AN UNUSUAL STRUCTURE ON THE LYCIAN ACROPOLIS AT XANTHOS

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Abstract

This article discusses the interpretation of an isolated one-room structure, excavated on the Lycian Acropolis at Xanthos. It contains a large oven, set back in its own recess, and number of unusual basins, cut into the rock, in which burnt material and a number of complete cooking pots were found. The possible function of this complex is discussed, in relation to a number of familiar hypotheses, which are then discarded. A detailed discussion is undertaken, of the design and working of the fixtures and finds recovered within the complex, and its urban context, in order to produce a more convincing interpretation.

Introduction

I have directed excavations on the Lycian acropolis at Xanthos since 1994, when I took over responsibility from Ch. Delvoye. In the same year, encumbered by the presence of an enormous fig tree, I wrongly identified a ‘basin’ and the base of a vault as a cistern. 1 Cisterns are common features at Xanthos, especially on the Lycian acropolis, and at the time this seemed to be the most reasonable interpretation of what was then only a partially excavated structure. The constraints of the terrain, as well as the circumstances of the current excavations, delayed a full examination of the sector, which finally started in 2002. 2 Two campaigns led to the discovery of an unusual installation, with occupation material of late 2nd to mid-3rd c. A.D. date, whose function still needs to be determined. But, a certain number of hypotheses can

1 This ‘basin’, coloured in blue, is represented on the general plan of the Lycian acropolis published in the Xanthos volume of the Dossiers de l’Archéologie.

L. Lavan, E. Swift, and T. Putzeys (edd.) Objects in Context, Objects in Use (Late Antique Archaeology 5 – 2007) (Leiden 2007), pp. 473–494
at least be discarded, through an analysis of the investment made in its architecture, the quality of its mortar finishing, the inner layout of the building, the artefacts recovered within from stratigraphic contexts, and the way in which the structure was integrated within the wider urban fabric.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

The installation is set directly onto the bedrock. It is situated between the remains of a defence tower of the Hellenistic city wall, to the west, and the ruins of the Byzantine Acropolis wall, to the north and the east—an architectural context that illustrates the long occupation of the sector. The northern boundary of our complex is clearly determined, as its north wall has been integrated to the later Byzantine modifications. However, its eastern limit remains unknown. Indeed, the end of the south wall was fitted into the outer face of the eastern city wall and it is therefore impossible to locate its terminus. Successive modifications, from Hellenistic to Byzantine times, as well as some dismantling (such as the removal of the ‘theatre pillar’), have substantially obscured our understanding of the north-eastern corner of the establishment. In fact, the overall configuration of the late fortifications, as well as the position of the Hellenistic tower, remains hypothetical (fig. 1).

The structure is rectangular in shape (surface area: 13 m²), with a recess (2.70 m wide) extending to the west. This recess occupies a higher position than the rest of the complex. The north and south walls are built over a first course carved into the bedrock, surmounted by two courses of well-carved rectangular limestone blocks, which are topped by a brick wall. All courses are bound by and covered with chalk mortar. The space was roofed by two parallel brick vaults (measuring: 38/39 × 33.5/34 × 9 cm) whose first courses are still visible in the south-west corner and in the north-south wall (fig. 2). The latter

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3 It represents the counterpart of the south tower, identified by ancient travellers; Metzger (1965) 2, 8, fig. 2. The outer face of the wall is built in orthogonal masonry provided with bosses. The two upper courses of the north wall have been modified later, most probably when our installation was built. According to H. Metzger, the Hellenistic fortress is dated to the 5th–4th c. B.C.

4 This is a funerary pillar following the typical tradition of Lycian funerary monuments. A fragmentary inscription found on its lower part states it has been displaced. Unfortunately, the date of this operation has not been preserved; Demargne (1958) 107–12.