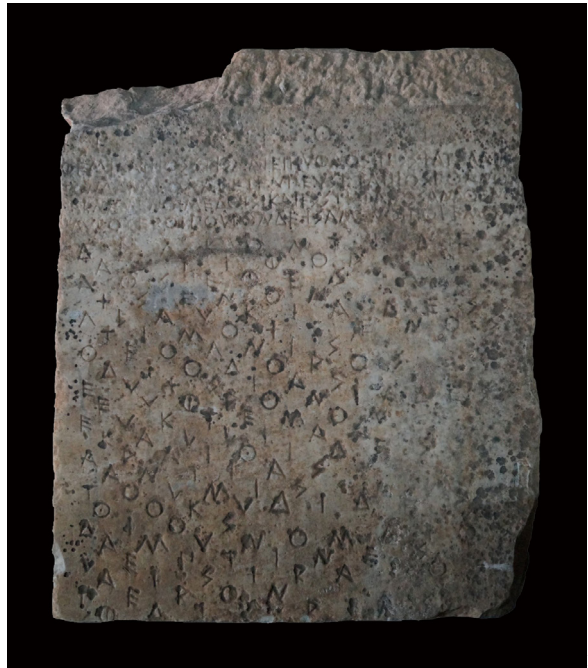
Two headless marble busts –one of them with *tabula ansata*–, and a small fragment of a bust or statue, reported to have been found as part of the same assemblage, still remain unidentified.

Three grave stelae were uncovered during the excavations conducted in 1977 and 1984, all discovered in the section of the antechamber (Fig. 5.11–13). The first two, today exhibited in the Archaeological Museum of Tripolis, are typical funerary products of attic workshops, dated to the middle of the 2nd century A.D. (Archaeological Museum of Tripolis (henceforth AMT) 2728; H. 1.16 m; Ntatsouli-Stavridi 1993, 36–7 pl. 26; Spyropoulos 2006a, 51, 53 fig. 3, 54, here Fig. 14. AMT 2729; H. 1.67 m; Ntatsouli-Stavridi 1993, 34–6 pl. 25; Spyropoulos 2006a, 54–5, 56 fig. 4). In both of them members of a nuclear family are to be recognized –parents





12.



13.

Fig. 12. Head of Herodes Atticus; height: 0.31 m. AMA 562. Copyright: Ephorate of Antiquities of Arkadia. Photograph by A.V. Karapanagiotou.  
 Fig. 13. Inscribed stele of the Erechtheis tribe; height: 0.68 m. AMA 535. Copyright: Ephorate of Antiquities of Arkadia. Photograph by A.V. Karapanagiotou.

and son– represented standing. The iconographic types for both women –the so-called mourning type in Fig. 14 and the popular Small Herculaneum type on the AMT 2729– reflect the ideal woman’s portrayal of the time, distinguished by modesty and morality and as links for the perpetuation of the family tree (Karapanagiotou 2013, 56–7, 60–2, 122–23, pls. 47 and 71). On the other hand, their male counterparts’ representation suggests their engagement with activities outside of the house: probably free landowners of the region in Fig. 14 and labourers involved in the agricultural enterprises of the villa on stele AMA 2729. The third one –discovered in 1977– an impressive stele of the type of the mistress and maid, has been interpreted as a Classical Attic grave relief reworked in Roman times, especially indicated on the hairdress of the imposing seated figure (Fig. 11, AMA 179; H. 1.57 m; Faklaris 1990, 101 no. 4 pl. 35a; Ntatsouli-Stavridi 1999, pl. 8, 50–1 fig. 52; Spyropoulos 2006a, 50–1 no. 11 fig.2).

Increasing re-use of earlier material, especially of sculptural works characterized the collections of wealthy villa-owners across the Empire during Late Antiquity. Funerary material was also reused as a decorative element within contemporary houses. Classical grave reliefs along with Hellenistic votive reliefs were very often recycled in several late Athenian residences, revealing the new owners’ message scheme (Barker 2021, esp. 228–30). Remodeling of earlier material is a well known practice among the funerary stelae of roman attic workshops (e.g. Karapanagiotou 2013, 221 no. 402 pl. 84, first half of the 1st century A.D.).

