

# The Domestic Landscape of Late Roman Sardis

One of the oldest and best-known cities of western Asia, Sardis had seen nearly a millennium of occupation before the dawn of Late Antiquity: as the capital of the Lydian empire, the satrapal outpost of Achaemenid Persia, the *polis* of Alexander and his Seleucid successors, and the Roman city that replaced it. The promotion of Sardis to metropolitan rank in the late 3<sup>rd</sup> century confirmed both its strategic value and historical reputation, and heralded an era of urban growth that continued into the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries. Typically overshadowed by works of civic infrastructure and public monuments, the architecture of private habitation constitutes an equally informative aspect of the city during each of these phases. The individual dwelling and the household it served would have been among the most important factors shaping the social identity and daily experience of most inhabitants. The remains of houses discovered across the site document the extent and density of settlement while offering the potential for direct access to the lives of its residents.

As at many cities of the classical Mediterranean, it is the houses of Late Antiquity that are most often met by excavation at Sardis, overlying if not directly continuing centuries of previous occupation and often appearing during investigation of early levels. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century H. C. Butler came across ramshackle structures of Roman and medieval date when he began excavations at the Artemis sanctuary, about 1 km south of the city<sup>1</sup>. Four decades later, G. M. A. Hanfmann discovered the late Roman House of Bronzes during the first days of resumed exploration of the site<sup>2</sup>. Nearly 60 years of subsequent work have noted domestic buildings that were occupied during Late Antiquity on the acropolis slopes, the urban plain, and outside the city walls, both close to the present surface and at depths as great as 3-5 m (fig. 1). Not many of these structures are well understood. Few survive in good condition and fewer still have been systematically explored for reasons of access, preservation, or priority. Many houses are known only by their foundations, while others comprise a dozen or more spaces of varied size and complexity. Changes made over the years in excavation methods, recording procedures, and interpretive paradigms

naturally hinder comparisons among sectors and with other sites. Despite the limitations of recovery and documentation, these scattered structures constitute an essential part of the urban landscape between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries. The story of their occupation describes the transformation of local lifeways during this time.

Archaeology makes clear that the urban development of Sardis was significantly affected by seismic events<sup>3</sup>. Time and again excavations have confirmed the vivid account left by Tacitus of the great earthquake of AD 17, which affected Sardis especially among the cities of western Asia. Impressive evidence of the catastrophe includes massive landslide, repair of hillside terraces, and the leveling of building debris across the site. Major relief efforts were coordinated by Rome and included securing the city's water supply, with the first known aqueduct at the site completed during the reign of Claudius<sup>4</sup>. The clearest result of this undertaking was the building of two great bath complexes on opposite sides of the urban perimeter, beyond the apparent limits of earlier settlement and along primary roads leading east and west. Both of these projects were begun in the later 1<sup>st</sup> or early 2<sup>nd</sup> century, and brought water and other resources to undeveloped, low-lying areas. The east complex may not have operated long as a bath and seems to have declined by the 4<sup>th</sup> century, when it was left outside the new fortification circuit<sup>5</sup>. By contrast, the west Bath-Gymnasium was an unqualified success. It received Antonine and Severan benefactions, and by the late 4<sup>th</sup> century dominated a monumental ensemble with a public plaza, a large arch, a colonnaded avenue with the so-called Byzantine Shops, and the Synagogue. Around the same time the nearby city wall was diverted 300m to the west, to include the Bath complex and open terrain to the south<sup>6</sup>. Decades of excavation, reconstruction, and study make this area the best known part of the ancient site.

The extramural environs of Sardis provide a wider context for understanding urban housing in Late Antiquity. The remains of Roman buildings, some featuring hypocaust floors and mosaics, are still visible in the eroding sides of the lower Pactolus valley, and suggest the presence of families who

