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## The stone doors of the Erechtheion

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# ΛΑΒΡΥΣ

Studies presented to Pontus Hellström

Edited by

*Lars Karlsson*  
*Susanne Carlsson*  
*and*  
*Jesper Blid Kullberg*



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*Abstract*

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This volume contains studies on Classical Antiquity presented to Professor Pontus Hellström on his 75th birthday in January 2014. The 41 papers cover subjects ranging from the Etruscans and Rome in the west, to Greece, the landscape of Karia, and to the Sanctuary of Zeus at Labraunda. Many papers deal with new discoveries at Labraunda, but sites in the surrounding area, such as Alabanda, Iasos, and Halikarnassos are well represented, as well as Ephesos and Smyrna. Many architectural studies are included, and these examine both Labraundan buildings and topics such as masonry, Vitruvius, the Erechtheion, stoas, watermills, and Lelegian houses. Other papers deal with ancient coins, ancient music, Greek meatballs, and Karian theories on the origin of ancient Greece.

*Keywords:* Pontus Hellström, Labraunda, Karia, Ancient Turkey, sanctuary, Ancient Greece, Hellenistic, Roman, Hekatomnid, archaeological excavations

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# The stone doors of the Erechtheion

by  
*Henrik Gerding*

## Introduction

In 409 BCE the Athenian assembly decided to resume the construction of the temple of Athena Polias on the Acropolis, a temple which today is better known as the Erechtheion. We do not know exactly when work on this building first began,<sup>1</sup> but it was probably suspended after the disaster of the Sicilian expedition (415–413 BCE), and the temple was left unfinished for some years. In 409 BCE a commission was appointed to oversee the continued work, and one of their first tasks was to make a detailed report on the state of the building, establishing how far the work had progressed and what remained to be done. Their report was made public and has survived as an inscription on the so-called “Chandler Stele”.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, the stele was found in pieces and the inscription is not complete. The largest fragment, which represents about one-third of the entire text, was recovered by Richard Chandler on the Acropolis in 1765 and is presently housed in the British Museum. Some smaller fragments, which turned up later, remain in Athens. The stele was originally inscribed on both sides, but the reverse of the main fragment was regrettably lost when the block was extracted from its find location.

The surviving text can be summarized in the following way: at the top of the front is a heading (lines 1–7), which introduces the commission and their undertaking. This is followed by the main text, which is divided into two columns. The first column begins with a description of the building (lines 8–92), stating what has been done and what is missing. It reveals that, apart from the upper part of the south-west corner, the walls had been raised approximately to the level of the frieze. This description is followed by a list of finished blocks lying on the ground, giving their number and dimensions. However, after just a few lines the text is interrupted where the stele has been broken off. A small fragment shows that further down the inscription goes on recording the unfinished blocks lying on the ground. This part of the report also occupies the second column.

In the latter section, one item stands out from the rest, as it does not refer to ordinary building blocks (lines 194–199). These six lines mention four doors made of stone (θύραι λίθιναι). Each block is 8.25 ft high (c. 2.67 m)

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<sup>1</sup> The conventional start date for construction on the Erechtheion is 421 BCE, but earlier dates in the 430s have also been suggested (Dörpfeld 1919, 13–4; Dinsmoor 1932, 319; Korres 1997a, 243; Hurwit 2004, 174; Anderson & Dix 2004, 21–2).

<sup>2</sup> *IG I<sup>3</sup> 474*; Stevens *et al.* 1927, 277–321.

and 2.5 ft wide (c. 0.81 m).<sup>3</sup> At the time of the inspection they were complete except for black stones which were to be set in the cross-pieces (τὰ ζυγά). The dimensions indicate that the blocks were door leaves that constituted two sets of double doors. In this paper I will consider briefly the possible implications of these stone doors, where they were meant to be placed, and what function or meaning they might have had.

## The Erechtheion

In the thorough, and in-many-respects brilliant, publication of the Erechtheion from 1927, edited by James Paton, it is concluded that the doors mentioned in the inscription do not fit any known opening in the building.<sup>4</sup> As a consequence, the authors hypothesized that the stone doors belonged to two adjacent doorways in an interior cross-wall in the western part of the building (*Fig. 1A*). The doors would correspond to two chambers separated by another, longitudinal wall. In the 6th century CE the Erechtheion was converted into a Christian church, and the interior of the building was completely transformed. The suggested longitudinal partition wall has left no trace whatsoever, but the western cross-wall is still evident in the foundations. Many of its foundation blocks can actually be attributed to the Roman period, but it is generally believed that the Roman cross-wall was preceded by an identical and original Greek wall.<sup>5</sup> It is established that the wall could not have reached all the way up to the ceiling, and it is therefore best described as a screen wall. Three arguments are raised in support of the existence of the longitudinal partition wall:

1. There is a slight difference between the orthostat levels in the north and south walls of the Erechtheion; a partition wall could be used to conceal this discrepancy.
2. With two interior rooms in the west part, the ground plan of the Erechtheion would have mirrored that of the Old Athena Temple, the so-called “Dörpfeld Foundations”.
3. The existence of two interior rooms might explain the doors mentioned in the inscription.

However, none of these arguments are decisive, and their usage often approaches a circular reasoning. Consequently, the suggested interior arrangement was challenged by John Travlos, among others; he interpreted the western cross-wall as a Roman addition and he denied the existence of a longitudinal partition wall altogether.<sup>6</sup> Instead, Travlos argued that the stone doors belonged to two small *adyta* in the west part of the Erechtheion, one of which contained the ancient image of Athena.

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<sup>3</sup> For the length of the Erechtheion foot standard, see Pakkanen 2006.

<sup>4</sup> Stevens *et al.* 1927, 158. *Pace* Lesk 2005, 75f.

<sup>5</sup> Stevens *et al.* 1927, 151.

<sup>6</sup> Travlos 1971a, 213; Travlos 1971b, 83. Jens Bundgaard (1976, 160f.) rejected both the partition wall and the western cross-wall. Cf. Mansfield 1985, 212; Lesk 2005, 73–75; Gerding 2006, 394.

