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THE LARGE HOUSE AT DYSTOS IN EUBOEA¹

By J. V. LUCE

THE site of ancient Dystos in south-central Euboea deserves to be better known. The imposing circuit of the city wall with its main gate and eleven towers bears comparison with the fort at Eleutheræe or the walls of Messene or Thasos. The numerous remains of private houses are of considerable interest for the history of Greek domestic architecture.

Dystos is accessible from Athens by the through bus to Karystos via the Eretria ferry; one could, I believe, be on its acropolis within six hours. I went from Eretria by car, and then on foot, in less than an hour and a half. The *Blue Guide* (1967) is wrong in stating that the site is only a thirty-minute walk from Velousia, and motorists should be warned that the road from that village (three to four miles) is hardly fit for a car. The best approach is from the tarmac road between Lepoura and Krieza. From there tracks lead westward across a well-cultivated plain to the foot of the isolated conical hill about 1,000 feet high on which the city stood. To the west of the hill the plain degenerates into a marshy swamp which must swell in winter to something approaching the lake shown on standard road maps of the area.

The city wall rings the hill about half-way up. On the west the ground falls away so steeply that only a slight fortification was needed. But to north, east, and south, the wall is stoutly built, faced with very massive blocks, and well preserved over most of its length. A virtually continuous stretch of nearly 700 yards can easily be traced. Eleven towers project from the curtain wall at irregular intervals, four being concentrated near the main gate where the hill is most accessible (Plate Ia). The tower flanking the east of the main gate has large, ingeniously fitted blocks varying quite widely in shape and size (Plate Ib). The eastern face still rises to an impressive height of twelve feet or more, and appears to have a small window near its top (Plate II). The main city gate, ten feet wide, with its great lintel still in position, is one of the most imposing of its kind (Plate III). Another gate further south, leading into a tower, also has an enormous lintel still in position.

On the question of the date of the walls Scranton points out that no one has produced any evidence since Wiegand. He did not visit them himself, but does not disagree with Wiegand's conclusion that they date from the fifth century B.C.² This is also the position of Philippson,

¹ The chief bibliographical references are listed below, p. 149.

² R. L. Scranton, *Greek Walls* (Cambridge, Mass., 1941), 82. Cf. Wiegand, 464.

though Kirsten will not go further than a cautious 'at least early Hellenistic'.¹ In style, various sections show a somewhat haphazard blend of polygonal, irregular trapezoidal, and isodomic trapezoidal (quarry-face) characteristics, to use Scranton's nomenclature (see Plates I–III). The mean dating of these three styles would be about 400 B.C., or a little earlier. I would be confident that they are original rather than archaizing. Were they perhaps built, or strengthened, under Athenian influence after the Peace of Nicias and before the Euboean revolt of 411 B.C.? In general appearance and dimensions the walls and towers seem to me to approximate closely to the fortifications of Eleutherae (which are dated about 400 B.C.) even down to the detail of vertical ornamental grooving on the corners of the towers.²

It is surprising to find such massive fortifications in a city so lacking in recorded history. The only annalistic mention of Dystos is in a fragment of Theopompus' *Philippica* preserved by Stephanus of Byzantium: Δύστος· πόλις Εύβοίας· Θεόπομπος ἐν Φιλιππικῶν κδ' "ἀποστήσας δὲ τοὺς ἐν αὐτῇ τῇ περιοικίδι τῶν Ἑρετριέων ἐστράτευσεν ἐπὶ πόλιν Δύστον." The extract is generally referred to the Euboean war which broke out in 349/8, but it could relate to Pericles' Euboean expedition a century earlier.³ In the fourth century Dystos was a deme of Eretria. The inscription (*I.G.* xii. 9. 191) recording a contract between the city of Eretria and Chaerephanes for the draining of 'the marsh at Ptechai' was referred by Wiegand (p. 467) to the Dystos marsh. Among other reasons he noted the fact that the sworn parties to the contract included sixty-three citizens of Dystos, the second largest group involved. However, W. Wallace has made a strong case for accepting the view of Eustratiades (who first published the inscription in 1869) that the marsh in question lay just to the east of the city of Eretria.⁴ Some later rather poor graves show that the city was still inhabited in the Roman period. These few scraps are the sum of what is known about its history.

Dystos was described by a succession of travellers and topographers in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁵ The only systematic survey, so far as I know, is that of Theodor Wiegand. Wiegand spent

¹ A. Philippson, *Die griechischen Landschaften* (Frankfurt, 1950–9), i (2), 623–4; E. Kirsten, *ibid.* n. 1.

