

The episcopal palace of Parnassos in Cappadocia and its Early Byzantine floor mosaics

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Abstract

The Roman *mansio* or way station and Byzantine bishopric of Parnassos in Cappadocia is chiefly known through inscriptions and bishops' lists and identified with the small Turkish village of Parlasan/Değirmenyolu. It came as a surprise when a salvage excavation unearthed a large building with sumptuous floor mosaics beyond the outskirts of the village. Previous excavation reports misrepresented the building as a basilica church, when it was in fact an apsed hall and may be identified as the reception unit of an elite residence, as this article shows. A large central room had an elevated apse where the landlord would have sat. An animal mosaic in front of the apse is comparable to similar compositions in fourth-to-sixth-century urban palaces but avoids any reference to pagan mythology and employs stylistic features that are otherwise known from church floors. A mosaic inscription identifies the reception unit as belonging to the bishop and thus as part of the episcopal palace. This discovery is augmented by the find of a Late Roman sarcophagus and three Early Christian gravestones. Later, after the original palace was mostly destroyed, the building complex underwent a second, utilitarian phase that appears to date from the Invasion Period, when the Arabs raided central Anatolia from the seventh to ninth centuries.

Özet

Esas olarak yazıtlar ve piskopos listeleri aracılığıyla, Roma döneminde *mansio* veya yol istasyonu ve Bizans döneminde piskoposluk olduğu bilinen Kapadokya'daki Parnassos, bugün küçük bir Türk köyü olan Parlasan/Değirmenyolu ile özdeşleştirilmektedir. Bir kurtarma kazısında köyün dış mahallelerinin ötesinde görkemli taban mozaikleri olan büyük bir bina ortaya çıkarıldığında bu bir sürpriz olmuştur. Önceki kazı raporlarında bazilika kilisesi olarak yanlış tanımlanmış yapı, aslında apsizli bir salondur ve bu makalede gösterildiği gibi elit bir konutun kabul birimi olarak tanımlanabilir. Büyük bir merkezi odada ev sahibinin oturacağı yüksek bir apsiz bulunuyordu. Apsizin önündeki bir hayvan mozaigi, dördüncü ila altıncı yüzyıl kent saraylarındaki benzer kompozisyonlarla karşılaştırılabilir, ancak pagan mitolojisine herhangi bir atıfta bulunmaktan kaçınır ve aksine kilise zeminlerinden bilinen stilistik özellikleri kullanır. Bir mozaik yazıtı, kabul biriminin piskoposa ait olduğunu ve dolayısıyla piskoposluk sarayının bir parçası olduğunu belirtir. Bu keşif, bir Geç Roma lahdı ve üç adet Erken Hıristiyanlık dönemi mezar taşının bulunmasıyla daha da zenginleşmiştir. Daha sonra, orijinal saray büyük ölçüde yıkıldıktan sonra, yapı kompleksi yedinci ve dokuzuncu yüzyıllar arasında, Arapların Orta Anadolu'ya akınlar düzenleyip istila ettiği dönemde başka bir işlevde kullanımını sürdürmüştür.

To view supplementary material for this article, including an appendix on a Late Roman sarcophagus and three early Christian gravestones, please visit <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0066154623000078>.

The Roman *mansio* or way station and Byzantine bishopric of Parnassos in Cappadocia is chiefly known through inscriptions and bishops' lists (Anderson 1899: 107–9; French 2012: 263–64, no. 158; Hild, Restle 1981: 252–53). Parnassos has been identified

with the small Turkish village of Parlasan/Değirmenyolu in northwestern Cappadocia (fig. 1), where an ancient route from Constantinople/Istanbul to southeastern Anatolia passed between the Halys/Kızılırmak River to the north and the Tatta/Tuz/Salt Lake to the south (Hild 1977:

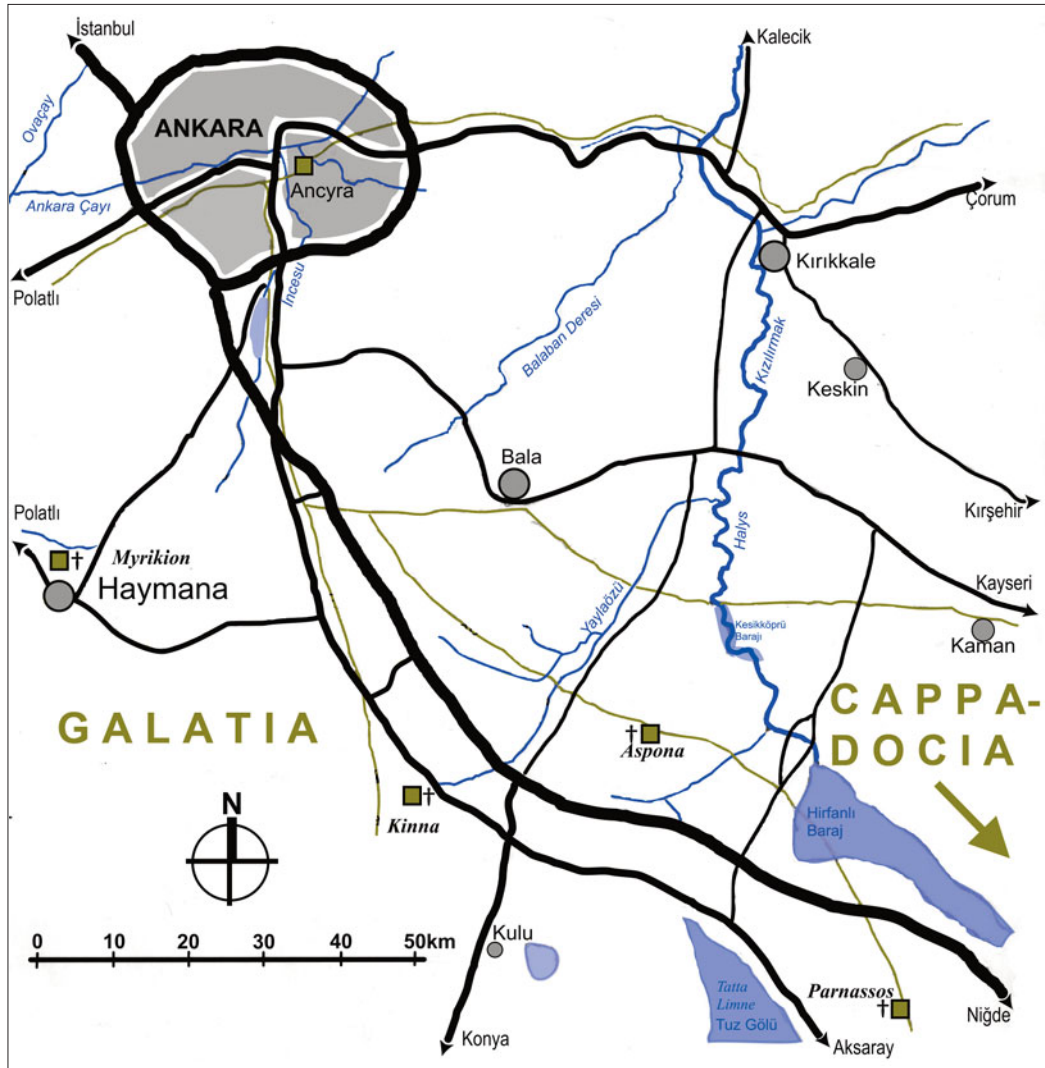


Fig. 1. Parnassos/Parlasan in relation to Ankara and other Turkish cities and roads (round and thick) as well as Byzantine bishoprics and routes (square and thin) (map by A. Vardar and P. Niewöhner).