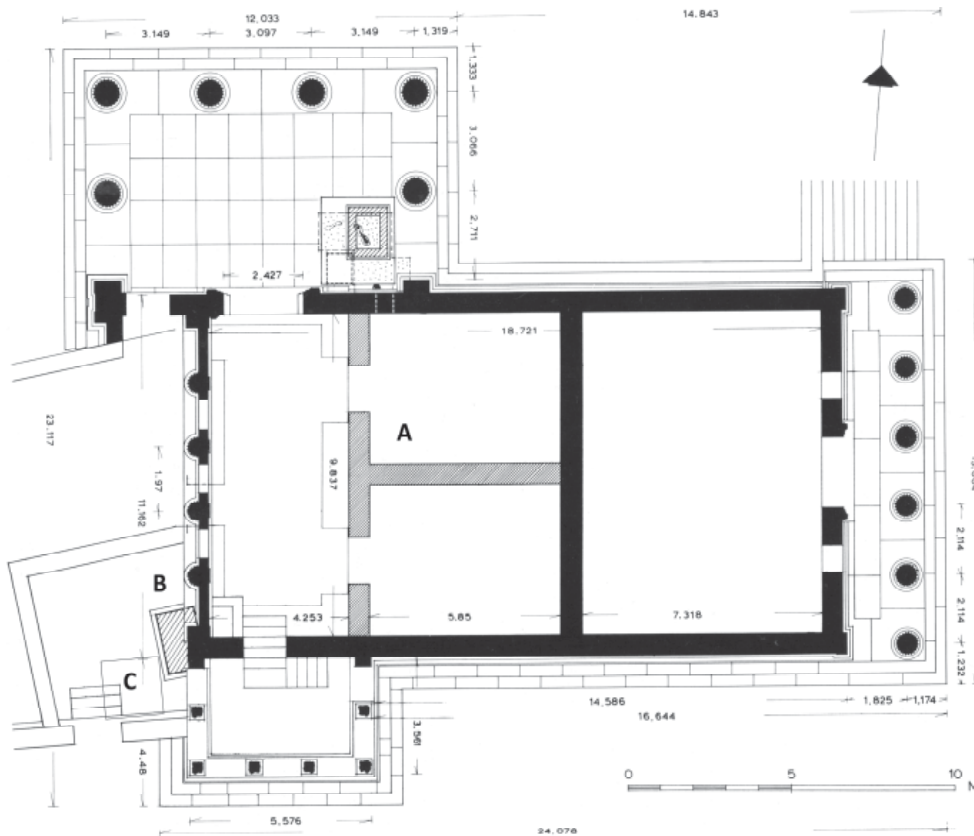


Fig. 1. Reconstructed plan of the Erechtheion. A. Hypothetical arrangement of the western cross-wall and longitudinal partition wall. B. Location of the Early Classical monument of Kekrops according to G.P. Stevens. C. Traces of the Late Archaic monument of Kekrops according to M. Korres. (Modified from Travlos 1971a, fig. 280).

This proposal has also been criticized.<sup>7</sup> Another solution, which was advanced by George Roux, has not received the attention it deserves.<sup>8</sup> According to him, the doors mentioned in the Chandler inscription may have been false doors meant to be fitted against the back wall of the western part of the Erechtheion. Since we cannot hope to find any conclusive evidence regarding the interior layout of the Erechtheion, I would like to approach the problem from a different angle: why would there be stone doors in the Erechtheion at all? Even if there is nothing that contradicts the hypothesis of a screen wall with two inner rooms, there is still one problem: there is no other example of stone doors in a Greek temple.

## Temple doors

Admittedly, our knowledge of temple doors may still improve,<sup>9</sup> but all the evidence at hand indicates that they were made of wood or bronze, and were sometimes decorated with ivory or precious metals. Epigraphic and

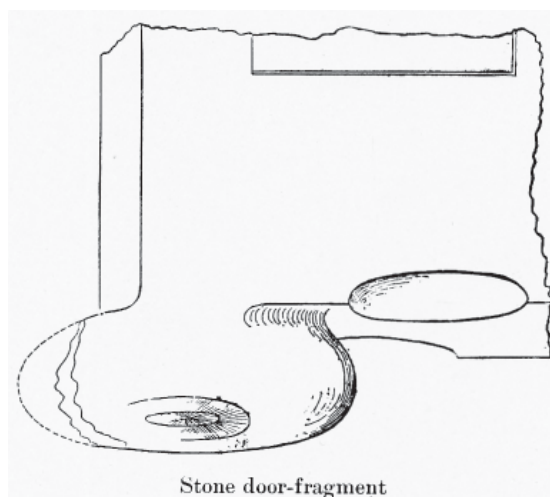
<sup>7</sup> Overbeck 1972.

<sup>8</sup> Roux 1989, 275.

<sup>9</sup> On early Greek doors, see Büsing-Kolbe 1978.

literary sources provide some information: the building accounts for the temple of Asklepios at Epidauros, from about 370 BCE, specifies the materials and costs for the elaborate wooden doors.<sup>10</sup> They were to be made of elm, lotus, and box-wood, and decorated with ivory. The cost for the ivory alone was 3070 drachmas. The specifications for the arsenal at Peiraeus (c. 347 BCE) mention bronze-clad doors.<sup>11</sup> Although this was a secular building, it was of a size and importance comparable to that of a temple. The temple of Zeus at Olympia is described by Pausanias as having bronze doors.<sup>12</sup> They probably had a wooden core covered with bronze sheets, as in the case of the arsenal, but the possibility of hollow bronze doors should not be excluded. Both techniques are known from the Roman period.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, the fire damage found on lintels and door jambs on many temples indicate that the door leaves in question were made of flammable materials.

There is one alleged example of a stone door from a Greek sanctuary: in the so-called “West building” at the Argive Heraion, the excavators of the late 19th century found what they believed to be a fragment of a stone door (*Fig. 2*).<sup>14</sup> Thus, Stevens and his co-authors could point to a possible parallel to the doors inside the Erechtheion. However, the identification of the fragment is doubtful. The presumed pivot has a flat disc-like shape, which only serves to increase the friction. The fact that the pivot is wider than the door leaf also means that there would have been a substantial gap between the door leaf and the frame. Moreover, it is made in one piece with the rest of the door. When this find was made very few Greek stone doors had been actually published. Now we know that in order to render stone doors usable, the Greeks hinged them on bronze pivots that were inserted into the door leaves.



*Fig. 2.* Marble fragment from the so-called “West building” at the Argive Heraion. (Waldstein 1902, pl. 26).

<sup>10</sup> *IG IV*<sup>2</sup> 102.44–67.

<sup>11</sup> *IG II*<sup>2</sup> 1668.

