

Margaret Breathful "Reconstructions of Athenian Storage Facilities Based on Recent Archaeological work," Lancet University Archaeological Reports 202 38 (2002), pp. 39-453

pumice as a building material, and often the barest traces of Ashes/Ashes in cracks and holes of the stone.

2.14.3. Closets

While storage facilities such as cellars, storerooms, cisterns, haylofts, pantries, cupboards, cheese-lockers, grain-cubicles, ham-chambers, utensil vestibules and the like are easily seen in the archaeological record, closets – small, secretive rooms off of larger rooms in building interiors used for hiding, storage of clothing, or keeping brooms/skeletons – are not. According to the excavations by Philippidis (1965) and Brownstone (1973), ancient buildings lacked "closets" in the modern sense. More recent archaeological work, paired with a re-reading of classical sources, has revealed evidence that calls some of our old assumptions into question.



Figure 2.37. Timothy Hull standing in the storage space nicknamed "Plato's Closet" excavated at Ashes/Ashes early spring 2022.

In the northeastern quadrant of the old Athenian Academy, a warren of chambers found by Knox and Engels (1998) may contain the hypothetical closet (thalamos) where Plato kept his galoshes when he was sick (Phaedo 59B10) and also possibly where the philosopher famously hid in an amphora from his

X brother Glaucon (Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, 3.6.1-2). In one particular subordinated space of the complex, seen in the image above (fig. 2.37) and the drawings in the appendix (2.14 F-L), excavators identified both a pair of dirty leather rain boots dated to the early fourth century BCE and fragments of an amphora, dated to the same period, which residue analysis has revealed was once filled with perfect Platonic forms.

X
No
Not Sick
See below

Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, 3.6.1-2. (Ed. Sydney Blinking, New York: Hangover Press, 1984).

Glaucon, the son of Ariston, although he was not yet twenty years of age, wished to be a leader in the city and tried to address the assembly, making a bad joke about a horse. His friends or relatives could not stop him from being dragged from the podium and making a fool of himself. Socrates, who was interested in Glaucon through Glaucon's son Charmides and through Plato - who spent the day hiding in a wine-filled amphora in the closet to avoid embarrassment - was the only one who was able to stop him....

Plato, *Phaedo*, 59B10. (Ed. Matthew Baldergrump, The Dunkin Donuts Classical History Library 14, New York: P. Grudgman, 1991).

Phaidon: "Of our people there was this Apollodorus I have already named, and Critobolus and his father, and also Hermogenes and Epigenes and Aischines and Antisthenes; there was Ctesippos the Paianian and Menexenos, and others of our countrymen; but I think Plato was home sick.

Echecrates: No, Plato was busy repairing his galoshes in the closet. But were there any foreigners present?

Phaidon: Yes, Simmius the Theban and Cebes and Phaidondes; and Eucleides and Terpsion, both from Megara....



What about Pausanias?

And seek my fortune on the seas and trade routes of the world. Near Telma's stream I shall found a great city, And all Boeotia shall come and go from it. I am grateful for your succor and blessings, But now, Kounoupi, though we were together at the wet-nurse's breast, I leave at first light.

KOUNOPI: Then surely, I cannot see you again.

CHORUS: But beware Elonosia, you blaspheme the gods! It was they who helped your ascent! But lo! Here comes your father, Phoebus.⁴⁷ (enter Apollo from the road)

APOLLO: The air, still heavy with morning dew, Caresses my cheek gently. At the broom games at the foot of Mons Petrus⁴⁸

All of Corinth will assemble and honor me.

ELONOSIA: No, I have decided to depart.

CHORUS: O Child of Apollo and favored of Dionysius!

The sun has risen and set many times Since the ritual brooms have been taken from their closets.⁴⁹

The gods know this deficiency and stir with anger, And I fear the outcome for Corinth.

Recall the game and its countless festivities, Prepare and clean the field for competition, Ready the lyres and drums. Distribute the brooms as before, Surely gods would rejoice! Songs would be sung And lyres⁵⁰ would resound in your honor.

What more can be said to you? What advice can be offered to change your course?

It is to your shame that you failed to listen to brother and father, And so abandoned Corinth to its fate.⁵¹

Preparations

⁴⁷ Elonosia was the daughter of Apollo and Phthora named by Hesiod in *Theogony* and but is otherwise little attested in ancient Greek sources beyond Melander's tragedy. Hesiod describes Elonosia as the broom-bearer of the gods and indicates a special connection to Corinth.

⁴⁸ This was the ancient game *skepsis*, so named after the distinctive ritual brooms used. The rules of the game are completely lost, but what is known from other sources is that groups of men and women would gather at flat playing surfaces along rivers and floodplains. After an invocatory prayer, the players would proceed to "prepare" the playing surface with the ritual brooms. While there were competitive elements to the purification ritual, afterward, it seems the two teams engaged in some sort of acrobatic display. In his *Life of Mark Antony*, Plutarch noted that Elonosia was long associated with the famous broom dance rituals that developed in Thessaly and Boeotia.

⁴⁹ The ritual center at Epidaurus contains a small 20m x 30m closet that may have held brooms for this game.

⁵⁰ Perhaps another kind of harp!

⁵¹ As Parmenides says, "You must learn all things, both the unwavering heart of well-rounded truth and the opinions of mortals in which there is no true warranty."