35–41, route A1; Cassia 2004: 107–8; Métivier 2005: 63). Parnassos/Parlasan is located at the bottom of a shallow valley that provides some protection from the wind and ample water (fig. 2). Several springs combine to form a substantial stream that is flanked by meadows and trees. The village occupies a rocky plateau to the west of the stream and is centred on a steep hüyük, or mound, that attests to an ancient settlement tradition. Sherds are widely scattered on the west side of the stream (but not on the east side), a few surviving old village houses re-use ancient ashlar, and the new mosque employs two column shafts and two mullions, the old mosque some more, unspecific marbles (Ersay Yüksel 2012). Otherwise, Parlasan used to be void of antiquities, and J. G. C. Anderson, who visited the village in the 19th century, explained this by a movement to the more prosperous town of Şereflikoçhisar, about 10 km to the south (Anderson 1899: 107–9).

It came as a surprise when a salvage excavation of the Museum for Anatolian Civilisations at Ankara unearthed a large building with sumptuous Early Byzantine floor mosaics beyond the southern outskirts of the village (fig. 2). The find spot suggests that Early Byzantine Parnassos was larger than the Turkish village, and the size, quality and decoration of the building, which was centred on an apsed hall and may, as we shall see, be identified as the episcopal palace, indicate that the bishopric of Parnassos was a substantial institution. The floor mosaics show that a provincial Anatolian bishop could aspire to some of the same standards otherwise associated with metropoleis such as Constantinople or Antioch. More recent discoveries of a Late Roman sarcophagus and three Early Christian gravestones confirm this impression and are presented in the online supplementary material: Appendix 1.



Fig. 2. Parnassos/Parlasan, view of the Turkish village, from the east (photograph © M. Arslan). The village is centred on an ancient hüyük or settlement mound, to the right or north of which the mosque may be recognised by its minaret. The location of the excavation site and bishop's palace beyond the southern outskirts of the village is marked by a white circle.

The salvage excavation

The object of the salvage excavation lay hidden below, and is surrounded by, fields and orchards. It was first noted in 1991, when a road from Parlasan to the neighbouring village of Palazobası was enlarged. The road passes to the east of the excavation site and cut off and destroyed what may have been a southeastern room (figs 3 and 4). As the terrain inclines towards the stream further to the east, the road was built on a lower level than the excavated building. The roadworkers noticed brick arches that may have served as substructure under the floor of the southeastern room. A second intervention occurred in 2007, when a trench for a water pipe was cut diagonally through the northern entrance passage, the apsed hall and a northeast room (figs 3 and 4). After another three years, the Museum for Anatolian Civilisations in Ankara unearthed the building and documented its mosaics in 2010 and 2011.

Under a thick layer of brown topsoil, which corresponds to modern agriculture, the building was covered by no more than 1m of debris, and often less, consisting mainly of rubble. Most other ancient building material appears to have been robbed at an earlier stage in the

building's destruction history. This is particularly obvious in the case of the apsed hall, the southwest, northwest and northeast walls of which form a uniformly low and horizontal socle (figs 3, 4 and 20). The level socle contrasts with the uneven preservation of all other walls and finds its explanation in a layer of lime mortar that covers it and preserves imprints of wavy finger-marks of the kind that were typical for bricks (Bardill 2004: 5–6, 27–28; Witte-Orr 2007). Apparently, the socle was prepared for, and followed by, a layer of bricks. Brick courses were often employed in Late Antique and Early Byzantine constructions, including in central Anatolia, whenever ashlar masonry required additional strength (Deichmann 1956: 19–33; Thür 2009). Similar brick-banded ashlar masonry can be seen at an Early Byzantine basilica at Örencik in the vicinity of Kadoi/Gediz in Phrygia (Altunkaynak Duğan, Ünan 2019). In the case of the apsed hall, the need for extra strength resulted from its greater height and width in comparison to all other rooms of the building. Later, when the complex had become a ruin, all bricks were carefully extracted to be re-used elsewhere, as bricks were difficult to produce, hard to come by and much sought after.



Fig. 3. Excavation site at the end of the first season in 2010, from the northeast (photograph © M. Arslan).



Fig. 4. Excavation site at the end of the second season in 2011, from the west (photograph © M. Arslan). In the foreground, the secondary room I that partly preserves a mixed stone floor and contains a drain. The trench that starts at the bottom left corner of the photograph and cuts diagonally across the palace was dug in 2007. The road in the background was built in 1991.

Before the complex was ruined and had started to be robbed for building material, the original palace and mosaic floors had already been disfigured and obscured by secondary walls and floors that are apparent in the western part of the excavation, to the west of the apsed hall (figs 4 and 21). Originally, the apsed hall was flanked by two western rooms, one to the northwest, the other to the southwest, that were in turn flanked by a western yard. Later, the two western rooms were each subdivided, with new earthen floors, below which their mosaics were hidden. The yard was also overbuilt by smaller rooms.

In the excavation reports, we noted some of the later interventions but failed to properly distinguish the two building phases and misrepresented the original building as a basilica church (Arslan et al. 2012; Sevim 2015; Sevim 2021). A more recent description and plans of building phases were adapted to suit this interpretation but, as we realise now, lack any factual basis (Arslan et al. 2021: 3–8). Their contention that the building was a three-aisled basilica and that intercolumniations were later walled off and aisles subdivided is unfounded and disproved by the walls in question. The walls that flank the apsed hall are solid and single phase, without any indication of earlier intercolumniations; the northwest and southwest rooms were always separate from the northeast and southeast(?) rooms, and they never connected to form aisles. A plan of a first building phase in the shape of a three-aisled basilica has, in hindsight, turned out to be entirely fictitious and plainly wrong (Arslan et al. 2021: plan 1). A second plan shows doors that do not exist and never did, as well as being misleading in other ways (Arslan et al. 2021: plan 2). Both plans and the accompanying description should be disregarded and may serve as a warning of how a relatively small initial mistake may grow into a fundamental misconception if subsequent interpretations are not checked against the archaeological evidence.

In the same excavation reports, we also identified the floor mosaic of the apsed hall as a representation of the Peaceable Kingdom, although a scene of a leopard hunting an ostrich (fig. 13) does not comply with the iconography of the Peaceable Kingdom. What is more, the mosaic does not allow any space for a sanctuary and altar that should have stood in front of the apse if the building was a church. An Early Byzantine church apse served to seat the bishop and clergy, in the same way as the emperor or landlord was seated on a secular apse, whilst the altar stood in front of the apse, in the easternmost part of the nave that formed the sanctuary. The altar and sanctuary were inaccessible to laypeople and separated by a *templon* or heavy marble screen on a stylobate that would divide any nave mosaic into two; a smaller eastern part inside the sanctuary was reserved for the clergy, a larger western part of the nave and its mosaic was accessible to the congregation. At Parnassos,

the mosaic floor is not divided, showing that the hall did not contain a *templon* and sanctuary in front of the apse. The building can thus not have served as a church. (Likewise, the southerly orientation of the apse at Parnassos was not customary in Early Byzantine church buildings, which would normally have an eastward direction, but this point is less straightforward, as some churches did have a divergent orientation for various reasons.)