1 Butler, Excavations 134. 146 f. 150-153.

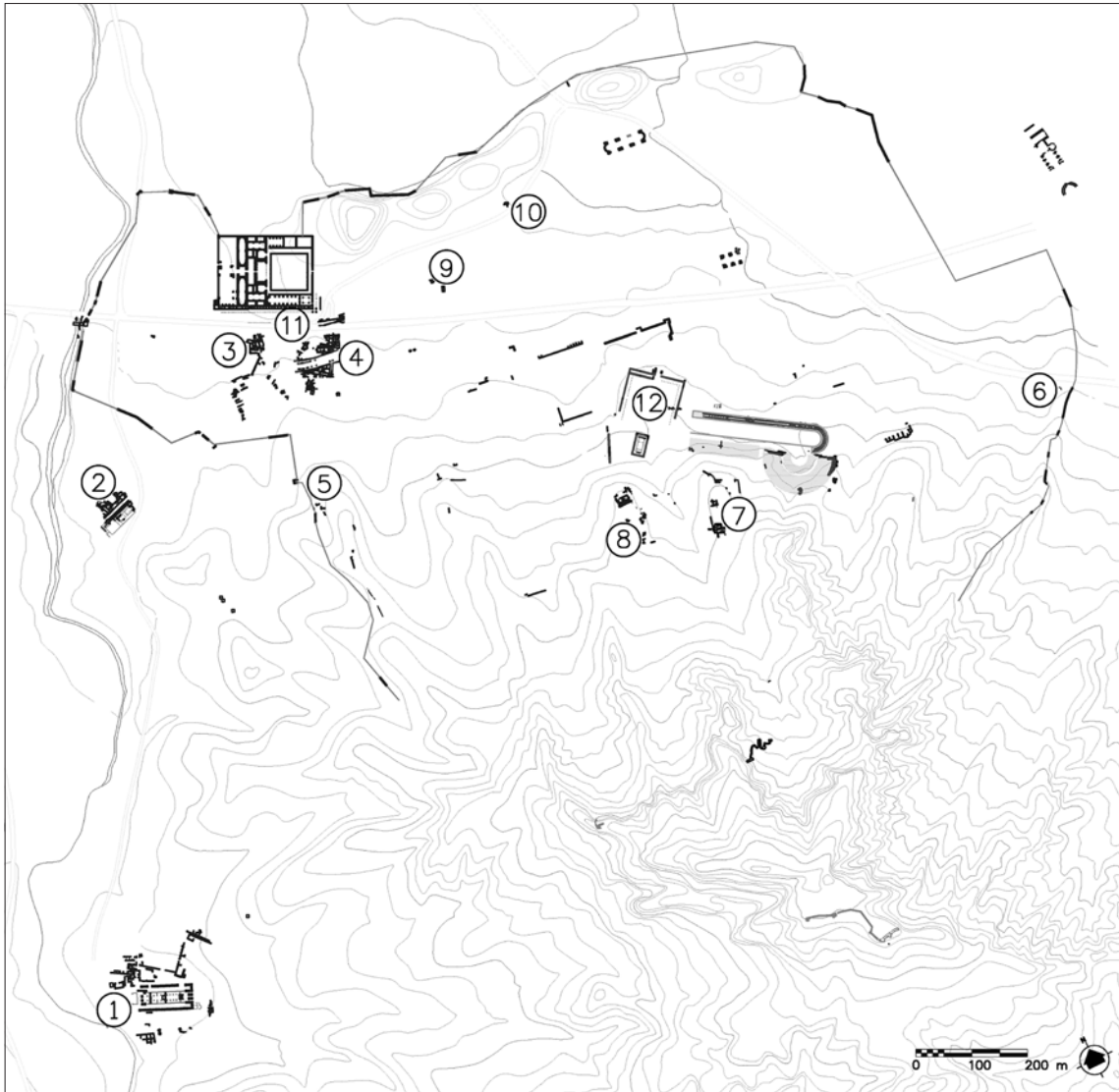
2 Hanfmann, Sardis 1958, 22-27.

3 Hanfmann/Frazer, Precinct 54 f. – Greenewalt/Sterud/Belknap, Sardis 1978, 7-15. – Hanfmann, Sardis 2-4. 141 f.

4 Tacitus, Annals 4, 55-56. – Butler, Excavations 35 f. – Buckler/Robinson, Inscriptions 29 no. 10.

5 Waldbaum/Hanfmann, Bath CG 129-150. – van Zanten/Thomas/Hanfmann, City Wall 37.

6 Yegül, Bath-Gymnasium. – Crawford, Shops. – Rautman, Sardis 12 f.



**Fig. 1** Sardis, plan of site with sectors preserving late Roman domestic buildings discussed in the text: Artemis Temple (1), Pactolus North (2), House of Bronzes (3), MMS (4), CW32 (5), CW6 (6), Field 49 (7), ByzFort (8), MD1/5 (9), MD2 (10), Byzantine Shops (11), Field 55 (12). – (© Archaeological Exploration of Sardis/Harvard University).

chose for different reasons to live outside yet close to the city<sup>7</sup>. Several clusters of rectilinear rooms were set up near the Artemis sanctuary, which by the 4<sup>th</sup> century may have served primarily as a quarry<sup>8</sup>. Most of these structures were explored long ago and their occupation is still unclear. Surviving features reflect an architectural vernacular that favored the construction of narrow walls in fieldstone and brick, enclosing small rooms with floors of packed earth<sup>9</sup>. Several related buildings have been observed on the north side of the Artemis sanctuary and within the limits of the present expedition compound. One limited sondage found walls along with pottery of Hellenistic and Roman date. More recent efforts identified an angular alleyway or corridor flanked by four or more small rooms of irregular plan. The alley, traced

over a length of 6-8 m, was about 2 m wide and was surfaced with small river stones. One of the rooms opened off the alley through a 1.6 m wide doorway equipped with a stone threshold and flanked by low stone benches. Interior walls of another room preserved traces of fine plaster. None of these rooms was fully excavated, yet their slender fieldstone walls and floors of packed earth suggest they saw routine domestic rather than specialized use. A layer of roof tiles was found covering all four rooms along with their few remaining artifacts, which included mainly transport and storage jars of the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>10</sup>.

