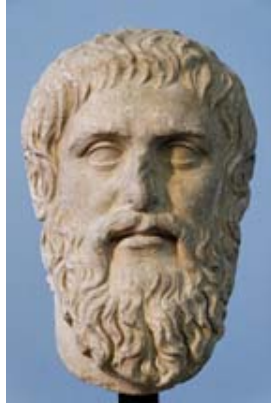


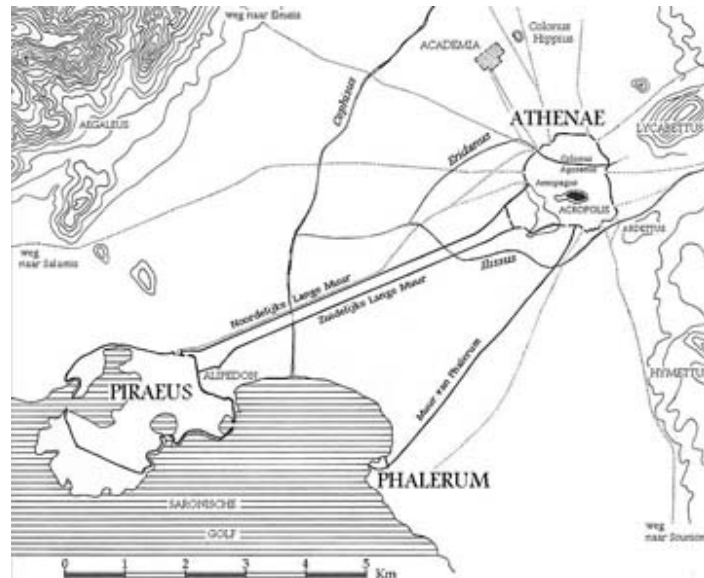
The Thiasos of Plato, Part 2



Plato sculpted
by Silanion
circa 370 BCE

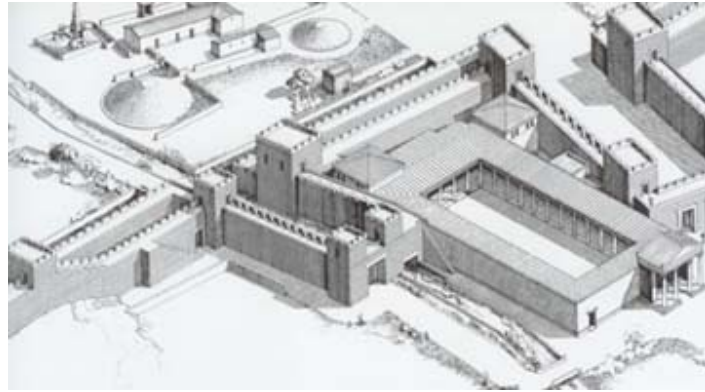


Socrates
portrait by
Palermo,
copied from
the 4th-
century
original



The Academy is located north of Athens.

It seems appropriate to begin in regular Socratic fashion, by dispelling false conceptions and replacing them with true ones. Let us begin first with the name. The term *Academy* (Greek: *Akademeia*) was used to identify a location long before it identified Plato's School. It was a public park in one of the most beautiful suburbs of Athens, a sacred precinct dedicated to the Attic hero Akademos, or Hekademos, who owned the property in the time of the legendary Theseus. Only later did the School become synonymous with its location. Second, Plato's educational institution was not established as a school (*didaskaleion*) but as a religious association (*thiasos*) that taught a way of life (*diatrib*) through educational forms that were commonly associated with schools: the lecture (*schol*) and the seminar (*diatrib*). Third, Plato's Academy was not isolated like the proverbial ivory tower but incorporated into the much larger and more colorful setting of Athens and its collective hierarchical life of obligations and entitlements that was the public cult of the *polis*. Rich with religious celebration and with groves sacred to Athena, the Academy was the site of festivals and funeral games, and it was the turning point of the Dionysian processions that marched from the Theater of Dionysus Eleuthereus at the center of the city to the sanctuary and back.



The Dipylon ('two-gated') was the largest and most important of fifteen gates into the Classical city of Athens. The road leading through it was more than 20 meters wide and formed the major route to Athens from Boeotia, leading via Plato's Academy into the city and on to the Agora and Acropolis. The corridor gate would have acted as a death trap to attackers. In times of peace, the Dipylon Gate had a more welcoming and a sacred aspect as it marked the transition from countryside to city. The interior court housed an altar for Zeus Herkeios ("of the Courtyard"), for Hermes (the divine protector of wayfarers and gates) and for Akamas, the local hero of the inhabitants of the surrounding township of the Kerameis. On entering the city, the weary traveler could refresh himself at the fountain house on his left. PHOTO: greeceathensaegeaninfo.com



The road from Plato's Academy led up to the Dipylon, which was the city's main gate while the Hiera Hodos (or "Holy Way") from Eleusis led up to the Hiera Pyli ("Holy Gate"). Between the two gates stood the Pompeion which was the building from which the Panathenaean Procession used to set out. The Kerameikos Cemetery extended beyond the Dipylon Gate. Its most interesting section was the Street of Tombs (Hodos ton Tafon), flanked on either side by the tombs of wealthy Athenians. PHOTO: yasou.org

