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CHANGING TOWARDS PERMANENCE IN THE ANCIENT GREEK BUILTSCAPE

The idea of builtspace that prevails in the ancient greek builtspace is the product of a wise and sensitive interchange with a landscape possessing a dramatically crystalline physiognomy. Greek landscape endures the persistent brightness of greek light and the sheer transparency of greek atmosphere. It creates a variety of limited, bounded, clearly defined spaces. Spaces that, through the reading, assimilating, and responding of man, are becoming places. Places that, through their builtscapes, are reflecting the syntactic structure and the physiognomy of landscape. Nurtured by a genuinely anthropocentric cosmotheory it developed into a clearly structured archetype: a "theatroid" enclosure (builtspace) bounded by orthogonal buildings (builtforms) and meaningfully interconnected with landscape.

The Agora gives an eloquent example of the idea of builtspace and relationship of builtspace and landscape in ancient Greece. Its development since archaic times up to hellenistic years epitomizes the etymology, syntactic structure, and perceptual organization of ancient Greek builtspace. An analysis of the perceptual organization of its landscape and builtspace (archaic-classical-hellenistic) testifies to that:

1. LANDSCAPE

a. Arrangement. The Agora lies north of the Areopagus and east of the Kolonos Agoraios. The ground slopes gently downwards to the bed of the Eridanos river on the north, and upwards to Acropolis and Lycabettus on the southeast and east. A "theatroid" (landscape) is defined by the "conoids" (landforms) of the hills. These "conoids" will be always present in the organization of the Agora infusing its builtspace with meaning, orientation, and identification.

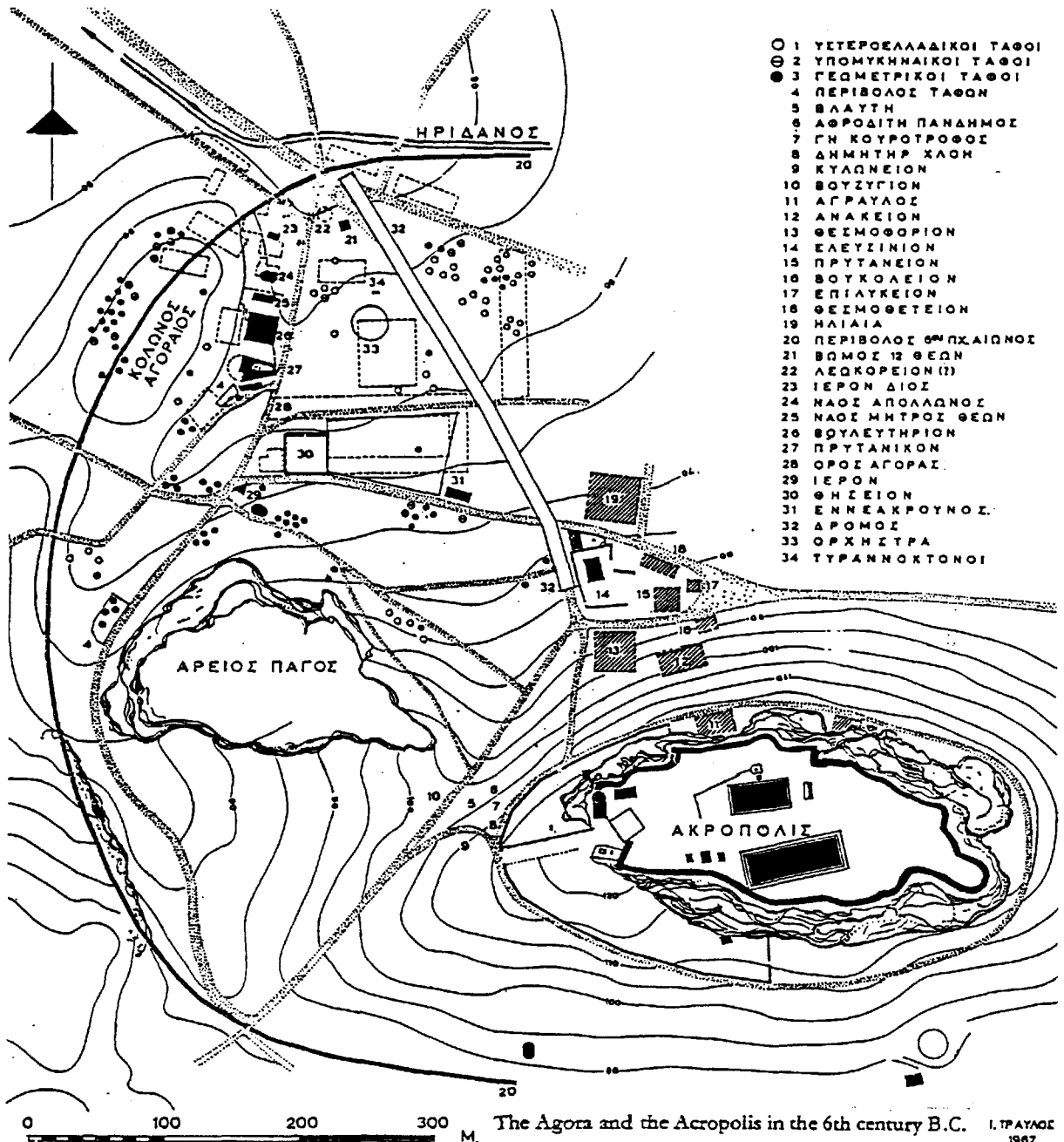
b. Spatial Organization: A system of "boundary limits" (landforms) and a system of "reference in space" (landscape) create the specific state and relation of space and mass (form) in the landscape of the Agora. A main horizontal plane is formed among the hills, which is connected with other landscapes through three paths running from northwest to southeast, northeast to south, and west to east. From prehistoric times on this was the place where the Athenians came together to celebrate festivals and to hold contests in honour of their heroes and ancestors.