<sup>12</sup> Paus 5.10.10.

<sup>13</sup> The doors of the Pantheon and the Curia had a wooden core covered by bronze; the bronze doors of the Temple of Romulus were hollow (Walsh 1983, 45).

<sup>14</sup> Waldstein 1906, 132, pl. 26.

According to the present author, the fragment from the “West building” instead belongs to a piece of stone furniture—a couch or, more likely, a stone chair. The best parallels for the circular knob are found in depictions of throne-like seats.<sup>15</sup> Today the “West building” is identified as a *hestatorion*, a building for banquets,<sup>16</sup> but the excavators first argued that it might have been a treasury and that the stone door was used for security reasons. It is questionable whether this argument can be applied at all. Stone has a low tensile strength and, unless they are made with a considerable thickness, stone doors break easily. Very few stone doors are found intact. A wooden door of equal thickness would actually be stronger, and its strength may be improved even further with a coating of bronze. Metal grilles in front of the doorways were also used to increase security in treasuries at Delphi. In any case, we have no evidence that the Erechtheion was ever used as a treasury,<sup>17</sup> and the doors in question are believed to have been set into a screen wall, which could have easily been climbed. Needless to say, stone doors are much heavier than wooden ones—each of the door leaves mentioned in the Chandler inscription would have weighed close to 600 kg—and for this reason alone they must be considered impractical for regular use.

## Stone doors in sepulchral contexts

Stone doors were not unknown to the Greeks, however. As I have already implied, a great number of them have been found. Unfortunately, there is no complete study on the subject yet, but one important observation can be made nevertheless: stone doors always belong to sepulchral monuments.<sup>18</sup> This unconditional statement relies on negative evidence, and may be disproved in the future. Still, there is no doubt that stone doors are intimately connected with funerary architecture. Rock-cut or built chamber tombs, sealed with a simple stone slab or a plug-like block, can be found all over the Mediterranean from the very earliest times. Stone doors that were meant to imitate wooden ones, however, first appear in the royal tombs of Pasargadae and Persepolis, and were used from Cyrus the Great down to Artaxerxes III.<sup>19</sup> Only a few door leaves have actually been found, but due to the similarities in doorframes and sockets, it can be safely assumed that they all looked basically the same (*Fig. 3*). They were double doors, swinging on pivots, with a sliding latch on the inside which could be turned by a key.

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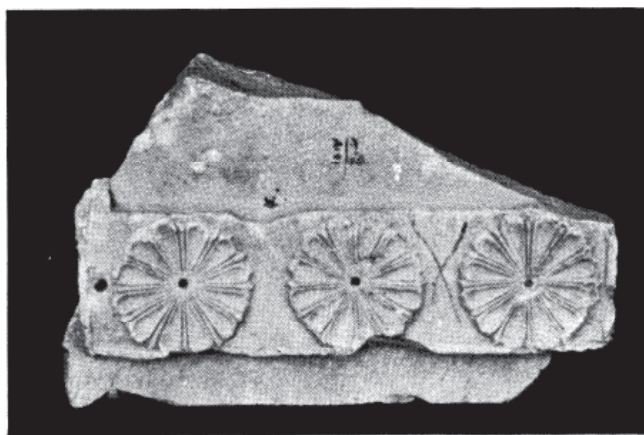
<sup>15</sup> Similar circular knobs can be seen, for example, on a seated terracotta figurine from Lokroi Epizephyrioi (Pick 1917, 208 fig. 4). Cf. Richter 1966.

<sup>16</sup> See e.g. Miller 1973, 9.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Linders 2007, 782. This also weakens the argument that the plan of the Erechtheion should mirror that of the Old Athena Temple; the function of the rear part (the *Opisthodomos*) as a treasury was not retained in the new temple but transferred to the Parthenon.

<sup>18</sup> The mention of a stone door in the inventory of the Neorion at Delos is merely an amendment, one which has been questioned by Roux (1989, 275; cf. *SEG* 37.692).

<sup>19</sup> Stronach 1967; 1978; Krefter 1968.



A.—FRAGMENT OF DOOR LEAF. FRONT VIEW

Fig. 3. Fragment of a Persian stone door. (Stronach 1978, fig. A).

The use of stone for an architectural element that was normally made of wood can be attributed to the liminal character of the tomb. Stone is a material that has the potential to resist time and was fitting for the eternal resting place of a king. Literary and iconographic sources describe Persian funerary cult, indicating that the door was the focal point for the rituals.<sup>20</sup> Apparently, members of the Persian nobility took their funerary customs with them to the western satrapies where local rulers emulated the court of the Great King. The monumental tomb at Taş Kule near Phokaea has been dated to the early 5th century BCE and attributed to a Persian aristocrat.<sup>21</sup> The doorway leading to the sepulchral chamber is relatively modest, but instead a much larger false door has been cut into the main facade. In front of it is a typical Persian fire altar, but the concept of the false door may have been picked up from local funerary practices.

At least from the 6th century BCE, and well into the Roman period, door stelai were set up as funerary monuments all over western Anatolia, particularly in the Phrygian inland. The phenomenon has been studied in depth by Marc Waelkens and Christopher Roosevelt, amongst others.<sup>22</sup> In many cases the door stelai are set up in front of tumuli, where the tomb itself is inaccessible, and constitute both markers and foci for grave cult. The direction of influences is not entirely clear, but the symbolic importance of the door is evident on Persian grave reliefs from Daskyleion,<sup>23</sup> and the inscriptions of some door stelai even give the names of Persian dignitaries.<sup>24</sup> The provincial capitals of Sardis and Daskyleion were melting pots where Persian, Anatolian, and Greek art and culture blended into a vivid mix.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, it is not surprising that stone doors made in typical Greek style have been found in this area as well. However, in some cases the carved stone blocks imitate double doors but

<sup>20</sup> Borchhardt 1968, 201–203; Büsing-Kolbe 1978, 119–121; Waelkens 1986, 26.

<sup>21</sup> Cahill 1988.

<sup>22</sup> Waelkens 1986; Roosevelt 2006. Cf. Jes 1997.