The original building

Prior to the major destruction that appears to have triggered the second building phase, only one homogenous, original building can be made out (fig. 5). Its layout is dominated by the large apsed hall, ca 8.5m wide and 14.5m long, plus the apse with a depth of over 5m. The hall will also have been the tallest room, with clerestory windows above the adjacent rooms to the southwest, northwest and northeast. Only the southeast-facing apse was freestanding, and it would have had large windows that highlighted the bishop, as he resided there. The lower, adjacent rooms must have received their light through windows that faced away from the apsed hall: the northern entrance passage from the northwest, the northeast room from the northeast and possibly the southeast, the southwest room from the southeast and the southwest, and the northwest room only from the southwest.

The need for windows also implies that the western yard was in fact a yard and not built up as in the second phase. At ca 5m in width, the yard was considerably wider than the northwest and southwest rooms (ca 3.5m in width). It is unlikely that any building of that greater width would have been lower than the narrower rooms, but were it on the same level, the northwest room would have been left without windows to shed light on its mosaic floor, and drainage from its roof would also have been blocked. Such a situation was normally avoided and seems particularly unlikely in a newly planned ensemble.

In fact, the western yard may have been an interior courtyard that served to provide the northwest and southwest rooms with light and air, whilst the next plot to the west was built up again. Compare, for example, a similar courtyard in the bishop's palace of Miletus, where a yard in the shape of a peristyle court contained a well and was surrounded on four sides by the reception unit, living quarters and palace chapel (Niewöhner 2015). At Parnassos, the situation changed in the second phase, as described below, but room I, which then occupied the northern corner of the yard, may have continued as a lightwell and did in any case have a drain; this could go back to the earlier period and might originally have drained the western yard (compare figs 5 and 19).

The other, eastern flank of the palace complex was partly destroyed by the new road and is generally less well preserved, apparently because it was closer to the surface of the declining slope (figs 3 and 5). This situation seems

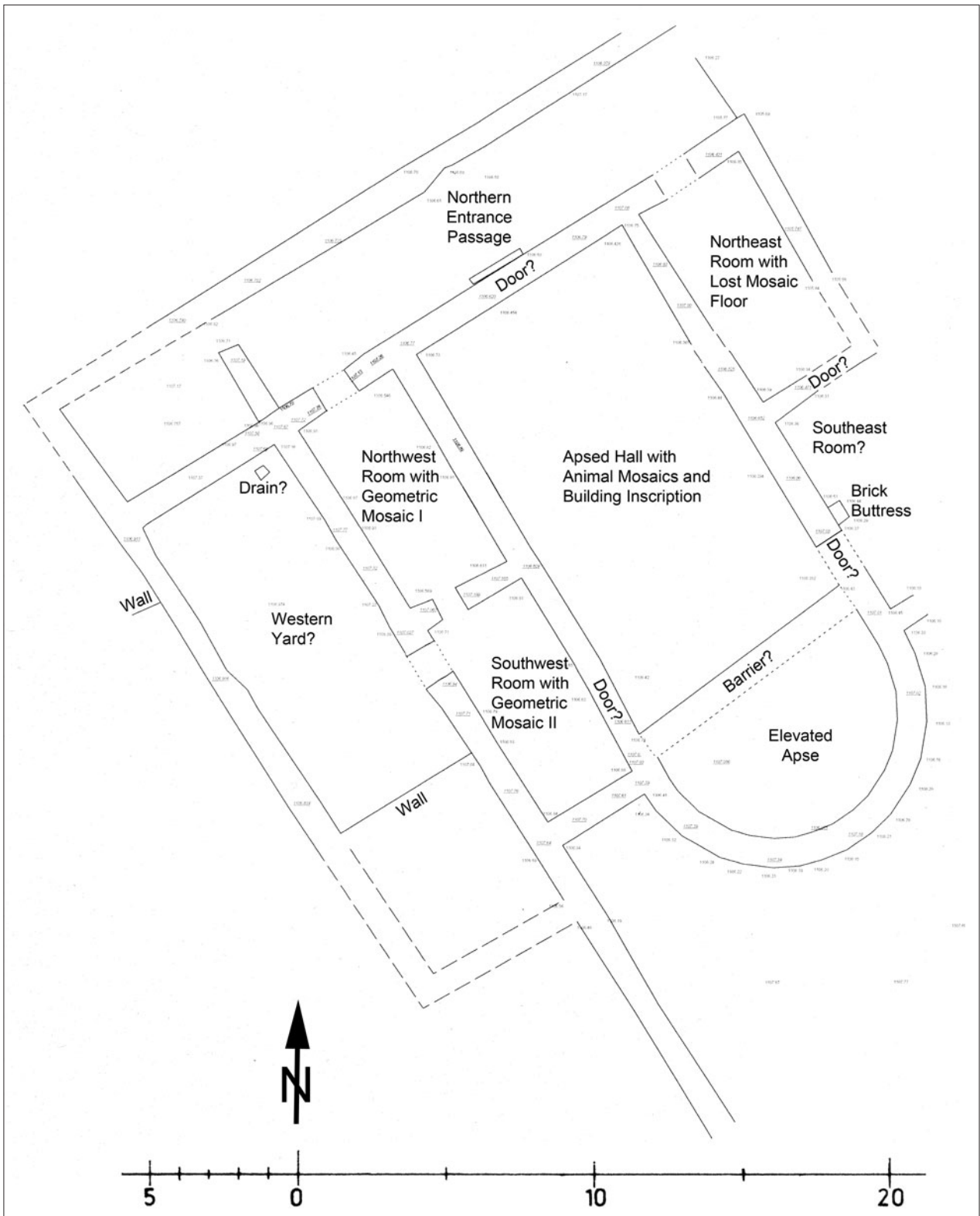


Fig. 5. Plan of the early walls, doors and floors only (plan by M. Arslan and P. Niewöhner).

to have led to the total destruction of a floor mosaic in the northeast room (ca 4 x 7.5m²). Only parts of the bedding survived, and a great many mosaic tesserae were retrieved during the excavation. Further southeast, the area where a room would have stood has been completely removed by

the roadworks down to and beyond foundation levels. It is thus not certain whether a southeast room existed. Remains of a potential southeast wall to the east of the apse and the analogy to the southwest room on the other side of the hall speak in favour of a southeast room, but a unique brick

buttress in the same area serves as a caution and shows that the building was not entirely symmetrical.

The brick buttress is located halfway between the southeast wall of the northeast room and the wall – now mostly destroyed – to the east of the apse (figs 3, 5 and 6). All three structures would have combined to support the southeast wall of the hall where it required extra strength. For comparable buttressing, see the north wall of an Early Byzantine basilica at Örencik in the vicinity of Kadoi/Gediz in Phrygia (Altunkaynak Duğan, Ünan 2019: 38, fig. 1). At Parnassos, the sloping terrain necessitated deeper foundations that, like a terrace wall, had to withstand sideways pressure down the slope to the east.

The brick buttress would have tied in with the horizontal brick band and formed its vertical equivalent. The buttress is also the only remaining part of original brick masonry in the building. The horizontal brick band appears to have been robbed, as described above, leaving behind perfectly level socle walls on the southwest, northwest and northeast sides of the hall. All walls are roughly 90cm wide and formed by two faces of irregular, coursed ashlars and a rubble core, held together by lime mortar that also served to close the joints (fig. 7). The additional brick band helped to reinforce the walls of the hall, because it was the tallest structure and most vulnerable to damage by earthquakes or any other movement, for example, of the foundations.

Together with the brick band, the doorsills of the hall seem to have also been robbed. This would have happened as a matter of course, because the doors and their sills interrupted the brick band and the robbers would have come across them, too, as they dug up the bricks. The only remaining evidence for the doors of the hall are depressions and irregularities where the doorsills interrupted the brick band because the sills were placed lower than the bricks (figs 3, 4 and 5).

