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ARCHITECTURE OF THE OFFICIAL SPACES OF SELECTED RESIDENCES IN *NEA PAPHOS*, CYPRUS

ABSTRACT

This paper deals with public areas in ancient residences. These zones, emphasising the social status of the owners of the houses, are analysed in several large residences erected in the Graeco-Roman Period in *Nea Paphos*, Cyprus: the 'Hellenistic' House, the Villa of

Theseus, and the House of Aion. Particularly, the special arrangement of the layout and the architectural decoration of three major public zones were studied: the entrance, the main courtyard, and the main room.

Keywords: *Nea Paphos*, residences, official spaces

Introduction

Irrespective of time and place, a residence usually performs different functions catering to the needs and wishes of its owner. In the Graeco-Roman world, rich citizens designed their houses in a way which combined at least two spheres of their life: the more private one consisting of personal, family apartments, and the more public one associated with the official activities of the owner. The latter frequently received special architectural layout and embellishment emphasising the social status of the master of the house.¹ The aim of the paper is to trace the changes in the design of these public zones in selected Roman residences in *Nea Paphos*, Cyprus.

Nea Paphos – an ancient town

Nea Paphos is an ancient town on the south-western coast of Cyprus (Fig. 1) founded in the 4th century BC. In the 3rd century BC, the island became a part of the Ptolemaic Kingdom of Egypt, which proved to be very important for the development of Cypriot art, culture, and architecture. In 58 BC, Cyprus became a part of the

Roman Empire, and *Nea Paphos* continued to be one of the most important cities on the island, where, most probably, one of the palaces belonging to the Roman governor was located.

Maloutena, a southern residential part of *Nea Paphos*, was occupied by splendid houses,² such as the House of Dionysus, the House of Orpheus, the 'Hellenistic' House, the Villa of Theseus, and the House of Aion. The last three constitute the most important edifices uncovered by the Polish Archaeological Mission of the University of Warsaw. Until 2007, Professor Wiktor A. Daszewski directed the Polish excavations in Maloutena. Since 2008, the Mission has been supervised by Doctor Henryk Meyza.³

Paphian residences

The 'Hellenistic' House is the oldest of the residences excavated by the Polish Mission, and it was built by the end of the 1st century AD and soon after destroyed by an earthquake.⁴ The House occupied the western part of a rectangular insula created by the regular Hellenistic urban grid (Fig. 2: A, A', 9, and 10).

¹ Hales 2003, 1–6, 18, 28–29, 36–39, 58–60.

² Młynarczyk 1990, 184–193; Daszewski 1998a, 5–23.

³ The author has been working for the Polish Archaeological Mission as an architect since 2005 and would like to extend

her gratitude to Dr Henryk Meyza for supporting her in many studies of the ancient Cypriot architecture.

⁴ Meyza *et al.* 2017.



Fig. 1. Map of *Nea Paphos* (based on Młynarczyk 1990, 162, fig. 16; Medeksza 1998, 37, fig. 1; retrieved from Google Earth on 5.10.2014).



Fig. 2. Plan of Paphian residences with marked official zones: the 'Hellenistic' House, the Villa of Theseus, and the House of Aion (drawing by S. Medeksza).

The Villa of Theseus was constructed after the fall of the 'Hellenistic' House and completed the destruction of the northern part of the older edifice. The construction of the Villa started in the 2nd century AD and continued in several phases up to the 4th century, transforming an oblong portico palace into an almost square peristyle one. This largest Cypriot residence was one of the most important buildings in *Nea Paphos* and in Cyprus, and it had all the characteristic features of a palace of a Roman Emperor's official representative, thus being identified as a *villa publica* or a *palatium*.⁵

At the same time, in the 4th century, the youngest and the smallest of the residences excavated by the Polish Mission, the House of Aion, was erected to the east of the Villa of Theseus, in the southern part of the so-called Late Roman Insula, next to Street B leading from the Paphian harbour to the Maloutena Plateau.⁶ There is an ongoing discussion about the function and nature of the House of Aion: was it a small but richly-equipped private residence or a seat of an unknown pagan religious-philosophical society placed in Maloutena, the residential district of *Nea Paphos*?⁷ Hopefully the continuous studies of the House of Aion may reveal its function in the future.⁸

The Paphian residences are in the majority of cases in a bad state of preservation: the remains of their walls usually reach no higher than a few lower layers of blocks, and their architectural embellishment is nowadays only fragmentarily present. But even poorly-preserved traces permit analysing layouts and structures, as well as observing transformations of plans and changes in trends of decoration and equipment of the residences over several centuries.

Irrespective of the time and place of the erection of the ancient rich houses, some of their internal spaces were more important and dominated the whole edifice. They were usually connected with public activities of their owners and therefore required an appropriate architectural frame, which resulted in more elaborate embellishment than in the private areas.⁹ We may point out at least three such public zones: the entrance (first), usually

leading to the main courtyard (second), next to which the main room (third) was located.¹⁰ Their analysis will be exemplified in details by three selected Paphian residences: the 'Hellenistic' House, the Villa of Theseus, and the House of Aion.¹¹

Entrance zone

The entrance zone was the first of such public areas (Figs 2–5). It was usually composed of a main gate and some internal rooms, e.g. an atrium or/and auxiliary rooms for a guard, although particular arrangements could have differed significantly from case to case. A special architectural frame is a common feature of the residences' entrance zones – a kind of the owner's 'show-off' on the threshold of the house.¹² The main gate and the subsequent rooms of the entrance zone would often be designed along one of the general compositional axes of the house prolonged through the peristyle court and the adjacent rooms.

