

More Than Meets the Eye: Identifying a Brothel in Ancient Greece

Building Z stands just within the Athenian city walls, south of the Pompeion and Sacred Gate of the Kerameikos. The Kerameikos excavations of the German Archaeological Institute, of Athens, under the direction of Ursula Knigge, recovered this structure from 1978-1981. It has been proposed that the building developed over five, non-continuous phases between 430-86 BCE. Although easily passed over by tourists to the Kerameikos today, Building Z contains several characteristics that have complicated interpretations of its function; suggesting multiple uses, beyond a domestic, in some of its phases.

The excavation of Building Z yielded over 1,100 total objects of varied material and function, including both fine and coarse pottery, astragaloi, loomweights and elaborate foreign objects (Knigge 2005). While the interior layout changes in the different phases, the complex as a whole remains nearly twice the size of contemporary Greek houses. Building Z's location is also significant as it would have been amongst the first things people would have encountered after entering the Sacred Gate from the Sacred Way.

Knigge describes Z1 and Z2 as *Wohnhäuser*, successive residential buildings, which due to their size must have belonged to someone of great wealth (Knigge 2005: 8). An earthquake is thought to have destroyed Building Z1 around 420 BCE (Ault Forthcoming). The rapid rebuilding of Z2, which retained its primary entrance in the exact orientation suggests the same owner and building function. An inscribed horos stone was found in the northwest courtyard of Building Z and dates to the mid-4th century BCE when the complex was between phases (Knigge 2005: 168). It is thought that Z2 was destroyed by fire at the end of the 5th century BCE and Z3 was constructed between 350-325 BCE (Knigge 2005: 49). The inscription describes the purchase of a segment of land for 450 drachmas. This likely refers to the plot of land where

Building Z is located and indicates a shift in ownership and perhaps building function. The lacuna in occupation between Z2 and Z3, the inscribed horos stone, alteration in interior layout and the influx of foreign objects suggest a change in not only ownership, but more importantly function.

Through a close analysis of the finds, the interior layout, and architectural features of Building Z3, this paper proposes that this complex functioned as brothel or place of paid sex, rather than what Knigge describes as both a *Wirtshaus* “inn” and a *Weberi* “textile mill” (Knigge 2005: 96-7). Wallace-Hadrill defines three criteria that a building must exhibit in order for it to be deemed a brothel. These categories are design, specifically masonry beds, erotic art, and graffiti that suggest prostitution and sex (Wallace-Hadrill 1995: 52). While all of these criteria are prominent features within the Lupanar in Pompeii, they are not applicable in the study of identifying places of prostitution in ancient Athens, since no example in Athens has been found with these qualifications; however this does not necessitate all brothels follow this typology. This paper, by suggesting a brothel function for the third phase of Building Z, hopes to challenge the traditional notions of what features an ancient Greek brothel would have contained.

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