Item No 15 on the ground plan of Fig. 5, found together with a damaged child head, refers to the much commented inscribed stele of the Erechtheis tribe of Athens, which has correctly been associated with the *polyandrion* of the 192 Athenians fallen at the Battle of Marathon (490 B.C.) and buried in the battlefield (Fig. 13, AMA 535; H. 0.68 m; Spyropoulos 2009; Karapanagiotou 2020 with previous bibliography). The stele was found reused in a wall of the early byzantine period, a few meters north of the Basilica, and originally it must have adorned the main hall of the building. The transfer and exhibition of this piece in the luxurious country residence of Herod Atticus on the coast of the Argolic Gulf can be attributed to his origin from Marathon and his “collecting tendencies”.

To the sculptural assemblage of the luxurious villa of Chiragan in south-west Gaul in the province of *Narbonensis* (located 60 km southwest of Toulouse, near Matres-Tolosane) one can now add the great sculpture



Fig. 14. Grave relief; height: 1.16 m; AMT 2728. Photograph reproduced after Ntatsouli-Stavridi 1993, pl. 26.

collection of the Loukou villa, which should be considered as a characteristic example documenting the iconographic program of a superb residence of the Roman period within the Mediterranean Basin (Barker 2021, 224 no. 21 on the sculptural assemblage of the Chiragan villa).

The sculptural adornment of the villa, originally commissioned by Herodes Atticus and enriched by the following owners for over nearly 300 years, was at the end preserved and protected to be grouped and re-exhibited at the Loukou villa. Part of this “historical” collection, including images of high rank roman officials, private images, divine-formed statues, funerary reliefs and inscriptions, has been exhibited by the last collector and owner of the estate in the Basilica.

## CHRONOLOGY

Recent archeological investigations conducted between 1977 and 1999 led to the conclusion that the residential complex life span at Eva/Loukou, Kynouria covered a period from the 1st century to the 5th century A.D.

Remodelings and additions are well established in the villa. Subsequent use of the estate has been dated to the years of Septimius Severus and the early Byzantine period. The mansion, the largest so far revealed in Greece, was most probably founded in the late 1st or at the latest in the first decades of the 2nd century A.D. The owner was Atticus, father of Herodes Atticus. The construction of the building complex must have begun after A.D. 96–98, on Nerva's Reign, when the confiscation of the property of the distinguished Athenian family, imposed earlier by the Athenian authorities, was revoked. Reused capitals of the Flavian period in the North Basilica support this date.

Ti. Claudius Atticus Herodes, father of Herodes Atticus, was the first senator in the family. He received the Roman citizenship under Nero, and subsequently acquired the name *Ti(berius) Claudius*. He married his niece Vibullia Alcia Agrippina, who descended from the Vibullii, from the Roman colony of Corinth. From this marriage was born Herodes Atticus, who is recorded by his full Roman name in a Latin inscription coming from Corinth as *L. Vibullius Hipparchus Ti. Claudius Ti. F Qu(irina) Atticus Herodes* (Katola and Nuorluota 2022, 167–70).

The major construction program was launched by Herodes Atticus and continued with extensions and changes after his death. The Eva Loukou villa residence functioned for about 200 years after the death of Herodes Atticus in 177. The presence of imperial portraits and inscriptions of the late 2nd to the early 3rd century A.D. indicates that the estate had become imperial property (Papaioannou 2018, 350). Theodoros Spyropoulos argues that the lotus and acanthus capitals found in the central peristyle at Eva/Loukou, closely similar to those found in the Severan Forum of Leptis Magna, indicate a remodeling of the villa by emperor Septimius Severus, following a hypothetical appropriation of the villa by the imperial family (Ksekalaki 2009). In the course of the 4th century A.D. a major destruction occurred at the villa, documented by the large reuse of spolia from earlier edifices used for the construction of the North Basilica. Papaioannou (2018, 350) suggests that the villa suffered from Herulian attacks and earthquakes.

