

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.

some kind of shelter built against the stoa wall. The line of piers runs from the west end of the passageway to the corner of the large niche in the back wall of the north stoa of the Agora. That niche encroaches on the passageway, narrowing it by about half. This area was blocked and subsumed into the house with the construction of the south apsidal hall (26) and related rooms (27–29) probably in the sixth century.

In the late Hellenistic through the high imperial period, buildings on the site of the Triconch House were part of a civic complex along the north side of the Agora. The late antique house was created by renovating existing structures and adding the two large apsidal halls (4, 6) in the late fourth or early fifth century. The resulting house was occupied for more than two hundred years. It suffered serious damage in the seventh century, as did much of the city, when substantial portions of the urban fabric of Aphrodisias fell into ruin. After late antiquity, the building became part of what was most likely an episcopal complex associated with the Cathedral, formerly the Temple of Aphrodite.

At every stage of its history, the site of the Triconch House was intimately linked with the structures and institutions that surrounded it, and its evolution follows the major phases of the history of Aphrodisias. Structures were first built there during the city's emergence as a planned town in the late Hellenistic period and they continued to be used throughout the imperial period. In late antiquity, when the city was a provincial capital, those structures were transformed into a large and well-appointed townhouse in the center of town. Finally, beginning sometime after the mid-seventh century AD, the Triconch House became a bishop's residence and remained a component of a larger ecclesiastical complex through the middle Byzantine period, when Aphrodisias was a metropolitan see and pilgrimage site.

The continued—and probably continuous—occupation of the Triconch House through the middle Byzantine period presents both challenges and opportunities for reconstructing the building's history. One challenge is that most of the objects that would have filled the late antique house were stripped away in later phases of occupation. Substantial portions of the building's late antique architectural fabric were reconfigured, carted off, or reused over several centuries. Evidence for the middle Byzantine occupation of the Triconch House consists of the extensive, if unevenly preserved remains of the renovated building, several lead seals of bishops and other office holders, and coins. Although uneven, the evidence for the middle Byzantine building on the site suggests that it was larger and more complex than its late antique predecessor.

There are many elements of the site of the Triconch House that defy precise explanation. Several blocked doorways, truncated walls, and rebuilt and renovated portions of this structure cannot be connected to any particular period. This study focuses on its major phases that roughly correspond with late Hellenistic/early Roman, late antique, and middle Byzantine periods, but there were other 'micro'-phases within these that cannot be fully reconstructed. Among the reasons for this are the long-lived building techniques at Aphrodisias and the regular reuse and repositioning of material. The nearly continuous occupation of this site over more than a millennium also contributed to its many permutations.

B. PERIODS AND NAMES

The term 'early Roman' is used to indicate a period corresponding to the civil wars of the late Republic through the reign of the Julio-Claudians, while 'high imperial' refers approximately to the reign of Trajan through the Severan dynasty.¹ 'Late antique' or 'late Roman' are used to describe the fourth through mid-seventh centuries. This era ends at Aphrodisias with the break in occupation of much of the city most likely after the reign of Heraclius. The so-called Dark Ages of the seventh through ninth century are discussed here in terms of absolute dates. The term middle Byzantine is reserved for the ninth through twelfth centuries.

In the roughly 1200 years covered by these terms, the city of Aphrodisias was known by at least three names. From the Hellenistic period to late antiquity it was called Aphrodisias, the sacred city of Aphrodite. By the sixth century it was more often referred to by the name of the province of which it was the capital, Caria.² By the seventh century it had adopted another name, Stauropolis, City of the Cross, but this seems not to have gained much traction, and the city is referred to as Caria again in the middle Byzantine period.³

The Triconch House has also undergone several name changes. In the early 1960s, it was referred to by its excavators as the Multi-Apsed Building, because of its form. Shortly thereafter it came to be referred to in field notes and publications as the Bishop's Palace, because of its proximity to the Cathedral and the discovery of bishops' seals in the house.⁴ Though probably accurate in the latest phases of the building (the ninth to twelfth centuries), the name Bishop's Palace is misleading as a description of the building for most of its history. The house has also been suggested as the location of a governor's palace.⁵ In 2009, the building was renamed the Triconch House, after its most prominent architectural feature.⁶

The name Triconch House is used here to refer to the late antique building that included the triple-apsed hall, which existed only after the late fourth or early fifth century. When discussing periods prior to that renovation, I refer to buildings on the site of the Triconch House.

