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Nea Paphos: Season 1999

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NEA PAPHOS

SEASON 1999

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A study season was carried out in September 1999¹⁾ with a view to preparing the final publication of a large villa publica, the so-called Villa of Theseus, which was probably the residence of the Roman governors of Cyprus. The campaign was thus focused on a re-examination of the material assembled in the site storeroom or deposited at the Archaeological Museum in Paphos.

¹⁾ The Mission, directed by the present author, included Mrs. Eudoksja Papuci-Władyka, Mr. Henryk Meyza, both archaeologists ceramologists; Mrs. Zofia Sztetyło, archaeologist-epigraphist; Mr. Waldemar Jerke, photographer; Ms Maike Droste, archaeologist-documentalist; and for a part of the time Mr. Stanisław Medeksza, architect. Three students of archaeology from Warsaw University and the Jagiellonian University in Cracow, and two students of architecture from the Technical University in Wrocław also participated in the work.

We are much indebted to the Authorities of the Department of Antiquities of Cyprus for assistance throughout the season. We also wish to express our gratitude to our numerous friends in Paphos, especially to the former and current Paphos Mayors, Messrs. A. Ataliotis and F. Sarikas, as well as Messrs. A. Soteriades and N. Eliades for their unflinching and friendly interest in our researches.

The documentation of a very rich collection of pottery recovered during the excavations of the edifice was especially time-consuming. Other objects, notably lamps, stamped amphora handles, all kinds of small finds including fragments of terracottas, stone and metal items were also checked.

Within the villa itself, some mosaic floors with geometric decoration were re-drawn following their final cleaning and consolidation. Ancient repairs to the mosaics were documented with special attention. They betray a great variety of procedures and materials depending on the quality and location of the pavements.

Photographs were taken to complete the extant documentation of the initial condi-

tion of walls and floors, after their discovery and prior to restoration, and following consolidation and restoration work. Several architectural decoration elements have also been photographed again.

One trial pit (1.85 m E-W, 1.20 m N-S) was dug in the south wing of the villa, inside the apsidal chamber (R 39), adjoining the grand reception hall R 40 (Figs. 1, 2, 3). The pit was located in the northeast corner of the horseshoe-shaped apse, abutting the east wall on the east and the upper step leading to Room 40 on the north, the room being located on a lower level with regard to the apse.

The pit was dug in order to check for possible earlier floors beneath the *opus sectile*



Fig. 1. Trial pit in R 39 (apse). Successive floor levels visible (Photo W. Jerke)

pavement decorating the apse (and the steps to R 40) in the last stage of its existence.²⁾

The top layer of lime mortar originally had served as bedding for the marble slabs of the *opus sectile* floor. The imprints of these slabs are easily discernible, even though the slabs themselves had been plundered already in antiquity. Beneath the mortar there was a layer of irregular, approximately fist-size stones set in a layer of brown soil. The mortar/stone substructure of floor no. 1 yielded 17 fragments of pottery, nearly all of them of the Hellenistic period except for two sherds of Roman amphorae of type V, known from the neighboring House of Dionysos and dated to the second half of the 2nd century AD.

The brown soil layer under the stones produced sherds of an ESA bowl of type 50; fragments of North African amphorae and rims of glass vessels of the type usually assigned to the 3rd century AD. This layer seems to originate from this period.

Directly beneath the brown soil and 14 cm below floor no. 1 there was another floor (no. 2; cf. *Fig. 3*). It consisted of a thin layer of lime plaster that was smooth on top. Floor no. 2 corresponded with the lower step to Room 40 and with a projection in the east wall. Of interest among the few sherds from this layer and the brown soil directly beneath are the fragments of an early Imperial ESA vessel and a cooking pot rim.



Fig. 2. Trial pit in R 39 (apse). Deeper floor levels visible (Photo W. Jerke)

²⁾ Another such pit was opened a few years back at the south edge of the apse, but did not yield any conclusive results.

