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Nea Paphos 1991

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NEA PAPHOS 1991

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1991 was largely a study season for the Polish mission excavating at the site of the ancient capital of Cyprus, Nea Paphos.¹ Work continued on the classification of Hellenistic and Roman fine tableware and the architectural recording of the site, particularly the design of geometric mosaics and theoretical reconstructions of missing parts of the floors. Excavations were limited to a minimum and lasted from August 26 to September 17; a reduced mission continued studies till the beginning of November.

The first of three sectors where new trenches were opened is the so-called Villa of Theseus, a Late Roman residence. In different parts of the building fragments of earlier structures had been uncovered in previous seasons (Fig. 1). One such structure consisting of a number of rooms (marked I-IV on the plan) was located under the northern part of the eastern wing of the villa; it was situated on the western side of a street

¹ The mission was directed by Prof. Wiktor A. Daszewski and comprised Prof. Zofia Sztetyłło, Dr. Evdoksia Papuci-Władyka, Mr. Henryk Meyza, archaeologists, Dr. Stanisław Medeksza, architect, Mrs. Ewa Parandowska and Miss Susanna Reim, conservators of painting and pottery. Eleven students from the Institute of Archaeology of Warsaw University also took part in the excavations.

It is on behalf of the entire Mission that I would like here to express my most sincere gratitude to the staff of the Department of Antiquities, who were always on the spot throughout the season and ready to help in all matters, whether concerning archaeological excavations and conservation or the organization of the study season. Especially I would like to thank Dr. M. Louloupis, Director of the Department, Dr. D. Christou, Deputy Director, Dr. D. Michaelides, Mr. Takis Herodotou and Mr. Vangelis.

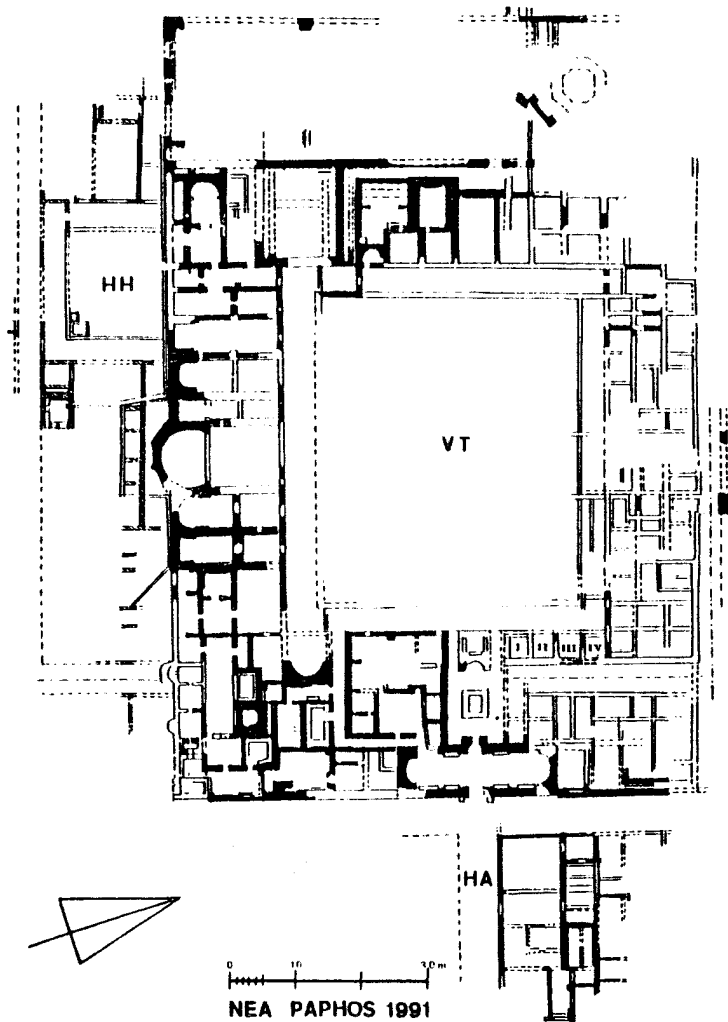


Fig. 1. Localization of earlier structures uncovered under the Villa of Theseus.