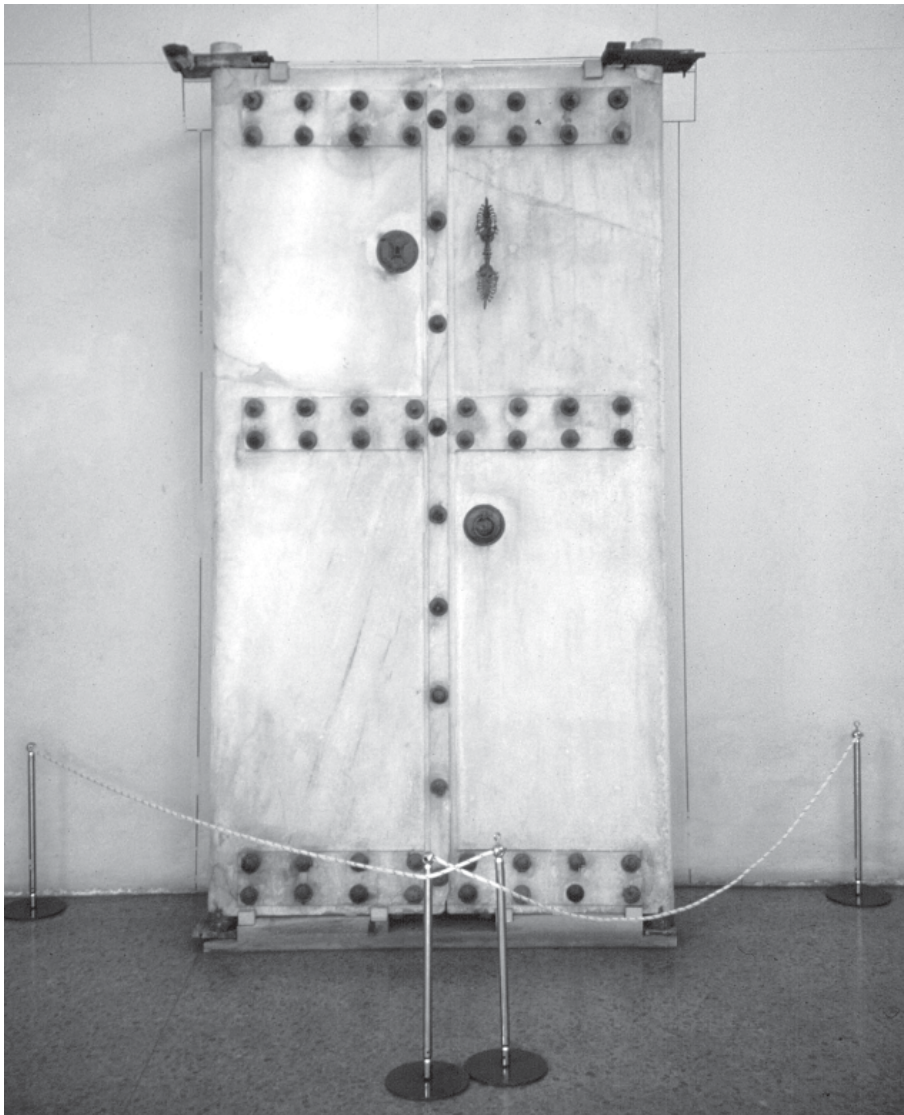
<sup>23</sup> See *supra* n. 20.

<sup>24</sup> Altheim-Stiehl & Cremer 1985.

<sup>25</sup> North-west Anatolia was gradually Persianized from 480 BCE, and particularly in the second half of the 5th century BCE (Kaptan 2003, 200).

are made in one piece, and it is difficult to say whether they were functional doors, false doors or merely stelai.<sup>26</sup>

From the end of the 5th century BCE, when monumental funerary architecture in the Greek style developed in Lykia and Karia, the stone door was an essential element both in freestanding heroa and rock-cut temple facades, as for example in the so-called “tomb of Amyntas” at Telmessos.<sup>27</sup> The greater part of the monumental door is hewn out of the rock, but the lower left panel was cut through and closed by a single door leaf. In this case it was a sliding door, but in other similar graves bronze pivots were used.<sup>28</sup> Stone doors are also found in many Macedonian tombs.<sup>29</sup> The most famous are perhaps those found in a royal tomb at Vergina, dating from the second half of the 4th century BCE (*Fig. 4*).



*Fig. 4.* Stone doors from the Macedonian royal tomb at Vergina. (Photo by the author).

<sup>26</sup> See e.g. Mendel 1912, 355.

<sup>27</sup> Akurgal 1961, 129–132; Büsing-Kolbe 1978, 115f.

<sup>28</sup> Roos 1971.

<sup>29</sup> For Macedonian tombs with stone doors, see Macridy 1911; Samsaris 1989–1990; Miller 1993, 8.

Of particular interest are the small attachments on the cross-pieces, which imitate the heads of nails used on wooden doors. In this case they are made of bronze. The Erechtheion inscription mentions black stones. Similar doors were used for many centuries and can be found in the Heroon at Kalydon, from the second half of the 2nd century BC, for example.<sup>30</sup> Other types also developed, however, like the ones kept at the museum at Um Quias in Jordan, ancient Gadara. These doors belong to Late Hellenistic tombs located in the vicinity of the city. Although stone doors are particularly frequent in Asia Minor, they can be found in many other parts of the Greek world, and also in Thrace and Etruria.<sup>31</sup>

Stone doors, false doors, and door stelai are variations of the same theme, and the popularity of the door motif can be explained by the multivalency of its symbolic content, whether it is regarded as a representation of the grave, or the *domus aeterna* of the deceased, as a passageway for the spirits, or as a gate to the underworld.<sup>32</sup> Considering the very clear Persian origin, it is likely that it also had a royal connotation, although it may have been diluted with time. In one Macedonian tomb, the so-called “Great tomb” at Lefkadia, the door motif is used in a repetitive way, approaching the ornamental.<sup>33</sup>

## The Kekropion—Significance and location

Built monumental tombs are rare in mainland Greece before the 4th century BCE, but there is reason to believe that the architecture of the Erechtheion included a distinct sepulchral aspect or even an actual tomb. Several literary and epigraphic sources show that Erichthonios, a mythological figure and the supposed grandfather of Erechtheus, was believed to have been buried in the temple of Athena Polias.<sup>34</sup> In reality, Erechtheus and Erichthonios are intimately connected, and they were probably confused with each other even in Classical times. The so-called “trident mark” of Poseidon, described by Pausanias, is usually associated with the death of Erechtheus, and it has been suggested that the North Porch of the Erechtheion actually constituted his cenotaph.<sup>35</sup> There is an even stronger candidate, though. Adjacent to the west wall of the Erechtheion was an area, or a structure, known as the Kekropion. Like Erechtheus and Erichthonios, Kekrops was a mythical king of Athens. He is sometimes considered the founder of the city, and is regarded as a central figure of Athenian mythology. We will start by taking a look at the written evidence for the Kekropion.

