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Review of L. Lavan, L. Özgenel, A. Sarantis, *Housing in Late Antiquity. From Palaces to Shops*

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Abstract

Like other volumes in its series, *Housing in Late Antiquity* owes its origins to two conferences, the Society for Architectural Historians and Late Antique Archaeology, Padua, both in 2003, as well as non-conference contributions. The result is a volume of seventeen chapters, translated into generally very good English, plus two lengthy bibliographic essays and an extensive, useful index. The three editors, aided by Simon Ellis and Yuri Murano, have produced a readable, one-stop-shop for anyone interested in late antique housing. The book's organization, beginning with broader thematic pieces, continuing with regional surveys, and concluding with individual house studies, allows the reader to sink comfortably from overview into detail, while its methodologies and authorship accurately reflect the state of the field—both in its advances and shortcomings.

Disciplines

Architectural History and Criticism | Arts and Humanities | Classics

Comments

At the time of publication, author Kimberly Bowes was affiliated with Cornell University. Currently, she is a faculty member at the Classical Studies Department at the University of Pennsylvania.

Book Reviews

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Housing in Late Antiquity.

From Palaces to Shops

LUKE LAVAN, LALE ÖZGENEL,

ALEXANDER SARANTIS, EDs.

Late Antique Archaeology, vol. 3.2. Leiden: Brill Press, 2007. Pp. xv + 538 + plates, ISSN 1570-6893 (pb).

Reviewed by Kim Bowes
(Cornell University)

Like other volumes in its series, *Housing in Late Antiquity* owes its origins to two conferences, the Society for Architectural Historians and Late Antique Archaeology, Padua, both in 2003, as well as non-conference contributions. The result is a volume of seventeen chapters, translated into generally very good English, plus two lengthy bibliographic essays and an extensive, useful index. The three editors, aided by Simon Ellis and Yuri Murano, have produced a readable, one-stop-shop for anyone interested in late antique housing. The book's organization, beginning with broader thematic pieces, continuing with regional surveys, and concluding with individual house studies, allows the reader to sink comfortably from overview into detail, while its methodologies and authorship accurately reflect the state of the field—both in its advances and shortcomings.

In this respect, Ellis' introductory essay reflects the positive and negative qualities of the volume as a whole. He offers some general, rather too-brief thoughts on sources and their problems and an overall chronological and geographical evolution of late antique housing; draws particular attention to the development of *episcopio* and *praetoria* as new kinds of domestic spaces; and ends with a call for study of Turkish seventeenth-century architecture as a window on Byzantine housing. The introduction perhaps fails sufficiently to highlight the volume's focus on urban housing: rural housing, with the exception of Jeremy Rossiter's piece on Carthage and Veronica Kalas' on Cappadocia, is considered only by incidental comparison. Conversely, several of the subjects Ellis discusses in detail as inherent to late antique domestic developments—*praetoria*, palaces, subdivision of single-family houses for multifamily/industrial use—are not substantially addressed in any of the volume's chapters.

After Inge Uytterhoeven's two useful bibliographic essays, the book begins in earnest with a section on *episcopio*, or episcopal residences. Murano provides a careful discussion of the meager evidence for episcopal residences in northern Italy, concluding that the absence of evidence for major fourth- and early fifth-century *episcopio* sites reflects the limited power of bishops at that time, whereas their development in the sixth century demonstrates bishops' growing power and influence. Likewise, Giuliano Volpe presents two recently excavated, sixth-century Puglian complexes, St. Peter in Canosa and the rural bishopric of San Giusto, as evidence of the power of bishops in both town and country in southern Italy. Burcu Ceylan has more to work with in her discussion of *episcopio* from Asia Minor,

considering the large but summarily excavated complexes from Side, Miletus, and Ephesus. In each case, she attributes specific functions to rooms by matching episcopal duties described in textual sources with room typology and location. All three authors admit that these complexes show no particular “episcopal” architecture, but, in their public and private aspects, simply echo the features of all elite houses. It is somewhat surprising, then, that none offers a set of criteria for identifying the complexes they study as *episcopia*, or a discussion of the heterogeneous terminology for such in the primary sources.

The next three essays address less tightly focused thematic problems. Isabella Baldini Lipolis surveys the legal sources on private buildings, rightly drawing attention to the jurists’ preoccupation with house spacing and height—the ingredients for fire hazard. Lale Özgenel provides a detailed analysis of spatial patterning in houses of Asia Minor, what she calls “the archaeology of spatial control.” She analyzes the placement of various room types and circulation patterns in a dozen elite houses, finding further support for Ellis’ now widely accepted notion of separation of social classes within the house. Ellis himself draws attention to the neglected topic of domestic lighting, using computer reconstructions to suggest the effects light may have had on the appearance and function of space. The ideas he advances are exciting; the reconstructions are somewhat less successful, due not so much to the self-admitted problems of reconstructing light but to sloppy thinking about roof and ceiling heights, overhangs and other properties of the architecture itself.