The main door was surely in the middle of the northwest wall, opposite the apse, where a well-worn marble step in the northern entrance passage provides additional evidence for the central location of that door and its great width. Two more doors appear to have flanked the apse on either side. On the northeast side, door jambs seem to be in evidence (fig. 6); due to the brick buttress, the door must have occupied a relatively narrow space right next to a barrier in front of the apse. On the southwest side, the door was further removed from the apse and may have been wider. The northwest room and the hall were not connected, and the same goes for the northeast room, unless a door was located where the modern water pipe has destroyed all evidence.

The location of the doors opposite and flanking the apse underscores the hall's focus on the apse. The apse itself was elevated 90cm above the mosaic floor of the hall (figs 3 and 4). The flooring of the apse has not survived;



Fig. 6. Brick buttress on the east side of the apsed hall's east wall, from the southeast (photograph © M. Arslan). To the left, what appears to be the northern door jamb of the apsed hall's southeast door.



Fig. 7. South wall of the southwest room, from the south (photograph © M. Arslan). The lower part, which used to be buried under later floor levels and was thus protected from the elements, has preserved the original, early treatment of the outer façade: stones remained visible, but joints were closed flush with mortar.

this suggests marble, as it would have been robbed for reuse. A barrier would seem to have distinguished the apse from the hall. The barrier itself has not survived, but some longitudinal foundations in the gap between the mosaic floor and the elevated apse (figs 3 and 5) could suggest the kind of barrier that was commonly placed in front of elevated apses in the reception rooms of Late Antique and Early Byzantine elites, secular as well as ecclesiastic (Baldini Lippolis 2001: 59 and *passim*; Özgenel 2007: 253, 255; Bintliff 2012: 369). (In contrast, Early Byzantine church apses did not require barriers, because the sanctuary in front of the apse was already screened off by the *templon*.)

Thus, with its elevated apse and sumptuous floor mosaics, the large central room at Parnassos appears to have constituted the centrepiece of a reception unit typical of Late Antique and Early Byzantine elite representation (Baldini Lippolis 2001; Özgenel 2007; Niewöhner 2013; Özgenel 2018; Uytterhoeven 2022). Living quarters, kitchens, storerooms et cetera must have been located outside the excavated area. Such a separation of different functions was typical of large elite residences (Özgenel 2007), including episcopal palaces (Niewöhner 2015; Hernández Cordero, Pülz 2019).

Together, the available evidence combines to date the original building to Late Antiquity or the Early Byzantine period. The characteristic masonry with brick bands was rarely employed before the third century and became exceedingly common from the fourth century onwards (Deichmann 1956, 19–33; Thür 2009). The proliferation of apsed reception rooms in the residences of provincial elites

was likewise a Late Antique phenomenon (Baldini Lippolis 2001: 58–60; Özgenel 2018; Uytterhoeven 2022). Finally, the few stray finds that were recorded during the excavations also point to Late Antiquity. These included a silver coin minted at Nicomedia/Izmit in the reign of Galerius (305–11) and two bronze coins from the reigns of Constantine II (337–40) and probably Theodosius II (408–50).

The animal mosaic in the apsed hall

The entire floor of the hall, with the aforesaid exception of the apse, is covered with an animal mosaic and its opulent borders (figs 3, 4 and 8). For detailed images, see the online supplementary material. The borders are more numerous and wider on the long southwest and northeast sides, thus providing space where a viewer could walk and stand while observing the central scene. In contrast, the short northwest and southeast sides of the mosaic have only two and one border, respectively, thus giving preference to a longer animal scene, as if to impress any visitor on the way from the northern door to the bishop in the southern apse with as long a scene and as many animals as possible.

An outer, geometric border that exists on the long southwest and northeast sides only employs black, white and red tesserae and may be described as a series of white squares, the corners of which are cut by small black semi-circles (figs 8 and 9). Each white square contains a small red square with a black contour, each black semi-circle an equally small red semi-rhomb with a white contour. After a narrow spacer in the shape of a red and white dogtooth-pattern, there follows the second, more conventional border, which continues also on the northwest side,

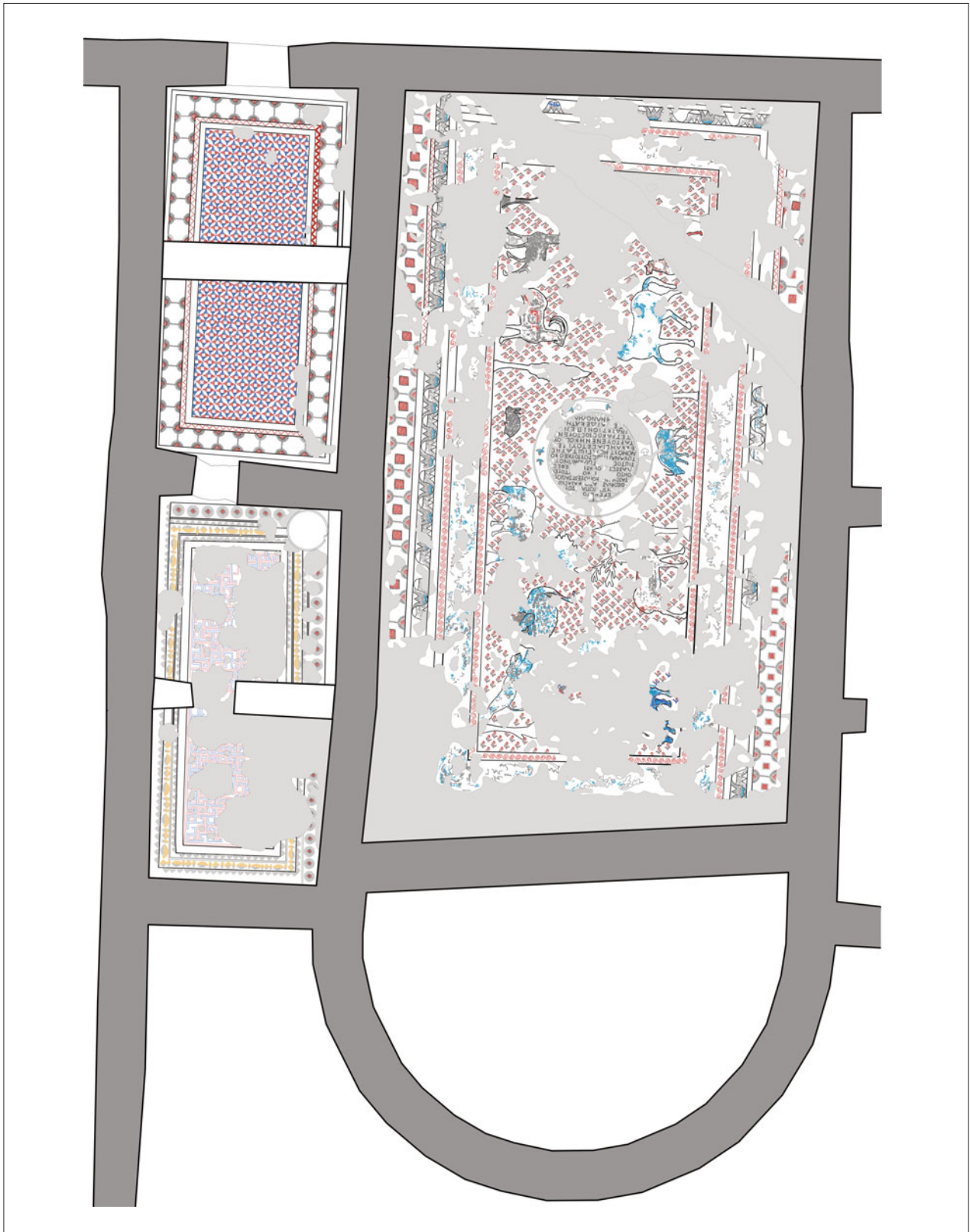


Fig. 8. Schematic drawing of the apsed hall and west rooms with their mosaic floors (drawing © M. Arslan). The white walls and the white pithos in the northeast corner of the southwest room are secondary. The animal mosaic in the apsed hall includes the following: on the west side, from north, a tree, a doe(?), a mountain goat, a cypress tree, a rabbit, a sheep(?), a deciduous tree, an ostrich attacked by a leopard, and a tree; on the east side, from south, a bull, a goose (missing from this drawing), a stag, a cypress tree, a goat, a tree, a horse with head turned back at a mare or colt(?), a black(?)bird above the horse (missing) and a tree.