c. Geometric Organization: The geometric features of spatial organization and the relation of space and mass (form) define the "pattern of geometric organization" of the landscape of the Agora-"CONOID (Volume)-THEATROID (enclosure)".

2. BUILTSCAPE

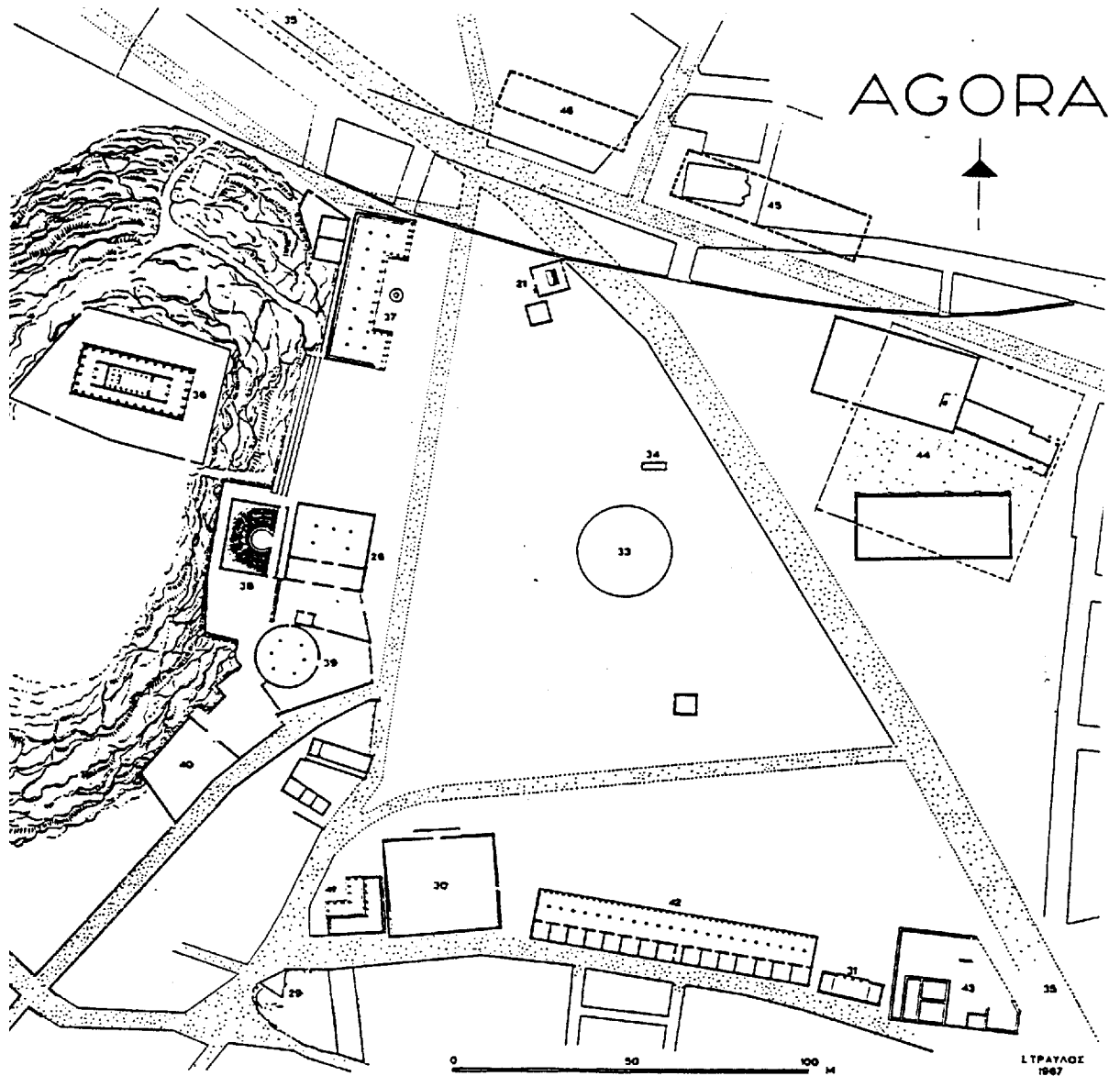
A. ARCHAIC

a. Arrangement: The Kolonos Agoraios (hill), the most definite "boundary limit" of the landscape of the Agora, attracts the first human response, the most important "boundary limit" of the builtspace of the Agora. A terrace is created at the southeast foot of the Kolonos Agoraios, supported by a retaining wall built along the west side of the western path, and a row of public buildings and shrines is built upon it. The Altar of the Twelve Gods on the north and the Heliaia on the south complete this first subtle expression of a built "theatroid" reflecting the natural one. In spite of the linear emphasis of the west side, the diagonal passage of the Panathenaic Way in front of it, as well as the two timid projections (Altar, Heliaia), do define a "theatroid".