The third section is formed of regional surveys of domestic architecture: Javier

Arce, Alexandra Chavarría, and Gisela Ripoll present an overview of extant late Roman urban houses in Hispania, including the recently excavated Morería area in Mérida; Francesca Ghedini and Silvia Bullo summarize the results of their more extended analyses of Tunisian houses and domestic mosaics; and Rossiter looks specifically at the evidence from Carthage, including a welcome discussion of non-elite housing and suburban villas. Kalas’ discussion of the tenth- and eleventh-century rock-cut elite houses from the Selime-Yaprakhisar area in Cappadocia provides an important glimpse of the afterlife of the late antique elite *domus*, but neither her nor Alan Walmsley’s discussion of an eighth-century house in Pella, Jordan (nor, indeed, Ellis’ introduction), offer any thoughts on how these later complexes compared to their late antique predecessors.

The final section offers a series of generally very good monographic studies on individual houses or groups of domestic compounds: Simon Esmonde-Cleary introduces a recently-excavated house in Éauze and proposes possible occupation by military personnel; Andrea Augenti re-examines the excavation archive and phasing of the so-called Palace of Theodorich in Ravenna; Will Bowden and John Mitchell prove that extraordinary domestic histories can be written with expert, open-area excavation in their discussion of the triconch “palace” at Butrint, Albania; Anne-Marie Manière-Lévêque provides a similarly rich analysis of the acropolis *domus* in Xanthos and its ceramic assemblages; Marc Waelkens and his colleagues present their detailed excavations of a house and *thermopolion* in Sagalassos, in which architecture and artifact assemblage are similarly combined to present total domestic histories; and

Walmsley presents the results of the excavation of an extraordinary eighth-century courtyard house at Pella, destroyed by a violent earthquake and thus containing a snapshot of Palestinian domestic life in 749 CE. These studies are the highlight of the book, but are somewhat marred by unreadable small plans.

For anyone looking for an overview of the physical evidence for urban housing in Late Antiquity, this is a useful book indeed. The articles and attendant bibliography discuss or allude to the lion's share of excavated material. A few papers—particularly in the final, monographic section—are testament to the power of artifact assemblages and detailed stratigraphic analysis to excavate not just houses, but generations of domestic lives. Anyone looking for new, probing analyses of domestic space or its relationship with late antique society, however, is likely to be disappointed. The introduction provides only a superficial discussion of the major methodological issues involved in reconstituting “society” from its houses and almost every essay embraces, and indeed, as Ellis himself specifically advances, a purely “functionalist” approach to domestic architecture. In the great majority of the chapters, rooms are attributed according to function, something Roman archaeologists ceased to do over a decade ago as the multi-functionality of domestic space became apparent. Several authors claim or assume that late antique houses exhibit increasing segregation of functions (particularly dining and reception): this may very well be true, but these same authors’ *a priori* embrace of functionalist room typologies leaves the hypothesis almost wholly untested.

The rhetorical, phenomenological, or gendered qualities of domestic space

or space syntax analysis—all approaches to houses now fruitfully used in other fields—are hardly touched upon in this volume, and the relationship between physical remains and textually-derived social history is only superficially contemplated (evident even in the otherwise excellent bibliographic essays, where the “historical” sections are incomplete and out-of-date). In collecting together so much of the evidence for late antique housing between two covers, the volume has performed a great service; in failing to ponder more deeply on its methods and preconceptions, it has missed an opportunity.

*Plague and the End of Antiquity:
The Pandemic of 541–750*

LESTER K. LITTLE, ED.
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,
2007. Pp. xx, 360, ISBN 978-0-521-
84639-4

*Justinian's Flea: Plague, Empire,
and the Birth of Europe*

WILLIAM ROSEN
London: Viking, 2007. Pp. 367, ISBN
978-0-6700-3855-8.

Reviewed by Anthony Kaldellis
(The Ohio State University)

Although neither of these books quite explains what the grim “end of antiquity” was or the hopeful “birth of Europe,” both represent welcome efforts to fuse biology and history to understand an event that lasted over two hundred years and affected nearly everyone between Iran and Ireland.

Plague and the End of Antiquity emerged from a Rome conference (2001). It is an informative, well written, sometimes fascinating, and nearly comprehensive volume, which can be recommended