Entrance zone in the 'Hellenistic' House

Unfortunately, there are no clear traces of the entrances leading to the 'Hellenistic' House, including its main gate. However, it seems reasonable to assume that by design the gate was located near the main hall and the courtyard of the House (both described and analysed below). The courtyard is situated in the central part of the residence and is surrounded by porticoes leading to several side rooms from each side except the southern, where the portico borders directly with Street A'. In the middle of the external wall of the southern portico, there is a threshold with holes – most probably assembly sockets for hinge pins of the doors (Fig. 2). Regrettably, only the lowest layers of the southern wall are preserved, so we cannot be sure if there was any special composition designed for the main gate. However, judging by the very rich architectural decoration of the House, and especially

⁵ Daszewski 1985b; Daszewski, Michaelides 1988, 53; Medeksza 1992, 5, 17, 24, 30; 1998, 25.

⁶ Daszewski 1985a; 1998a, 12–15.

⁷ Daszewski 1985a; Mikocka 2018, 127.

⁸ The House of Aion is currently studied by Ms Julia Mikocka, a PhD candidate from the University of Warsaw (Mikocka 2018). The wall painting and the mosaics of the House of Aion have been analysed by Prof. Elżbieta Jastrzębowska (Jastrzębowska forthcoming a; forthcoming b).

⁹ The paper focuses on the architectural means used to distinguish the public zones of the residences. In many official rooms, mosaics were used as floors and paintings embellished the walls. Their style and content constitute a separate scientific topic outside the scope of the article.

¹⁰ Hales 2003, 19, 28–29, 77.

¹¹ Remains of several other houses were uncovered within the area of the Polish excavations: the North-Eastern House in the northern part of the so-called Late Roman Insula, north of the House of Aion; the North-Western House under the north-western corner of the Villa of Theseus; the Roman House built above the western part of the 'Hellenistic' House; and the so-called Early Roman House east of the 'Hellenistic' House. As their public zones are not sufficiently preserved for a comprehensive analysis, the paper focuses on the official areas of the residences indicated above: the 'Hellenistic' House, the Villa of Theseus, and the House of Aion (Fig. 2).

¹² Hales 2003, 47, 57.

its two courtyards, the presence of such an arrangement appears highly probable. Perhaps some of the many decorative pieces found in the remains of the House originally constituted the architectural frame of its main gate situated in the southern wall leading to Street A'.

Entrance zone of the Villa of Theseus

As mentioned above, the Villa of Theseus was gradually built and enlarged. According to a detailed analysis and reconstruction presented by late Professor Stanisław Medeksza,¹³ in the first phase it was erected as an oblong palace with a wide portico running along its northern façade. The western side of the palace was distinguished with a projection of Room 23 – one of the largest halls in the residence, identified as an *oecus*, whose northern elevation was equipped with a portico repeating the composition of the central long colonnade. The arrangement of the eastern side of the palace built in the first phase is unknown, as it was completely destroyed during the enlargement of the residence in the second phase. Prof. Medeksza assumed that the composition and the contour of the portico palace were symmetrical. Therefore, one can expect that its right, unknown side might have been analogous to the left one in terms of the design of the façade – an external colonnade continuing the rhythm of the portico in front of the central part of the edifice (Fig. 2).¹⁴

The form and the position of the main entrance to the portico palace remain unknown, and its discovery is highly unlikely due to the massive enlargement of the residence during the second phase of its construction. Although it is impossible to reconstruct the exact form of the main gate without any fragments, a theoretical analysis of the palace's layout permits pointing out at least two hypothetical positions where the main entrance might have been located. Placing it in the middle of the portico, in front of the most important area of the residence, its main hall, is the obvious solution known from several Roman villas. Such an arrangement would have strongly emphasised the palace's major axis of symmetry along its two key public zones: the main entrance and the main hall. However, prof. Medeksza suggested another possible location of the main gate based on several analogies to other Roman residences with the portico running along the main façade treated as a communication corridor linking rooms that were placed next to it – for instance in the Villa Westenhofen. The main entrance to

these palaces was designed in one of the side projections or wings.¹⁵ Therefore, to get to the main hall, one had to pass many rooms while going through one of the palace's side wings and then down the portico. In the case of the Villa of Theseus, if an entrance was placed in one of the side projections, it must have been the eastern, unpreserved one (Fig. 2). The arrangement of the western wing in the form of one big room would rather exclude placing the entrance there, the more so that the western part of the palace was most probably used for private apartments. The unpreserved eastern wing was intended for more public or official activities due to, among other things, its location closer to the Paphian port.¹⁶ Unfortunately, as mentioned above, there are no physical remains that could confirm or falsify the presented theoretical considerations concerning the main entrance to the Villa of Theseus in its first phase, when it was still a portico palace.

In the second phase, the residence was turned into a peristyle palace by adding extra wings in the north, around a huge courtyard which became the main compositional element of the Villa. Crossing the original street grid by the enlarged residence was another result of the transformation of the portico palace into the one with a large peristyle. The Villa would then form the eastern closing of the main Street (B) connecting Maloutena with the *Nea Paphos* port. This new aspect of the palace was accentuated by its new main entrance complex situated in the newly-built eastern wing along the axis of the road leading to the harbour,¹⁷ which is another feature characteristic of the location of Roman residences (Figs 2–4).¹⁸

A monumental entrance situated in the central part of the eastern wing was a strong, dominating architectural feature. The main gate might have been designed as a two-column Corinthian porch (*prothyron*) crowned with a simple tympanum. Several fragments of such an architectural ensemble, including blocks from the entablature, a few pieces of Corinthian capitals, and plain column shafts, were discovered on the so-called Late Roman Street in the vicinity of the entrance zone of the Villa.¹⁹

The first room (no. 69) after crossing the gate is longitudinal and is situated crosswise to the main axis of the entrance zone, which runs along the extended axis of Street B. The shorter sides of the room are terminated with two apses. There are several oblong niches with low benches in the walls, which suggest the function of Room 69 – a vestibule serving as a waiting area for the guests before they were allowed to enter the following

¹³ Medeksza 1992; 1998.

¹⁴ Medeksza 1992, 24–26, 64–65; 1998, 26, 28–30.

¹⁵ Swoboda 1969, 23; Medeksza 1992, 25–26; 1998, 29–30.

¹⁶ Medeksza 1992, 25–26, 28; 1998, 29.

¹⁷ Medeksza 1992, 5–6, 24–26, 34, 41; 1998, 35.