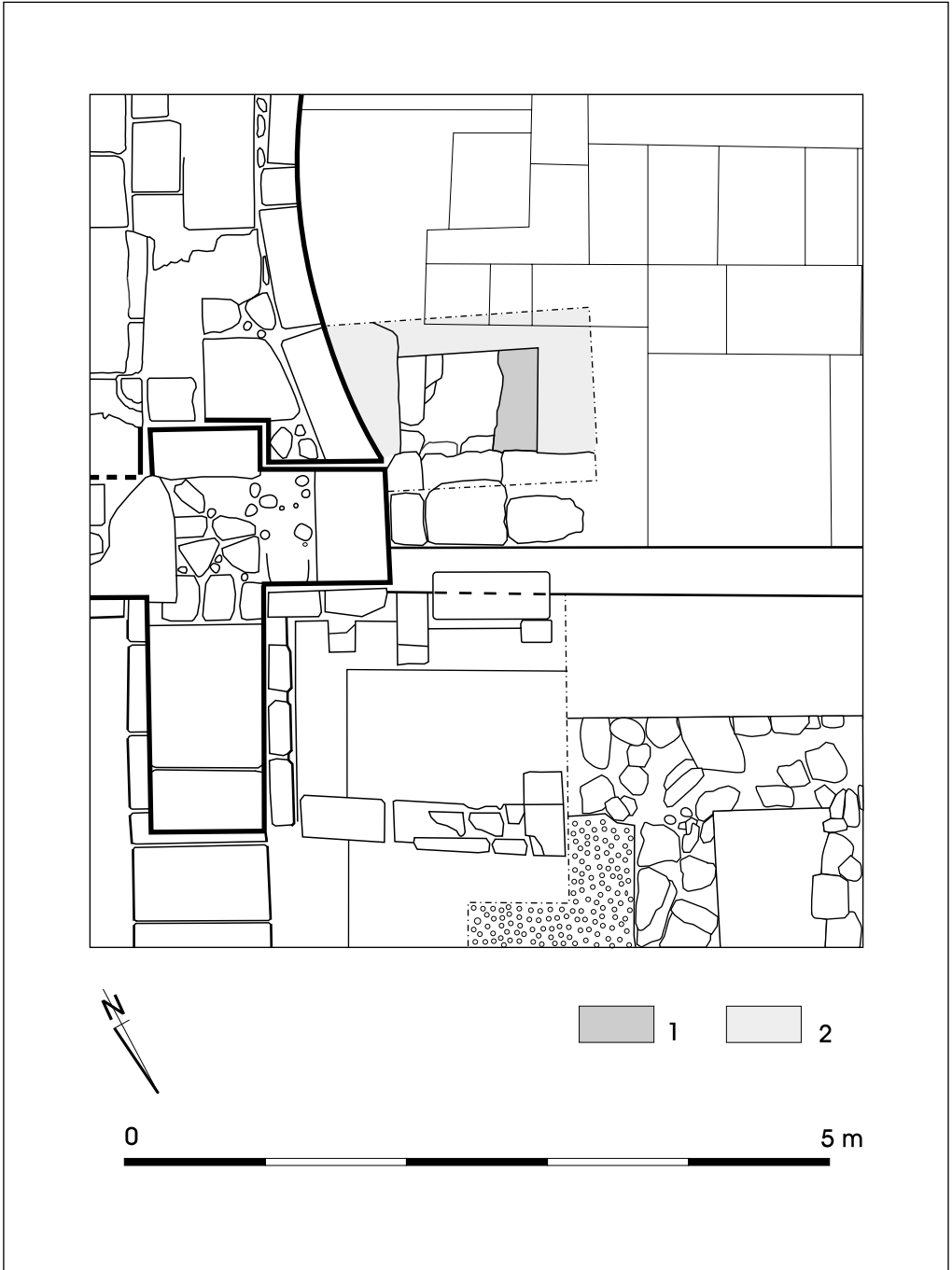


Fig. 3. Plan of trial pit in R 39
(Drawing M. Droste)

The third consecutive floor (no. 3, *Fig. 3*) was made of a thin lime plaster, rather rough on top. It was uncovered beneath the brown soil, that is, some 15 cm below floor no. 2, laid on a heteroclite filling of brown soil, stones of small and medium size and fragments of fallen plaster with traces of painted decoration, apparently unconnected with the villa, but originating from earlier structures. The floor was somewhat damaged along the east wall. The fill contained sherds of various

amphorae, such as, for instance, Mau 27/28, Sub-Coan, Tripolitanian, probably Cretan AC1 and Dressel 6; a piece of a terracotta oil lamp of Italian origin, of the 1st cent. AD; Cypriot Sigillata forms P.28 and P.29 representing the tableware. All these finds point to the end of the 1st and the early 2nd century AD.

The digging of the pit was stopped at c. 80 m below the uppermost floor of the apse.