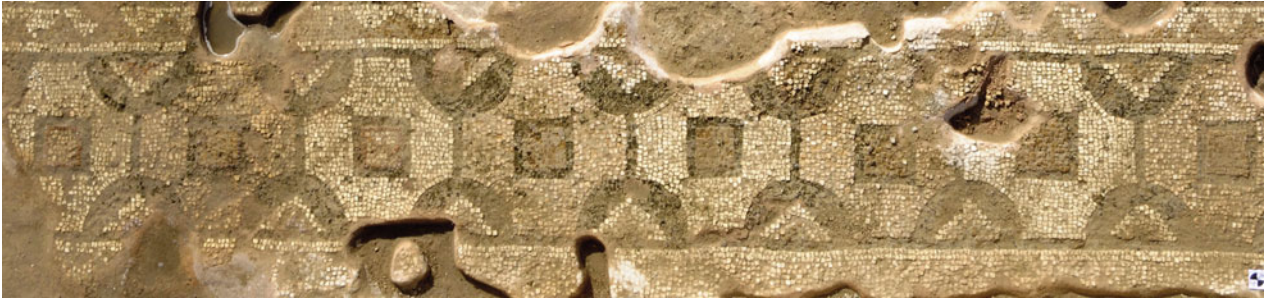


Fig. 9. Southeast corner of the animal mosaic with a well-preserved geometric outer border, from the northeast (photograph © M. Arslan).



Fig. 10. Western border of the animal mosaic, middle section with a well-preserved middle border in the shape of alternately hanging and standing calices with a dogtooth-pattern below and a white band above, from the southwest (photograph © M. Arslan).

but not on the southeast. It is made up of alternately hanging and standing calices, each with a black bottom, a turquoise centre and white leaf tips (figs 8 and 10). The next spacer is a plain white band, after which follows the third and innermost border that continues around all four sides of the animal scene. It consists of two narrow, red and white wave bands that enclose a wide, blueish-grey acanthus scroll on a black ground (figs 8, 11 and 12).

The animal scene is a hybrid combination of two designs: one is essentially central, with a middle medallion that is surrounded by animals and trees, to be seen by viewers who circulate on the outside (figs 8 and 12). Originally, this design was conceived for round reception rooms like the Theodosian palace rotunda at the Myrelaion in Istanbul (Niewöhner 2013). Later, it was also adapted to square rooms, for example the ‘Megalopsychia-Mosaic’ in a suburban villa at Daphne, outside Antioch on the Orontes (Lassus 1934: 122, fig. 6; Campbell 1934: 202). At Parnassos, the same design was stretched to fit the

longitudinal hall, which meant that animals and trees are now aligned along the southwest and northeast sides, where they could be observed by those walking or standing on the wide triple borders.

The second design element of the scene takes the form of a flowery meadow that completely covers all remaining space between the middle medallion, animals and trees, but is arranged at right angles to the latter (figs 8 and 12). The flowers form regular rows and face north in the northern half of the mosaic and south in the southern half, as if aimed at a visitor entering through the main, northern door on the one side and at the bishop in the southern apse on the other. In this way, the flowers provide the animal scene with a second, longitudinal orientation and help to reconcile the essentially circular layout with the long proportions of the hall.

This combination was novel and seems to have been conceived late in the history of mosaic floors. The earlier, round or square figural scenes exemplified by the Myrelaion and the ‘Megalopsychia-Mosaic’ have no rows



Fig. 11. Eastern border of the animal mosaic, middle section with a well-preserved inner border in the shape of a scroll between wave bands, from the northeast (photograph © M. Arslan).



Fig. 12. Central part of the animal mosaic, from the northeast (photograph © M. Arslan). On the bottom side, from left to right, a stag, a cypress tree, a goat, a tree and a horse; on the top side, and thus upside down, from right to left, a mountain goat, a cypress tree, a rabbit, a sheep(?), a deciduous tree and an ostrich.

of flowers, and clashes of orientation, style and colour at Parnassos confirm that the flowers originate from a different pictorial tradition. At right angles to the animals and the trees, the flowers are obviously at odds with the former. Their arrangement in dense rows of identical shapes that form a geometric repeat pattern is alien to the loose and naturalistic grouping of the various animals and trees. A similar difference is manifest in the choice of colours: all flowers have the same standardised black

leaves and red blossoms, while the animals and trees employ a range of bluish-grey and brown pastel colours. Thus, the rows of flowers compare to carpet patterns best known from church floors (e.g., Donceel-Voûte 1988: 329–31, 355, 383–84, 497, figs 315, 341, 369–70, 458), while the animals and trees continued in a more naturalistic Roman tradition. A combination of flowers, animals and trees as at Parnassos is attested to at a church at Temanaa in Syria (Jouéjati 2012).

At Parnassos, the animals are arranged individually or in pairs, and grouped as well as separated by the trees (figs 8 and 12). The animals are mostly black, blueish-grey and brown in colour, but each individual is carefully differentiated from its neighbours on right and left as well as across the width of the mosaic so as to lend variety to the composition. The northern part of the mosaic contains two pairs of animals, each of which is framed by two trees. On the west side, a mountain goat (supplementary fig. 5) and what may be a doe and his spouse (supplementary fig. 6) are standing back to back. Their colours gradually change from black croups to white bellies. Only the right, or southern, tree is preserved well enough to be identified as a cypress (figs 8 and 12). On the southeast side, a large, blueish-grey horse turns its head (supplementary fig. 7) towards what appears to be a smaller, brown horse that follows behind (supplementary fig. 8); the two horses could represent a mare and a colt or possibly a stallion and a much smaller mare. Above the croup of the large blueish-grey horse, the hind part of a black bird can be made out, but its head is lost (supplementary fig. 9).

The central part of the mosaic is mostly given over to the medallion with inscription, and the animals seem to have been selected because they are small enough to fit into the remaining space (figs 8 and 12). On the west side, a blueish-grey rabbit (supplementary fig. 10) and what looks like a

woolly sheep (supplementary fig. 11), with colours between white and brown, face in opposite directions. On the east side, a blueish-grey goat is grazing (supplementary fig. 12). The southwestern part of the mosaic is again framed by two trees and shows a corresponding pair of animals (figs 8 and 13). In this case, the trees are deciduous on the left, or northern, side and a cypress on the other side. Between them, a leopard (supplementary fig. 13) attacks a fleeing ostrich (supplementary fig. 14). Both animals are mostly blueish-grey in colour, but the pair stands out for being the only exotic animals, strange to the region of Parnassos, as well as for taking part in the only hunting scene among the otherwise calm and peaceful creatures. The opposite, southeastern part of the mosaic has only one tree, a cypress, that separates this section from the centre (figs 8 and 12, supplementary fig. 15). To the left, or south, of the tree follow a stag (supplementary fig. 15), a goose (supplementary fig. 16) and a bull (supplementary fig. 17), the first light brown and white in colour, the latter two mostly black and dark brown.