¹⁸ Hales 2003, 44–45.

¹⁹ Medeksza 1992, 6, 41; 1998, 35–36; Meyza *et al.* 2011, 286–287, fig. 3.

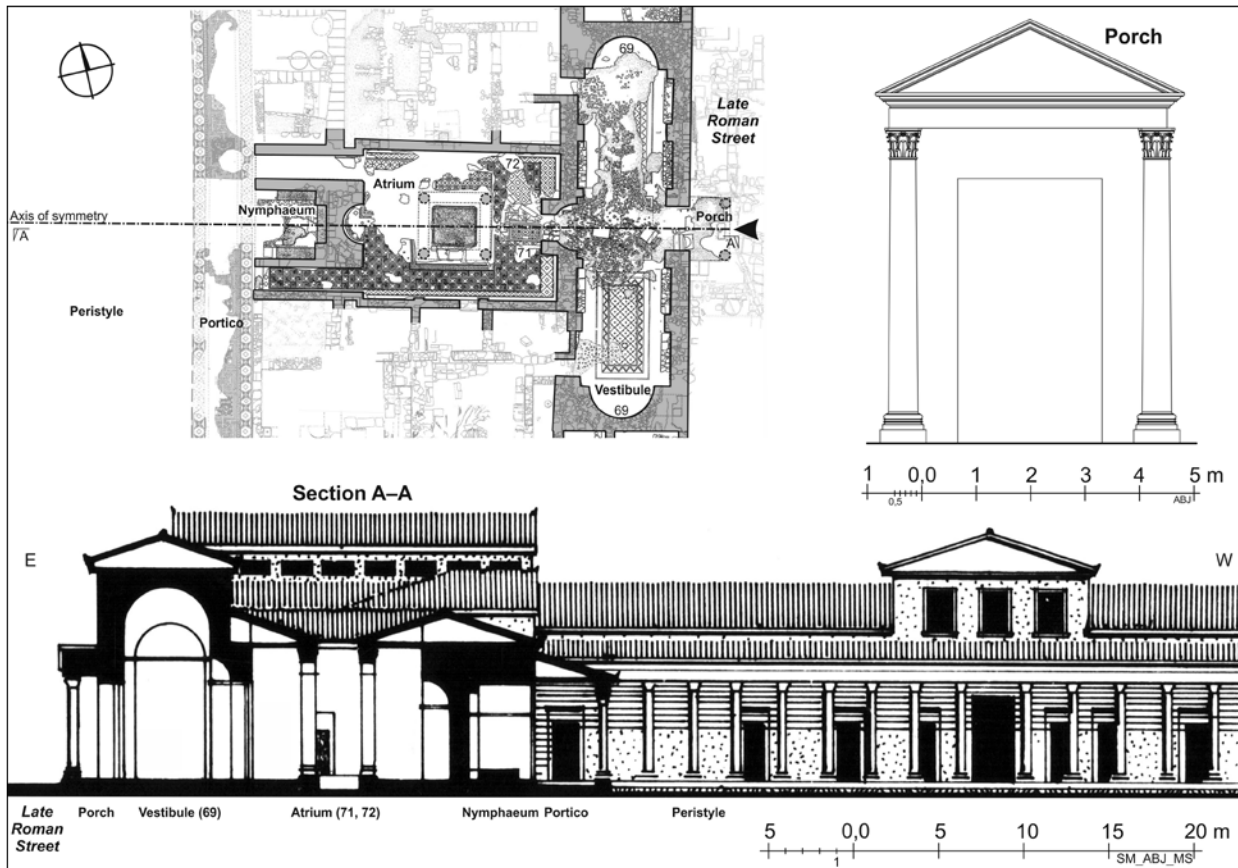


Fig. 3. Entrance zone of the Villa of Theseus (the plan drawn by S. Medeksza; the section reproduced from Medeksza 1998, 48, fig. 2b; the porch drawn by A. Brzozowska-Jawornicka).

rooms of the Villa. Three doorways in the wall opposite the one with the main gate led further on. Two of those, placed symmetrically to the main axis, connect the waiting room with smaller rooms which most probably were intended for the guard of the Villa responsible for controlling the incomers. The third is located axially vis-à-vis the main gate in an apse. It contains doors leading to the next room of the entrance zone – an atrium with an *impluvium* – a crucial element of a Roman residence.²⁰ Four, presently missing, columns standing in the corners of the basin supported the ceiling. There is another apse, a small one, in the wall behind the atrium. Two passages on both sides of this shallow semi-circular recess led to the major public zone of the Villa of Theseus: the peristyle court. A kind of *nymphaeum* was placed behind the atrium from the side of the courtyard closing the whole entrance complex.²¹

All the rooms of the entrance zone (69, 71, and 72) were paved with geometrical mosaics. Several small apses in the walls of the waiting room and the one in the atrium were most probably designed for statues. Perhaps some of the many splendid sculptures uncovered in the Villa²² were originally standing in the entrance zones.

Judging by the thickness of the walls, the rank of the entrance zone was accentuated by elevating it in relation to other neighbouring parts of the palace: the whole residence with an elevated entrance zone constituted a closure of the viewing axis of Street B leading from the harbour. Such a location of the residence and its entrance emphasised the highest rank of the Villa among other houses built in Maloutena.

The axis of the entrance zone, from the Corinthian portico through the waiting room to the atrium, lies on the E-W axis of the whole residence, thus replicating the

²⁰ Hales 2003, 18–19.

²¹ Medeksza 1992, 37, 41–42, 44, 62–63; 1998, 35–36.

²² Selected literature concerning Paphian sculptures is provided in the bibliography published in Daszewski, Meyza 1998, 131–138.



Fig. 4. Entrance zone of the Villa of Theseus (photo by M. Jawornicki).

course of the main Street (B). This axis is also one of the major compositional principles of the Villa's peristyle court described below.