The best-known example of extramural habitation is the small villa excavated at Pactolus North in the 1960s. This striking suburban residence stood on a low ridge overlook-

7 Greenwalt, Sardis 1974, 65 fig. 5. – Foss, Sardis 47f. – Scheibelreiter-Gail, Mo-saikien 359f. cat. 128.

8 For the decline of the Artemis temple Hanfmann/Frazer, Precinct 53-56. – Foss, Sardis 37f. – Rautman, Sardis 14.

9 Butler, Excavations 150-153 fig. 169. – Hanfmann/Frazer, Precinct 57-62.

10 Greenwalt, Sardis 2002, 482.

ing the Pactolus river, about 120 m beyond the city wall and presumably close to the main road leading to the Artemis precinct. Excavation found a sprawling complex with three groups of spaces arranged around an open yard. The central range comprised a row of rooms, about 5.5 m wide, lying along one side of an access road. A small vestibule from the road controlled entry to this part of the villa. Two adjacent rooms were paved with geometric mosaic floors. Two larger spaces featured fine mosaics with guilloche frames enclosing birds, sea creatures, and animals of the hunt (fig. 2). The exceptional nature of the decorative program is clear from its extent, skillful craftsmanship, and figural subjects, which are not known elsewhere at Sardis<sup>11</sup>. Farther west stood several larger reception spaces, also once paved with geometric mosaics, as well as a small vaulted bath. The villa's northeast area apparently served more utilitarian needs, with workshops and utility rooms growing up around an early Roman mausoleum. The respect shown this earlier feature apparently extended to secondary burials, which may reflect the owner's long-term interest in the estate. The origins of the villa may date as early as the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> century, with the mosaic rooms, bath, and supporting structures added in the late 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> century. As time passed the steady retreat of the Pactolus riverbank led to frequent repairs, changes in circulation patterns, and eventually the construction of two new pools or tanks to supply the bath. This ongoing investment coincides with two other 4<sup>th</sup>-century initiatives: the westward extension of the city wall and construction of a nearby basilica, Church EA<sup>12</sup>. Despite their proximity, the relationship between villa and basilica remains unclear. The mosaics of both buildings present a variety of traditional ornament but no explanatory text. Artifacts recovered from villa and bath lack explicit Christian content. With its suburban location, open plan, figural mosaics, and private bath, the villa represents a special kind of residential experience, a showcase that stood apart in many ways from other houses in the area.

The road from Pactolus North seems to have entered the city from the southwest, crossing the newly annexed urban quarter with the House of Bronzes and intersecting the western colonnaded avenue near the arch and plaza. Porticoes, shops, and other structures have been identified but not systematically investigated at several places along its length. The incompletely excavated House of Bronzes occupied a level area between these two public thoroughfares. The earliest parts of the complex apparently included a row of small rooms, about 3 m deep, which stood against a low terrace in the late 3<sup>rd</sup> century. During the 4<sup>th</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> centuries these rooms became part of a multilevel residential building with more than a dozen spaces, a large cistern, and enclosed yard that looked across undeveloped land to the southwest. The remains of several earlier tombs were incorporated into the



**Fig. 2** Rooms with mosaic floors in late Roman villa at Pactolus North, as excavated in 1962 (looking southwest). – (© Archaeological Exploration of Sardis/Harvard University).

later house, with the apparent reuse of an early Roman mausoleum again suggesting long-term ownership by a single family. For much of its life the residence faced north and east, with a marble-paved court and large water tank welcoming visitors from the nearby streets. From here one passed through a small vestibule to the best-preserved part of the complex, a spacious reception room with opus sectile floor (fig. 3). To the south the room ended in a polygonal exedra with raised floor and rear doorway. A large marble sigma table, iron folding campstool, and polykandelon were found on the exedra floor and establish the room's use for dining in the later 6<sup>th</sup> or early 7<sup>th</sup> century. A second large, tile-paved room stood on higher ground to the west and likely also served for reception. Farther north, a repurposed vaulted tomb offered a safe place to stow the well-known bronze vessels – including a cylindrical jug, two authepsa, cauldron, and incense shovel – that were used in more public areas. Smaller rooms, utility spaces, and connecting hallways met ordinary household needs, with an elongated yard along the south side perhaps used for stabling animals or household storage<sup>13</sup>.

11 Scheibelreiter-Gail, *Mosaiken* 360-362 cat. 129.

12 van Zanten/Thomas/Hanfmann, *City Wall* 35-49. – Buchwald, *Churches* xiii-xiv.

13 Foss, *Sardis* 43f., with earlier references. – For the vessels Waldbaum, *Metalwork*.



**Fig. 3** Reception room of the House of Bronzes, as excavated in 1959 (looking northeast). – (© Archaeological Exploration of Sardis/Harvard University).