Like the limited colour scheme, the trees also display little overall variety, with three apparent cypresses and one deciduous kind, the other three trees being too damaged for identification (fig. 8). Just as in the case of the few colours, however, the two types of trees are also distributed so as to achieve variety among neighbouring trees, both right and left and across the width of the mosaic.



Fig. 13. Southwest corner of the animal mosaic, from the northwest, including a leopard attacking an ostrich (photograph © M. Arslan).



Fig. 14. The medallion with wreath and inscription in the centre of the animal mosaic, from the northwest (photograph © M. Arslan).

Overall, the animal mosaic is closely comparable to similar compositions in fourth to sixth-century urban palaces and suburban mansions at Constantinople, Antioch and beyond (Baldini Lippolis 2001: 73–77), but lacks any reference to hunting and ancient mythology of the type otherwise often employed to signpost a landlord’s virility, aristocratic lifestyle and learning (Uytterhoeven 2009). Instead, the animals at Parnassos are combined with a flowery meadow of a kind known not from aristocratic representation but from churches. Both peculiarities find their explanation in the mosaic inscription, which identifies the landlord as a churchman, who would have nothing to do with hunting and ancient mythology but would look kindly on the ecclesiastical connotations of the flowery design.

The mosaic inscription

The medallion in the centre of the hall mosaic contains an inscription that is to be read from the north; that is, by an approaching visitor on the way from the main northern door to the southern apse (figs 8 and 12). The medallion has an overall diameter of about 2.4m, including a laurel wreath that is 30cm wide and leaves an inner circle 1.8m in diameter for the inscription. The wreath is green, with additional grey tri-lobes, and has a binding of light tesserae that marks the northern side as the ‘bottom’ (fig. 14). The inscription forms 15 lines of black letters on a white ground, with a cross and two flanking ivy leaves on top. It reads (*SEG LXIV*, 1502; Arslan et al. 2021: 9–10):

♣ † ♣

2 ἐγένετο [τὸ] ἔρ-
γον τοῦτο παρὰ τοῦ

4 θεοφιλεστάτου καὶ ἁγιο-
τάτου ἐπι[σ]κόπου Εὐσταθίου

6 ὄντο[ς δὲ τοῦ] διακόνο[υ] τοῦ εὐ-
λαβεστάτου Κρί[σπο]υ ἐφες-
8 τῶτος [τῷ ἔρ]ῳ Λονγίνου
τοῦ ἀναγνώστου τοῦ κε οἰκο-
10 νόμου τῆς ἁγιωτάτης
ἐκκλησίας ἔτους τε-
12 τάρτου ἐνενηκοστοῦ
τετρακοσιοστοῦ ἐν
14 ἰνδικτιόνι πεν-
τεκαίδεκάτη·
16 Ἐμμανουήλ

Translation

♣ † ♣ This work was executed on behalf of the most God loving and holy bishop Eustathius, when the most pious Crispus was deacon and as Longinus, the reader and financial administrator of the most holy church, oversaw the work, in the year 494 and the 15th indiction. God be with us.

The ‘work’ in question may have been the whole building or just the mosaic. Eustathius may have been one of several Early Byzantine bishops of Parnassos known by that name. Following the bishop, Crispus the deacon was likely the second-highest church dignitary at Parnassos. Longinus the reader likely shared his ecclesiastical role with several others at Parnassos and probably owed his outstanding mention to his second, more worldly function as financial administrator of the church, in this case the bishopric of Parnassos. In the absence of any donors, Longinus would have managed the funding of the ‘work’. If the Actian era was applied (which is by no means certain), the work may have been executed in AD 462, which was a 15th indiction (Arslan et al. 2021: 10–12). In that case, Eustathius could have been the same bishop who is attested as participating in the Council of Chalcedon in 451 (Schwartz 1933: 150, 17, no. 13).

However, the sole responsibility of the bishop and the deacon, as well as the reader and financial administrator, leaves no doubt that the ‘work’ belonged to the bishopric of Parnassos. The apsed hall must have been the reception room of the episcopal residence, as this seems to be the only conceivable explanation for the inscription and why the bishop declared himself and his clergy invested in an otherwise secular kind of building. Compare commemorative building inscriptions in other episcopal palaces (e.g., Gerber 1917: 104–6; Marano 2007: 111; Seeliger 2011:

206–7; Niewöhner 2015). Ecclesiastical officeholders employed some of the same status symbols as worldly elites (Ceylan 2014; Saradi 2020), and many bishops are known to have been recruited from the aristocracy (Rapp 2005: 183–95). At Parnassos, the hall may have been newly built by the bishop at the same time as the mosaic was laid, or at an earlier point in time by a different bishop. It may also have originally belonged to an earlier, Late Antique elite residence that was at some point taken over by the bishop and converted into his palace, as is known to have happened in other cities (e.g. Niewöhner 2015; Pülz 2019).

The geometric mosaics in the northwest and southwest rooms

The geometric mosaics in the west rooms appear to be contemporaneous with the animal mosaic in the hall, which suggests that bishop Eustathius’ ‘work’ comprised more than the latter floor and may have included the whole building. The geometric mosaics in the west rooms employ the same colours as the geometric outer border of the hall, that is, mainly black, white and red, and the west rooms have similar borders, too (fig. 8).

The northwest room employs almost the same outer border as the hall but with flipped colours (figs 15 and 16; cf. fig. 9). The border consists of a series of black squares, the corners of which are cut by small white semi-circles that each contain a red semi-rhomb with a black contour. Again, as in the hall, the border is framed by a red and white dogtooth pattern, but this time it is not only on the inside, but also on the outside. Next follow, again on both sides, thick black bands, but some of the outside bands are cut down to thin lines by the southwest and northeast walls of the narrow room. Inside this border, the northwest room has a repeat pattern of overlapping white compass flowers that, on a black ground, alternate with small off-white squares.

The southwest room, like the hall, has an additional outer border on some sides but not on others (figs 8, 17 and 18). In the hall, this may have been intentional, in order to provide additional space for viewing the animals on the one hand and depicting as many animals as possible on the other, but in the southwest room no such reason comes to mind. The extra border occurs on the northwest and northeast sides and could have been avoided by adding to the repeat patterns of the main border and the central panel. Such additions would seem to be a simple task, and it is not obvious why the mosaicists preferred the addition of an outer border that compromised the symmetry of the floor.

The additional outer border on the northwest and northeast sides of the southwest room consists of a series of white circles on a black ground. Each white circle contains a red rhomb with a black contour. The main border that continues



Fig. 15. Northwest room with geometric floor mosaic; northern half, which was later partitioned off as room B, from the southwest (photograph © M. Arslan).



Fig. 17. Southwest room with geometric floor mosaic; northern half, which was later partitioned off as room D, from the southwest (photograph © M. Arslan). The upper left corner contains the bottom part of a pithos, and numerous round holes indicate where more pithoi used to stand during the second phase.

along all four sides of the rectangular room is made up of a relatively large astragal between two dogtooth-patterns. The astragal is white on a split ground, red on the outside and black on the inside, which contrasts with a black-and-white



Fig. 16. Northwest room with geometric floor mosaic; southern half, which was later partitioned off as room C, from the southwest (photograph © M. Arslan). The top of the secondary partition wall on the left is formed by a level band of re-used brick fragments (see fig. 20).