Entrance zone in the House of Aion

An interesting composition of the entrance may have also occurred in the youngest of the Paphian residences – the House of Aion – much smaller than the Villa of Theseus or the 'Hellenistic' House, but also furnished with very rich architectural decoration.²³

Many decorated blocks characterised by similarly rich carvings of high artistic quality were uncovered in Room 19 in the eastern part of the edifice,²⁴ but it seems that they did not originally belong to this room. Most probably, they were used to embellish the House in some other area. As there are no clear indications of their original location, it was assumed that they must have been

used to emphasise an important part of the House, perhaps its main, monumental façade directed toward one of the major Paphian roads – Street B linking Maloutena with the main harbour of the town.

The theoretical reconstruction of the arrangement of the façade takes into account the gate, above which a multi-span arcade could have been placed (Fig. 5)²⁵ – this idea was based upon the pieces of architectural embellishment corresponding with the decoration of the main façades from the Balkan palaces, such as *Porta Aurea* at the palace of Diocletian in Split²⁶ or the West Gate of the *Felix Romuliana* Palace in Gamzigrad.²⁷ Clearly, in such arrangements the niches under the arcades were of exceptional importance, most probably holding statues – a kind of manifestation of the residence owner's rank and beliefs.

The exact position of the gate within the southern wall of the House of Aion is unknown. At least two

²³ Medeksza 1987; Mikocki 1992; Brzowska-Jawornicka 2016.

²⁴ Daszewski 1998b, 127–129, figs 6–7; Daszewski *apud* Hadjisavvas 1998, 691–692; Daszewski 1999, 172–173, fig. 10; Lichočka, Meyza 2001, 168, 201–202, fig. 7; Brzowska-Jawornicka 2016, 152–154, pl. 2.

²⁵ Brzowska-Jawornicka 2016, 160–164, pls 5–6.

²⁶ Selected literature: McNally 1996, 41–42; Nikšić 2004, 167; Cambi 2005, 166–167; Nikšić 2011, 196.

²⁷ Selected literature: Čanak-Medić 1978, 78, fig. 60; Ćurčić 1993, 70, 85, fig. 11; McNally 1996, 42; Breitner 2011, 143–146.

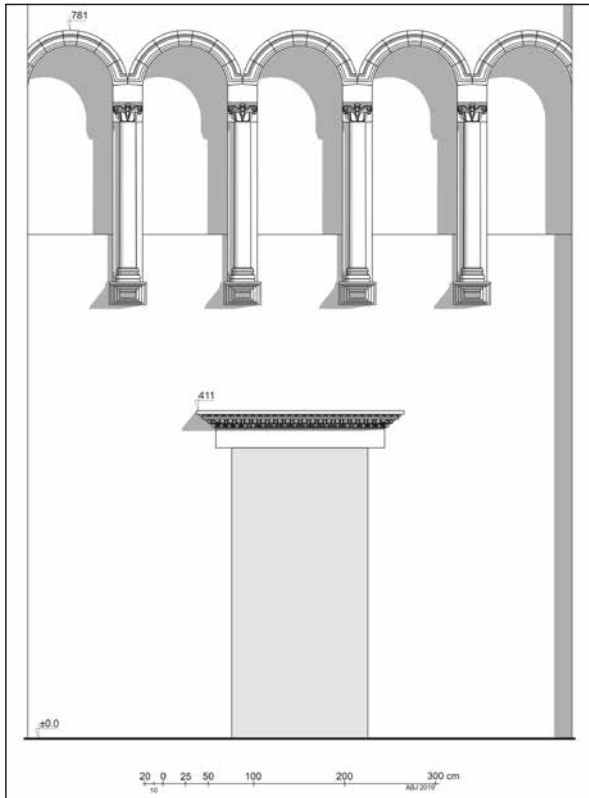


Fig. 5. Reconstruction of the entrance to the House of Aion (drawing by A. Brzozowska-Jawornicka).

arrangements are possible: the first one where the gate linked the street and the small court of the House and the second one with the gate leading from the street straight to the main hall of the edifice (rooms 1 and 2; Fig. 2). Given the rich architectural embellishment of the latter, the second variant seems to be more probable.

Courtyard

The entrance zones were frequently placed next to the subsequent public spaces of the rich residences – centrally located main courtyards (Figs 2, 6–8). Such carefully designed open spaces played a very important role in the functioning of ancient residences, as they supplied them with light, air, water (if there were basins for collecting water, which was a very common practice), privacy, and tranquillity. They also allowed communication between the rooms surrounding them. Furthermore, the courtyards were often used as the principal meeting places

where the inhabitants of the house could gather. This led to a special role of the courtyard as a public space and resulted once again, just like in the case of the main gate, in rich architectural embellishment and special facilities, such as sculptures, benches, flowerbeds, basins, fountains, or even fish ponds (*piscinae*).²⁸ A very well-preserved example of the latter may be found in one of the other Paphian residences – the House of Dionysus.²⁹ In the late antique Graeco-Roman society, the peristyle house was considered as an ideal Roman house, an object of aristocrats' desire, and the proof of their high social status.³⁰

The courtyards were usually designed as regular, square or rectangular, circumscribed areas with two axes of symmetry, which could have been emphasised architecturally by important rooms or areas of the residences, such as the entrance zone or the main room. The court usually took the form of a peristyle: a large open space surrounded by porticoes derived from the Greek architecture.³¹ The roofed colonnades played a very important role in a residence. Not only did they provide shadow so important in the hot climate but also allowed the owner to manifest once again his social status and wealth through architectural means, such as extravagant arrangements and layouts, richly-decorated classical orders, or expensive materials, *e.g.* imported stones.

Peristyle of the 'Hellenistic' House

The 'Hellenistic' House was erected around two courtyards. The main one lies in the eastern part of the edifice (Figs 2, 6). Together with the porticoes, it occupied probably most of the width of the House. However, the design of the northern part of the courtyard is hypothetical, because of the massive destruction of the House caused by earthquakes and the subsequent erection of the Villa of Theseus.³²

The court was surrounded by porticoes creating a spacious peristyle.³³ Two axes of symmetry, running through the centre of the court, were emphasised. The E-W axis, being the most important one, was accentuated on the western side by the richest and biggest portico with the main hall behind it. The eastern end of this axis was highlighted by the central span of the eastern portico, which was wider than the rest. The N-S axis was most probably underlined on the southern end by the main entrance to the 'Hellenistic' House. Its northern end was completely destroyed, but it seems probable that its composition could have emphasised the central span.