Immediately east of the House of Bronzes are the MMS sectors, where an expansive residential quarter was explored during the 1980s-1990s (fig. 4). For centuries the area was dominated by the remains of the Archaic fortification wall, which descended the westernmost spur of the acropolis before continuing northward onto the plain<sup>14</sup>. Local residents clearly favored the location and built houses from Archaic through Hellenistic and Roman times. The city's expansion in the 4<sup>th</sup> century marked a turning point in the neighborhood's development. A 20-m-wide street was extended through the area, cutting through earlier homes and the Archaic wall in the process. Porticoes carried by piers and columns flanked the street and gave access to adjacent houses. An inscription found near the west end of this new thoroughfare records the building of an unnamed street (embolos) that ran from a tetrapylon as far as the street of Hypaepa, and was said to have been done without public expense<sup>15</sup>. Civic leaders and local property owners surely cooperated in the expropriation of land and the intensive residential development that ensued.

Several houses of ambitious design grew out of this initiative. The most northerly rooms at MMS stood a few meters

behind an imposing portico that faced the nearby plaza<sup>16</sup>. The approach of visitors from this direction is implied by the presence of a peristyle court with Ionic capitals and opus sectile floor and also by a porter's booth. Two or more hallways led south to multiple reception spaces. At the south end of one of these corridors stood a squarish, marble-paved room with a 3.1 m wide doorway. Other passages continued to a large rectangular room with a tall apse facing its main entrance. The apsidal room's importance was reinforced by its wide axial doorway, paving with large tiles, and painted walls representing a colonnade with incrustation-style panels<sup>17</sup>. The awkward arrangement of rooms reflects preexisting walls and perhaps property boundaries, as well as later changes. The legacy of earlier features is equally apparent in the organization of the more southerly house, which centered on another peristyle surrounded by multiple sites of reception (fig. 5). An entrance vestibule and short passage provided access from the colonnaded street to the court. To the southwest a broad doorway opened onto a squarish apsidal room with patterned mosaic floor and flanking chambers. A much grander reception hall, the largest room of the complex, stood on the opposite side of the court,

14 Greenwalt, *Sardis 1116-1120*. – Cahill, *Mapping 117-119*.

15 Foss, *Sardis 115 nos. 18-19*.

16 Greenwalt/Ratté/Rautman, *Sardis 1992-1993*, 4-6. A modern road separates the portico (at sector MMS/N) and residence (at MMS), but their close location makes the relationship clear.

17 Rautman, *Aura 148-153 pls. 15-17*.



**Fig. 4** Plan of late Roman street and houses at Sectors MMS and MMS/S. – (© Archaeological Exploration of Sardis/Harvard University).

along with other marble-paved rooms of imposing appearance. By the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century what once had been two or three neighboring houses were combined into a single residence of impressive scale. Over subsequent generations local families removed interior walls, lowered and repaved floors, and installed or replaced water features along with the pipes and drains that served them. At its greatest extent the complex comprised more than 30 spaces and featured at

least three open courts, six water basins or tanks, and two or more latrines<sup>18</sup>.

About the same time, another group of houses to the south of the MMS street was reconfigured into one or more comparable residences. By the late 5<sup>th</sup> century this complex included at least a dozen ground-level rooms, with two substantial stairways leading to an upper level. Two entrances lay behind the street's south portico. One of these led to a broad

18 Rautman, *Townhouse* 52-60.



Fig. 5 South part of late Roman house at Sector MMS, in 1987 (north at top). – (© Archaeological Exploration of Sardis/Harvard University).

vestibule and apsidal hall, originally paved in marble and surrounded by painted walls (fig. 6). Within the broad apse was a raised mosaic floor with central double-Solomon knot<sup>19</sup>. A pair of niches in the apse wall flanked a narrow doorway from a back room through which the domus owner arrived before his guests. Both the surrounding wall and semidome seem to have been covered by painted stucco with incised geometric patterns. The discovery of a hoard of glass weights in the back room suggests that the house may have belonged to a merchant or municipal official who received clients here in the early 7<sup>th</sup> century<sup>20</sup>. A second entrance from the street opened onto another marble-paved peristyle. A large stone-lined water tank stood next to the doorway with a narrow portico continuing along the east and south walls. Behind the south portico was a large rectangular space with marble

floor, a raised platform paved in opus sectile and tiles, and incrustation-style wall paintings. A marble sigma table was found shattered but complete on the floor, along with pottery dating use of the room for dining into early 7<sup>th</sup> century<sup>21</sup>.

This group of imposing late Roman houses, together with others continuing beyond the limits of excavation, marks a key moment in the history of Sardis. The refashioning of earlier dwellings into minor mansions of ambitious design and decoration reflects the interests of a mobile, cosmopolitan elite, and speaks the same language of competitive display known across the late empire<sup>22</sup>. Each of these residences included a dozen or more ground-level spaces covering 300-400m<sup>2</sup>, with the two northern houses apparently combined into a single complex by the turn of the 6<sup>th</sup> century. Overriding concerns included the arrangement of portico facades, clear entry vesti-