Fig. 18. Southwest room with geometric floor mosaic; southern half, which was later partitioned off as room E, from the southwest (photograph © M. Arslan).

dogtooth pattern on the outside and a red-and-white version of the same on the inside. As in the northwest room, the border is set off by a thick black band against the repeat pattern that fills the central panel. In the case of the southwest room, this pattern consists of three interwoven meander or swastika patterns, one black, one white and one red.

Overall, the geometric floors of the west rooms are nondescript and neutral in character. They would have provided a certain, limited splendour, but do not indicate any particular function for the rooms in question. With

doors from the northern entrance passage and to the hall in the southeast, the two rooms provided alternative access to the apse and the bishop (fig. 5). This entranceway may have been used by servants and lower clerics who assisted the bishop in his receptions and the execution of his duties. Access cannot, however, have been the only purpose; otherwise, one would expect a single unified passage instead of two separate rooms. The northeast room, which had a mosaic floor, too, was a third room of similar size and decoration, and a fourth may conceivably have existed to the southeast of the hall. Being too numerous for use by the bishop alone, all these additional rooms may have housed parts of the episcopal administration and/or served as (temporary?) offices, such as are sometimes referred to in written sources (Baldini 2020: 156; Saradi 2020: 170). They may, for example, have been used by lesser clerics, who, in the role of secretaries, received lesser visitors and dealt with their requests first, before either consulting the bishop or admitting the visitors in question into his presence.

The second building phase

Parnassos' fortunes appear to have turned once more when the episcopal palace was destroyed and the subsequent rebuilding limited to small rooms of utilitarian character. When the southwest wall of the apsed hall was still standing, that is, before the site was robbed for building materials, the northwest and southwest rooms, as well as the adjacent western yard, underwent a secondary building and occupation phase. The second phase followed severe damage to the original palace building and was fundamentally different in character. The apsed hall did not yield any traces of re-use and was probably given up entirely. However, the passage to the north of the apsed hall, now A, appears to have remained in use, because a pithos was placed there and the passage continued to provide access to the northern half of the northwest room, now room B (fig. 19). What seems to have been a floor of cobbled stones in the eastern part of the passage may have come about through levelling of debris from collapsed earlier walls (figs 3 and 4).

The secondary room B (ca 2.5x3m²) was created by walling off the northern half of what used to be the northwest room (compare figs 19 and 5). The partition wall is based on the Early Byzantine mosaic floor and stands five uneven stone rows high, after which a band of re-used bricks provides some levelling in preparation for the next rows of stones (figs 16 and 20). The secondary wall is set in mud and employs no lime mortar; remnants of such mortar on some stones indicate that they, too, were re-used from earlier, ruined structures. The northern door remained, but the sill was elevated, undoubtedly in response to a new floor on a higher level, below which the mosaic would now have lain hidden.

The southern half of what used to be the northwest room, now room C (ca 3x3m²), is slightly larger than room B and roughly square (fig. 19). Its only entrance was through the earlier door from the south. There, what used to be the earlier southwest room was now also divided into two approximately equal halves, rooms D and E (each ca 3x3m²), but this time the partition wall contained a door. In addition to this door, room E likely had a second, earlier door on the southeast side.

Room D certainly retained the earlier door on its northwest side, and a newly placed sill on a higher level is again indicative of an elevated secondary floor that would have hidden the Early Byzantine mosaic. The high floor level of the second phase is confirmed by remains of a pithos in the northeast corner of room D that would once have been sunk deep into, and held in place by, a high earthen floor (fig. 17). A series of round holes in the mosaic floor around the pithos and along the northeast wall indicates that numerous more pithoi were once stood here. The holes would have accommodated the narrow lower ends of the pithoi, while most of their voluminous upper bodies were contained in the high earthen floor. Yet another pithos is attested by one more hole in front of the southwest wall, identifying room D as place for storage.

Further to the west, a series of four new rooms, F to I, was erected against the earlier southwest wall of the northwest and southwest rooms, now rooms B to E. The earlier southwest wall of the western yard and at least one wall to the west of it had previously been razed to ground level (figs 4 and 19). The mud-based masonry, high floor level and utilitarian character of the new rooms compares to that of rooms B to E, suggesting that they all belonged to the same second building and occupation phase. The new rooms would have blocked any pre-existing southwestern windows of rooms C and D; these may instead have received new windows on the northeast side, confirming that the apsed hall had probably not survived the general destruction of the Early Byzantine palace.

The southernmost west room F was over 2m wide and 6–7m long, thus extending further west than the western yard used to. An additional room J to the southwest of room F confirms that whatever used to follow to the west of the western yard in the Early Byzantine period was now overbuilt. The secondary walls are ill preserved, and the excavation did not establish the location of doors. Two more rooms, G and H, to the northwest of F appear to have had similar proportions, but their southwest walls remain elusive. The fourth and northwesternmost room I, to the southwest of B, was up to 2.5m wide but only about 3.5m long, with a single door on the southwest side that opened onto a narrow room K. Room I has preserved remnants of a floor made from various stones in a random arrangement, as well as, in the northern corner, a drain (figs 4, 19 and 21). It may