The main hall of the residence (Room 10) was designed behind the western portico characterised by the

²⁸ Jashemski *et al.* 2018, 341–481.

²⁹ Nicolaou 1967, 101–103, figs 1–2.

³⁰ Medeksza 1992, 42–43.

³¹ Hales 2003, 208–209.

³² Meyza *et al.* 2017.

³³ A detailed analysis of the architectural decoration of the 'Hellenistic' House is going to be published in a separate paper: Brzozowska-Jawornicka forthcoming.

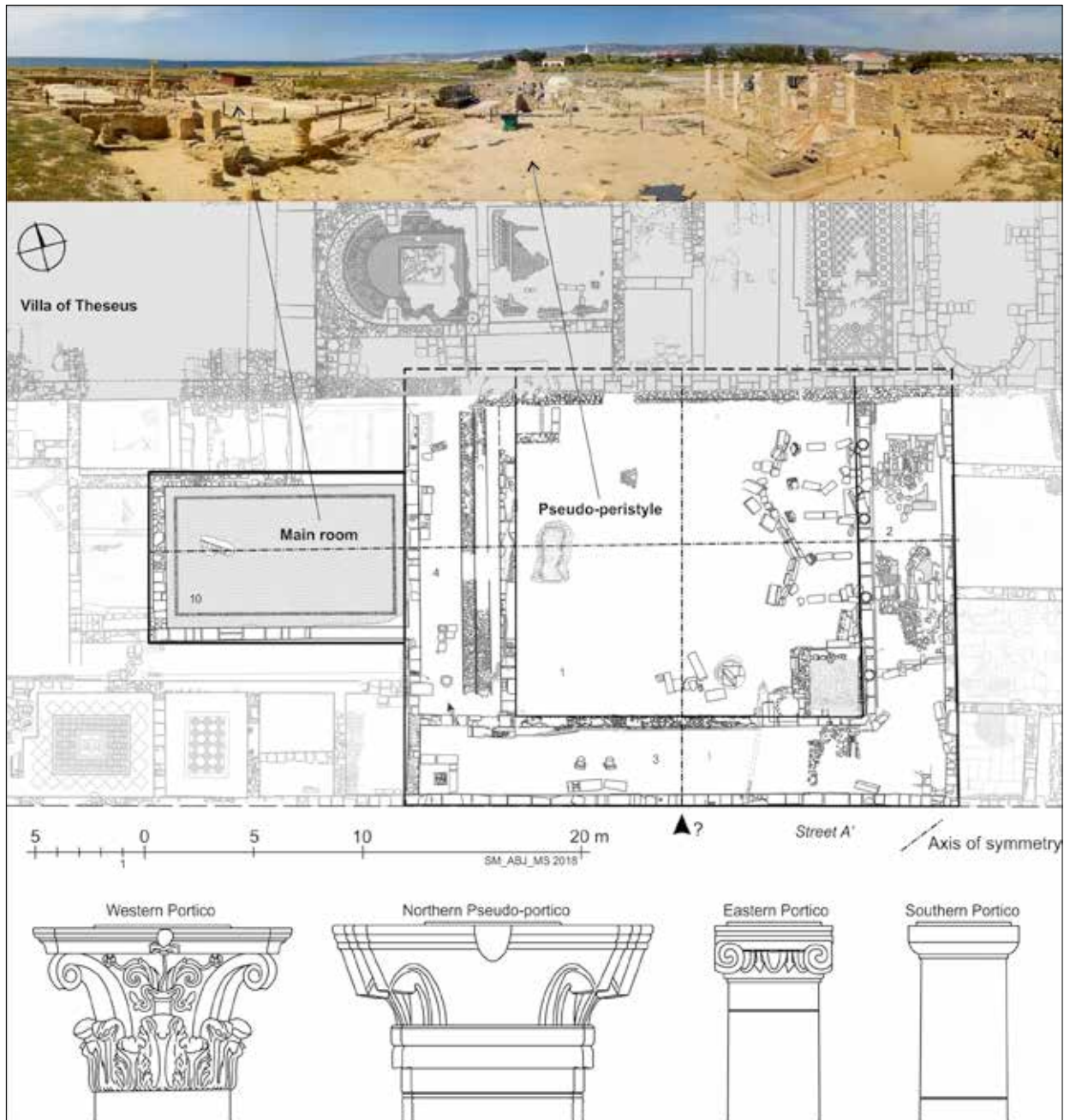


Fig. 6. Peristyle and the main room of the 'Hellenistic' House (capitals of columns from the peristyle – drawings and photo by A. Brzowska-Jawornicka).

wealthiest architectural decoration in the House. To the east of the courtyard, more modest rooms were located – the domestic area of the residence.

Out of the four porticoes of the court, the eastern one, erected in slightly simplified Ionic order, turned out to be the best-preserved structure of the 'Hellenistic' House. The southern Doric portico has been preserved in a much worse condition, but it was possible to determine its size as being equal to the Ionic colonnade.

The western portico was erected in the Corinthian order in a special variation called the Alexandrian style.

As written above, the north part of the main courtyard was completely destroyed by the later construction of the Villa of Theseus. However, pieces of another type of capitals discovered in the main courtyard may indicate that they could have constituted the architectural frame of its northern part. They were identified as the so-called blocked-out capitals resembling the 'Nabataean' capitals of Type 1 known from Petra.