19 Greenwalt/Rautman, Sardis 1996-1998, 649-651 figs 5, 7. – Scheibelreiter-Gail, Mosaiken 358f. cat. 127.

20 Greenwalt/Rautman, Sardis 1996-1998, 651 f.

21 Greenwalt/Rautman, Sardis 1994-1995, 481-486. – Greenwalt/Rautman, Sardis 1996-1998, 646-647.

22 Rautman, Townhouse 60-62. – Bowes, Houses 95-98. – Ellis, Housing 4-7.



**Fig. 6** Apsidal room in late Roman house at Sector MMS/S, as excavated in 1998 (looking southwest). – (© Archaeological Exploration of Sardis/Harvard University).

bules, and interior courts for air and light. Paths of access and circulation were shaped by marble thresholds for sliding and pivoting doors. In each house at least two rooms were distinguished by their size and interior arrangement, and typically included an apse, marble or mosaic-paved floors, walls with painted revetment, and arched windows with a central mullion. Furnishings and artifacts attest the importance of formal reception and dining into the early 7<sup>th</sup> century. The presence of a few painted details, objects decorated with crosses, and pilgrim flasks attests the dominant Christian discourse of the eastern empire. Household infrastructure depended on an external supply of fresh water that could be displayed and drawn from multiple basins; sub-floor drains carried rain, latrine waste, and household debris from the domestic environment into public sewers. Located near the city's western gateways, within sight of the Bath-Gymnasium, Synagogue, and plaza, this conspicuous block of residential splendor would have claimed the attention of visitors arriving in the city.

Despite their local prominence, both in Late Antiquity and during the course of modern excavations, it is clear that the House of Bronzes and MMS houses were not typical of how most people at Sardis lived. Recent work elsewhere at the site

has identified a number of smaller buildings that were constructed or at least occupied around this time. In most cases only part of these structures has been explored and their original extent and purpose remain unclear. Materials and methods of construction seem to have varied with resources, location, and purpose. Deep foundations, for example, were needed when building on unstable, sloping terrain. The fabric of rising walls ranged from unmortared fieldstones and mudbrick to cemented rubble with brick leveling courses<sup>23</sup>. Freestanding walls were 0.35-0.60 m thick, with interior spans averaging 3-4 m. Mosaic, opus sectile, and marble floors were departures from the ordinary; tiles seem to have been preferred for paving interior rooms, with hard-packed earth used in secondary spaces and passages. Many of these buildings needed frequent repairs yet stood for generations, adapting to the changing needs of their occupants for living space and shelter<sup>24</sup>.

The northern slopes of the acropolis, with their fine view of the urban plain and Hermus valley, continued to invite habitation. Excavations near the city wall have found the remains of several small structures that stood on sloping terrain about 40-50 m above the plain. Surviving features near

<sup>23</sup> For building materials and methods commonly seen at Sardis Buchwald, Churches 3, 51-53.

<sup>24</sup> Bowes, Houses 35-60. – Ellis, Housing 2-4.



**Fig. 7** Late Roman domestic units (villa?) at Field 49, as excavated in 2012 (looking southeast). – (© Archaeological Exploration of Sardis/Harvard University).



**Fig. 8** Late Roman room with mosaic floor at the ByzFort sector, as excavated in 1984 (looking northeast). – (© Archaeological Exploration of Sardis/Harvard University).



the east city wall include tile-paved rooms and open spaces of uncertain size that apparently were served by terracotta pipes and drains (CW6). One or more buildings of similar construction stood close to the west city wall about the same height (CW32). Both structures were occupied in the later 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries. Some kind of pathway from the lower city presumably ran along the inner face of the fortifications for use by soldiers as well as local residents. Neither structure had any clear connection with the nearby defenses apart from occupying a small parcel of land within their circuit<sup>25</sup>.

Much of the upper city is known to have stood on pre-Roman terraces that were stabilized and reoccupied in the first centuries AD<sup>26</sup>. Exploration of several of these terraces has found structures that may date as early as the 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> century, but these were enlarged or overbuilt by later houses that were occupied into the 5<sup>th</sup> century or later. Recent work at Field 49, a flat spur of the acropolis west of the theater, has identified a villa-like complex with multiple rooms and an adjoining yard (fig. 7). The presence of plaster-covered walls and opus sectile floors shows how the owners cultivated a sense of domestic luxury. The discovery of several large pithoi set into the floor of the yard suggests that agricultural crops may have been processed and stored here as well<sup>27</sup>.

A broadly contemporary complex occupied the facing spur of the acropolis. Exploration of the north end of this expanse, known as the ByzFort sector, identified deep foundations of a substantial building of rectilinear plan, with small spaces set to either side of a central corridor. The building may still have been occupied in the early 5<sup>th</sup> century when several small rooms were set into the eastern slope at a slightly lower level. At least one of these rooms had a geometric mosaic floor and likely formed part of a private residence (fig. 8)<sup>28</sup>. Trial excavations carried out between the two sectors located a 5 m wide street with a deep drain, which ran parallel to the terraced hillside and passed by other houses or shop-like structures. To the south, between the street and the massive retaining wall, was a large, 6 m wide room with an intermediate column supporting an upper level or roof. Two smaller rooms with tile floors were found at a lower level across the street. A series of terracotta pipes from the south supplied a pair of large holding tanks in one of these rooms. Construction of the street dates to the late 4<sup>th</sup> or early 5<sup>th</sup> century, and the various rooms were occupied into the early 6<sup>th</sup> century<sup>29</sup>. Basement-like spaces of similar size and occupation have been found along the edge of the Field 49 terrace<sup>30</sup>.