C. URBAN CONTEXT

Most of Aphrodisias was laid out according to a grid plan in the late Hellenistic period.⁷ The public buildings in the city center were fitted into the framework provided by the grid, which was oriented to the cardinal directions; streets connected public buildings with the rest of the city and with each other (Figs. 1–2). To the north and south of the Triconch House were the Temple of Aphrodite (Fig. 2, no. 2) and the north stoa of the

1 *AJA* 1997, 3–5; *AJA* 1998, 235, 238; *AJA* 2008, 728.

2 *e-ALA*, I.1-I.10; *ALA*, 1–3, 11–34.

3 *ALA*, 149–151 and *e-ALA*, esp. VI.54; Nesbitt 1983, 159–60.

4 Campbell 1991, 14.

5 Erim 1986, 73. See below, Chapter 5, for discussion.

6 Berenfeld 2009.

7 Ratté 2008, 7–36.

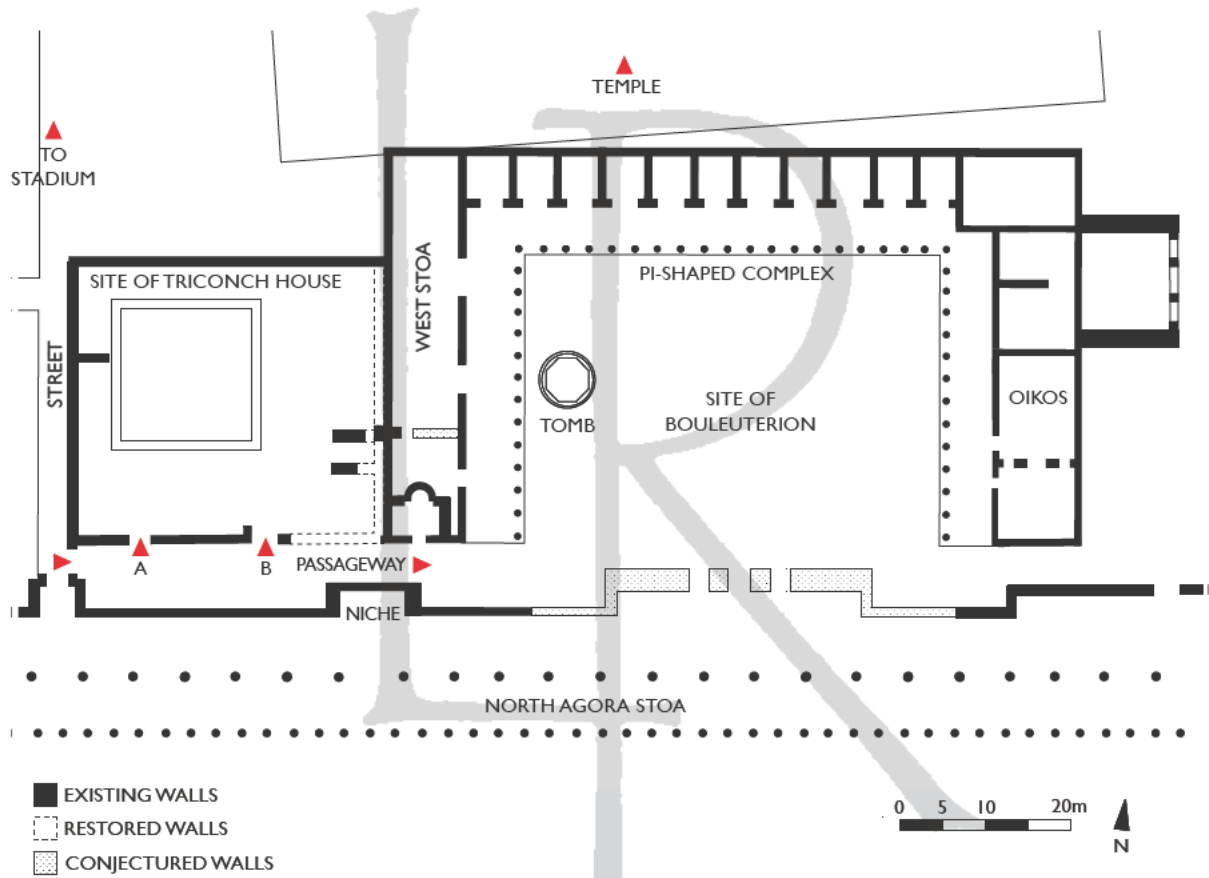


Fig. 5. Site of Triconch House and surrounding precinct. Restored plan, Hellenistic to early Roman period.

