

A Critical Reassessment of Building Delta on Delos

The building on the Greek island of Delos designated Building Delta by archaeologists has been identified as the bouleuterion, or seat of the city council.¹ This paper reassesses that identification, and based on a reanalysis of the evidence I propose an alternative.

That a bouleuterion existed on the island is clear from numerous inscriptions referring to the political institution of the boule and the structure in which it was housed.² These inscriptions, Building Delta's placement relative to public and sacred spaces, and hypotheses concerning the space within bouleuteria in general have led scholars to propose an identification of Building Delta as the bouleuterion.³

Like the identification of other political spaces on Delos, though, that of the bouleuterion is still largely open to debate. The lack of in-situ inscriptions and the unassuming, non-monumental appearance and numerous phases of the remains of Building Delta have created difficulties for archaeologists and scholars trying to identify the function of the original structure. Certain attributes of the structure are also rather unclear, such as the use of the interior space and the association of the building with an Archaic altar to Athena Polias incorporated into the structure,⁴ and scholars have not agreed on the dates of construction, chronology, phases, or even reconstructions. These problems are magnified by the lack of any definitive publication on the civic buildings on Delos and relatively scanty evidence for Greek civic buildings prior to the 5th century BC. Assessing the chronologies and phases of the building and correlating these with political episodes and changes in population of the island have also proven challenging. While relatively abundant epigraphic evidence on the functioning and tasks of the boule can shed some

¹ Bruneau 2005.

² Hellmann 1992; Chankowski 2008.

³ Étienne 2007; McDonald 1943.

⁴ McDonald 1943.

light on the council's meeting places as well as its chronology, too much weight has been placed on epigraphic evidence rather than archaeological data, and this has often driven the interpretation of the various construction phases and use of the buildings.

In this paper, I examine the issues surrounding this attribution. Concluding that Building Delta is unlikely to have been the bouleuterion, I propose an alternative identification for the structure, based on the date, physical appearance, size, location, history, comparanda, and epigraphic evidence for the structure. In reaching these conclusions, I reevaluate the development, historical background and location (especially in relation to urban space) of the building based on the sociopolitical context of Delos and Athens and the historical evidence of the Delian and Athenian institutions on the island. I attempt to ascertain whether the chronology of the structure tentatively identified as the bouleuterion, attested in the archaeological records, aligns with the epigraphic and historical evidence and whether we can accept the political functions assigned by scholars to Building Delta. I briefly assess whether the building resembles other structures classified as bouleuteria throughout the Greek world and the problems surrounding the identification of early Greek bouleuteria. Finally, I present evidence suggesting that Building Delta, rather than serving as a bouleuterion, may have instead have been a multifunctional hall and/or a seat of the sacred assemblies and magistrates.

Works Cited

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