The lower acropolis slopes and urban plain have been less systematically investigated. Most of the area lies under

several meters of landslide and architectural rubble, with the unexcavated remains of a few large structures – vaulted terraces, Buildings A, C, and D, sections of city wall – rising above the cultivated fields. The uneven contributions of surface reconnaissance, remote sensing, and trial excavation suggest that much of the lower city was occupied at one time or another, while some undeveloped areas were left to accumulate building debris and domestic rubbish<sup>31</sup>. Excavation at the MD1/S sector, located 200 m east of the Bath-Gymnasium, identified a narrow, unpaved alley flanked by four rooms with sturdy walls built of mortared rubble (fig. 9). The alley was 2.3 m wide and sloped downward to the north, with a covered drain and terracotta pipes running beneath its packed-earth surface. Three of the rooms opened directly off the alley through doorways with stone thresholds for locking doors. The largest of these rooms measured at least 5 by 7 m in plan, preserved part of a mosaic floor, and was probably domestic in function. About 20 m to the southeast stood a larger, similarly oriented structure. Four walls defined the trapezoidal plan of a single large room, 8.5 by 3.5 m in area. The interior floor lay about 1.5 m lower than the nearby alley and in its final state was reached only by a stone staircase from an upper level. A trough or latrine was added following the room's subdivision into two independent spaces, with a pithos left on the floor confirming their use for household storage. The consistent orientation of all of these features resembles other buildings in the area and suggests the presence of a regular street plan<sup>32</sup>. Deeper excavation noted late Hellenistic and early Roman material underlying all of these houses, which were occupied during the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>33</sup>.

A third domestic structure was found about 170 m to the northeast, close to the city wall and like its neighbors also overlying late Hellenistic and early Roman fills. Identified features at the MD2 sector include three tile-paved rooms whose plastered walls preserve multiple phases of construction. Several of the rooms communicated through doorways with thresholds and were intermittently joined or partitioned. The narrow dimensions of one room reflect its use as an inner corridor joining parts of the larger complex. An unroofed utility space on the north side preserved a recessed, cement-lined vat that may have used for processing agricultural goods or working with textiles. Coins and pottery recovered below the tile floors trace the building's continuous occupation between the late 4<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>34</sup>.

These views of central Sardis attest a range of buildings whose planning and construction varied with the needs of individual households. Their direct access, modest size, and

25 Greenewalt, Sardis 1999, 416 fig. 5. – Greenewalt, Sardis 2000, 228 fig. 3.

26 Cahill, Mapping 119-121.

27 Cahill, Sardis 2012, 124-126 figs 5-6.

28 Greenewalt/Cahill/Rautman, Sardis 1984, 34-36 figs 22-23. – Greenewalt u. a. Sardis 1986, 155-159. – Scheibelreiter-Gail, Mosaiken 357 f. cat. 125.

29 Greenewalt/Ratté/Rautman, Sardis 1988-1989, 26 figs 22-23. – Greenewalt/Ratté/Rautman, Sardis 1990-1991, 23 f. fig. 25.

30 Cahill, Sardis 2010, 213. – Cahill, Sardis 2011, 147 f. fig. 3.

31 Greenewalt/Rautman, Sardis 1996-1998, 672.

32 Cahill, Mapping 121-124.

33 Greenewalt/Rautman, Sardis 1994-1995, 500 f. fig. 26. – Greenewalt/Rautman, Sardis 1996-1998, 669 f. fig. 26.

34 Greenewalt/Rautman, Sardis 1996-1998, 670 f. fig. 27.



**Fig. 9** Late Roman alley with flanking houses at Sector MD1/S, as excavated in 1997 (looking south). – (© Archaeological Exploration of Sardis/Harvard University).



**Fig. 10** Byzantine Shops, during excavation in 1968 (looking southwest). – (© Archaeological Exploration of Sardis/Harvard University).

simple furnishing contrast with the elite mansions of western Sardis, and are probably more representative of how most people lived. Another, more distinctive form of urban housing appears in block-like rows of small, repetitive spaces, commonly identified as shops but often providing domestic shelter as well<sup>35</sup>. These linear structures shared front and back walls, and could be organized into units of several connecting rooms. An early part of the House of Bronzes may have followed this design. A similar, unexcavated structure has recently emerged from an eroding acropolis spur that supports the western city wall. The back wall was built of mortared brick and rubble against the hillside, and projecting brick pilasters set at 2 to 3 m intervals supported a vaulted or timber roof. Structurally independent partitions could easily be added to this framework to create storerooms, workshops, or commercial venues, in addition to living space for resident families.

