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Nea Paphos 1990 : Report

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NEA PAPHOS 1990 REPORT

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Another season of excavations in Nea Paphos by a mission sponsored by the PCMA started on 3 September and ended on 5 October 1990. Work progressed in all three of the sectors covered by the mission's investigations, that is, in the so-called Villa of Theseus, the so-called House of Aion and the Late Hellenistic house (Fig. 1).¹

In the area of the Villa of Theseus, that is, the Late Roman residential structure, investigations focused on the northern end of the eastern wing. In this part of the villa Roman walls have all but totally disappeared making the plan of the residence difficult to follow. On the other hand the earlier structures are quite clearly visible. Large segments of walls cleared in previous seasons were found grouped on either side of a longitudinal street of Hellenistic date. They formed rows of rectangular rooms, the axes of which ran at right angles to the axis of the street. Particular rooms were equipped with drainage channels which emptied into the main sewer running down the street below its surface. At the time that the Villa of Theseus was built this street had disappeared completely under new constructions and the earlier walls were used in part as foundations for partition walls inside the villa. Some of the rooms, both

¹ The mission comprised: Prof. Wiktor A. Daszewski, Prof. Zofia Sztetyło, Dr. Evdoxia Papuci-Władyka, Mr. Henryk Meyza, archaeologists, Dr. Stanisław Medeksza, architect and Mr. Bogusław Okupny, photographer. Participating on a volunteer basis were students from the Institute of Archaeology of Warsaw University and the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw, as well as foreign students from Cyprus, the United States and Great Britain. The mission wishes to express heartfelt thanks to the authorities of the Antiquities Department of Cyprus for their friendly aid in the course of the work, as well as for help in the reconstruction and anastylosis of the monuments. We are especially grateful to Dr. A. Papageorgiou, Director of the Antiquities Department, and to Dr. D. Michaelides, the archaeologist in charge of the Paphos district.

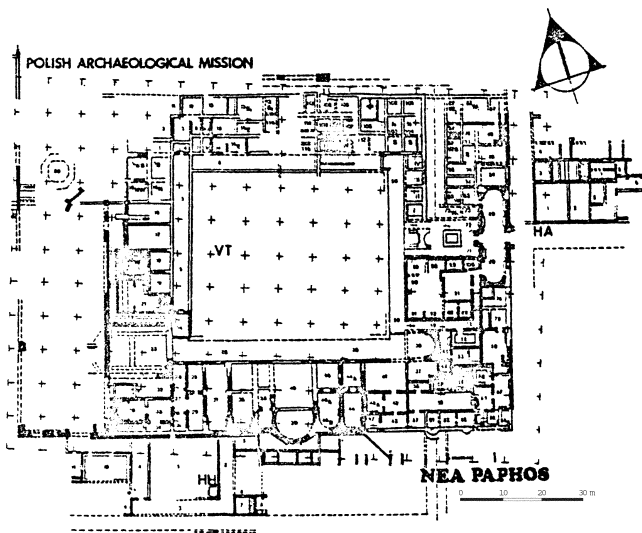


Fig. 1. Plan of the Polish excavations.

VT – Villa of Theseus, HA – House of Aion, HH – Hellenistic House.

on the eastern and western side of the street, still had great pithoi sunk in the ground. The content of two such pithoi on the western side of the street was investigated in a previous season, but did not supply any conclusive dating evidence. Investigations were continued this year, the object being a large terracotta container sunk into the ground near the outer wall of a room on the eastern side of the street. The results were very interesting. It turned out that the container was a kind of cylinder without bottom. Its flat floor, some 0.50 m below the preserved top of the container, was made of potsherds set flat in a layer of clay and bearing evidence of burning. Inside the container, in a fill of rather homogenous grey silty soil mixed with ashes there was a pottery deposit including plates, cups, bowls, kitchen pots, fragments of Megarian bowls, a stamped Rhodian amphora and three terracotta oil lamps. The entire group can be dated to the period from the end of the 3rd to the early 1st century BC. The

stamp on the amphora belongs to Diodotos, dated to 210-175 BC. By the same token there can be no further doubt concerning the dating of the dwellings on either side of the street the later Hellenistic period.

Within the House of Aion work proceeded to the northeast of rooms discovered so far, particularly in the vicinity of rooms 7 and 8. The debris inside room 7 included many bits of painted plasters from the walls and ceiling. The decoration was figural, vegetal and geometric; the figural parts were of outstanding quality. Substantial fragments of the decoration were pieced together from preserved bits in the course of the season; an example of this work is a male figure in the dress of a kitharodos, perhaps a representation of Apollo (Fig. 2). Excavations were carried out to the north of this room, on the other side of its northern wall. Two other rooms were found to be adjacent to it. Their floors were on a much higher level and they were separated by a N-S wall without foundation. They can be dated quite precisely by numerous coins and pottery of the second and third quarters of the 4th century AD. In the north-western part a stratigraphical trench reached bedrock at little over 2.10 m below the preserved tops of the walls. It was found that the earliest habitations belonged to the Ptolemaic period, presumably the beginning of the 2nd century BC. These Hellenistic structures subsequently served as foundation for the northern wall of room 7. Nevertheless, the area must have been occupied at an even earlier date, even before anything was built here. Sherds lying immediately upon bedrock are proof of it: fragments of a black-figured Attic vase and a hydria of the White Painted VII type and perhaps also White Painted II. The most interesting find from the trench was a terracotta oil lamp discus from the middle of the 1st century AD, decorated with a very rare representation of the nymph Amaltheia nursing a small Zeus.