² Compare my Plates Ia and II with the excellent pictures of Eleutherae in A. W. Lawrence, *Greek Architecture*² (Pelican History of Art, Harmondsworth, 1967), Plate 119. Lawrence notes (p. 232) that many fortifications of the late fifth century were very systematic, with small rectangular towers placed within easy bow-shot of one another, and commanding straight stretches of curtain walling. This description fits Dystos well.

³ See F. Jacoby, *F.Gr.H.* II B 115, fr. 149. Yet another possibility might be the Spartan intervention in Euboea in 411 B.C. (Thuc. viii. 95).

⁴ *Hesperia* xvi (1947), 115–46.

⁵ The references may be found in *I.G.* xii. 9, p. 160. For prehistoric habitation at Dystos see L. H. Sackett and others, *BSA* lxi (1966), 76.



PLATE Ia. Dystos: a typical stretch of wall with projecting tower



PLATE Ib. Dystos: the tower to the east of the main city gate



PLATE II. Dystos: the east face of the tower flanking the main city gate



PLATE III. Dystos: the main city gate



PLATE IVa. Dystos: the northern half of the large house seen from above



PLATE IVb. Dystos: the northern portion of the pillared arcade between Rooms 5 and 6

five days on the site in June 1895 assisted by two companions, and later published his findings with a plan of the acropolis, and a plan of the large house which forms the main subject of this study (see the bibliographical note). This house has received cursory mention by a series of authorities since, but not all of them appear to have seen it, and I do not know of any detailed study of it since Wiegand.¹ So much has been found out about Greek domestic architecture since his time that the plan of the house can now, I believe, be made more intelligible. I was not equipped to survey the house, so I have reproduced Wiegand's plan, adding the orientation and scale transposed from his site plan, and a key embodying my interpretation of the layout (see Fig. 1).

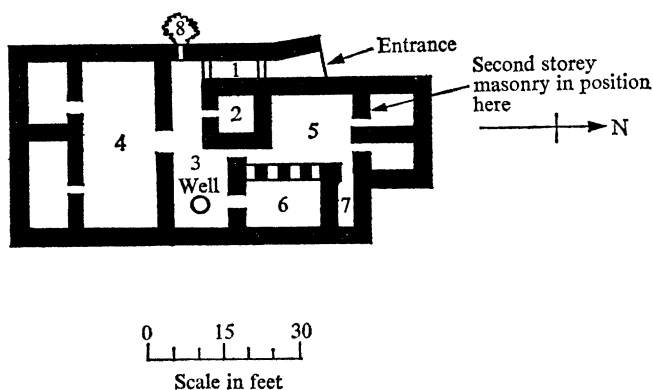


FIG. 1. Plan of the large house at Dystos.

Key: 1. Entrance passage with two doors. 2. Porter's lodge. 3. Courtyard. 4. Main reception room (ἀνδρῶν) (?). 5. Work-room and/or living-room. 6. Kitchen. 7. Bathroom. 8. Small cave hollowed in hillside and perhaps used as a store-room.

The house lies within and close to the walls on the south-east side of the acropolis. It is solidly built of large squared blocks of the local limestone, and measures 78 by 37 feet over-all. The ground-floor walls still stand to quite a considerable height. At one point in the north-west corner a few courses of the second storey are still in position, and the opening of a doorway leading into an upper room can be made out (Plate IVa; cf. Wiegand, Plate VI, 2). A particularly striking feature is the west wall of room 6, which consists of a pillared arcade with a block about 10 feet long extending from the side wall over two of the pillars

¹ Fiechter in *RE* vii. 2540 calls it 'small'. Most people today would be happy to live in a house with a 78-foot frontage and at least ten rooms. W. B. Dinsmoor, *Architecture of Ancient Greece* (London, 1950), 211, describes the houses of Dystos as 'rustic', a misleading term for solid structures that have lasted for over two millennia. Lawrence, *op. cit.* 241, republishes Wiegand's plan with an inaccurate scale.

(Plate IVb). If the house is correctly dated to the fifth or fourth century, its state of preservation must make it unique among Greek houses. At Olynthus, and in the Dema house in Attica, the walls were of adobe construction on rubble foundations, and nowhere stand more than a few feet high.¹ In the Dystos house the visible remains are all of cut stone on a scale remarkably massive for a private house. Its proximity to what looks like a garrison block (Wiegand, 462) might suggest that it belonged to some important official of the city. The courtyard and rooms are choked with fallen masonry, which makes it difficult to estimate the actual height of the walls above floor level, and prevents any thorough inspection of the floors.

