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Palace of Antiochos

Summary :

A large palatial complex excavated northwest of the Hippodrome (today Atmeydan) belonged to the *praepositus* (grand chamberlain) Antiochus serving at the court of Theodosios II (408-450). The early 5th-century monumental palace consisted of two sectors. In the southern sector there was an absidal hexagonal building which was later, probably in the 7th century, converted into the church of St. Euphemia. The northern sector of the palace was originally occupied by a large rotunda and an adjoining horse-shoe shaped portico which opens on the street running along the west side of the Hippodrome. At some point during the 5th century, when the palace was in the imperial possession, a long hall was added to the rotunda.

Date

first half of the 5th c.- 7th c.

Geographical Location

Constantinople, Istanbul

Topographical Location

To the northwest of the Hippodrome

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1. Historical context

A large palatial complex excavated between 1942 and 1964 northwest of the Hippodrome and south of the Mese (the main thoroughfare of Constantinople) may be plausibly identified as the residence of the praepositos Antiochos (Antiochus) serving at the court of Theodosios II (408-450), on the grounds of the find of a column base *in situ* bearing the inscription "of Antiochus the praepositus".[1] Antiochus was a Persian eunuch and became a regent of young Theodosios according to the agreement between the Emperor Arcadius, Theodosios' father, and the Persian king Yazdgerd I. He arrived in Constantinople soon after 402 and made a successful career while serving in the Great Palace: first he was a cubicularius (chamberlain) and a tutor of Theodosios II and then became a *praepositos*.[2]

2. Architectural description

2.1. Southern sector

The early 5th-century monumental palace consisted of two sectors. In the southern sector (now inaccessible to the public) there was an apsed hexagonal building that probably served as a dining hall (triclinium). The length of each side of the hexagon is 10,4 m and the diagonal of the hall is about 20 m. On each side of the hexagon there was an apse, except for the side which formed the entrance. The apses were polygonal on the exterior and semicircular in the interior. Each apse was 7,65 m wide and 4,65 m deep, thus allowing a semicircular bench (called the *sigma* or *stibadium*) and a dining table to be installed there. Small circular rooms were inserted between two neighbouring apses and they communicated with some of them. In the centre of the hall was originally a marble pool in the floor. Such pools were not uncommon features of Roman reception and dining halls in the Late Antiquity. The hexagon was preceded by a wide semicircular portico. Further smaller rooms of centralized plans were grouped along the back wall of the semicircular portico and these may have served as bedchambers (*cubicula*) and/or private dining rooms. The semicircular portico had a diameter of about 60 m and was paved with marble slabs. The courtyard was accessed through an elaborate vestibule the central space of which formed a circular room.

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2.2. Northern sector

The northern sector of the palace was originally occupied by a large rotunda with niches in the interior and horse-shoe shaped portico adjoining the street running along the west side of the Hippodrome.[3] The interior diameter of the rotunda was 20 m. A small bath with absidal rooms, accessible from the street by a staircase, adjoined the entrance portico on the south. The rotunda was apparently easier accessible to the public than the hexagon and may have served as an audience hall for Antiochus' clients, as he was a powerful and influential man. According to a recent research the palace seems to have been built after 429 on the grounds of the stamps on the bricks found during the excavations.[4] Moreover, a column base found in the palace refers to Antiochus as the praepositos, which means that the palace was erected when he held this office. The palace was finished or the works stopped in 439, when Antiochus fell from imperial favour and his property was confiscated. At some point during the 5th century, when the palace was in possession of the Emperor, a long hallway with an apse in its end was added to the rotunda. The hallway was 52,5 m long and 12,4 m wide and was accessed from the rotunda through a double-apsed vestibule. This long hall was modified in the 6th century with the addition of six apses on its long sides.[5]

3. Later history

The hexagonal hall was later (probably in the 7th century) converted into the church of St. Euphemia (in "ta Antiochou"), and the relics of St. Euphemia of Chalcedon were translated there. The bema of the church was built of reused 6th-century material. Probably at the same time polygonal mausolea were added, adjoining to the circular porches. The rotunda to the north of the hexagon had already disappeared by the time when the mausolea were built, since one of them stood partly over it. During the iconoclastic period the church was secularized by the Emperor Constantine V but the saint's relics were safely transported to Lemnos. It was restored by the Empress Eirene and the relics were returned in 796/797.[6] In the late 13th century the church was restored and decorated with a cycle of frescoes depicting the life and martyrdom of St. Euphemia.[7]

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1. For the column base with the inscription see Duyuran R., "Second Report on the Excavations on the Site of the New Palace of Justice at Istanbul," *Istanbul Arkeologi Müzeleri Yilligi* 6, (1953), p. 75.

