

EXCAVATIONS BY THE WALKER TRUST (ST. ANDREWS) ON THE
SITE OF THE GREAT PALACE, CONSTANTINOPLE.
PRELIMINARY REPORT ON THE WORK DONE IN 1952 AND 1953

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Excavations on a portion of the site of the Great Palace had been carried out on behalf of the Walker Trust during four seasons before the war, when a large peristyle court and an extremely fine mosaic pavement had been discovered. A report on the work was published in 1947. The mosaics were covered over temporarily in 1939. Work was resumed in 1952, under the direction of the writer of this article. They were carried on a more extensive scale in 1953, partly under his direction, and partly under that of Mr. J. B. Ward Perkins, Director of the British School at Rome. That season, in addition to work on the original site, a full examination of the building known as "The House of Justinian" was also undertaken, and an architectural study of the area was made by Mr. G. U. S. Corbett, Librarian of the British School at Rome. Work on the main site was carried on in 1954. A detailed publication of the work done will be issued in 1957. In the meantime this preliminary notice is offered, at the invitation of the Director of the Department of Antiquities at Ankara.

Our first task in 1952 was to assure the adequate conservation of the superb mosaic floor which had been unearthed in earlier seasons. The second was to extend the excavations with the object, first of seeing if mosaics survived in other parts of the structure, and secondly of determining more precisely the date of the mosaics themselves. Our third aim

was to throw more light on the nature and identity of the building to which the mosaics belonged: a tentative identification of the peristyle court and its mosaics with a structure known as the Heliakon of the Pharos had been made in the first report on the excavations (1).

The mosaic floor disclosed in the earlier work had originally formed the floor of the colonnade of a great peristyle court. Mosaics were well preserved on the north-eastern side; the south-eastern side had not been examined; mosaics on the other two sides were fragmentary. In 1952 practically the whole of the north-eastern side (Pl. 1., A, A 1 and A 3) was roofed over. Fragmentary mosaics from other sites (A. 6 and F) were lifted, and were installed in the arcades of a bazaar-like street, the Arasta Sokaik, which ran across the site. The mosaics are thus now adequately preserved, and they can also be seen in a satisfactory manner. Indeed, the site is now virtually a "mosaic museum", arranged as such has been opened to the public as a separate section of the Museum of Antiquities of Istanbul (2).

(1). The Great Palace of the Byzantine Emperors, Oxford, 1947, p. 15.

(2). I take this opportunity of expressing my sincere indebtedness, as well as that of the Walker Trust, to İsmail Aziz Ögün, Director of the Museum of Antiquities, for his constant help during the execution of this work. I should also like to thank İsmail Reha Arıcan who undertook the difficult task of lifting the mosaics.

With the safety of the mosaics assured, work in connection with our more truly archaeological aims could proceed, and trenches intended to investigate further the extent of the mosaic floor were dug in three places, namely along the whole south-eastern side of the court (Pl. 1, K, C), at the south-eastern extremity of the north-east side, under the street known as the Torun Sokak (Pl. 1, T), and under a wall of the Arasta Sokak, along the inner margin of the mosaic (Pl. 1, A, A 1) A large trench in the first area disclosed the inner and outer retaining walls of the peristyle court, but unfortunately no mosaics whatsoever remained. Under the Torun Sokak, however, they proved to be well preserved, and an area some seven by six metres was unearthed. At the side of the A, A 1, a considerable portion of the border, averaging about 1 metre in width, and extending over a length of some six metres, was also laid bare. Mosaics from both these areas were lifted in 1953 and 1954.

Although it was disappointing to find nothing on the extensive south-east side of the peristyle, the good state of preservation and the interesting character of the compositions found in the other two areas to some extent compensated for this. The section of border in area A, A 1 was particularly interesting, for it was composed not only of scrolls, inhabited by animals and birds of a very lively character, but also by a great human head (Pl. 2). In position this head corresponds to the bearded heads of Oceanus previously found as parts of the border, but its nature was more interesting, for it represented a moustached figure, which would seem almost to be a portrait of some barbarian chieftain, done from the life. The hair, however, is conventionalised, and mingles with the scroll, and the colouring of the moustache is not naturalistic, for

blue and green tesserae are used. This great head is something well nigh unique in late antique art, and from the artistic as well as the technical point of view, it is one of the finest examples of early mosaic that have come down to us. Colours of blue and green glazes are used with very subtle effect beside those of coloured marbles in the scroll, in the face, and, more especially, in the animals and birds which appear amidst the foliage. The man who executed it was a real master, and the work here is of finer quality than much of that in the main area of the floor itself.