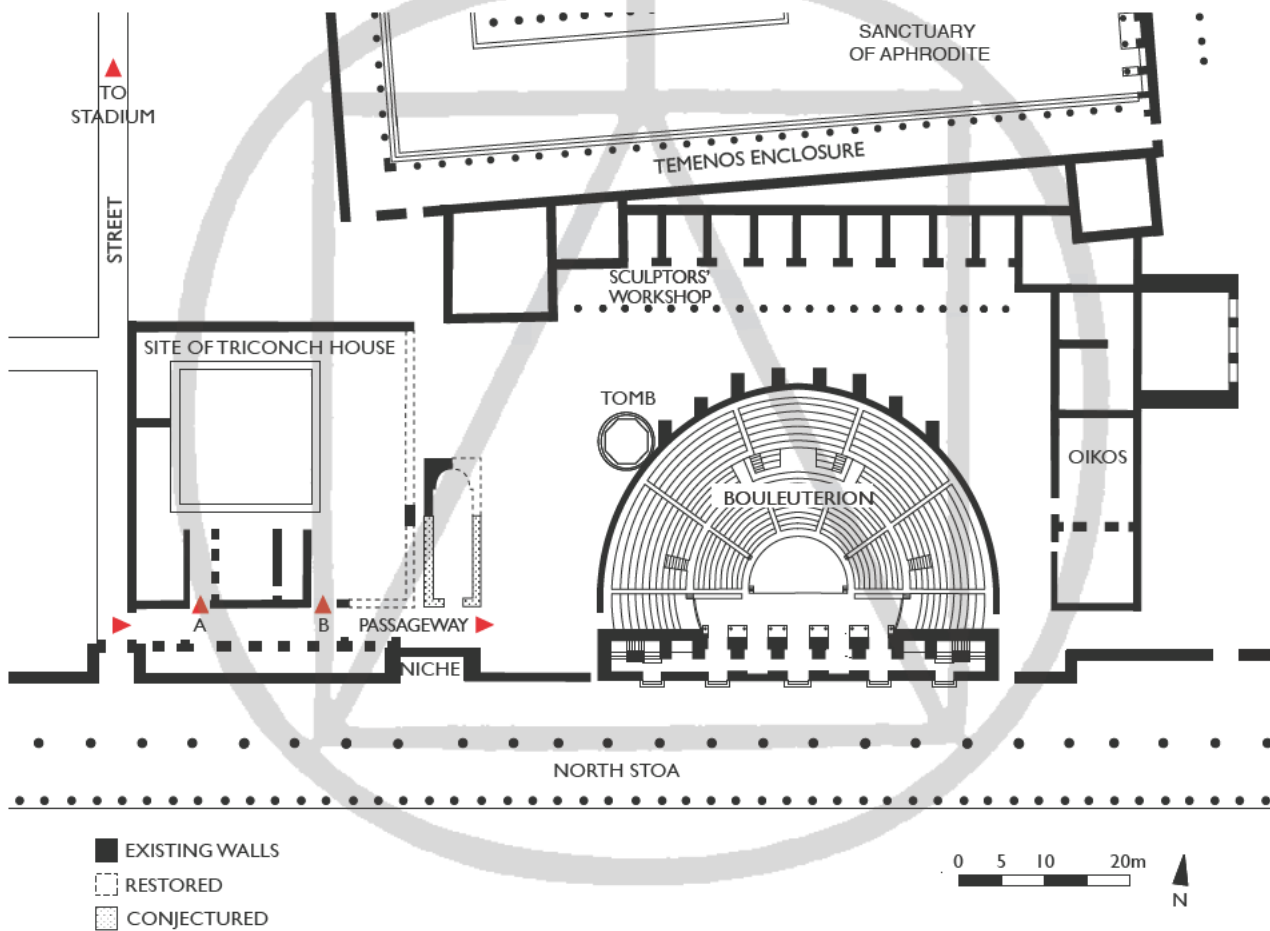


Fig. 6. Site of Triconch House and surrounding precinct. Restored plan, late third to early fourth century, with Bouleuterion.