Judging by the form of the capitals, it also seems that the northern part of the main courtyard was designed as a pseudo-portico with engaged columns. It means

that the court would have been a pseudo-peristyle. Such design shows strong connections between Cyprus and Egypt, as pseudo-peristyles were commonly used in the architecture of Alexandrian houses, for example in Kom el-Dikka.³⁴

The size of the architectural remains of the western and northern porticoes permits determining the height of their columns: they were much taller than those from the two other porticoes. It seems that the courtyard of the 'Hellenistic' House was composed of porticoes of two different heights – a configuration described by Vitruvius as the Rhodian peristyle.³⁵ Together with the usage of four different architectural orders, it formed a very extravagant and unrepeatable arrangement. The Rhodian peristyles are known from, for instance, Cyrenaican residences:³⁶ the House of Great Peristyle or *Casa della Quattro Stagioni*.

During excavations conducted in the area of the peristyle, interesting traces of older structures were uncovered, including the remains of several basins and water cisterns. Most probably, they were built earlier than the 'Hellenistic' House or during the first phases of its erection, prior to the peristyle described above. They were covered with a thick layer of fertile soil,³⁷ which suggests the function of the peristyle courtyard – a garden surrounded by richly-decorated porticoes.

Peristyle of the Villa of Theseus

The central courtyard of the Villa of Theseus was another great Paphian peristyle – the largest not only in *Paphos* but also on the whole island (Figs 2, 4, 7, 8). It constituted the centre of the composition of the Villa when the residence was transformed from a portico palace without an inner court into a peristyle palace arranged around a huge courtyard.³⁸ During the first phase of the Villa's enlargement, it was designed as an almost square peristyle with a side measuring around 50 m. The second one changed the outline of the court – the northern wing was widened inside the courtyard to the south, so that the layout of the courtyard became rectangular. Those transformations affected the northern wing of the Villa, used as a domestic, less representative area, but a discussion of this is beyond the scope of this paper. It seems also that after the reconstruction, the northern wing was

not fitted with a portico from the side of the courtyard, but with a plain wall. Such an arrangement would make the courtyard an incomplete peristyle with three instead of four porticoes: western, southern, and eastern.³⁹

The courtyard was designed as a square peristyle in the first phase of the transformation, from the portico palace to the peristyle palace, with two axes of symmetry: the E-W axis covered the former course of Street B, accentuated on the western side by Room 17, while the eastern was emphasised with the monumental entrance zone described above; the N-S axis was highlighted by the most important part of the whole Villa – the complex of the main hall, described below, placed in the middle of the southern wing, which from the beginning constituted the most important part of the palace. It was strongly underlined by the southern portico, forming another dominant axis of the residence, with two strong accents on both ends. Room 36 closed the portico from the east with the famous mosaic floor depicting Theseus, which gave the Villa its present name.⁴⁰ The western counterpart of Room 36, the *oecus* (Room 23) was designed in an extravagant form resembling a basilica with very narrow side aisles.⁴¹

The trial trenches dug in several spots of the courtyard of the Villa of Theseus uncovered structures that had been constructed before the building. Judging by the size of the peristyle, there must have been some inner facilities, such as benches (garden furnishings), but there are no clear traces of them.

The porticoes surrounding the courtyard were undoubtedly provided with a proper architectural frame, most probably with slender columns. There are very few remains of architectural decoration which could be unambiguously associated with the porticoes, for example an Attic base with the lower part of a smooth column shaft. The material of these pieces is their most interesting feature, since they are made of marble and granite⁴² – stones which were certainly imported to Cyprus, as there are no deposits of such rocks on the island suitable for use in architecture. Importing huge amounts of those, at least 50 columns, indicates the highest position of the Villa owner in the Cypriot society, a very high rank in the administration of the Roman Empire's provinces, as well as his considerable wealth.

The style of the colonnades remains unknown. The Doric and Corinthian orders were suggested.⁴³

³⁴ Selected literature: Majcherek 1995, 11–20, figs 1–2; 1997, 22–30, figs 1–2; 2000, 32–34, fig. 5; McKenzie 2007, 150, 180–183, 210, figs 309, 310a.

³⁵ Vitr. *De arch.* VI.7.3.

³⁶ Stucchi 1975, 217–218, 309, fig. 320; Pensabene, Gasparini forthcoming; Rekowski forthcoming.

³⁷ Meyza *et al.* 2017.

³⁸ Medeksza 1992, 26, 31–33; 1998, 26, 32–35.

³⁹ Medeksza 1992, 30, 39–40; 1998, 34–35.

⁴⁰ Daszewski 1977; Daszewski, Michaelides 1988, 53.

⁴¹ Medeksza 1992, 6, 24–27, 31, 33, 36; 1998, 28–30.

⁴² Medeksza 1992, 29; 1998, 30–31.

⁴³ Medeksza 1992, 29; 1998, 30.

⁴⁴ Daszewski 1985a; Mikocka 2018, 127.



Fig. 7. Peristyle of the Villa of Theseus, pieces of a column (photo by M. Jawornicki).

In my opinion, the latter seems much more appropriate for the embellishment of the seat of a Roman governor of Cyprus. The columns could have been imported as ready-made elements from the quarries outside the island, which would have resulted in using elements characterised by a finish different from the Cypriot tradition.

As mentioned above, very few remains of the architectural decoration from the peristyle were excavated. Such a situation may stem from later re-usage of the Villa's carved decorative elements in Paphian buildings erected after the destruction of the palace and the burning of the marble elements in later lime kilns. Perhaps some of the columns which may presently be seen in the Byzantine castle known as *Saranda Kolones* (Forty Columns) or in the early Christian Basilica of Chrysopolitissa originally belonged to the largest residence of the island (Fig. 1).

Courtyard of the House of Aion

Although the House of Aion is the smallest of the Paphian residences examined in this article, its layout is

much more ambiguous than those of the others, which results in an ongoing academic discussion concerning its function: whether it was a public or a private house.⁴⁴ It is worth underlining that peristyles treated as basic elements of architectural designs were used in both private and official buildings, for example in villas as well as in public baths, so the presence or lack of such a courtyard does not indicate the function of a building.