The mosaics found below the Torun Sokak, like those previously discovered in area A, are arranged in three parallel registers, and show a number of separate compositions. These include, nearest the inner border, a man leading a camel, with two boys on its back. One of the boys holds a bird before him (Pl. 3). In the middle register is shown a mounted hunter with a spear, who is chasing two deer. In front of them is a tree, which extends into the register above. Beyond it is a bear, devouring a small animal, probably a lamb. Behind the rider is a tree, and behind again a tower-like water fountain, of a type similar to those appearing in Pompeian paintings. On the uppermost register is a mule, which carried a bundle of sticks on either side as well as a rider. But the rider is being kicked off, and is seen upside down behind. The mule has a very wicked look in its eye, and this is one of the very few examples of humour that appear in the art of the period. The mosaics were overlaid by a layer of very hard cement, over which a later pavement of marble had been laid. This cement was harder than the setting bed, so that the cleaning of the mosaics was very difficult.

With the objective of furnishing a more sure dating for the mosaics two

excavations were undertaken below their setting bed. This was made possible by the fact that the, y in places were lifted and removed. The more extensive of these excavations was on site F (See Pl. 1). The excavations disclosed the fact that an earlier building, apparently a bath, had been destroyed in order to permit the construction of the peristyle court. Its walls and floor had been cut through for the foundations of the outer sustaining wall of the peristyle, and its walls had, over the rest of its area, been levelled off to permit the laying of the mosaic floor rather more than a metre above it (Pl. 4). Some fragments of unglazed pottery lamps, which bore the cross as the main theme of their decoration, were unearthed at the very base of the outer wall of this building. Its walls were constructed of bricks 34X34X5 cm. in size. A number were extracted, and rather more than half of these bore stamps. Some of these stamps were single lined, and contained the name **IAIOC** or **RAIOY** others contained the same name, but shown in the form of a cruciform monogram (pl. 5). It has so far proved impossible to find any stamps exactly comparable to these. The name **RAEIOC** or **RAEIOY** appears on a number of stamps of sixth century date (1), but these are mostly two line, rather than single line stamps; or, when in the form of a monogram, have the letter **Γ** at the right hand side instead of at the top. In general they would seem to be later than the stamps found in our "bath" building. Further study of this material may permit more exact conclusions. At the moment, however, all that can be said is that the pottery fragments suggest, though they do not absolutely prove, a date after 330, and

that the brick stamps suggest the fifth century. From this it may be argued that though the date originally proposed for the mosaic, which lies between 410 and 420, is not preferred, a rather later one would seem perhaps more probable. In the "notitia urbis" it is recorded that there were originally several private houses in this part of Constantinople (1). It seems probable that the "bath" building was part of one of these, and that it was destroyed, with other similar private buildings, when the Palace of the Emperors was enlarged.

A second excavation of similar type was undertaken on site A 4 (Pl. 1) where a deep trench was dug right down to virgin soil, which is here a heavy yellow clay. This trench was dug entirely through filling, which had been brought from elsewhere at a number of different periods. Numerous very small fragments of pottery were found in this filling, of Roman, Hellenistic, and fifth century Greek date. The stratification served to prove that the curious stone arch below mosaic level which had been noted in the "First Report" was actually a later insertion, put in to strengthen the structure after the mosaic floor had fallen into disuse.

The most extensive part of the excavation, however, was that undertaken in the exercise ground of the Aygır Deposu, to the south of the peristyle (2). Work here was undertaken with the primary objective of identifying the site. Two groups of substructures were already known in this area (See Pl. 1); they had been planned by Mamboury and Wiegand, and termed respectively D and

(1). Seeck, 230.

(2). I take this opportunity of thanking the Director of the Aygır Deposu for permission to dig and for numerous facilities accorded.

(1). I have to thank the late M. E. Mamboury for bringing this stamp to my notice. It occurred in situ in the Magnaura palace as well as in other sixth century buildings.

D c. (1). Our excavations were conducted in the unearthed area between them.

Substructures of a very massive character were discovered in this area, and they serve to prove that the site was occupied by buildings of very considerable size and importance, at an early date. At least five distinct building periods are represented. The earliest work was executed in friable greenstone of a very distinctive character. The same stone was found in the rear wall, at the opposite end of the peristyle court. This greenstone was used for a vaulted substructure, which was subsequently ruined, and then repaired in brick and concrete. There followed a second and more thorough collapse, which must have involved all the vaults, and much of what remained of them was then removed to make way for an entirely new structure from the ground upwards. This new building was in large limestone blocks, and its walls were extremely thick and massive. It seems to have terminated towards the sea in a great apse (Pl. 6). One of the side walls of the structure was traced from the apse in the landward direction as far as the outer wall of the peristyle where it formed a corner. Only a section of the corresponding wall on the opposite side could be examined, but it was possible to reconstruct the plan of the building on the basis of what was found. Between these side walls there were two transverse walls, both pierced by arches. That furthest from the sea corresponded with the outer wall of the peristyle, though because of the slope of the ground its foundation was at a lower level. The other transverse wall, which was pierced by three openings, stood about half way between the peristyle and the apse (See plan, Pl. 7). One of the openings in this transverse wall