To date, according to Georgios Spyropoulos (2006a, 40), the founding of the North Basilica was considered to have taken place in the last decades of the 1st century A.D. by Herodes Atticus' father (with the column capitals of the Flavian period) and was completed around the year 130, with the addition of an apse by Herodes himself. The latter hypothesis is based on the unconvincing dating of the capitals of the apse in the years of Hadrian. It can now be established that the North Basilica was built after the 4th century with reused members from buildings of the late 1st and early 2nd centuries A.D. The availability of older architectural features must be due to the destruction of a number of buildings and should be examined alongside the evidence of contemporaneous seismic activity. In the region of the Argolid, two major natural disasters have been recorded in the course of the 4th century. In A.D. 361, a local earthquake caused damages in Nafplion, approximately 20 km north of Eva/Loukou (Papazachos and Papazachou 1997, 181). On the morning of July 21st, A.D. 365, the Eastern Mediterranean was shaken by an earthquake, which is generally believed to have been the strongest recorded earthquake in the Basin. It most probably originated around Crete and was followed by a tsunami that hit the Mediterranean coastlines causing many deaths. Testimonies of the impact of the earthquake on the Peloponnese are the destruction of ancient Patras, many buildings at the sanctuary of Olympia and ancient Gortyna in Arkadia (Pararas-Carayannis 2011, esp. 267–70. A subsequent period of economic decline and uncertainty was followed by the sack of the Visigoths (A.D. 395/396; Papaioannou 2018, 350 no. 218). It was only after the departure of the Visigoths from the Peloponnese in A.D. 397, thus at the beginning of the 5th century, that the North Basilica must have been founded, during the very same period that new mosaic pavements were added in the villa, the most indicative among which is the mosaic showing a chariot race. Papaioannou (2018, 349–50) believes that “the sculptural and mosaic program represent Herodes' artistic tastes” (on an analysis of the Loukou mosaic with the chariot race, see Kokkini 2002, 106–9 pl. 34a).

During the second half of the 4th century A.D., apart from the construction of private dwellings, two well documented cases of public building activity are known in the Argolid, though mainly repair works.