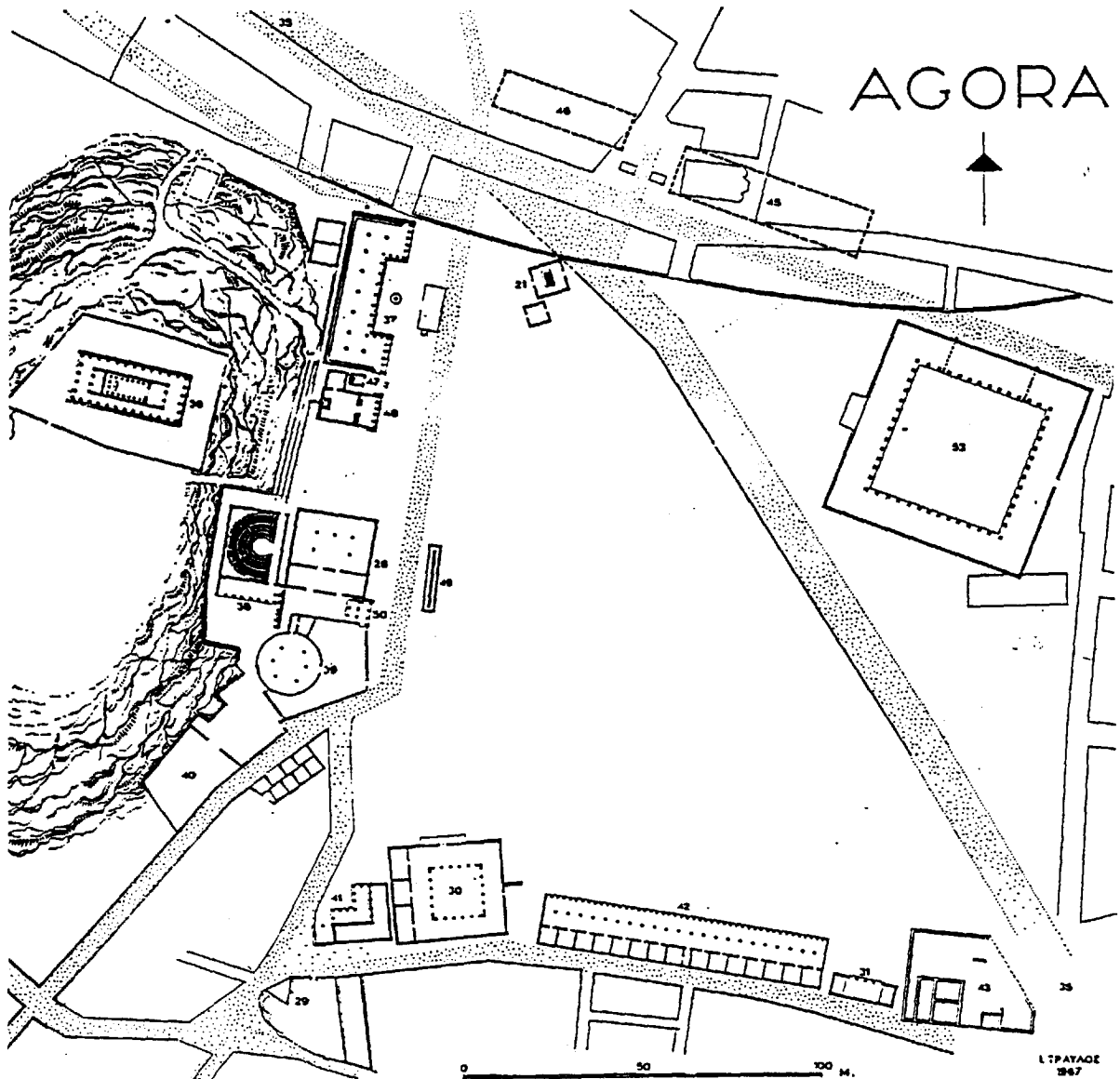


b. Spatial Organization: A system of "boundary limits" (builtforms) and a system of "reference in space" (builtspace) create the specific state and relation of space and mass (form) in the builtscapes of the Agora. The main natural horizontal plane becomes the main horizontal plane of the builtscapes and the paths channels of movement.

c. Geometric Organization: The geometric features of spatial organization and the relation of space and mass (form) define the "pattern of geometric organization" of the builtscapes of the Agora - "CONOID (volume) - THEATROID (enclosure)".



The Agora around the end of the 5th c. B.C.



The Agora circa the end of the 4th c. B.C.