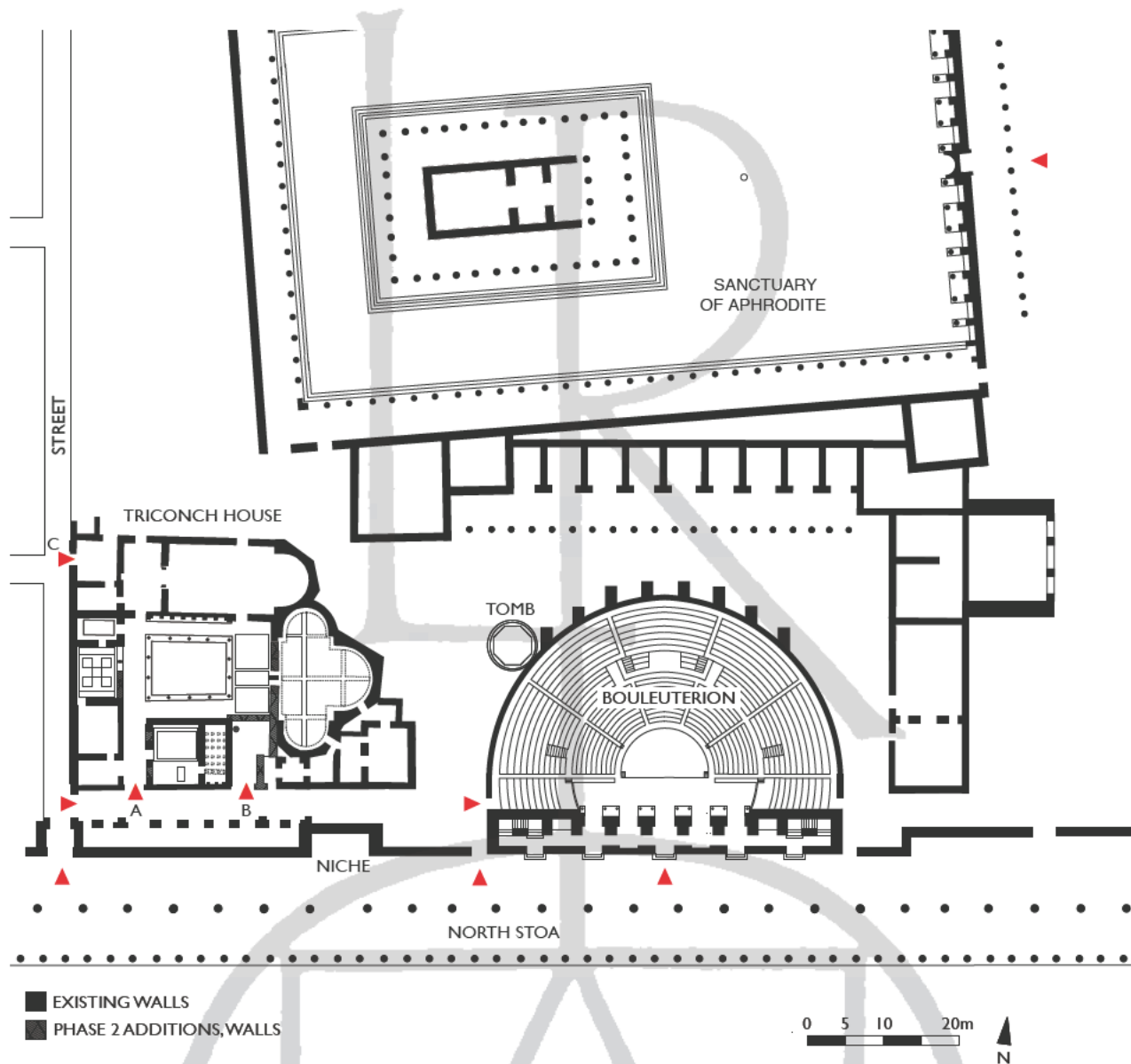


Fig. 7. Site of Triconch House and surrounding precinct. Restored plan, late antique phases 1–2 (fifth century AD), with Temple of Aphrodite.

Agora, respectively (Fig. 2, no. 5); these and the Theater stage building (Fig. 2, no. 11) are the earliest known monumental buildings in the city and were all under construction by the late first century BC.⁸ Immediately adjacent to the Triconch House to the east, and also located between the Temple of Aphrodite and the Agora, was the Bouleuterion precinct (Fig. 2, no. 3). In the early imperial period, the area currently occupied by the Bouleuterion was a rectangular space framed by a *pi*-shaped complex of stoas and public buildings fronted by colonnades on its north, east, and west sides (Fig. 5).⁹ The boundary between the site of the Bouleuterion and that of the Triconch House shifted more than once in the imperial period and late antiquity.

Throughout the imperial period, most of the site of the Triconch House was occupied by a large rectangular build-

ing, which was reduced slightly in size when the monumental Bouleuterion was constructed in the late second or early third century AD (Fig. 6). The two buildings, however, remained spatially and topographically connected through the third and fourth centuries.¹⁰ When the Triconch House was completed around AD 400, most of the buildings in the city center were already centuries old, but actively maintained. The street marking the west side of the property remained in use and the paved passageway behind the north stoa of the Agora connected the city street to the Triconch House and the Bouleuterion. Entrances to the Triconch House (doorways A and B), which led to the peristyle courtyard, opened onto this passageway (Fig. 7). The passageway was also directly accessible from the north stoa of the Agora.

The sanctuary of Aphrodite, to the north of the Triconch House, was still intact at the end of the fourth century and re-

8 *AJA* 2000, 222. For detailed discussion, see Ratté 2002.

9 For signs of an earlier imperial Bouleuterion on this site, see Reynolds 1996, 121–126; *AJA* 2008, 726; Bier 2008, 166–168.

10 *AJA* 1997, 5; Bier 2008, 145–168.