2. He may have been praepositos before 414, but in this case his career would be apparently interupted in 413/414 when Musellius is attested as the praepositos. On the other hand, it is equally possible that Antiochus became praetpositos after 414, as Musellius' successor. Moreover, it is not known exactly when he stepped down from his office, but it must have been at some time before 439, when he was forced by the emperor to become a priest of Hagia Sophia. Nevertheless, even as the ex-praepositus he received the prestigious title of patrikios and continued to meddle in state affairs. On Antiochus see Greatrex G., Bardill J., "Antiochus the Praepositus: A Persian Eunuch at the Court of Theodosius II," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 50 (1997), p. 171-197.

3. Until recently scholars wrongly identified the rotunda with the Palace of Lausus, see Dolunay, N. – Naumann, R., "Untersuchungen zwischen Divan Yolu und Adalet Sarayi 1954," *Istanbul Arkeologi Müzeleri Yilligi* 11-12 (1964), p. 137; Müller-Wiener, W., *Bildlexikon zur Topographie Istanbuls* (Tübingen 1977), pp. 238-239. Identification of the rotunda as part of the Palace of Antiochus by Torelli Landini, E., "Note sugli scavi a nord-ovest dell'Ippodromo di Istanbul (1939/1964) e loro identificazione," *Storia dell'Arte* 68 (1990), pp. 25, 28. On the correct location of the Palace of Lausus see Bardill, J., "The Palace of Lausus and Nearby Monuments in Constantinople: A Topographical Study," *American Journal of Archaeology* 101 (1997), pp. 67-95.

4. Bardill, J., *Brickstamps of Constantinople* 1 (Oxford 2004), pp. 107-109.

5. See the excavation report of Naumann, R., "Vorbericht über die Ausgrabungen zwischen Mese und Antiochus-Palast 1964 in Istanbul," *Istanbuler*

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Mitteilungen 15 (1965), pp. 135-148. Such a layout of the hall points to its function as a banqueting hall. Similar halls were the Great Palace of the Byzantine emperors (Triklinos of 19 Couches) or in the House of Bacchus in Djemila (North Africa); examples of such a layout can be also found in episcopal residences in Italy (Ravenna and Grado – halls with five apses; Lateran palace of the popes in Rome – the so-called Council Aula with eleven apses).

6. On the translation of the relics see Berger, A., "Die Reliquien der Heiligen Euphemia und ihre erste Translation nach Konstantinopel," *Hellenika* 39 (1988), pp. 311-322.

7. Naumann, R. – Belting, H., *Die Euphemia-Kirche am Hippodrom zu Istanbul und ihre Fresken*. Istanbuler Forschungen 25 (Berlin 1966).

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Glossary :

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apse

An arched srtucture or a semi-circular end of a wall. In byzantine architecture it means the semicircular, usually barrel-vaulted, niche at the east end of a basilica. The side aisles of a basilica may also end in an apse, but it is always in the central apse where the altar is placed. It was separated from the main church by a barrier, the templon, or the iconostasis. Its ground plan on the external side could be semicircular, rectangular or polygonal.

bema

The area at east end of the naos in Byzantine churches, containing the altar, also referred to as the presbetery or hierateion (sanctuary). In these area take place the Holy Eucharist.

client (lat. cliens)

In the Roman and Late Roman history the 'cliens' was a man (or sometimes a foreign state) who, for any of a number of reasons, puts himself under the protection and sponsorship of a patron benefactor ("patronus")

koubikoularios or cubicularius

(from lat. cubicularius) The term designated eunuch officials in the service of the Emperor. Apart from their particular responsibilities in the court, they oftenly held positions as military commanders and undertook diplomatic delegations.

praepositos

(from lat. praepositus sacri cubiculi) The praepositos or praipositos (*πραιπόσιτος του ιερού κουβουκλίου* or *του ευσεβεστάτου κοιτώνος*) was a grand chamberlain by the Early Byzantine period the highest official, usually Eunuch, in the imperial service. After the 6th C. his functions were assumed by the parakoimomenos. The dignity involved in palace ceremony and disappeared until the end of 11th C.

triclinium

Hall for symposia where three anaklintra were placed around the three sides of a square table. During the Late Roman period it was the main reception area of both houses and palaces (the term is maintained in the Byzantine era).