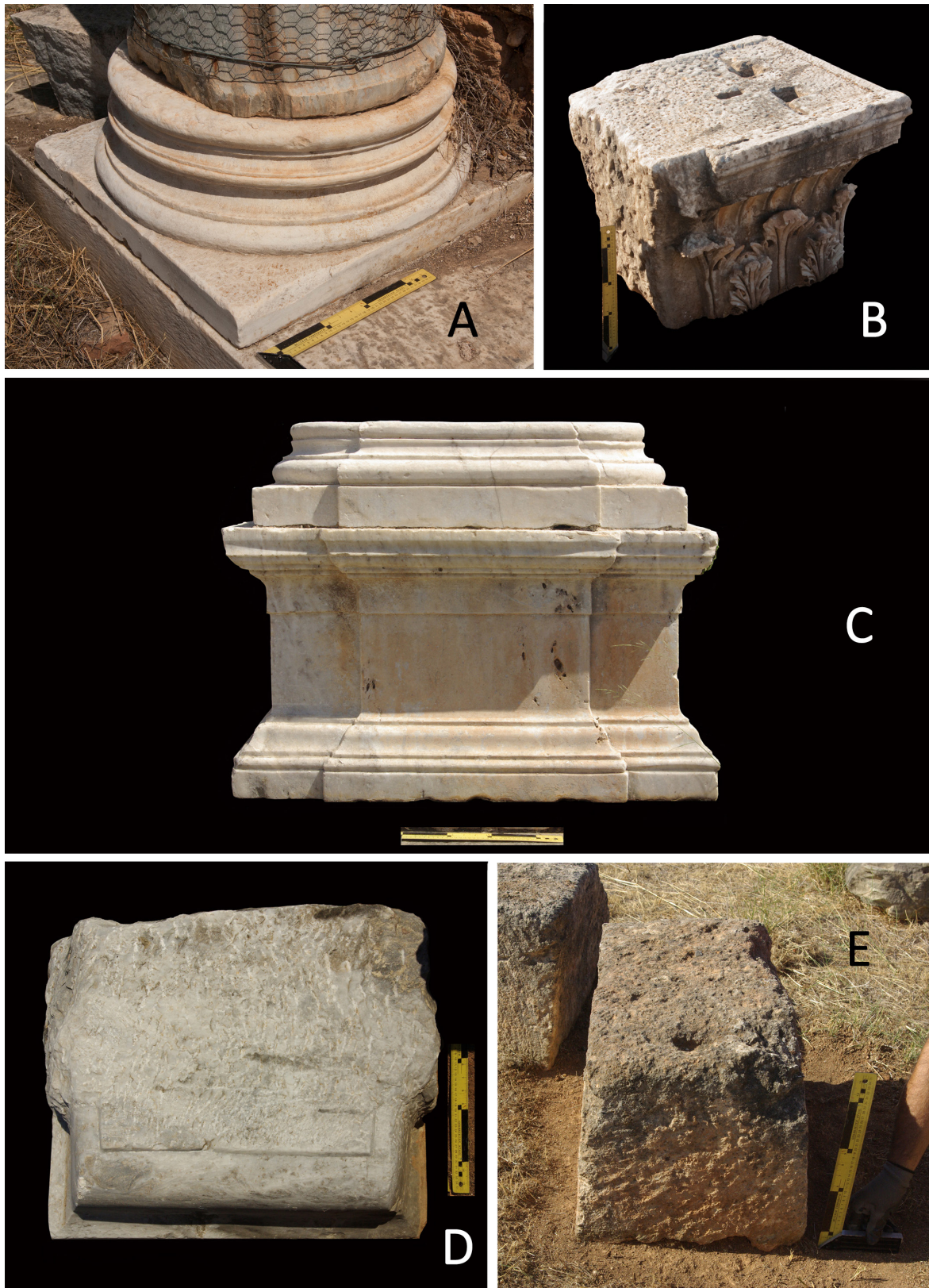


Fig. 15. Architectural members of the North Basilica. A: column base in the apse; B: pilaster capital; C: pedestal and base of the composite pier in the tribelon; D: bottom surface of the corner pier in the clerestory; E: arch voussoir lying upside down. Photographs by L. Tsatsaroni.

Emperor Julian repaired a basilica and a jetty in Nafplion that were damaged during the earthquake of A.D. 361 (Papazachos and Papazachou 1997, 181). A temenos wall and a surrounding colonnade built from the architectural features of the early Hellenistic Katagogeion and the “industrial buildings” were added in the Asklepieion of Epidauros, quite possibly before the earthquake of A.D. 365. No members from temples have been reused in the surrounding wall and stylobate foundations; instead, only features of aged, decaying, constructions with mudbrick walls are documented in the surrounding temenos wall (Kanellopoulos 2000).

A period of abandonment is attested from the looting of marble revetment and floor slabs, the stylobate slabs between columns and the composition of the *tribelon*. This phase was followed by the collapse of the building. All columns and nave’s material, together with the window caps, have fallen to the south and are now lying in the nave and south aisle; no collapse material lies in the north aisle. Two column shafts have smashed against the south wall of the basilica. It is therefore obvious that the violent collapse with a direction north–south was caused by an earthquake with an epicenter north of Kynouria. Indeed, in A.D. 856, a violent seismic event with an estimated strength greater than 8 on the Richter Scale completely destroyed Corinth, which lies directly north of Eva and at a distance of 58 km from the latter (Papadopoulos 2000). This catastrophic tremor and the subsequent severe destruction must have marked the end of all activities in the North Basilica compound.

## CONCLUSIONS

The Basilica of the Galerian complex of Thessaloniki, a magnificent building of imperial grandeur, measuring 24 x 67 m on its exterior, was the largest example of its type in mainland Greece. The erection of the complex is dated to the late 3rd – early 4th century A.D., when Caesar Galerius Valerianus Maximianus (A.D. 293–311) chose Thessaloniki as the seat of the eastern part of the Roman Empire. Loukou’s North Basilica, 938 m<sup>2</sup> in total, is the second largest monument of this category in Greece, widely recognized as a nexus of buildings functioning as audience and reception halls. The size of the monument and the grandeur of its decoration support the view that the owner of the early 5th century villa at Loukou was a personality of high/senatorial rank, possibly even a member of the imperial court, who occasionally resided in this coastal region of the Peloponnese.

The architectural plan of the North Basilica reveals the contemporary trends of design for monuments of this category. During the 4th and 5th centuries, following the imperial palatial basilicas (Split, Thessaloniki, Rome, Trier), large apsidal halls were added in Villa Romuliana, near Gamzigrad (East Serbia, A.D. 293–311; Djurić and Prochask 2021, 99–102 with related bibliography) and in the praetoria of Gortyn and Caesarea Maritima. Similarly to the villas at Eva/Loukou and Via Appia, Herod the Great’s Promontory Palace in Caesarea Maritima was confiscated and was subsequently used as a luxurious praetorium of the Roman and Byzantine governors (Burrell 1996; Demandt 1996, 144, fig. 14). A private basilical hall was included in Maxentius’ retirement palace on Via Appia. Maxentius’ mansion was built over an earlier villa, which, according to the excavators, also belonged to Herodes Atticus (Sanders 1989, 107 with related bibliography). The villa at Mediana, near Naissus, built during emperor’s Constantine’s reign, also contained a large apsidal audience hall (Milosevic 2011, 171–74). During the 5th century a second administrative basilica was founded 150 m east of Caesarea’s praetorium (Burrell 1996, 236–38; Patrich 2000; 2014, 63–5); in late antiquity Piazza Armerina, a compound with a 15 m wide private basilica, was built atop an earlier villa (Villa del Casale, Wilson 2017).