The best-known example of this urban phenomenon is the so-called Byzantine Shops. This long row of cellular rooms stretched along the south side of the Bath-Gymnasium and Synagogue, and faced onto the marble avenue through a 3 m high portico (fig. 10). The final form of the street, portico, and shops apparently dates to the early 400s, and no doubt reflects a coordinated undertaking by municipal authorities. The 32 identified rooms were about 5 m deep, 3-6 m wide, and shared a series of sturdy piers, a tall back wall, and a continuous drain. Over the next 200 years these rooms saw frequent changes of which only the latest are clear: narrow partitions shaping interior doors, cupboards, and niches, with benches, service counters, and tables set against the walls.

At the time of their destruction in the early 7<sup>th</sup> century, these modest rooms made up about 20 independent units, each with one to three rooms and perhaps an equal amount of space above. The street-side location and ready access were well suited for vending food, personal services, and similar small-scale commerce. Some of the recovered artifacts suggest specialized activities, such as the dying or fulling of cloth, recycling glass and metal scrap, and retail dining. The many bronze coins found in some of the rooms certainly would be appropriate in a commercial setting<sup>36</sup>. Yet in other respects the furnishings and artifacts resemble ordinary domestic assemblages. Benches and latrines, basins and hearths, stone mortars, storage and serving vessels, tablewares, lamps, and tools – all these are equally present in the House of Bronzes and the MMS houses. The shared material culture recovered from different settings suggests a growing convergence of household commerce and habitation around 600.

The most recent glimpses of late Roman domestic life come from ongoing work in another part of central Sardis<sup>37</sup>. Field 55 occupies a low ridge of the acropolis that lies just below the ByzFort sector and west of the stadium. Recent

work has established that this area originally supported a broad plaza, about 100 m across, with an axial staircase or ramp approaching a large temple built in the later 1<sup>st</sup> century. Both the temple and its surrounding precinct were apparently damaged by earthquakes in the later 3<sup>rd</sup> century, after which their remains were taken to stabilize the terrace and develop the area. Large blocks of spolia were carefully laid and clamped with iron and lead in rebuilding the eastern face of the terrace. Similar construction appears in a 2.7 m thick perpendicular wall that projects 10 m toward the stadium. The proximity of the stadium, the presence of a deep drain, and the steady accumulation of gravel below the terrace suggest that a sloping road or similar public passage ran through the area in later antiquity.

This ambitious reconstruction project broadly coincided with the appearance of unrelated domestic structures atop and next to the rebuilt terrace (fig. 11). Investigation of the north terrace located several small, unevenly preserved spaces that stood in front of the earlier retaining walls. One of these units, measuring about 6 by 14 m in its late phase and apparently covered by an upper level, was found just west of the axial staircase or ramp. Narrow doorways in the north and west walls gave access to the room. Coins and domestic pottery recovered from floor level and two shallow niches recessed under the earlier staircase date its occupation to the 5<sup>th</sup> through early 7<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>38</sup>.

Work along the top of the eastern edge of the terrace has exposed two connecting rooms of a larger residence that may have stood atop an earlier portico (fig. 12). Both spaces were 6.2 m wide and once looked onto an irregular yard to the west. The two rooms were carefully paved with tiles, had plastered walls, and apparently served as a place of reception. The plastered walls of the smaller room were boldly painted with fluted columns set on high pedestals separating panels of colorful revetment. Four iron campstools and five swords were found in these rooms along with coins and pottery dating into the early 7<sup>th</sup> century<sup>39</sup>.

A third commercial or domestic unit stood in front of the east terrace wall, at the level of the sloping passage and stadium. Excavation to date has focused on a single room, 4.5 m x 6.5 m in plan with an upper level of similar size, which lay in the shadow of the rebuilt terrace and projecting spolia wall. A doorway in the east wall once opened directly onto the nearby passage, but in its latest phase the room was entered only from the north, perhaps from a similar room built along the terrace face. The abrupt collapse of the roof sealed the contents of the room. The most important furnishings include parts of a marble platter and two sigma tables, together with the charred remains of a supporting frame. A bronze polykandelon was found on the table with several glass lamps

35 Ellis, *Housing* 10 f. – Lavan, *Emporion* 347-351.

36 Crawford, *Shops*; for additional discussion of contents Harris, *Shops* 92-119. – Lavan, *Emporion* 347-351.

37 Greenewalt, *Sardis* 2005, 745 f. fig. 7. – Cahill, *Sardis* 2013, 421-423 fig. 9.

38 Greenewalt, *Sardis* 2004, 176.

39 Greenewalt, *Sardis* 2005, 745 f. – Rautman, *Aura* 155 pl. 19.



**Fig. 11** Late Roman domestic unit in front of north terrace wall at Field 55, as excavated in 2005 (looking northeast). – (© Archaeological Exploration of Sardis/Harvard University).

lying nearby. Two ceramic jugs and several dishes suggest the final setting of the table, along with two bronze jugs, a bowl, and a small bucket left on the floor. Coins recovered from floor level include a follis of the early 7<sup>th</sup> century. The general impression is of a modest, multi-functional space where one family continued to live during the last years of the city. The range of artifacts closely resembles the Byzantine Shops and elite residences of western Sardis<sup>40</sup>.

