

THE ASKLEPIEION ON KOS

KOS



The Asklepieion, the most famous monument on Kos, lies 3.5 km north-west of the ancient city. It stands on the slopes of a low hill, and enjoys a superb view over the sea and the coast of Asia Minor opposite.

The Asklepieion on Kos was discovered at the beginning of the 20th c. by the German archaeologist R. Herzog, after a suggestion by Iak. Zarrahptis, a local antiquarian. The site was subsequently excavated by Italian archaeologists, who also restored the monument and gave it its present form.

The site is laid out on three terraces:

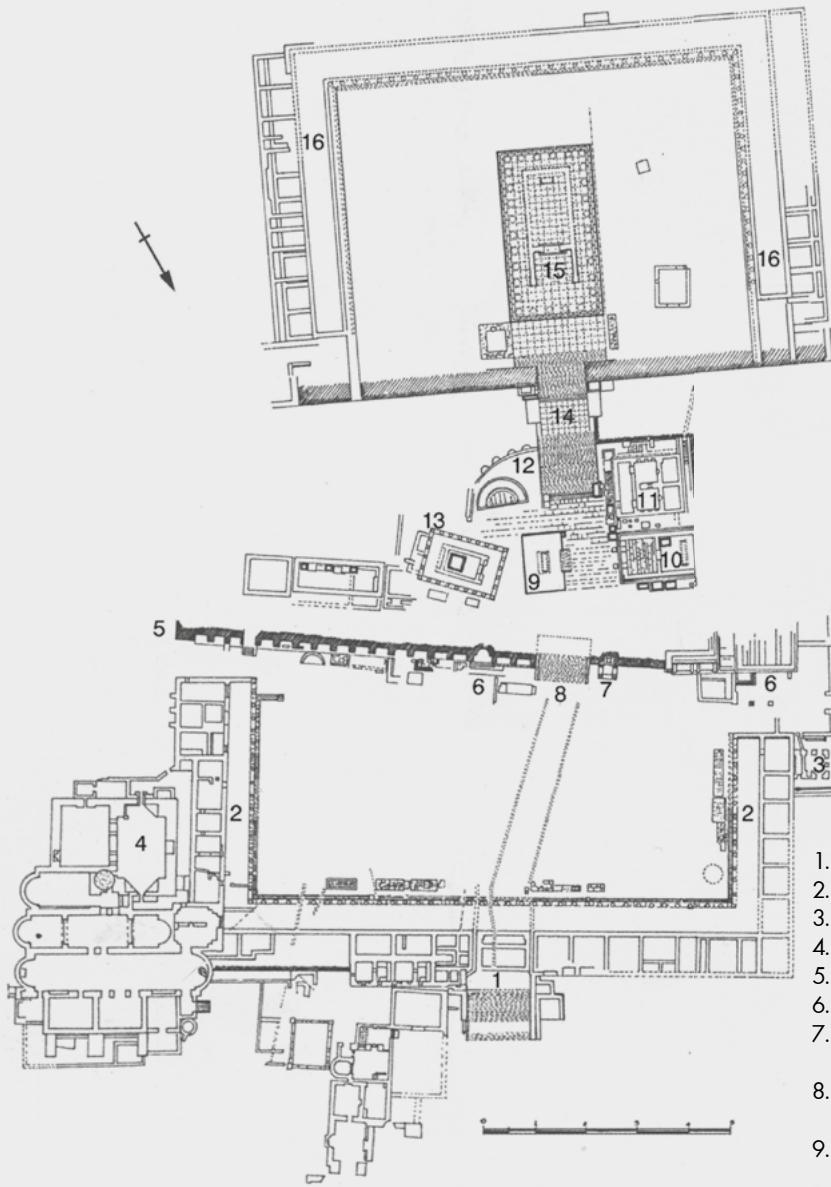
I. The lowest terrace was bounded on the west, north and east sides by a stoa in the shape of the Greek letter Π (only the foundations of this can now be seen). To the east was a complex of Roman thermae (baths) dating from the 3rd c. AD, of which remains of wall-paintings and floor mosaics survive. During the Roman period, recesses were formed in the retaining wall supporting the second terrace, and in one of these a spring and water cistern are preserved to the present day. To the west of the staircase leading up to the second terrace is a recess in the form of a small temple, in which there is a base of a statue (probably of Nero), dedicated by Gaius Stertinius Xenophon of Kos, personal doctor to the emperors Tiberius, Claudius and Nero.

2. On the second terrace are the remains of a large altar, the earliest structure in the Asklepieion. The altar was built about the middle of the 4th c. BC, and its sculptural decoration, of which virtually nothing survives, is thought to have been the work of the sons of Praxiteles. To the west of the altar is the earliest temple of Asklepios, in the Ionic order and dating from the 3rd c. BC. To the south is preserved a building that has been identified with the priests' residence or the "abaton" – the place in which the sick waited for Asklepios to appear to them in their dreams and heal them –, behind which can be seen the entrance to the sacred spring. To the east of the altar is a small Roman temple in the Corinthian order dating from the 2nd c. AD.

3. On the third, final terrace stands the large Doric temple of Asklepios, which dates from the 2nd c. BC and is enclosed by a Π-shaped stoa. In the Early Christian period a church called the Panaya Tarsou was erected in the pronaos of the temple. All that now survives of this church is an Early Christian capital, once used as an Altar. The name "Tarsou" is believed to be a corruption of the words *tou əlsous* ("of the grove") with reference to the grove of cypress trees all around the Asklepieion, in which Apollo Kyparissios was originally worshipped before Asklepios.

Much of the temple superstructure was quarried by the Knights of the Order of St John of Jerusalem to be used in the construction of the medieval castle.





- 1. Propylon
- 2. Hellenistic stoa
- 3. Toilets
- 4. Thermae (Baths)
- 5. Retaining wall
- 6. Springs
- 7. Small temple of Xenophon
- 8. Staircase to the second terrace
- 9. Altar
- 10. Ionic temple of Asklepios
- 11. Priests' residence or "abaton"
- 12. Semicircular exedra
- 13. Temple in the Corinthian order
- 14. Staircase to the third terrace
- 15. Doric temple of Asklepios
- 16. Stoa



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