running from north to south, a street which formed part of the Hellenistic street network and went out of use at the time that the Villa of Theseus was constructed. In three of the rooms there were large clay bins set in the floor in the eastern corners, adjacent to the street. Originally, these clay bins were supposed to be located in specially prepared openings in the eastern walls of these rooms (see Fig. 2), but this plan was abandoned and the bins were moved slightly to the west in order to be inside the rooms. Similar clay vessels were discovered on the other side of the street, in another early edifice facing it on the east. There, in room no. 95, a bin of this kind contained a set of Hellenistic pottery,² dated from the late 3rd to the early 1st century BC. In room II of the western structure three bins of this type were discovered; the northernmost one was explored in 1983 and was found to be almost empty, except for a few sherds of storage vessels. The other two bins located in the south-eastern corner were investigated now. They were similar in dimensions: about 1 m in diameter, and originally projected slightly above floor level. In the debris filling the two bins, fragments of a plain, slightly flaring rim were discovered. Both bins belonged to an earlier phase in the occupation of the room, for at a later date they were bisected by a narrow stone wall running from east to west. Neither one had a bottom, so they could not have served as pithoi, but rather as the lining of a hole in the ground. In both cases the bottom was made separately of different materials: in the eastern bin the floor consisted of flat-lying potsherds, exhibiting traces of burning, found at a depth of c. 0.35 m from the preserved top of the bin, which is more or less flush with the level of the floor in the room. Exploration of the western of the two bins provided interesting results. At a depth of c. 0.20 m there was a kind of floor made of flat-lying

² See W.A. Daszewski, *Nea Paphos 1990*, *PAM II*, 1990 (1991), pp. 78-79.