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<sup>30</sup> Dyggve, Poulsen & Rhomaios 1934, 50f.

<sup>31</sup> Thracian tombs with stone doors: Golyama Arsenalka, Griffins tumulus, Helvetia tumulus and Shushmanets tumulus (Kitov 1996; all dated to the late 5th century BCE). Etruscan tomb with stone doors: Tomba del colle Casuccini (early 5th century BCE?).

<sup>32</sup> ‘Totenhausgedanke’ and ‘Grabhäuser’: Waelkens 1986, 25f. Passageway for the spirit of the deceased: Tritsch 1943. Symbolic gate to the Netherworld: Bianchi 1976, 12.

<sup>33</sup> Miller 1993, pl. 1c.

<sup>34</sup> For a compilation of the sources, see Mansfield 1985, 213.

<sup>35</sup> E.g. Kron 1976, 43–48.

The so-called “Hekatompedon inscription” is dated to the early 5th century BCE and relates religious regulations on the Acropolis. The Kekropion is mentioned here as a landmark in the description of a larger sacred area.<sup>36</sup> It is an amendment, but it is considered to be quite certain. In the report of the commission regarding the state of the Erechtheion, the Caryatid Porch is called “the porch adjoining to the Kekropion”.<sup>37</sup> This gives us the exact location. A third inscription, dating from the 4th century BCE (334/3 BCE), was to be set up at the shrine of Kekrops (*to hieron tou Kekropos*).<sup>38</sup> Finally, the indirectly transmitted testimony of the historian Antiochos tells us that the tomb (*taphos*) of Kekrops was located on the Acropolis of Athens.<sup>39</sup> One of our secondary sources, Clemens of Alexandria, goes even further:

These temples – for I will not keep silence even about them, but will expose them also – are called by a fair-sounding name, but in reality they are tombs. But I appeal to you, even at this late hour forget daemon-worship, feeling ashamed to honour tombs. In the temple of Athena in the Acropolis at Larissa there is the tomb of Acrisius; and in the Acropolis at Athens the tomb of Cecrops, as Antiochus says in his ninth book of *Histories*. And what of Erichthonius? Does he not lie in the temple of Athena Polias?<sup>40</sup>

The alleged tomb of Erichthonios cannot be located today, but the tomb of Kekrops must be identical with the Kekropion. Both Kekrops and Erechtheus belong to the ten eponymous phyle-heroes of Athens. Most of them, probably all of them, had their own shrine, and it is reasonable to assume that several of these shrines were located at the presumed grave of the hero. Pausanias, for example, tells us that “there is at Athens a hero-shrine to Aigeus”, another eponymous hero.<sup>41</sup> The Kekropion, thus, seems to have been a combined tomb/shrine, and it was located very close to the Caryatid Porch of the Erechtheion, probably adjoining it.

Even though the location of the Kekropion can be established with some precision, there are no physical remains of it today. When restoration work first began on the Acropolis in the 1830s it was feared that the Caryatid Porch would collapse. The earth directly beneath the south-west corner was cleared away in order to support the building with a rubble wall. This wall was later replaced by a steel structure. The general area to the west of the Erechtheion was excavated by Pittakis in 1859. No documents related to the early restoration work or the excavation have been published, but it is reported in a secondary source that Pittakis found “*viele Antiken*”,<sup>42</sup> an expression that might also include architectural elements.

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<sup>36</sup> *IG I*<sup>3</sup> 4B.10.

<sup>37</sup> *IG I*<sup>3</sup> 474 lines 58–59, 62–63, 83–89. In all three cases the preposition *πρός* is used with the dative (“by”), as noted by Mansfield (1985, 228 n. 13).

<sup>38</sup> *IG II*<sup>2</sup> 1156, 34–36.

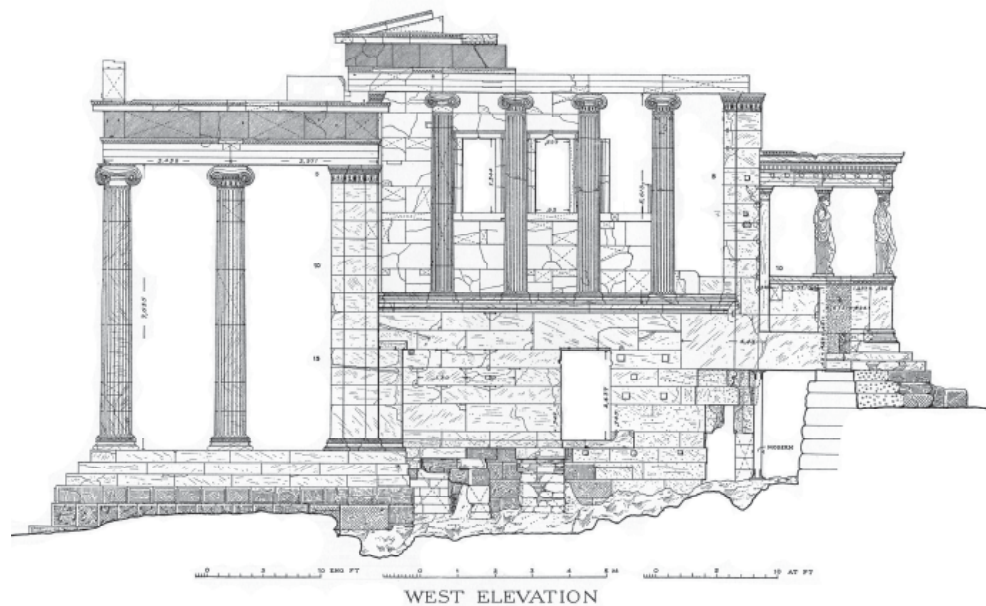
<sup>39</sup> Antiochos Pherekydes *FrGrH* 333 F1.

<sup>40</sup> Clem. Al. *Protr.* 3.45 (English translation by G.W. Butterworth 1919). Cf. Apollod. 3.14.7.1.

<sup>41</sup> Paus. 1.22.5.

<sup>42</sup> Kavvadias & Kawerau 1906, 14.