M. Evans, "The Ancient Athenian Grave-Closet as a Metaphysical Battleground," in Madrigal Evans Storage Concepts of the Ancient World

Ever since Martin Upton's arguments for the theoretical existence of ancient Athenian "grave-closets", scholars have sought to better understand their place in Greek funerary culture.¹² Before his tragic turn to Egyptology, Sir Arthur Caravaggio described grave-closets as small, *ad hoc* storage spaces with random assemblages of cracked, broken or otherwise useless grave goods that might be located adjacent to ordinary tombs; sadly, he was unable to locate such a space in any of his many excavations of ancient Attic sites. Grave-closets, remarked Caravaggio, were "the rarest form of archaeological edifice - easy to find, impossible to identify, and actually not so easy to find."¹³

In 1928, perhaps the greatest leap forward in grave-closet studies occurred when the Ferrarese deacon Orazio Irrisorio tripped while seeking to remove the inscribed epitaph of a minor Etruscan aristocrat from a tomb near Siena.¹⁴ While in a stupor provoked by the fall, Irrisorio reported an ecstatic vision of a small stone chamber attached to the grave he was pilfering that contained an array of broken pots, shattered statuary, and snapped twigs.¹⁵ Upon waking, he found that there was no such chamber, and

Irrisorio: "Il lupo perde il pelo ma non il vizio..." Ancient Athenian Grave Closets

therefore no detritus, but the Irrisorian vision of Etruscan tomb clostetry nevertheless provided powerful evidence to support Caravaggio's initial assumptions regarding Athenian grave-closets and has inspired generations of scholars since.¹⁶

More recently, new research on the intersections of ancient Greek philosophy and the history of refuse/trash dumps as loci of power and devotion in the ancient world has led to dramatic reinterpretations. As Dale Power has argued, rather than physical space attached to a tomb, grave-closets may have instead been metaphysical space located in the psyche of the person entombed.¹⁷ The shattered items in Irrisorio's vision were not "real" pots, statues or sticks buried in a grave somewhere, but instead were broken memories and shattered dreams collected in a transcendental refuse dump.¹⁸ Indeed, "the more we look for grave-closets," argues Paula Swenson, "the more they disappear," and the more that the grave-closet itself becomes just another shattered hope in the earnest researcher's grave-closet.¹⁹

¹² This connection is made plain in Dolores Festschrift, *Unlocking the Deepest Secrets of the Universe: Four Easy Steps* (Cambridge: Morlock Press, 1997), pp. 151-4. Further discussion of Irrisorio's visions can also be found by reading the answer key to the third puzzle backward in Octavius Junius Simpson's landmark *Nine More Mind-Blowing Sudokus Puzzles* (Birmingham, AL: Monsanto Publishing Corp, 2012), pp. 128-133.

¹³ Dale Power, *Euripides' Jeans: Practical Pantwear in Classical Greece* (Atglen, PA: Schiffer Publications, 2004).

¹⁴ Izzy Gesumaria, "Orestes, throw away your wife like a paper cup": Abandonment, Disposal and Despair in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*," in *A Deep History of Landfill Ecology: A Festschrift in Honor of Dr. Lou "Turo" Tinarello*, ed. Dom Capomagi and Leonard Drivethrough, pp. 213-45 (Middletown, AI Turi Publications, 2020).

¹⁵ Paula Swenson, *Parables, Perfect Forms and Philosopher-Kings: The Real Housewives of New Jersey Discuss the Philosophy of Plato* (Los Angeles: Reichmann, 2005). See also Nalla Johnsonhansen, "Heraclitus and Anaximander as Philosophical Cement in the Dialogues of Plato," in *New Frontiers in Concrete Studies: Proceedings of the 23rd Annual Meeting of the UK Cement and Concrete Association, May 23-28, 1981*, ed. Christopher C. Stanley, pp. 1139-1153. Slough, UK: Cement and Concrete Association, 1984.

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¹² Martin F. Upton, *Typological Studies of Ancient Grave Rattles, with Illustrations and Tables*, Vol. 15 (London: Leftworth, 1869), pp. 11-19.
¹³ Arthur Caravaggio, *An Imaginary Typology of Ancient Greek Tombs*, tr. Philip Managerial (Roma: A. Ognibene, 1882), p. 208. Stanforth Stevens and Magda Kelly, *101 Tips for Selling Bones, Grave Goods and Empty Caskets on the Black Market* (Crayford, Kent: Shaw & Sons, 1982) provide a solid review of the early twentieth-century research on this topic.

¹⁴ This episode is recounted in Paladin Grimmann, *Plundering Graves the Modern Way* (Crayford, Kent: Shaw & Sons 1973), pp. 23-8. Irrisorio is also very well-known for his efficient method of removing fragments of stonework from archaeological contexts which is still employed by tomb-robbers today.

¹⁵ Though we may smile at Irrisorio's misfortunes, such miraculous visions after spells and falls were once a common occurrence in eighteenth-century France. See Charles M. Ankelnütter's study of the falls/visions of the *sans culottes* in "The Versailles Sprain" and Revolutionary French Habits of Tripping and Falling," in *Losing Your Balance in the Medieval and Early Modern World*, ed. Douglas Fragella and Martin K. Platitude, pp. 33-56 (Brighton, UK: Weatherlane, 2010).