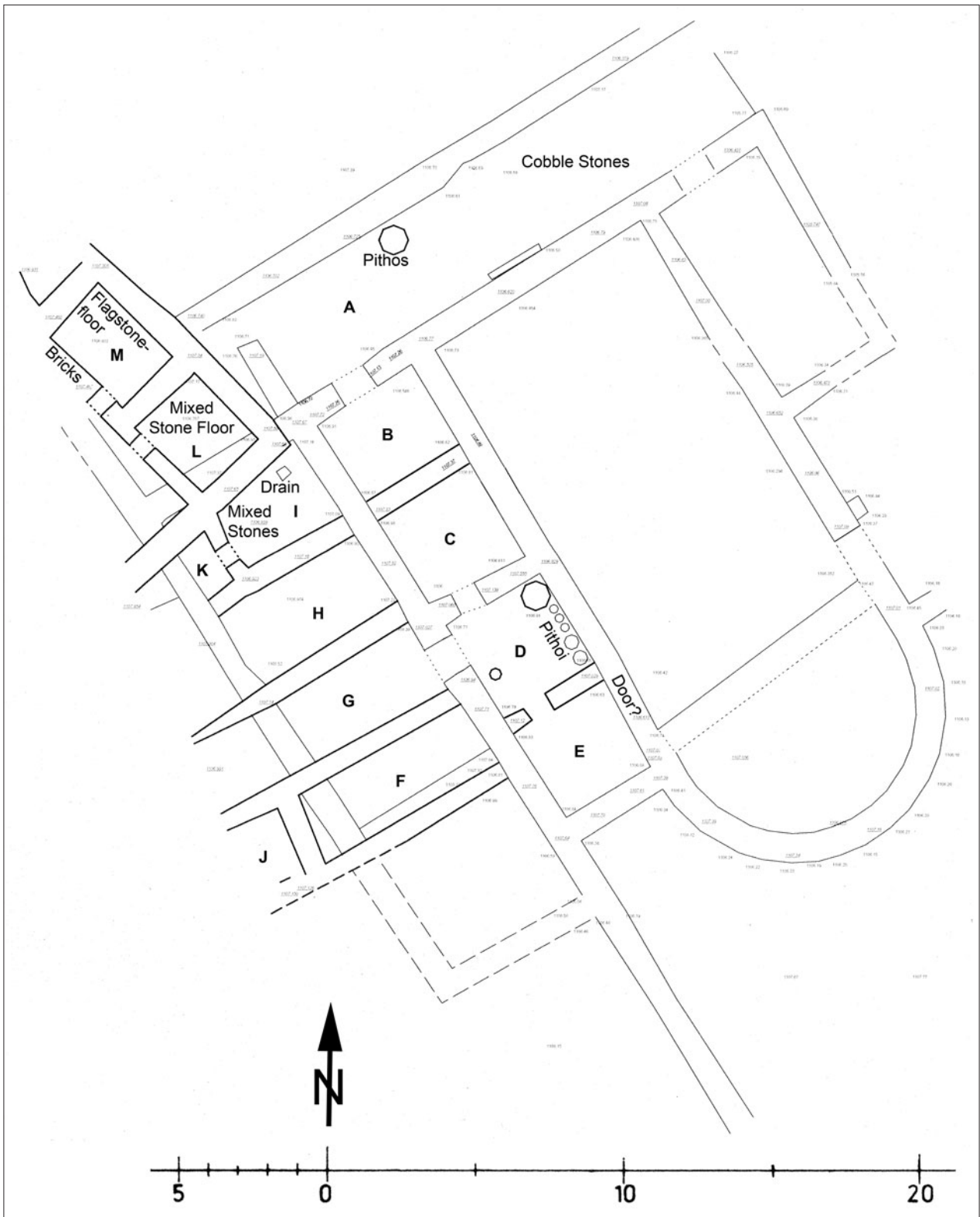


Fig. 19. Complete plan of the excavated ruins, including the second phase walls and rooms A–M, with secondary floors, pithoi and the drain in bold (plan by M. Arslan and P. Niewöhner).



Fig. 20. Northwest room with geometric mosaic floor, the northern part of which was later partitioned off as room B, from the northwest (photograph © M. Arslan). The secondary partition wall in the middle ground stands on the Early Byzantine mosaic, is built without lime mortar, and employs mixed masonry with a level band of re-used bricks (see fig. 16). The elevated door sill in the foreground also relates to the second phase, when the uneven filling underneath would have been hidden by a higher floor level. On the left, the west wall of the apsidal hall forms a level horizon, apparently for a band of bricks, which could also explain the low level of preservation, because bricks were much sought after and would have been robbed for re-use.



Fig. 21. Northeastern corner of the excavation, from the west (photograph © M. Arslan). The secondary rooms M, on the left, with flagstone-floor, and L, on the right, with a mixed stone floor, diverge from the orientation of the Early Byzantine palace below.

therefore have been a small interior yard and could have served as a lightwell for the adjacent rooms B, H, K and L. For similar small yards and lightwells, compare once again the bishop's palace at Miletus (Niewöhner 2015: 222).

The northwest wall of room I forms slanting angles because it is aligned with two more secondary rooms, L and M, that overbuild the western end of the northern passage, but with a different orientation (figs 19 and 21). The new orientation probably corresponded to structures beyond the northwestern limits of the excavation and suggests that the second building and occupation phase extended in that direction. Room L (ca 2x3m²) had a single door on the southwest side and a mixed stone floor similar to that in room I. Room M (ca 2x3.5m²) also had a single southwestern door and stands out for its floor of large flagstones. Its southwest wall is preserved up to a levelling band of re-used bricks, in the same way as the partition wall between rooms B and C, confirming that the second building phase employed banded masonry.

Overall, the second phase implies that the Early Byzantine palace had undergone major destruction. The northwest and southwest rooms had probably lost at least their roofs, as the secondary partition walls and elevated floors would hardly have been built in intact interiors. The southwest wall of the western yard, any buildings to the west of it, and the west end of the northern entrance passage appear to have been ruined totally; otherwise, they would have hardly been replaced with new buildings of inferior quality. However, the Early Byzantine remains were razed systematically to ground level in order to build immediately on top of them, suggesting that the second building phase was still conceived within the framework of its Early Byzantine predecessor. Thus, the latter would seem to have been destroyed suddenly and the second phase to have followed soon after, in an effort to – as far as possible – repair the earlier structure.

Despite all other efforts, the second phase did not attempt to retain the size and interior decoration of the Early Byzantine palace. The long northwest and southwest rooms were divided into smaller units, and the floor mosaics were covered up, although it would surely have been possible to maintain both. The mosaic in the northwest room is completely intact, and the pithoi-holes in the mosaic of the southwest room were dug later, when these tall containers were sunk deep into the high earthen floor of the second occupation phase. In the bishop's palace of Miletus in Caria, a patchy floor mosaic was repaired by placing fragments of a different mosaic into the holes (Niewöhner 2015: 191, figs 5–6). In contrast, the second phase at Parnassos appears to have been solely utilitarian, without any concern for the impressive size and status symbols that had characterised the original palace. This change in attitude suggests that the overall situation had changed fundamentally by the time of the second building phase. The Early

Byzantine heyday, with its sumptuous episcopal palaces, the latest of which, at Miletus, was last renovated at the turn of the seventh century (Niewöhner 2015), was over.

As to absolute chronology, no diagnostic finds were recorded, which excludes the Middle Byzantine and later periods, when from the tenth century, at the latest, easily recognisable pottery and coinage became plentiful in Anatolia again. This leaves the so-called Dark Age or Invasion Period, from the seventh to the ninth centuries, when first the Persians and then the Arabs invaded and raided Anatolia and the Byzantine Empire came to the brink of collapse. The material culture of these centuries was poor, coins were rare, and archaeology hardly ever turns up datable finds, although circumstantial evidence points to continuous urban habitation and rural agriculture (Mango 2009; Cassis et al. 2018; Zavagno 2021). The second phase at the episcopal palace of Parnassos appears to be a case in point. The site seems to have continued, albeit on a utilitarian scale, during the Invasion Period, but not thereafter. Middle Byzantine Parnassos may well have retracted to the ancient hüyük and resembled more the Turkish village than a Late Antique city, as most of Anatolia appears to have become ruralised during the Middle Byzantine period (Niewöhner 2023).

Conclusions

The salvage excavation recorded hardly any small finds, and the characterisation and dating of the second building phase as utilitarian and belonging to the Invasion Period is based on circumstantial evidence. There can, however, be hardly any doubt that the excavation site was deserted and no longer in use by the Middle Byzantine period. As to the original, Early Byzantine building and its function, their reconstruction poses less of a problem, once the initial misconception in the excavation reports has been set aside. The building did not have colonnades, was not a basilica and did not contain a sanctuary. The apse did not relate to use as a church, but served to seat the landlord, and the apsed hall and flanking rooms formed the reception unit of an elite mansion or 'palace'. Unusually, the floor mosaic excludes hunters and ancient mythology, but includes a flowery meadow of a kind otherwise attested in churches. An explanation is provided by the inscription that credits the mosaic to the bishop and his clergy, thus identifying the apsed hall as the reception room of the episcopal palace.

The discovery of the episcopal palace transforms the image of Early Byzantine Parnassos from little more than a way station in barren countryside to that of a sizeable town and prosperous bishopric, aspiring to some of the same standards as major metropoleis. Early Byzantine settlement patterns and hierarchies must have been different from today's, and the divide between a provincial Anatolian town and pre-eminent urban centres like Constantinople and Antioch could have been relatively small.

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Competing interests

The authors declare none.

Supplementary material

Supplementary material may be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0066154623000078> and consists of the following:

Appendix 1

A Late Roman sarcophagus and three early Christian gravestones from Parnassos

Supplementary bibliography

Appendix 2

Detailed images of the animal mosaic in the apsed hall of Parnassos

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