Instead, we have to look at the Erechtheion itself, where it is supposed to have adjoined the Kekropion. The measured drawings made by G.P. Stevens and published in 1927 are still the best available documentation of the Erechtheion (*Fig. 5*). Both the foundation and the upper part of this wall display a number of oddities. In the west elevation we see the Caryatid Porch to the right and the large North Porch to the left. Between them, a row of engaged columns stand on a wall with a small entrance leading into the west cella. The filling between the columns is part of the Roman alteration of the temple. Originally, the intermediate spaces were open, apart from a low balustrade. The situation at the lower south-west corner, which was carefully examined by Stevens, is complicated. The following account only conveys the most important features.



*Fig. 5.* West elevation of the Erechtheion. (Stevens *et al.* 1927, pl. 4).

The first peculiarity is visible in the foundation. The two bottom courses stop about 1.3 m short of the south corner. The end surfaces of the blocks are rough but exhibit Greek tooling (*Fig. 6*). Thus, we know that they are not broken and that there were no adjacent blocks. The next course, however, ends with a broken block, which appears to have been similar to the following three blocks above. These extended all the way to the corner, but they were cut back on the outside so that their thickness diminished towards the southern end. Inside the Erechtheion the wall looked normal, but in reality the lower section of the corner only had a thin stone coating. Next comes an enormous block. It spans the distance between the main body of the Erechtheion and the terrace of the Old Athena Temple and carries the west side of the Caryatid Porch. However, it also redirects the load of the entire south-west corner away from the weakened foundation. This also explains why the last foundation blocks were made of marble, instead of the usual poros stone—a harder material was required to cope with the concentrated load.



*Fig. 6.* The lower part of the south-west corner of the Erechtheion. (Photo by the author).

The entire construction is cumbersome, expensive, and hazardous; it was the discovery of a crack in the huge block that necessitated the interventions in 1837. Ancient Greek architects are well known for their devotion to solid foundations and their determination to take them down to bedrock. Only the most compelling motive would cause them to consciously undermine an important structure at such a critical point. It seems probable that the solution here does not correspond to the original plan, but is the result of a forced alteration. Stevens explained the anomalies as due to "...serious, and perhaps rather unexpected, hindrance

to normal construction...”.<sup>43</sup> Later he modified his view slightly, and posited that the Erechtheion was adapted to an earlier known structure, the Kekropion.<sup>44</sup> The aim would have been to leave the existing edifice untouched and unaltered.

## The Kekropion—Previous reconstructions

There are different theories on the nature of this edifice, but most scholars agree that it was some kind of free-standing monument, commemorating or marking the presumed grave of Kekrops. Stevens believed that the three oblique blocks in the west wall of the Erechtheion were cut back as a negative formwork around the monument in question (*Fig. 1B*).<sup>45</sup> This hypothesis, which has attracted many adherents, implies a small rectangular structure. It would have been situated on a level slightly below the central terrace. The area was probably delimited by a sacred enclosure. Out of respect for Kekrops’ grave, as it seems, the architect of the Erechtheion made every possible effort to keep the monument undisturbed.

What kind of monument was it then? The rectangular structure might have been some kind of altar, or a base. The latter alternative fits well with the findings of Manolis Korres.<sup>46</sup> He has identified a large Ionic capital, which was reused in the north wall of the Acropolis, as a part of an Archaic grave marker. This votive column was 1.4 m in diameter, 11 m high, and erected at the end of the 6th or beginning of 5th century BCE. Foundations (2 x 2 m) for the column were taken down to bedrock next to the Old Athena Temple, leaving traces both in the ground and in the adjacent foundation wall (*Fig. 1C*). The column was destroyed in the Persian sack, and according to Korres a new marker (pillar, column or stele) was raised beside the old one and it was this one that was interfering with the Erechtheion.

Now, we might ask ourselves: Why would the architect knowingly design the Erechtheion so that it came into conflict with an existing monument? All he had to do was to lay the west wall two feet further east; alternatively he could have had the marker moved back to its original position (where the votive column had been standing). Either way he would have saved himself and the builders a lot of trouble. In fact, it has already been argued by William Dinsmoor that the west wall was moved 26 in to the east after construction had begun.<sup>47</sup> However, these measures were obviously not enough to completely avoid the problematic situation at the south-west corner.

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<sup>43</sup> Stevens *et al.* 1927, 127.

<sup>44</sup> Stevens 1946, 93–97.

<sup>45</sup> Stevens *et al.* 1927, 130; 1946, 93–97. Scholl (1995) has argued for an interpretation of the Caryatid Porch as a funerary monument over Kekrops, but the epigraphic sources make it clear that the porch is distinct from the Kekropion.

<sup>46</sup> Korres 1997b. Cf. Korres 1994, 40f.; MacGowan 1995.

<sup>47</sup> Dinsmoor 1950, 192. Cf. Dörpfeld 1904, 105.

The post-Persian monument commemorating Kekrops, conjectured by Stevens and Korres, must have been visible and well known to the builders before the construction of the Erechtheion commenced,<sup>48</sup> but all the evidence indicates that the foundation was adapted to an obstacle that was *not* previously known.

## An alternative hypothesis

Considering the facts, it seems more likely that the builders of the Erechtheion, as they dug the foundation trench for the west wall, encountered something unexpected, which forced the architect to change his plans and resort to an unorthodox solution for the south-west corner of the building. Whatever they found, it could not be removed or incorporated in the foundation wall. According to the present author, this could only have been a tomb, and the reason that the builders were taken by surprise must have been that it was found on the very edge of, or perhaps even outside, the delimited area of the Kekropion; the Archaic monument stood several metres to the west.<sup>49</sup>

Could there have been an actual tomb below the Kekropion? The answer is yes. A total of nineteen cist graves from the Helladic and Sub-Mycenaean periods have been documented on the Acropolis, several of which were situated close to the Erechtheion. Most of them were children's graves, but at least one was of an adult.<sup>50</sup> As in all the previously known cases, the suggested grave under the south-west corner of the Erechtheion would have been made of stone slabs enclosing an inhumation. It would have rested directly on bedrock and measured less than 50 cm in height. This would explain the interruption of the two bottom courses. The cut-back blocks above, do not represent the shape of an adjoining structure, but were trimmed down to reduce the weight of the unsupported, projecting part. These stones actually constitute a series of cantilever blocks, the lowest of which had to be supported by a wooden beam until the weight of the following course could stabilize it. The socket for the beam is clearly visible (*Fig. 6*). Further up in the construction, the thickness of the wall is also diminished in order to minimize the load.<sup>51</sup>

It is tempting to imagine the baffled amazement of the builders as they suddenly and unsuspectingly came across the bones of what they believed to be the founder of the city. Undoubtedly, work was immediately brought to a halt and priests notified. Plans were adjusted, and the incident probably raised the question of refurbishing the Kekropion. Whatever its nature was, the original monument was most probably left in a damaged state since the Persian sack, and the disclosure of the actual grave, would

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<sup>48</sup> Cf. Korres 1994, fig. on p. 47; Korres 1997b, 102.