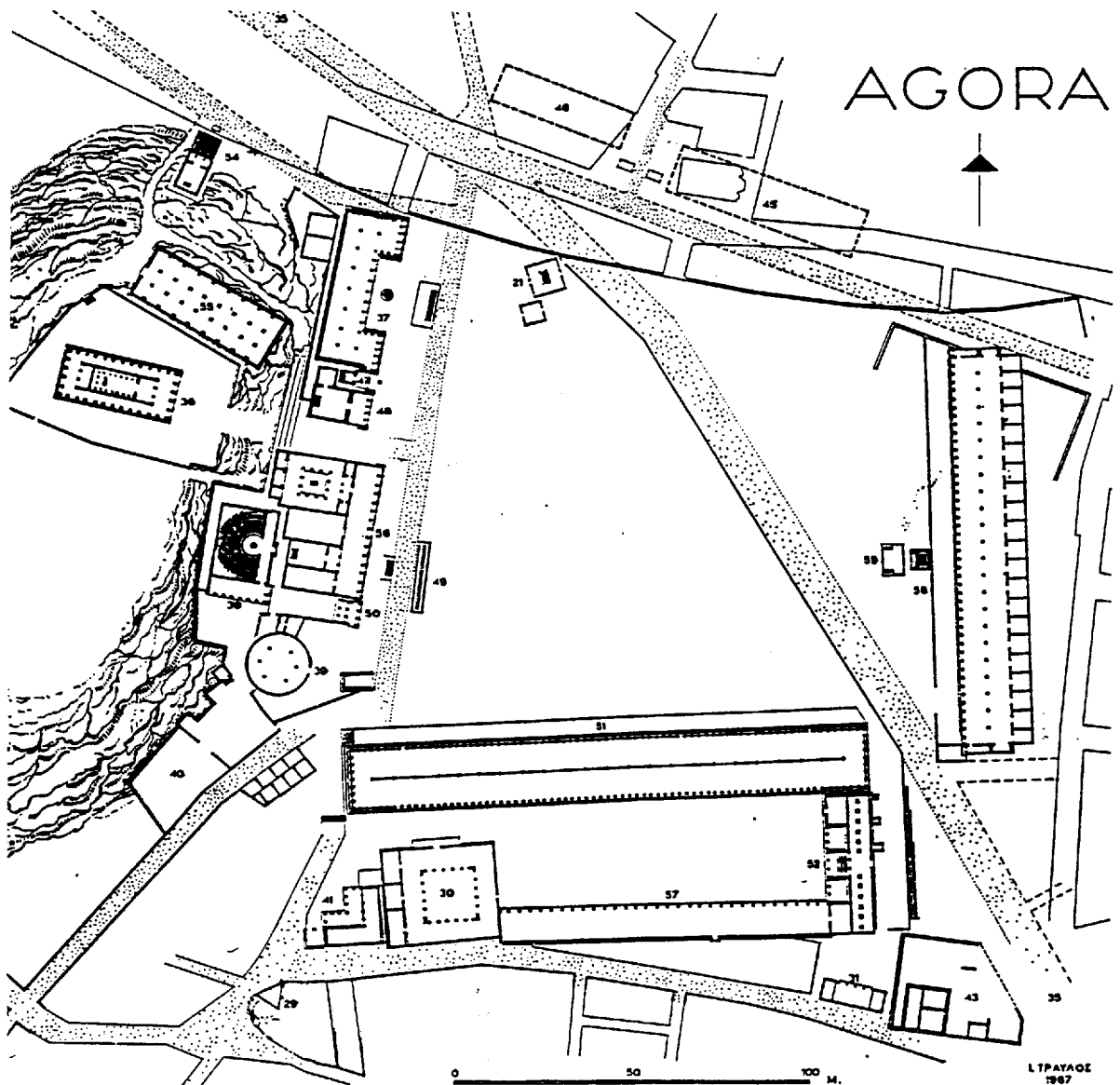
B. CLASSICAL

a. Arrangement: After its complete destruction by the Persians the Agora takes a fresh beginning, preserving memories of archaic stage. The same west side (along the southeast foot of the Kolonos Agoraios) is built first. The temple built on the Kolonos Agoraios, the impressive Hephaisteion, sets its powerful energy-lines into motion and becomes an ordering element of the builtscap.

The South Stoa, the fountain, and the Mint together with the Heliaia give to the Agora its south side. While the square building, the shops and workshops, and the Poikile Stoa form its north side. In this way, a definite "theatroid" is pronounced with inherent stimuli for further development and sharper definition.

b. Spatial Organization: The main horizontal plane of the builtscap is differentiated by the buildings ("boundary limits") and the paths in various parts (the central one where the orchestra for the theatrical performances is, the one between the Stoa of Zeus and the Old Bouleuterion, the one before the South Stoa, the one before the Poikile Stoa, the one before the shops and the Square building). The energy-line of Hephaisteion dictates the location of the orchestra and binds it into the spatial organization of the Agora. While the Panathenaic Way, receiving the energy-line of the Acropolis, binds the whole Agora into the spatial organization of the city.

c. Geometric Organization: the definition of the three sides of the builtscap of the Agora together with the energy-line of the Hephaisteion contribute to a clearer expression of the same "pattern of geometric organization"- "CONOID (volume)-THEATROID (enclosure)".