The owner of the North Basilica at Loukou constructed a complete mansion with secluded accommodations suitable for living, meetings and contemplation, which do not appear in the arrangement of the original phase of the villa; these facilities are oriented towards the artificial landscape of the garden with its mythological themes of the mosaics and statuary (Giesecke 2001). Had such private facilities existed in unexcavated portions of the latter, they would have been aged and, therefore, obsolete during the 4th century A.D. As the accommodation was built against the south side of the North basilica, it received constant sun exposure during the winter, while

it was cooled by cross drafts of winds through and between the Basilica and the north wing of the peristyle during the summer (Fig. 7). As a result of their location, the *cubicula* of the upper floor did not command view of the gentle slopes and coast of the Argolid north of the villa. Instead, they were oriented towards the artificial landscape of the garden with its mythological themes of the mosaics and statuary. Had the south wall of the basilical hall have windows, by symmetry to those windows in the north wall, then the openings would not be sources of light; instead these south windows would open in the accommodation of the upper floor (Fig. 7). The elevated *cubicula* would, therefore, offer, on the south side, a view of the man-made universe of the garden and, on the north side, view of the basilica's remarkable interior.

The emblematic Basilica fulfilled the aims of an open reception hall with the taste of more private educational and philosophical associations. The sculptural adornment in the building's proper could be understood as a museum collection and the hall itself as an art gallery, exceeding the norms for such luxurious residences. Indeed, Vitruvius (6.5.2) notes that men of a rank need – in their houses – libraries, picture galleries, and basilicas, finished in a style similar to that of great public buildings. In Late Antiquity, statues, statuettes, portraits and reliefs from earlier periods were frequently used for decorative purposes in the luxurious residences of aristocratic patrons across the Empire (Barker 2021, 223–30; this practice is also observed, beyond any doubt, in the North Basilica. The reused columns and pilasters can be understood within the context of spoliated architecture, seen after the basilicas of Lateranum (A.D. 313) and the Apse of Constantine in Rome (A.D. 315; Lambrinou 2015, 391–94). Besides the practicalities of such reuse, the pillars of the basilica, also become relics of a lost past to be preserved and presented.

The sculptural decoration program of the Basilica is of primary importance, since it reveals its owner's personality. Apparently, the founder was a wealthy, educated antiquarian, with a variety of spiritual interests, a great admirer of the classical Greek past and a follower of Herodes Atticus and his legacy, withdrawn in the elevated accommodation of his rural villa. Not only did he collect many of the sculptures belonging to the previous phases of the villa, but he also preserved and safeguarded the old material, creating a *Μουσείον* with a specific exhibition program. These aspects reflect the lifestyle, but also the very spirit of “Neoplatonism”, the predominant philosophical school of thought that flourished in the Greco-Roman world of late antiquity, i.e., the middle of the 3rd to the middle of the 7th century A.D. It is referred to as “a grandiose and powerfully persuasive system of thought that reflected upon a millennium of intellectual culture and brought the scientific and moral theories of Plato, Aristotle, and the ethics of the Stoics into fruitful dialogue with literature, myth, and religious practice” (Wildberg 2016).

The mythological repertoire of the sculptural decoration of the great hall echoes religious practices conducted by Proclus (A.D. 412–485), the Head of the Neoplatonic School of Athens, in his alleged house, “The House of Proclus”, known as House Chi, situated on the slope of Areopagus, overlooking the Athenian Agora (Karivieri 1994). Marinus of Neapolis (born ca. A.D. 440), in his *Life of Proclus*, emphasizes Proclus' intimate relations with the gods, especially Asclepius, and his activities on practical religion conducting certain rites that saved Athens from a drought and earthquake (Afonasina and Afonasin 2014, 20–2). The devastating earthquakes that shook the east Mediterranean about 50 years before the establishment of the Basilica had an overwhelming, unforgettable impact on the infrastructure and fabric of the ancient world and, consequently, on the mentality of the succeeding period, causing a reorientation of cultural life in general. The North Basilica, a virtual arc of both a local and a global glorious past, reflects this transitional phase of the ancient world, preserves and activates the rapidly disappearing ancestral values.



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