<sup>49</sup> It should be remembered that only the existence of an Archaic monument/marker has been verified, whereas the early Classical one is still purely conjectural.

<sup>50</sup> Gauß & Ruppenstein 1998. See also Kavvadias & Kawerau 1906, 32; Kurtz & Boardman 1971, 32; Bundgaard 1974, 10–12.

<sup>51</sup> Stevens *et al.* 1927, 306f.

have provided an occasion to enhance the architectural articulation of the hero-shrine.

This could have been achieved by erecting a monumental peribolos tomb of the kind that was getting popular in the Kerameikos precisely at this time.<sup>52</sup> Peribolos tombs are basically square grave mounds where the emphasis is put on the retaining wall, in particular on the front wall. They served the twofold purpose of delimiting the designated sepulchral area and containing the burials within. In the case of the Kekropion we might imagine well-built ashlar walls, nearly 3 m high, crowned by decorated coping.<sup>53</sup> These walls were only required on the north and west sides of the peribolos, as the foundations of the Old Athena Temple and the west wall of the Erechtheion would have made up the south and east sides, respectively. It can be noted that the exterior surface of the latter wall, to the south of the small doorway, never received its final treatment. Some blocks were left rough and the lifting bosses were not trimmed down. Apparently this part of the wall was not meant to be seen.<sup>54</sup> Within these retaining walls an earth fill protected the burial and provided a platform for votives and phyle inscriptions. The new structure would have gone up together with the lower part of the Erechtheion, and was probably more or less complete at the time of the commission's report, except, possibly for some ornaments and fixtures, such as the (false) doors.

## Some parallels

There are no comparable examples of monumental heroa from Classical Athens, but if we look further away, we might find some interesting parallels. Two of these are found outside Sparta. The sanctuary known as the Menelaion is described as the tomb of Menelaos and Helena by Pausanias (3.19.9). Herodotos (6.61) called the place a shrine of Helena, and Isokrates (10.63) said that Menelaos and Helena were worshipped there as gods. It is best described as a monumental platform with decorated retaining walls.<sup>55</sup> The excavator, Hector Catling, called it an altar-tomb and demonstrated that it received its monumental form in the 5th century BCE.<sup>56</sup> Most probably it was the significant remains of a Bronze Age settlement at the site that furnished, or at least strengthened, the association with Homeric heroes in later times.

The Amyklaion, in its final form, is approximately contemporary with the Menelaion, but its exact layout is uncertain.<sup>57</sup> Apart from scattered architectural elements, our main source is the description by Pausanias (3.19.3). It is imprecise and has given rise to various reconstructions. Some features are clear, though: the original focus of the shrine was a

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<sup>52</sup> For peribolos tombs and further references, see Closterman 2007.

<sup>53</sup> The level of this coping is indicated by a raised surface on the west wall of the Erechtheion (Stevens 1946, 95).

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Stevens 1946, 95.

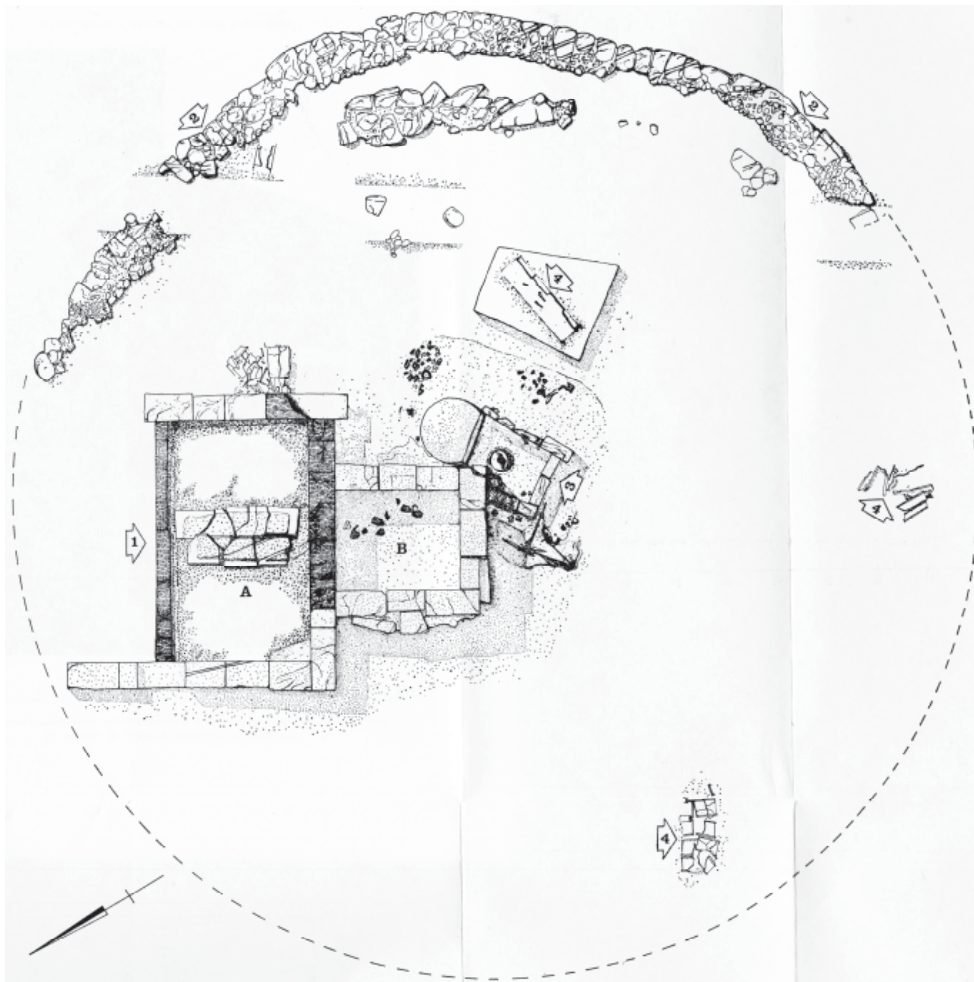
<sup>55</sup> Tomlinson 1992, 249.