The trench east of room 8 of the House of Aion uncovered a large part of yet another room lying on a level some 0.50 m higher



*Fig. 2. House of Aion, Room 7.
Reconstructed fragment of painted wall decoration.*

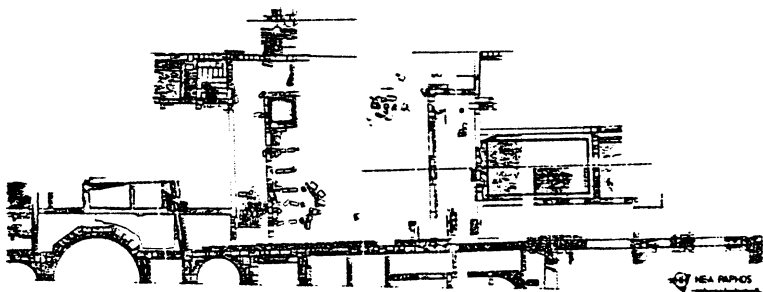


Fig. 3. Plan of the Hellenistic House.

than the rest of the house. This newly discovered room had a plain mosaic floor, similar to that in room 8. It was made up of large tesserae measuring about 2x2 and 2.5 x 2.5 cm.

The greatest effort was concentrated upon continued excavations of the so-called Hellenistic House (Fig. 3), which lies immediately to the south of the Villa of Theseus. The building represents a type of house with a central peristyle court around which the main reception and household rooms were planned together with presumed lodgings. The northern wing of this structure was destroyed completely when the later villa was constructed, the latter being located on a slightly lower level. Owing to the insignificant differences in the original elevation of the area and the leveling work that took place, the stratigraphic sequence of archaeological layers was turned upside down with Hellenistic layers connected with the construction and occupation of the Hellenistic house being found above the Late Roman levels in the Villa of Theseus.

The previous seasons saw the clearing of the entire eastern wing of the peristyle (that is, its preserved part) and some of the rooms adjoining it. The rooms in the northern part of the wing were found to differ from those in the other end. The northern rooms all had traces of fine mural decoration consisting of painting in the so-called structural style, which corresponds to the First Pompeian Style. The rooms in the southeastern corner of the portico were of

a totally different character, having some connection with the use of water as the waterproof floor and drain in one of the rooms would suggest. The room next to it on the east was a latrine of fair size indicating that it was intended for a number of users at a time.

The latest excavations continued the investigations of the western wing of the peristyle begun last year. What became apparent was the fact that the Ionian column portico of the eastern and southern wings was completely different, both in size and nature, from the western one. New fragments of columns and pillars were discovered there. The capitals represented the specific variety of the Corinthian order that is typical of regions which came under Ptolemaic influence. One such capital of large size (top span is 1 m) was discovered last year and this season supplied new fragments. The stylobate of the western colonnade is wider than that of the eastern one and draws from the size of the columns themselves. A sounding made in the middle part of the western stylobate brought some surprising results. It demonstrated that the stylobate did not have any foundations, at least in this section.

Opening off the western portico was a large room (no. 10) more of which was uncovered this year. Its dimensions 11 x 6.50 m show it to have been a reception hall with an axis that is perpendicular to the portico. A wide entrance with a span of 3.10 m opens out on the portico. The mosaic floor in this room is made up of irregular chips of a creamish-white limestone and of black basalt(?). The decorative motif is extremely simple: a thin, about 10 cm wide black band running parallel to the room's walls on a uniform whitish ground. The materials used (irregular bits of stone) as well as the technique, coloring and design place this mosaic among Hellenistic floors known from other regions of the Mediterranean, especially from the nearby Cyrenaica and from Greece proper. The Paphos mosaic should be considered a work of the 2nd century BC.

Traces of stucco relief pillars are visible on the preserved parts of the walls of room no. 10, while the fill yielded many fragments

of painted plaster. The designs included red and black bands, green and yellow lines. A much richer wall decoration, and much better preserved as well, was found in room no. 11. Three subsequent layers of plastering were recorded on its walls, the paintings being done in the *al secco* technique. On the two earlier layers of plaster the decoration took on form of large rectangular fields of uniform color, alternately red and black. Their sides as well as the corner of the room were emphasized by vertical bands of either red or green color. White and red bands separated the fields from each other. The latest layer of plastering was a whitish plaster with a red line running about 0.30 m above floor level.

The ceramic material accompanying the relics of architecture indicated that the building, constructed in the later Hellenistic period, continued in use right down to perhaps the second half of the 1st century AD, when it was destroyed in an earthquake. The ruins served subsequently as a ready source of building material, an activity which apparently continued up to the middle of the 2nd century AD, as indicated by ceramic evidence from the fill of the dismantled walls. It was at this time that the Villa of Theseus started taking shape; many fragments of architectural details found previously reused in the walls of the Roman residence can now be surely traced to this Hellenistic House.