THE HOUSE OF THE LYCIAN ACROPOLIS AT XANTHOS

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Abstract

This article discusses the material remains of structures on the Lycian Acropolis in Xanthos. They were formerly interpreted as religious monuments, but it is now clear that they derived from a late antique domus. This grand residence was replete with numerous reception suites and courtyards and was accessed from a street leading from the agora. Its rooms were organised around a grand central courtyard, arrayed on five levels, and lavishly decorated with fountains and marble and mosaic floors. Looming over Xanthos, the House of the Lycian Acropolis represented a symbol of power and status, reinforcing an impression that the city of Xanthos flourished during Late Antiquity.

INTRODUCTION

The remains of the House of the Lycian Acropolis were situated in the north-east angle of the acropolis, in the shade of the Byzantine fortress. They were almost completely excavated by the French mission between 1953 and 1956. Since 1994, archaeological work has resumed, redefining the function of the buildings and clarifying their different phases of development. Numerous guidebooks still interpret the installations as a church and an episcopal residence: an opinion which needs to be revised. Because the apse flanking the great eastern room 1 to the north-east was south-facing, it is highly unlikely that this was a Christian monument. No late antique church was arranged in such a way, even in Lycia. Furthermore, in recent years, systematic cleaning has brought to light the clear relationship between the rooms of the west wing and the north-east peristyle (9).1 This great, open, circulation court (380 m² in surface area) was surrounded by four subdivided wings in one or two

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1 NE refers to the north-east sector of the acropolis, SE refers to the south-east sector, separated from each other by an east-west wall, forming the southern boundary of rooms 32, 27, 9, 2 and 1NE.

L. Lavan, L. Özgenel and A. Sarantis (edd.) Housing in Late Antiquity (Late Antique Archaeology 3.2 – 2005) (Leiden 2007), pp. 475–494
Fig. 1 House of the Lycian Acropolis at Xanthos with its boundaries marked in grey, and the units as they appeared in Phase 4b.