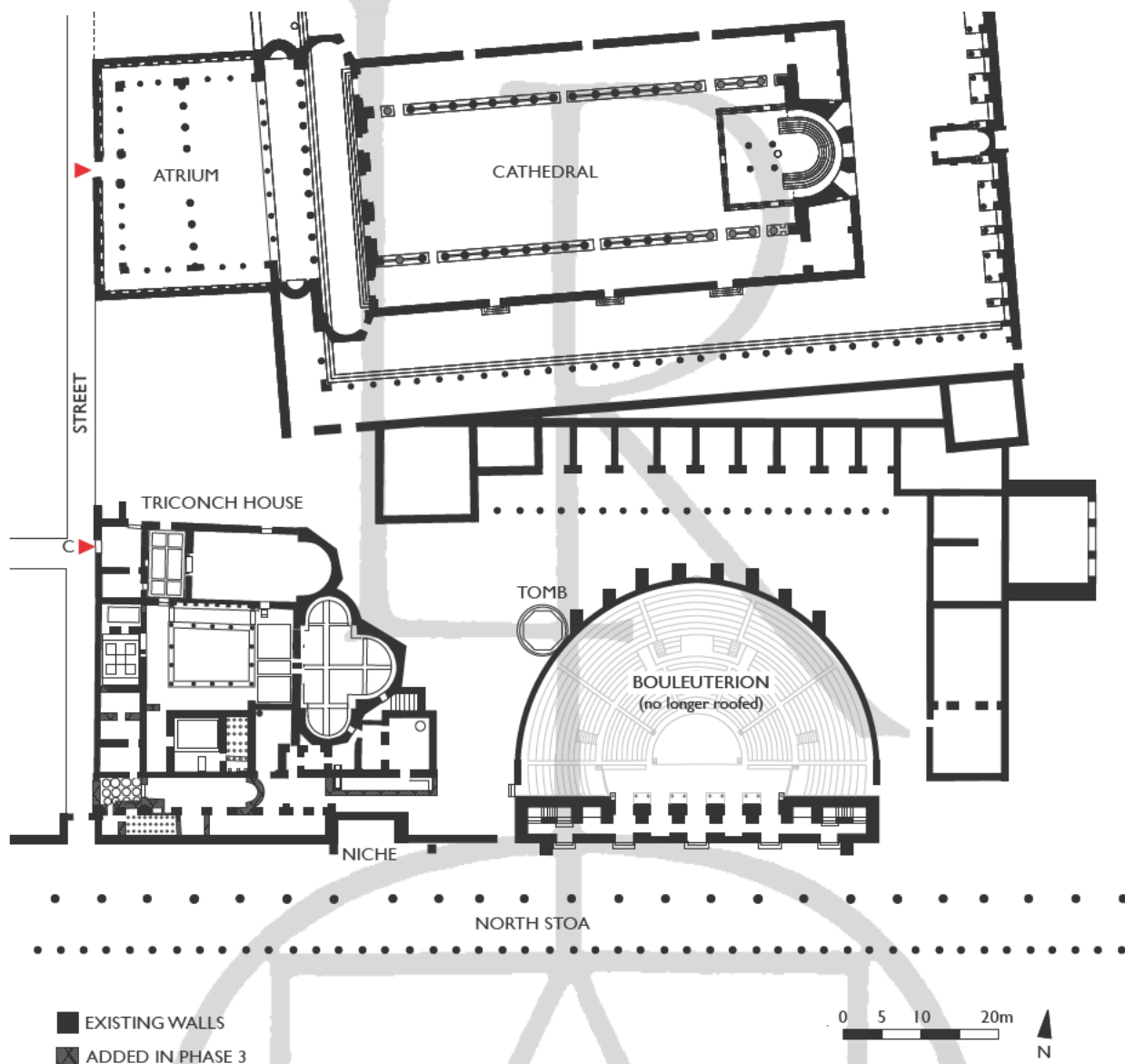


Fig. 8. Site of Triconch House and surrounding precinct. Restored plan, late antique phase 3 (sixth century AD), with Church.

mained so for probably another fifty years; in the mid-fifth century, however, it was entirely rebuilt as a Cathedral.¹¹ During the years that this project was in progress, the residents of the Triconch House lived next to a large construction site; when it was over, the relationship between the Triconch House and the Sanctuary had been dramatically altered (Fig. 8). Not only did this project include dismantling much of the Temple, rearranging its columns, and building the much larger Church around its skeleton, but it also turned the building back to front. The entrance to the Christian sanctuary was on the west side and faced the same street that bordered the west side of the Triconch House. One traveling on the road that led north from the Agora would now pass a main door to the Triconch House on the way

11 J.J. Coulton proposes that the Cathedral was constructed in two distinct phases, with the main sanctuary building completed perhaps around AD 450 and the narthex and atrium added later (pers. comm. July 2017). For previous discussions: Cormack 1979, 110–112; Cormack 1990a, 32–34; Hebert 2000, 35–75; Chaniotis 2008a, 243–274.

to the Church. This connection was further emphasized in the late fifth to sixth century by two developments: the construction of the Church atrium, which extended to the street and was entered through a monumental doorway there; and the expansion of the Triconch House south, over the passageway behind the north stoa of the Agora (rooms 26–29), blocking its southern entrances and access to the Bouleuterion from the west.