Like other houses at Sardis, the modest buildings that overtook this once-important public space were an integral part of the late Roman city. All of these buildings sheltered households that functioned within a provincial urban setting, and tell a story that is inseparable from the site as a whole. The apparent scarcity of earlier Roman housing reflects the limited exploration of the city center, but also the renewal of many buildings around the turn of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, and sometimes their further development in the 5<sup>th</sup> century. Known domestic structures do not appear consistently across the site but were concentrated in pockets of habitation, which seem

to have followed municipal investments in infrastructure, especially streets, water, and drainage. Differing architectural forms reflect familiar social and economic hierarchies of the late empire, from narrow rows of street-side units, to awkward clusters of indeterminate spaces, to stylish mansions with running water, interior courts and reception spaces, decorated floors and walls, and arched windows.

These self-conscious displays of status and wealth attest civic values and a competitive spirit that were shared by many elite families, who invested in fortifications, streets, and public monuments as well as their own homes. Nowhere are these interests more apparent than in the newly developed quarter of western Sardis, whose great Bath, Synagogue, plaza, colonnaded roads, and luxury houses presented 5<sup>th</sup>-century visitors with a coordinated display of private affluence and urban splendor that continued across the domestic threshold. At different points in the 6<sup>th</sup> century this facade of public engagement served equally to conceal changes that were taking place in many of these houses, whose owners

40 Compare Crawford, *Shops*. – Rautman, *Wells*. – Waldbaum, *Metalwork*.



**Fig. 12** Late Roman houses built atop and in front of east terrace wall at Field 55, during excavation in 2015 (looking west). – (© Archaeological Exploration of Sardis/Harvard University)

subdivided, reorganized, and abandoned individual rooms while adding benches, hearths, ovens, and pressing basins to others. Furnishings and goods recovered from these spaces, whether accumulated during long abandonment or sealed by sudden destruction, document a widely-shared material culture that suggests a narrowing of social contrasts in the

later 6<sup>th</sup> century, as individual families adapted their houses, shops, and mansions to changing economic and social conditions. Left behind by the ebbing of cosmopolitan fashion was the continuity of everyday routines, craft making, and agricultural production within the vernacular traditions of western Asia.

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## Zusammenfassung / Summary / Özet

### Die häusliche Landschaft des spätrömischen Sardis

Häuser sind wesentlicher Bestandteil einer jeden städtischen Siedlung, sie prägen das Leben der Menschen, die sie einst bewohnten, aber auch die historische Perspektive späterer Betrachter. Im Fall von Sardis, der größten Stadt Lydiens in römischer Zeit, wurden seit Beginn der modernen Ausgrabungen auf dem gesamten Gelände und in der Umgebung Gebäude mit häuslicher Nutzung gefunden. Die Wohnhäuser umfassen eine Vielzahl von Strukturen, die über Generationen hinweg bewohnt wurden, von kleinen Ansammlungen unbestimmter Räume und Reihen von Geschäften am Straßenrand bis hin zu ausgedehnten Agglomerationen spezialisierter Wohngebäude. Die Verteilung und die Art der häuslichen Erfahrung, die von diesen Gebäuden bewahrt wurde, bewahrt eine wichtige Perspektive für das Leben in Sardis in spätrömischer Zeit.

### The Domestic Landscape of Late Roman Sardis

Houses form an essential part of any urban site, shaping the lives of people who once occupied them as well as the historical perspective of later observers. In the case of Sardis, the largest city of Lydia in Roman times, buildings of domestic purpose have been found across the site and its environs since the beginning of modern excavations. Identified dwellings include a variety of structures that were occupied over generations, from small clusters of indeterminate rooms and rows of street-side shops, to sprawling agglomerations of specialized residential spaces. The distribution and nature of domestic experience preserved by these buildings offer an important perspective of life at Sardis in Roman and later antiquity.

### Geç Roma Dönemi Sardis'inin Kent İçi Peyzajı

Kentlerin önemli bir parçasını oluşturan konut formları, sonraki gözlemlerin tarihsel perspektifinin yanında, bir zamanlar orada iskan eden insanların yaşam biçimlerini de şekillendirmiştir. Roma Dönemi'nde Lydia'nın en büyük şehri olan Sardis'te, modern kazıların başlangıcından bu yana, arazi genelinde ve çevresinde konut maksatlı yapılar bulunmuştur. Tanımlanan konutlar, nesiller boyunca tahrip edilmiş, grup halindeki tanımsız odalar, sokak kenarındaki dükkan sırası ve özelleştirilmiş konutlarıyla, büyüyen bir yığına dönüşmüş yapılar içermektedir. Bu yapılardan geriye kalanlar, ev deneyim türleri ve dağılımına ilişkin Geç Roma Dönemi'nde Sardis'teki yaşama dair önemli bir bakış açısı sunmaktadır.