is shown at the back of Plate 8. The semi-arch at the side of it belongs to yet another period of reconstruction, which was done partly in the same massive blocks - they must have been reused - and partly in brick. This period of reconstruction probably coincided with the erection of a number of piers, walls and vaults in brick, inside the great stone walled structure. These brick structures appear in the foreground of Plate 8, and are shown again in Plate 9; a further portion of the great stone wall is visible here behind the brickwork at the centre of the picture. The object of all these brick walls and vaults must have been to hold up the floor of the building above, and this floor was at much the same level as the mosaic pavement of the peristyle court. The two must have been associated one with the other. Indeed, the plan that results (Pl. 7) is one quite usual in late Roman and early Byzantine times; it is an apsed building with a peristyle court or atrium in front of it. A throne room or a church would be equally possible, but the comparatively small size of the apsed building and the essential character of the mosaics of the peristyle suggest that the former is a more probable identification.

The brickwork shown on Plate 9 is not all of the same period, for in places repairs and minor additions can be distinguished. The last of these is probably to be assigned to the tenth century. By the twelfth century the building had fallen into disuse, for it was already being used as a dump for rubbish, in which numerous fragments of glazed pottery were found. These are quite easily datable.

In addition to the brick reconstructions inside the great stone walls, a further important addition was made on the outside. It is shown in Plate 10, where the great stone wall appears at

(1) Die Kaiserpalate von Konstantinopel. Berlin, 1934.

the back of the picture and the addition, in alternating brick and stone courses, on the left. Actually nine courses of brick alternate with one of large stone blocks. This is the structure associated with the Pharos in the First Report. The work is in a technique usually associated with the sixth or seventh century. It is probably slightly earlier in date than the building on the opposite side of the great stone structure, surveyed by Mamlboury and Wiegan as building D lb.

A tentative chronology of the building periods may be suggested as follows:

- (1). Work in greenstone. Perhaps to be associated with private dwellings on the site (see above). IV century, or before.
- (2). Repairs to above, in brick and concrete. IV century.
- (3). Construction of the main sub-structures in great stone blocks. This is probably contemporary with the peristyle and the mosaic pavement. V century.
- (4). Construction of the building outside this, identified as the Pharos in the first report. VI or VII century.
- (5). Modifications to the great stone structure, reusing some of the stone blocks and also brick. VI or VII century.
- (6). Extensive reconstruction inside the great stone structure in brick. Perhaps VII century.
- (7). Minor modifications in brick. Perhaps X century.
- (8). Desertion of the building. XII century.
- (9). Erection of the square building published by Mamlboury and Wiegan as D c. XV century.

Though these suggestions are for the moment purely tentative, it is possible to draw a few definite conclusions from them.

Firstly, the identification of Mamlboury D c. as the church of St Elias, which was proposed in the First Report, must definitely be discarded, for there are no Byzantine foundations here which can be associated with a church of any sort. Secondly, it seems most unlikely, on account of its form and character, that the brick and stone structure adjoining this is to be identified as the Pharos. Thirdly, our main edifice would seem to take the form of a massiveapsed building, standing up on the side towards the sea in a most imposing manner, and having, on the landward side, a great peristyle court in front of it. In the final report on the excavations, which we hope to issue in 1957, an attempt will be made to identify this in the light of the evidence afforded by the texts relating to the Great Palace.

In addition to the work undertaken on the main site, a thorough examination, accompanied by excavation, was given to the structure known as the House of Justinian. Excavations showed that the original sea wall must have stood some 4.60 metres behind the present one. At a subsequent date an outer wall was built in front of it, and at the same time further concrete structures were added between the two. The platform on which the building known as the House of Justinian stands is in reality made up of these three walls. The original sea wall, which was little more than a metre wide, was however, at some time or another removed, in greater part, leaving what appears to be a trench between the new outer wall and the new inner structure. Both of these are of hard concrete, and the impression of the original wall, where it had been removed, remains, as if photographed upon the concrete. The structure above, the so called House

of Justinian, is also of two periods, both later than the construction of the second or outer sea wall. The marble window jambs and other architectural features all represent material reused from some other building. Archaeological evidence proves that the second or outer sea wall is post Justinianic; it may tentatively be assigned to the seventh century. Comparisons with masonry details suggest that the original sea wall, now

in part destroyed, and surviving only as a negative impression on the later concrete, should be assigned to the Theodosian age. The structures above, the so called House of Justinian, must be later than the seventh century. The earlier work might perhaps be of the eighth, the later is more probably tenth. There is no evidence to suggest that any part of this structure has any connection with Justinian.