In or not long after the mid-seventh century, the Triconch House suffered damage. Its west and south rooms were abandoned and in some areas collapsed. The house was, however, reoccupied in the middle Byzantine period and was incorporated into a large complex that included the Church (Fig. 9). The church continued to function as the city's Cathedral and was refurbished probably in the tenth or eleventh century.¹² Other areas of occupation in the middle Byzantine period were the Theater hill, where there was a fortified village, and a small

12 Hebert 2000, 212–242.

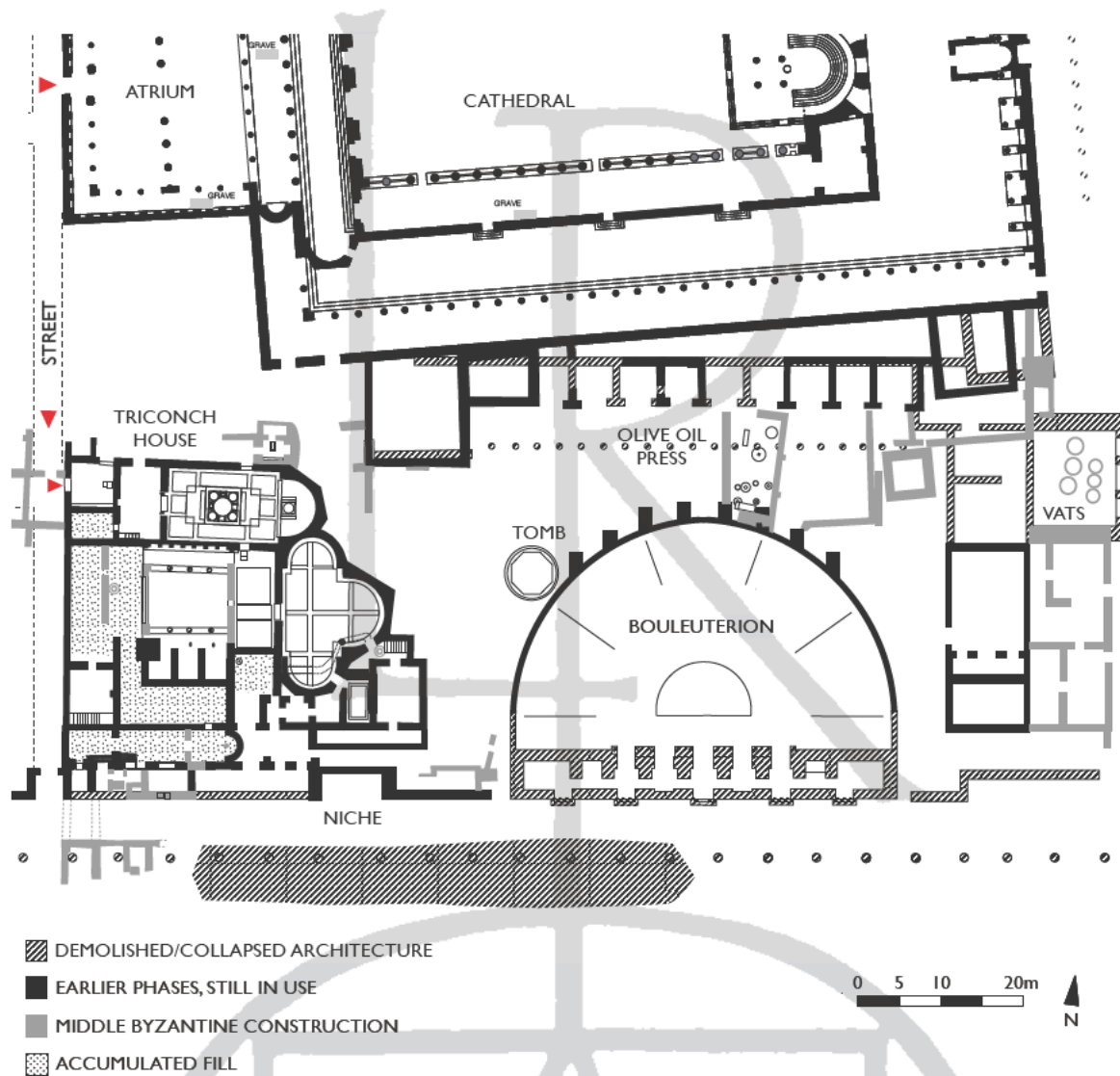


Fig. 9. Triconch House and surrounding precinct. Restored plan, middle Byzantine period.