The Dystos house would obviously repay excavation. Until this is done, any interpretation of the functions of the various rooms can only be provisional. But I suggest that Wiegand was mistaken in identifying the area I call Room 5 as a second and major courtyard (*Haupthof*).² He gives no reason for this identification (Wiegand, 466). Possibly he felt that his *Halle* (my Room 6) with its pillars should open on to a courtyard. But it is hard to see the point of a 'hall' in this position when one could get from the courtyard (3) to area 5 without going through area 6 at all. If he meant 'portico', the area (15 by 8½ feet) seems rather small for such a structure, and runs counter to Socrates' recommendation that house porticoes should face south (Xen. *Mem.* iii. 8. 9). Wiegand's suggestion may have misled Plommer into calling the plan 'chaotic',³ but I think that good sense can be made of it in the light of some of the findings of the Olynthus excavations.

In the houses at Olynthus the excavators noted the repeated occurrence of a complex of three rooms, one large, one medium, and one small. This complex has been thoroughly discussed by Mylonas (see bibliographical note, p. 149), who named it the '*oecus*-complex', and by Graham, who prefers the term 'kitchen-complex' (Graham [2], 328). Mylonas analyses the complex into two main types: type A in which a solid wall divides the large Room I from the medium Room II; type B in which this solid wall is replaced by a pillared partition (see Fig. 2). Though some matters are still in dispute, Mylonas and Graham are now in broad agreement about the functions of the three rooms. The large room (I) served as a work-room and/or living-room. Remains show that routine tasks like corn-grinding and weaving were performed there, and it is thought that it served as a focal point for the household.

¹ For the Olynthus houses see bibliographical note. For the Dema house see J. E. Jones and others, *BSA* lvii (1962), 76-114.

² He is followed by D. S. Robertson, *A Handbook of Greek and Roman Architecture*² (Cambridge, 1945), 298. D. M. Robinson, *RE Suppl.* vii (1938), 253-4, more cautiously speaks of 'this enigmatic house seemingly with two yards'.

³ H. Plommer, *Ancient and Classical Architecture* (London, 1956), 204.

In some cases a large stone-surrounded hearth, centrally placed, was uncovered in Room I. The medium room (II) was the kitchen proper, often found with stone flags and a thick deposit of ashes. The smallest room (III) was a bathroom or washroom, as is shown by the tubs, complete or fragmentary, so often found there.

My suggestion is that the rooms I have numbered 5, 6, and 7 in the Dystos house constituted an *oecus*-unit or kitchen-complex of the Olynthian type B. The scheme fits in well with the plan and the visible remains. Room 5, about 15 feet square, would provide good working space, and is slightly larger than the minimum size noted at Olynthus (4 by 5 metres). Between rooms 5 and 6 stands the distinctive pillared partition found in at least eleven of the houses tabulated by Mylonas (397-8), and in eight of the eleven tabulated by Graham (Graham [2], 329-30). A very similar partition occurs in the remains of another large

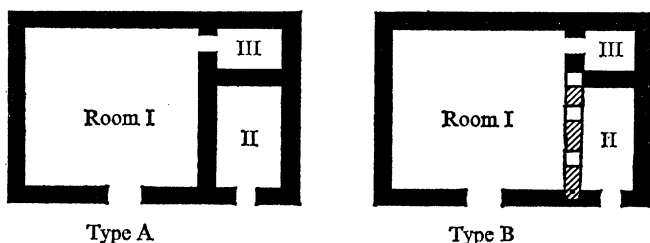


FIG. 2. The *oecus*-unit of the Olynthian house (after Mylonas, *Excavations at Olynthus*, Part vi, Fig 6, p. 369).

but only partially preserved Dystos house not far south of the present one (Wiegand, Plate V = site plan). The average distance between the centres of the pillars in the Olynthus partitions is from 1.4 to 1.5 metres (Graham [1], 190), and this accords closely with the Dystos partitions (1.5 m.). The distance seems too small for a portico; portico pillars at Olynthus are on average 2.25 to 2.5 metres apart. I suggest, therefore, that Room 6 was the kitchen proper. From it there is easy access to the well in the courtyard, and to Room 4, if that was the men's dining-room. Room 7 (8 by 3 feet) completes the complex. Wiegand suggested it may have been a storeroom, but we may picture it as a bathroom conveniently close to the main source of hot water, as in the Olynthus units. Drainage could easily have been arranged through the outer wall and down the steep slope to the east. Further on-site examination might confirm these suggestions, and also solve the question of access to the second-storey rooms. As at Olynthus, the staircase was probably of wood, and could have run up along the west wall of Room 5 to a small landing under a high-pitched roof. There is no need to interpret Room 7 as a stair-well.