<sup>56</sup> Catling 1976.

<sup>57</sup> Tomlinson 1992, 250.

colossal statue of Apollon. It apparently stood on an altar-like base, within which was the tomb of Hyakinthos, accessible through a door in the base. Pausanias specifically states that it was a bronze door. What is of particular interest, though, is the fact that in both cases the presumed grave of a mythological figure is monumentalized, or re-monumentalized, during the 5th century BCE.<sup>58</sup>

A better parallel can be found in Lavinium in Italy. This is the place where Aeneas was said to be buried. In the 1960s a tumulus was excavated at the site (*Fig. 7*).<sup>59</sup> The original grave mound dates from the 7th century BCE, but it was reshaped and turned into a heroon towards the end of the 4th century BCE. The original grave is located in the centre of the tumulus. However, the tumulus was dug up and a new structure was built against the old burial. When the mound was covered up again, a segment was apparently left open in order to expose the façade. Here, broken pieces of stone doors were found by the excavators. Their reconstruction shows what the monument would have looked like (*Fig. 8*).



*Fig. 7.* Plan of the Heroon of Aeneas. (Somella 1971–1972).

<sup>58</sup> For additional examples from the Hellenistic period, see Alcock 1997.

<sup>59</sup> Somella 1971–1972.

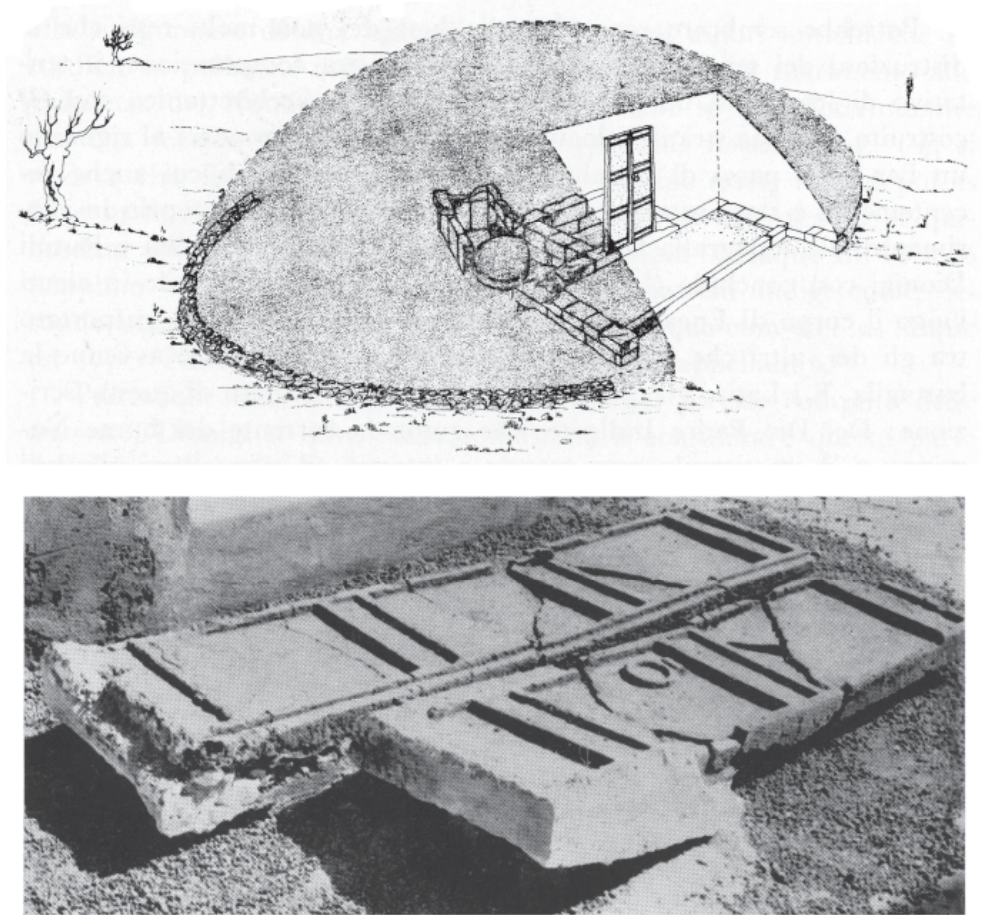


Fig. 8. The stone doors of the Heroon of Aeneas and reconstructive drawing. (Somella 1971–1972, figs. 5 & 23).

Although we must observe the distance in time and space between the Kekropion and the so-called “Heroon of Aeneas”, there are some striking similarities. A prehistoric burial loses its original identity. Several centuries later, mythological associations are projected upon it. The grave is opened and then remonumentalized. The connection between the human remains and the mythical figure is manifested architecturally and the grave becomes the centre of a hero cult.

It should be noted that the doors at the tomb in Lavinium, although they were made in two separate pieces, could not be opened. They were false doors. This was probably also the case with the doors of the Erechtheion. There need not have been a grave chamber inside the Kekropion, but the presence of doors could have constituted the outward manifestation of a grave otherwise not visible, just as in contemporary examples from Asia Minor.

## Conclusion

It can be concluded that the stone doors mentioned in the Chandler inscription most likely carry sepulchral connotations. In view of both its funerary character and its close connection to the Erechtheion, the

Kekropion constitutes the most plausible context for these doors. If one set of stone doors is attributed to the tomb of Kekrops, the second set is likely to have belonged to that of Erechtheus/Erichthonios, although its exact location is unknown to us. It might have been situated inside the Erechtheion, or even been part of the Kekropion.<sup>60</sup> The wish to articulate these tombs in a way that appears to be unprecedented in Athens would have been motivated by the unique standing of Kekrops and the momentous find of what was believed to be his physical remains. Lacking 'royal' funerary imagery of their own, it would have been necessary for the Athenians to look abroad. The inspiration for the door motif was close at hand and its appearance in Athens can be seen as part of a larger Persianizing trend, which is also visible in the Odeion of Perikles.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Cf. Elderkin (1941, 117f.) on the *prostomiaion* in the commission's report as referring to *stomion* as an entrance to the tomb.

<sup>61</sup> Miller 1997, 241.

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