There are no signs of a large courtyard in the House of Aion. It seems that there was a courtyard in the middle of the southern part of the House, but a rather small one, especially in comparison with the peristyles of the 'Hellenistic' House or the Villa of Theseus. Only three porticoes bordered it from the western, northern, and eastern sides, so it was an incomplete peristyle (Fig. 2, rooms 16E and 16W, 6 and 40).⁴⁵

At the end of Antiquity, the Graeco-Roman society and its lifestyle started to change. These changes had a strong impact on architecture. The lack of a large peristyle court in the design of the late-antique residences is considered as one of the symptoms of the decline of Graeco-Roman Antiquity.⁴⁶ Taking that into account, the lack of a complete, spacious peristyle in the House

⁴⁵ Daszewski 1999, 169; Lichočka, Meyza 2001, 168; Mikocka 2018, 126.

⁴⁶ Ellis 1988, 565–576.

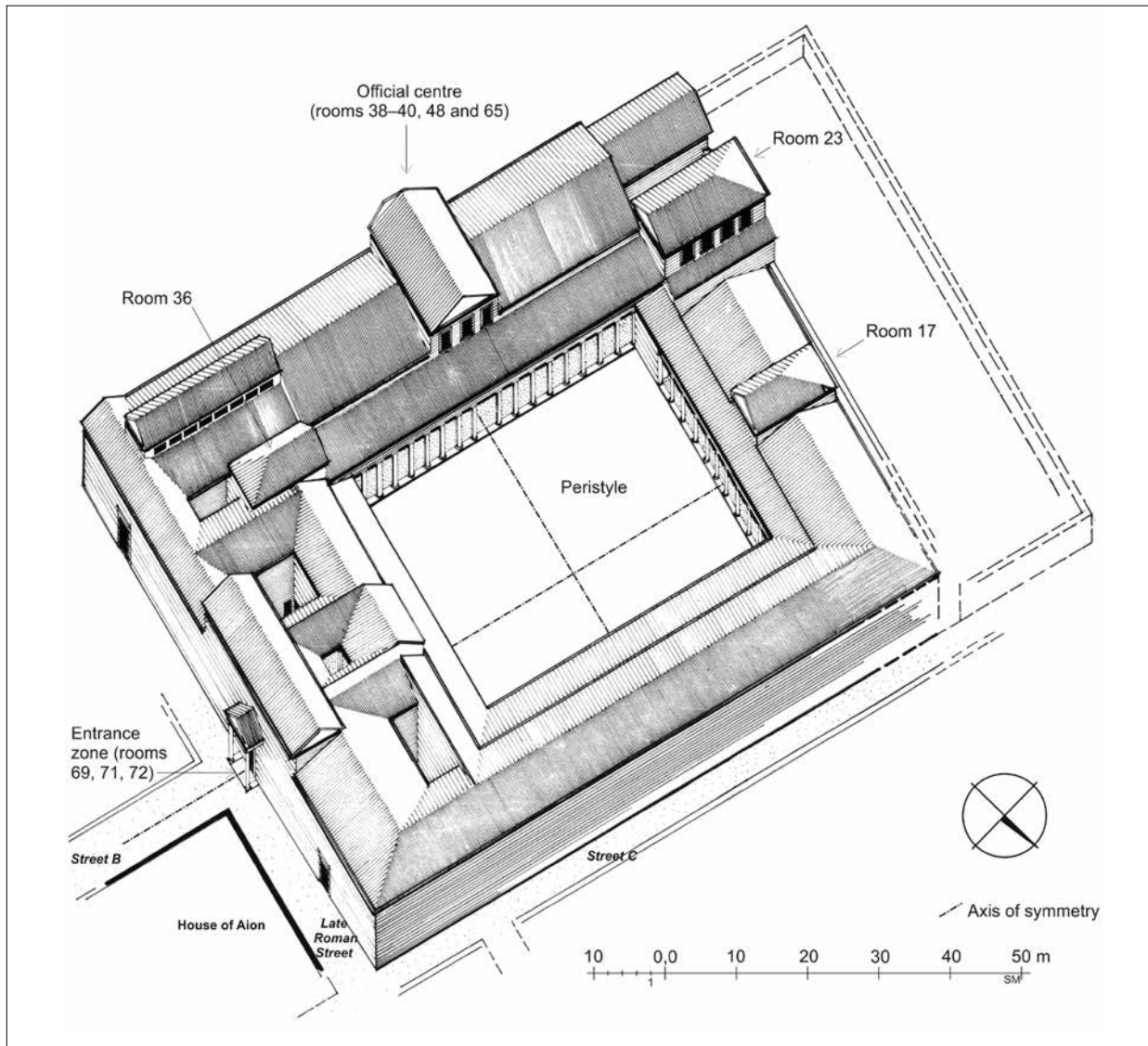


Fig. 8. Villa of Theseus – a reconstruction of the final phase (reproduced after Medeksza 1992, 111, fig. 30).

of Aion seems significant, whatever the function of the building, private or official. Designing a more modest, in terms of scale and decoration, main court may be regarded as a sign of the times when the classical peristyle courts were no longer required.

Main hall

The main hall, usually connected with the peristyle courtyard, was another space of a residence requiring special architectural frame which would reflect its representative function (Figs 2, 6, 8–11). It was a space where the

owner would meet his guests. It could have been derived from rooms of various functions, such as the Greek *oecus*, the Roman *tablinum* (initially a master bedroom, later an office),⁴⁷ or also Roman *triclinium* (a reception hall). It is also important to underline that, in the light of the recent research, rooms were multifunctional and used according to the needs and wishes of the family living in the residence and not according to a clear and rigid terminology concerning the typical Greek or Roman houses known, for example, from the Vitruvian treatise.⁴⁸

The main hall was of great importance particularly in residences belonging to high-ranking citizens of the

⁴⁷ Hales 2003, 107–108.

⁴⁸ Hales 2003, 126–147 with indications to further literature.