The question of direct access between Rooms 5 and 6 can only be settled by excavation, as one cannot tell by inspection whether the openings between the pillars go down to floor level. In most cases at Olynthus the openings were partially blocked off by a rubble or adobe filling. As the pillars were usually wooden, this served to protect their bases from the fire in the cooking area. The height of the filling could be adjusted to provide the working surface for a 'service hatch'. The openings themselves would help to integrate the working areas of the house, and would permit supervision of the kitchen from the living-room. They would also improve the ventilation and lighting of both rooms. Finally there is the important problem of smoke dispersal. The kitchen proper must have been provided with an adequate flue, and if there was a hearth, or brazier, burning in the work-room, any smoke from it could filter through the partition openings and up the kitchen flue. This flue may, as Graham suggests, have gone up through two stories to the roof (Graham [1], 190-2; modified in [2], 343).¹

The Dystos house is generally taken to be Hellenic rather than Hellenistic, though not, it must be admitted, on very firm grounds (Graham [1], 148 n. 16). The argument rests on the association of its masonry style with that of the walls, and also on the presence on the acropolis of numerous other stone-built houses of a very simple, and therefore presumably early, type. If my identification of the *oecus*-unit is correct, the received date will receive some additional support. This type of unit, so typical of the Olynthus houses (which date between c. 400 and 348 B.C.), is not found at all in houses at Colophon of c. 300 B.C.,² nor in the Hellenistic houses of Priene or Delos. As Chalcidice was colonized from Euboea it is not surprising to find similar house-plans in the two places.

One feature of the Dystos house, the entrance passage with two doors (*θυρωρείον*), has no parallel at Olynthus, though it does occur in some of the richer houses on Delos. There is also a rather similar arrangement in a large house at Eretria, said to be probably of Hellenistic date (Graham [1], 148-9 and Fig. 7, 183). Here there is a porch with a door leading into a passage running at right angles through to the *pastas* and court in the centre of the house. The Eretria house also has a conspicuously large *andron*, 6.9 metres square.

¹ Most of the above points are well made by Vanna Svoronos-Hadjimichalis in her article 'L'évacuation de la fumée dans les maisons grecques', *BCH* lxxx (1956), 483 ff., though without mention of Dystos. See especially 498-9 and Fig. 12. She also draws attention to an interesting variant in one of the Olynthus kitchen-complexes (493 and Fig. 8). In this a small alcove (4 by 3 ft.) *between* the kitchen and bathroom opens to the work-room through two pillars directly opposite a large hearth. The lower portions of the pillars can be seen in the general view of the house illustrated in Graham [1], Plate 42. It is hard to resist the conclusion that the alcove is a ventilation shaft.

² See L. B. Holland, *Hesperia* xiii (1944), 91-171.

The balance of probability, I think, favours a pre-Hellenistic dating for the house, but until further systematic examination is made of it—and it clearly deserves such examination—any conclusion about its date must remain rather tentative.

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 Graham [2]: J. W. Graham (and D. M. Robinson), *Domestic and Public Architecture = Excavations at Olynthus*, Part xii (Baltimore, 1946).
 Mylonas: G. E. Mylonas, 'The *oecus*-unit of the Olynthian house', Excursus II in *Excavations at Olynthus*, Part xii (Baltimore, 1946).

VERSION

After reading 'Horace the Minstrel'

O QUAM splendidus ille qui poema
 iucundum prius Anglice peractum
 interpres citharis lyraque dexter
 retro transtulit in modos Horati!
 rem quanta tenuit fidelitate!
 doctus scripsit et eruditus; ipso
 Flacco scripsit Horatianiora;
 plaudit Melpomene, Camena plaudit,
 splendet dulce modis et arte carmen:
 resplendet tamen ipsa plus origo.
 O versus utinam mei decore
 scriptis illius aemulo niterent:
 ausim dicere pro meis vel unum
 (quod dixisset Horatius modeste),
 'parva haec, sed mea, sunt; ego unus auctor'.

M. HELLEWELL