

THE STEREOBATE OF THE GREEK TEMPLE: THE GENESIS

The paper covers the genesis of the stereobate and its evolution as the base of the Classic Greek Temple. Identification of the cultural sources of the stereobate requires a research into Ancient East, Minoan, and Mycenaean cultures. During the Classic period, an almost comprehensive reinterpretation of the temple basic elements occurred, although its base still stood firm as it did through the Minoan and Mycenaean cultures. These traditions are proven by a number of essential elements, particularly, in the setting of the temple upon the stereobate.

Several earliest available images demonstrate a temple on the top of the hill, in full compliance with the present-day Minoan tradition. In later Mycenaean images, it is already depicted standing on an artificial platform.

This temple type has not changed significantly, as it might be observed on the Cypriot coins of the 10th century BC that bear an image of the main temple of Paphos Aphrodite (Astarte), placed on an artificial hill — a stereobate.

On the one hand, placing the temple on a high stereobate could be linked to the formal tradition of erecting the sanctuary on the top of a natural hill, but, on the other hand, this tradition refers us to an ancient ritual going back to the culture of Ur, 5-4 millennium BC. This tradition demanded that the temple had two sections: one above the ground level accessible for humans, and the underground one belonging to the deity and concealed inside an artificial hill.

In the Greek culture, the underground temple was known as Adyton — the Holy of Holies, an inaccessible sanctuary, located under the temple. There is no doubt that the Greeks cherished this tradition, inherited from the Cretan-Mycenaean and Ancient East cultures. Arthur Evans discovered similar structures during his excavations in Crete, and one can trace a fraction of the stereobate on a piece of vase from the Heraklion Museum, with a human figure inside a sanctuary. There are Minoan gems that represent a clearly visible masonry of the stereobate that replace a hill with an artificial platform.

A visible temple above the ground copied an invisible one - its underground counterpart? And together they made an entity, where the stereobate emulated a hill with a temple of God, hidden from the mortals. Later on, through the 10th to the 12th centuries BC, this vertical pattern somehow lost its meaning, the underground temple was moved up to the dark cell, and the whole sanctuary was transformed into a horizontal axial composition. Ultimately, this transition produced a strong impact on the spatial pattern of the Greek temple, so that some memories of the Minoan past could still be seen in the remains of Classic Greece.

Key words: stereobate, ancient temple, Adyton, Greek culture.

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