In Plato's time, visitors from the city would have made their approach to the Academy past temples to Artemis and to Dionysius Eleuthereus, along a wide ceremonial avenue lined by funerary monuments to the honored dead. Off the road, behind the monuments on either side, rested garden plots, small

houses, and the suburban residences of foreign residents (*metikoi*) and prosperous Athenian citizens; among them, the Garden of Epicurus and the house of Sophocles. Before the entrance to the sanctuary, there was an altar to Love (*Eros*), and beyond the ancient Wall of Hipparchus (See Supplement 2) that circumscribed the Academy and made it something like a vast courtyard, was the tree-filled sanctuary itself, crossed by many paths, which were bordered by altars to Prometheus, Hermes, Heracles, Hephaistos, Zeus Morios, and Kataibates. The paths within led through the groves of the twelve sacred olive trees called the *moriai* to either the altar and sanctuary of Athena or the exercise gardens (*gymnaseion*).

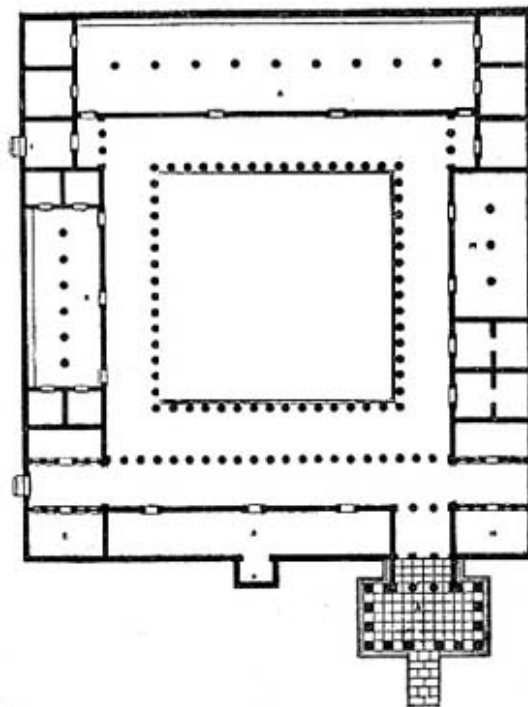


Diagram of the palaestra at
Epidauros

The *gymnaseion* complex enclosed a large rectangular court. At its center was the *palaistra*, a low building with its own central courtyard. Here boys were taught the art of wrestling. On the north, the structure was flanked by a bathhouse; on the other three sides, by pillared porticos that enclosed three oblong halls. These were inhabited by teachers and filled with tables for students, painted terra cotta metopes, wells, and

great quantities of sculpture. As an institution, the *gymnaseion* at the Academy was one of three main centers of education for the men and boys of Athens. Here the body was trained through the sporting arts – running, wrestling, javelin throwing, boxing – and the mind through the arts of the Muses. This had been the custom for two hundred years, ever since Solon, a distant relative of Plato, made learning letters compulsory. Unlike elsewhere, both the *palaistra* and the exercise garden at the Academy were public and so full of activity that they frequently attracted the presence of Socrates. He is most famously depicted at the Agora, or center city plaza, searching for a citizen of the *polis* wiser than he, the one who knew that he knew nothing; but that is only a partial image: Socrates as “gadfly.” Socrates was most at home at the Academy.

[<READ PART 3>](#)

SUPPLEMENTS

Supplement 2:

The Wall of Hipparchus



Murder of Hipparchus
by the tyrannicides
Harmodius and
Aristogeiton

depicted on a Greek
vase

This edifice is only one of the public works provided for the polis by Plato's legendary relations. The wall surrounding the Academy is attributed either to Hipparchus, a well-known patron of the arts, or to his brother Hippias, tyrant of Athens (527-514 BCE). Both were sons of Peisistratos, tyrant of Athens (546-527 BCE), who was in turn related to Solon (638-558 BCE), the legendary educator of the polis, who traced his paternal ancestry back to the last king of Athens. The mothers of Solon and Peisistratos were cousins. All were distant members of the maternal family of Plato (427-347 BCE), whose lineage included Prometheus, Helen, and Aiolos. The family of *Plato the son of Ariston of Kollytos of the Neleidae of the Athenoi*, on his father's side, claimed Poseidon as their founder through a long line of heroes: Neileus and Pelias, Nestor, Antilochus, and Melanthos; the sons of Melanthos, Kodros and Mendron, were the founders of the three great Athenian clans from which Plato descended. Solon, as the primary lawmaker of archaic Athens, ended aristocratic rule by reforming the rival hierarchies and deific loyalties of its powerful clans into the polis and by placing its control in the hands of the wealthy; Peisistratos unified classical Athens by increasing the prosperity of Athens in a short time and by promoting a Panhellenic culture; Plato completed this progression by establishing a Panhellenic institute of higher education and promoting the ethical rule of philosopher kings.

<[READ PART 3](#)>