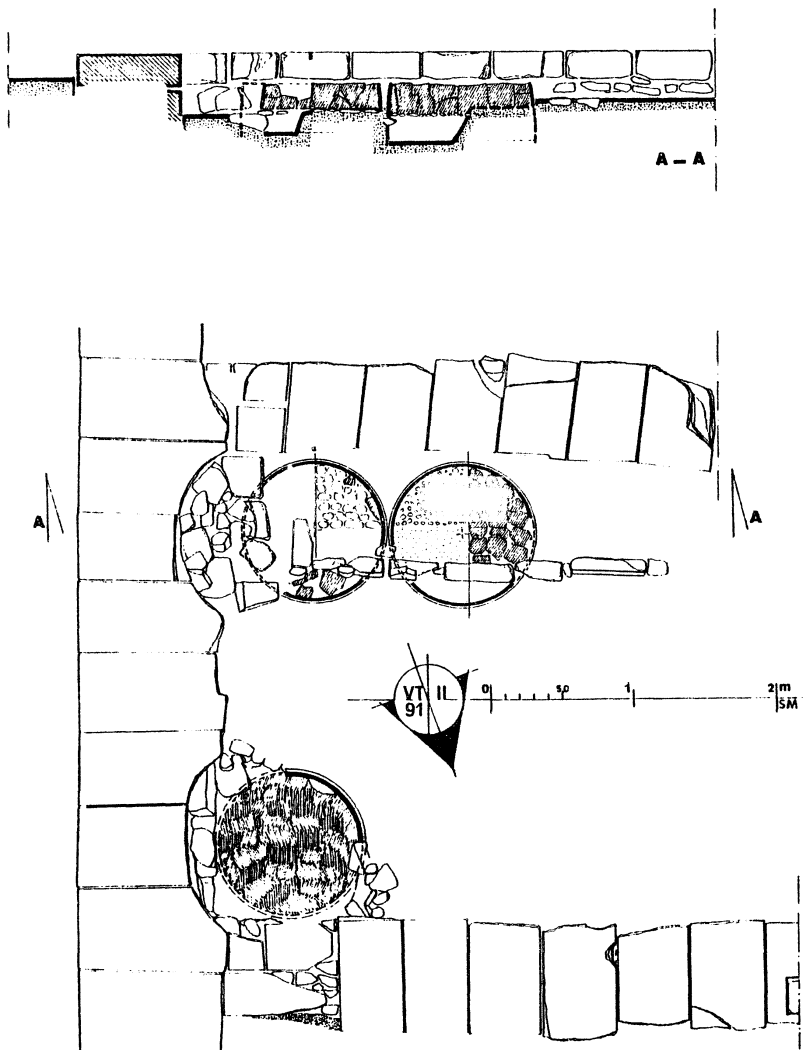


Fig. 2. Plan and section of clay bins uncovered in room II.

potsherds and pebbles in a burnt grey soil. A little above this floor, in a layer of burnt black soil, there was a jawbone of a small boar or pig. About 10 cm below this floor there was another one, made of a several-centimeter thick layer of grey clay, cracked from burning. Below it, down to about 0.60 m depth, the soil was brown and burnt through. The pottery material would indicate a date in the later Hellenistic period with the latest sherd below the lower floor being a fragment of a lamp discus with voluted nozzle from the beginning of the first century AD. Overall, the results confirmed an earlier suggestion that the building facing the western side of the street should be dated to Later Hellenistic times in general and its abandonment to a point somewhere at the beginning of the Early Roman period

The next sector where excavations were continued was the site of a large Hellenistic edifice discovered in previous seasons to the south of the Villa of Theseus (so-called Hellenistic House, Fig. 3). Trenches were dug in all three of the uncovered wings: western, southern and eastern. On the west, room no. 10, which was presumably the main official hall of the edifice, was almost completely cleared. Its floor was found to be a mosaic of rough irregular chips of stones forming a simple design of a rectangular black frame against a white background. The walls of this room, almost totally destroyed and plundered in search of stone, were preserved in only small fragments on the north and west, as well as some blocks on the east. Traces of painted wall plaster were visible on the fragmentary remains, permitting a reconstruction of the lower register of wall decoration which consisted of large rectangular fields of a dark red color set apart by yellow pilasters projecting about 4 cm and 0.53 m wide. The upper parts of the southern wall were uncovered during a careful clearing of the debris in the middle of the room. The preserved fragments of plaster demonstrated that

the sections of the wall above the red fields were covered with a white plaster imitating blocks of masonry. In other words, the character of the decoration found in this hall would indicate a system of decoration typical of the so-called "structural style", otherwise called the First Pompeian style.

Room no. 12 to the north of room no. 10, the clearing of which was completed this season, was of smaller dimensions: 4.80 m long, but of unknown width, which could not be determined owing to the complete destruction of the northern end of the room (together with a section of the floor) during the construction of the Villa of Theseus. The lime mortar floor of room no. 12 was finely polished. The walls have not survived.

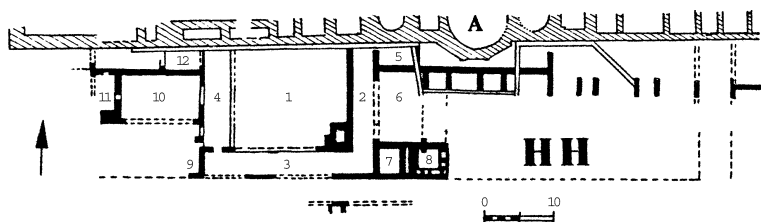


Fig. 3. Hellenistic House. A – walls of the Villa of Theseus.

Excavations west of room no. 10 permitted the length of room no. 11 to be determined at c. 3.50 m; the floor of this room was about 0.80 m below the level of the floor in room no. 10. The eastern and northern walls of the room still bore large sections of painted decoration,³ but the western wall was plundered to the ground. The lime mortar floor was preserved in very good condition. West of room no. 11 traces of yet another room were observed with drains running in a westerly direction beneath the earthen floor, serving to distribute runoff rainwater

³ Idem, p. 73.

as indicated by the remains of a vertical drain installation and a settling tank located in the northwestern corner of the room. Under a layer of debris near the southeastern corner of the room a human skeleton was discovered, the skull crushed by a block of stone; the person apparently died during the earthquake which destroyed the building.