triconch church near the south end of the Roman Basilica.¹³ Extra-mural churches and pockets of settlement in other areas of the city are additional signs of late occupation, but have not been fully studied.¹⁴ At the end of the twelfth century, the city was sacked by the Turks and the population deported.¹⁵

D. CHAPTER SEQUENCE AND SUMMARY

This book is organized chronologically and follows the development of the site of the Triconch House from the earliest evidence for its occupation in the late Hellenistic and early Roman periods through its final collapse along with the rest of the city

in the late twelfth century. Throughout, the site of the Triconch House is considered in relation to its immediate neighbors, the Agora, the Bouleuterion, and the Sanctuary of Aphrodite, later the Cathedral.

Chapter 2 describes the discovery and excavation of the building. Chapter 3 examines the evidence for structures on the site of the Triconch House from the first century BC through the fourth century AD. Throughout this period the site was occupied by a rectangular building with a large open courtyard, which was integrated into the surrounding complex of civic buildings and monuments on the north side of the Agora. It is argued that movement between the site of the Triconch House, the Bouleuterion, and the north stoa of the Agora was facilitated by passageways and prominent doors and that connections were further emphasized by lines of sight. Possible identifications of civic buildings that preceded the Triconch House in the imperial period are examined here, including a hypothesis that it may have been the location of a gymnasium. This chapter also includes discussion of third- to fourth-century megalographic

13 For the Triconch Church see: Cormack 1979, 114–116; 1990 34–36. On the Basilica: see Stinson 2016. See Chapter 6 for further discussion.

14 On the extramural churches, see Dalgıç 2012, 367–396.

15 Nic. Chon. *Hist.* 494–5; discussed in *e-ALA*, VII.27, VII.9 and Hebert 2000, 258–259. See below, Chapter 6.

wall paintings of Victory and the three Graces, which were installed in a loggia-type corridor (12) and neighboring rectangular room (13) on the south side of the building.

Chapter 4 describes the architecture and interior decoration of the late antique house. The architectural development of the building is divided into three phases. The first late antique phase begins around AD 400 and is marked by the construction of the triconch (6) and north apsidal hall (4) and the unification of the site into a single, elaborate domestic property. Architectural components are discussed along with decorative elements and furnishings, including mosaic and *opus sectile* floors, sigma tables, and a relief depicting a double image of Nemesis. Statuary associated with a series of niches in the peristyle courtyard is discussed, as is evidence for the presence of a large statue of the Aphrodite of Aphrodisias in the house. The second architectural phase is broadly dated to the fifth century and includes the installation of a private bathing suite on the south side of the building and some alterations of the peristyle courtyard.

The third and final late antique phase of the house represents a marked change in the urban orientation of the building. The connection between the Triconch House and the Bouleuterion was severed in this phase by the construction of a long, narrow apsidal hall (26) along the south side of the house (referred to as the south apsidal hall). This renovation roughly coincides with the construction of the atrium and narthex of the Cathedral, resulting in a closer topographical connection between the

Triconch House and the Sanctuary. After these renovations, the only public (that is, non-service) entrance to the Triconch House (C) opened onto the same street as the main door to the Cathedral.

Chapter 5 examines the Triconch House in relation to late antique houses at Aphrodisias and more widely in the empire. The significance of the construction of a triple-apsed hall in an urban house in the eastern Mediterranean is discussed in connection with villa architecture in the west as well as broader trends in late Roman elite domestic buildings. Finally, it is argued that the Triconch House may have been a governor's residence in late antiquity, based on an examination of renovations of the Agora and the Bouleuterion as they relate to the Triconch House, as well as literary and epigraphical evidence.

Chapter 6 is an exploration of the middle Byzantine history of the Triconch House and argues for its integration into a precinct dominated by the Cathedral and its identification as a bishop's palace. Archaeological evidence is presented for the reconfiguration and expansion of the house in this period, including the construction of at least one chapel in the expanded building, and agricultural production facilities. A series of lead seals found in and around the house is also presented. Finally, the latest phases of the building's history and its final abandonment are discussed in relation to evidence for the destruction and collapse of the city in the late twelfth century. Chapter 7 presents a brief summary of the conclusions of this study.

