

Introduction, Context

A. INTRODUCTION

The Triconch House is a large, late antique peristyle house in the ancient city center of Aphrodisias (Pls. 1A–B; Figs. 1–2). Previously known as the Bishop's Palace, it is one of the best preserved late antique houses in the Greek East and one of several in the Roman empire with a triple-apsed, or triconch, dining room (Fig. 3). The late antique house represents, however, only one phase in a much longer continuum of occupation of its site, which was roughly the size of a city block and located at the

heart of the monumental urban center. This study is concerned both with the history and development of the urban location of the Triconch House and with the details of the late antique building. It traces the development of a plot of land measuring roughly 50 m by 50 m over the course of some 1200 years, from at least the first century BC through the twelfth century AD.

In addition to a detailed examination of the architecture and decoration of the late antique house, the site of the Triconch House is viewed here as one module in an evolving urban landscape. The house was surrounded on all sides by public spaces:



Fig. 3. Aphrodisias. Triconch House. State plan.

the Agora to the south, the Bouleuterion to the east, the Temple of Aphrodite (later transformed into a church) to the north, and a street to the west. This study examines the house within its immediate surroundings in the northern part of the city center and considers these within the larger context of the urban development of Aphrodisias.

The plan of the Triconch House is dominated by a central peristyle court (5) and two large reception rooms (Fig. 4). The north apsidal hall (4) is adjacent to the north side of the peristyle and was fronted by a series of interconnected vestibules (rooms 1–3), which were accessible from the street (doorway C). The triple-apsed room or triconch hall (room 6) opened off of the east side of the peristyle. The west side of the courtyard is lined with a series of rectangular rooms (7–11), some still paved with polychrome mosaics or *opus sectile* floors. The exterior (west) wall of these rooms bordered a north-south street. Additional rooms (30–35) were built over the street in the mid-

dle Byzantine period. Opening onto the south side of the courtyard was another suite of rooms (13–14). These were decorated with large-scale figural wall paintings and were later converted into a private bathing suite. Attached to and just south of the east and south apses of the triconch were several small rooms (21–23), which were probably service areas in late antiquity, and one large rectangular room of indeterminate function (24). The south edge of the house bordered a paved passageway that ran behind the north stoa of the Agora. Two entrances to the house were accessible from this passageway in late antiquity—one (A) led to the long, narrow space (12) that emptied into the southwest corner of the peristyle courtyard; the other (B) led to the southeast corner of that courtyard (through later rooms 18 and 19).

The west half of the passageway behind the Agora stoa was by late antiquity, and probably before, divided into two aisles by a row of massive schist piers. These most likely supported



Fig. 4. Triconch House. Simplified state plan with room numbers, building entrances (A, B, C), and locations of 1999–2001 trenches.