In the southern wing of the Hellenistic House the upper fill of a cistern in the southern end of the western portico was cleared. The pottery covered a period from the Late Hellenistic to Roman of the second half of the 1st century AD and indicated the time when the cistern went out of use. Its opening dates will be determined when the lower parts of the fill are explored.

Excavations within the southern portico permitted some important general observations to be made. The southern portico apparently suffered destruction at the same time as the eastern one, in the second half of the 1st century AD, but contrary to the eastern portico, it was subsequently plundered and completely destroyed. Preserved fragments indicated that it had had a Doric colonnade instead of an Ionic one, as in the eastern wing or Corinthian as in the western one. The width of the southern portico was determined at 3.20 m. A white lime plaster covered the column drums and capitals. In the southeastern corner of the court, directly adjacent to the pool built in this spot at a later date, there was the opening of another large underground cistern. It was filled with rubble consisting of blocks from the ruined stylobate and column drums. There were fragments of Cypriot Sigillata from the late 1st century AD in the debris, while sherds of a Cnidian amphora of the 2nd century BC were found at a lower level. Although the evidence overall is not sufficient to date the cistern, the structure should be considered contemporary with the building and presumably re-used at the time of the construction of the pool.

In the eastern wing of the structure the explorations of the latrine (No. 8) were completed (a corner of this facility had been identified in the previous season). It turned out to be of large dimensions (4.76 x 3.86 m), comfortable for at least ten people at a time. Particular walls were preserved to a height from 0.50 to 1.20 m above the waterproof floor of lime mortar in the central part of the room. On the east and south, deep drains ran along the walls; presumably wooden seats in a wooden frame were mounted above these drains. The fill yielded fragments of terracotta oil lamps, fragments of terracotta figurines and the bottom part of a stone statuette representing Kybele seated on a throne supported on two sitting lions. The ceramic evidence clearly indicates that, although the room was destroyed in the second half of the 1st century AD, at least part of the facility continued in use till the first half of the 2nd century AD.

The third sector is the Roman House of Aion (Fig. 4); three trenches were opened here. A deep test trench was dug at the hypothetical intersection of the southern wall of the house with the continuation of the eastern wall of room no. 6, but without results, this part of the house having been destroyed completely in modern times (a deep pit with modern wrappers found at the bottom, possibly evidence of earthworks of some kind carried out by the RAF meteorological station once located in this area).

Another trench was opened in the northeastern corner of room no. 5. An earlier lime mortar floor

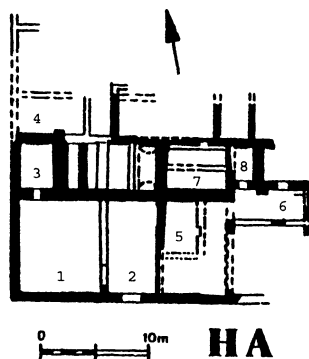


Fig. 4. House of Aion.

was uncovered about 0.35 m below the present one. The absence of finds did not allow an absolute chronology to be established. All that could be determined was the contemporaneity of the floor with an earlier wall, apparently of Hellenistic construction, extending to the north and well preserved there, where parts of it had been reused in the construction of the eastern wall of room no. 7 of the House of Aion.

The third trench was situated in room no. 9. Below the latest uncovered occupation level from the middle of the 4th century AD, 15 different layers, including three floors were identified. The lowest occupation level, set immediately upon bedrock, yielded pottery material from the end of the 4th and beginning of the 3rd century BC – White Painted and Attic Black-Glazed wares. The level immediately above was connected with a mud-brick structure of some kind from the early 3rd century BC. Next above it, there was a later Hellenistic layer and a Roman one, roughly dated up to the 2nd century AD. The 4th century occupation level of the House of Aion lay directly on top of this relatively early formation.

A substantial number of small finds, not in a good state of preservation unfortunately, came from all the excavation areas; the material included fragments of terracotta figurines, oil lamps, metal objects and fragments of architectural decoration.