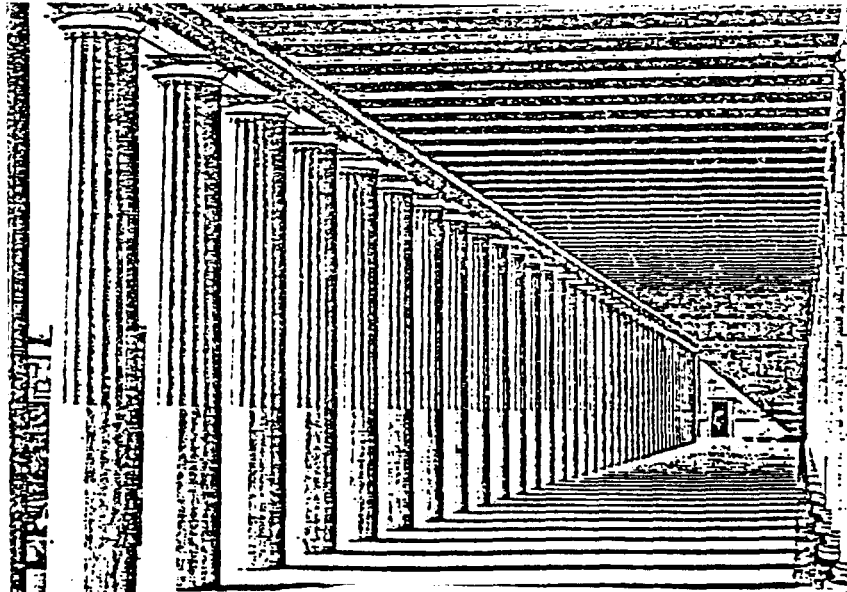
The Agora circa the mid-2nd c. B.C.

C. HELLENISTIC

a. Arrangement: In this period the built "theatroid" of the Agora reaches its full maturity. The Square building gives its place to the Stoa of Attalos, which defines very clearly the east side. The South Stoa is rebuilt at a different angle (to comply, together with the Stoa of Attalos, to the cardinal points and bind the Agora to the Order of the Cosmos), and the new Middle Stoa is added. In the west side the Metroon and the temple of Apollo Patroos contribute to its cohesion and, still, respect the energy-line of the Hephaisteion. Therefore, three concretely defined sides form the built "theatroid" of the Agora.

b. Spatial Organization: The Middle Stoa is an "intermediate limit" which together with the "boundary limits" differentiate the built space of the Agora in various parts (the central one, the one between the Middle and South Stoas, the one before the Stoa of Attalos). The energy-line of the Hephaisteion thrusts upon the middle of the Stoa of Attalos, dictating the position of the Statue of Attalos and the Bema, and bounces back to reach the monument of the Heponymous Heroes and the altar in front of the Metroon. The Bema becomes the important spot where Man experiences an ordered built space structurally connected to an ordered Universe.

c. Geometric Organization: The redefinition of the three sides of the Agora (with the building of the Stoa of Attalos, the rebuilding of the South Stoa, and the demolishing of the Square building), and the full employment of the energy-line of the Hephaisteion give to the same "pattern of geometric organization"-CONOID (volume) - THEATROID (enclosure), - its sharpest and most integrated definition.



The prevailing preference of Greek culture for a tangible existence on this earth rather than on some future paradise, supports the interlocking of the drama of space with the theater of place into a healthy, dynamic balance. Man and Nature coexist creatively (without losing their limits and identities). Landscape and built space complement each other justifying, thus, the existence of Cosmos.

REFERENCES

The drawings are taken from: John Travlos, *Pictorial Dictionary of Ancient Athens*, London: Thames & Hudson 1971, pp. 20-23.