Graeco-Roman society, so it required appropriate arrangement and special embellishment. In comparison to the entrance zone and the main peristyle courtyard, the main hall was considered to be a slightly more official space, as it was the room where the owner would perform his official duties. In such circumstances, the architectural means used to emphasise his role as a representative of the authorities were particularly significant.⁴⁹

Usually, main halls were designed on a rectangular layout, with the main entrance placed on the shorter side connecting the room with one of the porticoes of the peristyle courtyard. This portico could have been fitted with a colonnade and an entablature more decorative than the others – the complete set of official zones, composed of the main room and the adjacent portico of the peristyle, were highlighted. As written above, the Rhodian peristyle, with the main portico higher than the others, constitutes one of the most extravagant versions of such an arrangement.

The main entrance to the room was usually located in the middle of the shorter wall and at the same time in the centre of the main portico. The symmetrical composition of both, the room and the portico, was underlined by a portal of the gate leading to the main hall. Its design could also be richer than that of the other doorways.

The main axis of the residence usually followed the axis of symmetry of the main courtyard and the portico neighbouring the main hall, where it went through the gate connecting them. Then it continued in the main hall, overlapping the longitudinal axis of the room. This axis was also used to emphasise the position of the master of the house – his seat/throne was placed at the end of the room, opposite the entrance, and at the axis linking the peristyle with the main portico and the main hall. The area around the master's seat could be even more architecturally accentuated by the layout of the back side of the room and its cover – for instance, instead of a straight wall enclosed by a ceiling or a roof, an apse surmounted by a semi-dome could be introduced.⁵⁰

According to Vitruvius, locating the main room on the southern side of the residence was the best position concerning its exposition to light and, in consequence, its insulation and heating.⁵¹ In practice, the location of the main room in relation to the cardinal directions resulted from a variety of factors taken into account by designers, primarily including the local specificity. The southern side might have been generally preferred but not always favourable or even possible to achieve.

Reception hall of the 'Hellenistic' House

The arrangement of the main room of the 'Hellenistic' House (Figs 6, 9) follows in many aspects the scheme presented above; however, a few of its features are designed in a different manner. Although the complete destruction of the northern part of the House makes it difficult to reconstruct the appearance of its peristyle courtyard, it seems logical and probable that the main, longitudinal, axis of the residence reception hall was coordinated with the axis of the main courtyard. As written above, the importance of Room 10 was underlined by the arrangement of the courtyard in the form of the Rhodian peristyle, with the Corinthian portico, the most decorative colonnade in the House, preceding the main hall.

The layout of the reception hall was rectangular, with one of the shorter sides connected with the adjacent portico. The position of the main hall behind the western colonnade does not follow the Vitruvian principle according to which it should be placed on the northern side of the peristyle in order to get as much sunlight as possible. It seems that designing the main room of the 'Hellenistic' House on the western side of the courtyard might have been caused by the desire to shield it from the prevailing cold western winds in winter.⁵² Such reversed orientation of the main hall in relation to the cardinal directions perfectly exemplifies an adaptation of the general rules to the regional weather and climate conditions.

The reception hall was furnished with a white mosaic of irregular fragments of pebbles surrounded by a black border. The walls were decorated with wall-paintings resembling the so-called first style of the Pompeian painting.⁵³

Official centre of the Villa of Theseus

The main hall of the Villa of Theseus was surrounded by several accompanying rooms – the official and representative centre was situated in the middle of the southern wing – its location underlined the key role it played within the residence (Figs 2, 8, 10). In the first construction phase of the Villa, when it took the form of a portico palace, the centrally located main hall with adjacent rooms dominated the whole edifice, with its height simultaneously creating its axis of symmetry. In the second phase, when the portico palace was expanded into the peristyle palace, this axis was prolonged to the north for the newly-built extensive courtyard surrounded by eastern, northern, and western wings.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ Medeksza 1992, 28–29.

⁵⁰ Medeksza 1992, 48–63.

⁵¹ Vitr. *De arch.* VI.1–2.

⁵² Medeksza 1992, 13–14.

⁵³ Daszewski 1991, 83; 1992, 253; 1993, 88.

⁵⁴ Medeksza 1992, 6, 24, 26–27, 30; 1998, 32.



Fig. 9. Reception hall of the 'Hellenistic' House (photo by A. Brzozowska-Jawornicka).

Similarly to the 'Hellenistic' House, the position of the main hall of the Villa of Theseus is opposed to the Vitruvian principles, as it is oriented to the north. This design might have resulted from the climatic reasons mentioned in the paragraph about the main room of the 'Hellenistic' House, but also from the desire to direct the Villa's façade towards Street B – the most important one in the Maloutena area.⁵⁵

As mentioned above, the key part of the Villa of Theseus forms a whole complex, composed of five rooms, going far beyond the schemes of the traditional Roman *tablinum*. The most important set, the reception hall, consists of two compartments placed along the N-S axis of the whole residence: a circular one (no. 39) followed by a rectangular one (no. 40) open to the peristyle. They are symmetrically flanked on both sides by two more sets of rooms: Room 38 in the west and rooms 48 and 65 in the east. Together with the monumental three-part entrance leading to the southern portico they formed a set of rooms typical of an imperial palace.⁵⁶

The most important room in the Villa of Theseus (no. 39) is easy to identify thanks to its unique form of a wide rotunda. The external contour of the room wall protrudes beyond the southern outline of the edifice in the form of a polygonal apse (three sides of an octagon). The internal form and outline of Room 39 were changed during the transformations of the residence. According to prof. Medeksza, the room was primarily designed as a wide rectangle with a longer E-W axis. Its long side, opposite Room 40, formed a section of a circle measuring around 1/3 of its outline: a shallow apse round on the inside and polygonal on the outside. Two shorter sides of Room 39 were connected directly with the lateral rooms – 38 and 48 – possibly with wide arches. Such an arrangement allowed the owner of the residence to appear in front of his guests by entering the apse of Room 39 directly from one of the side rooms. This kind of design of the main room might be considered as an equivalent of a throne hall closely related with the official duties of the Villa's owner and points to the representative

⁵⁵ Medeksza 1992, 13.

⁵⁶ Medeksza 1992, 48; 1998, 30.

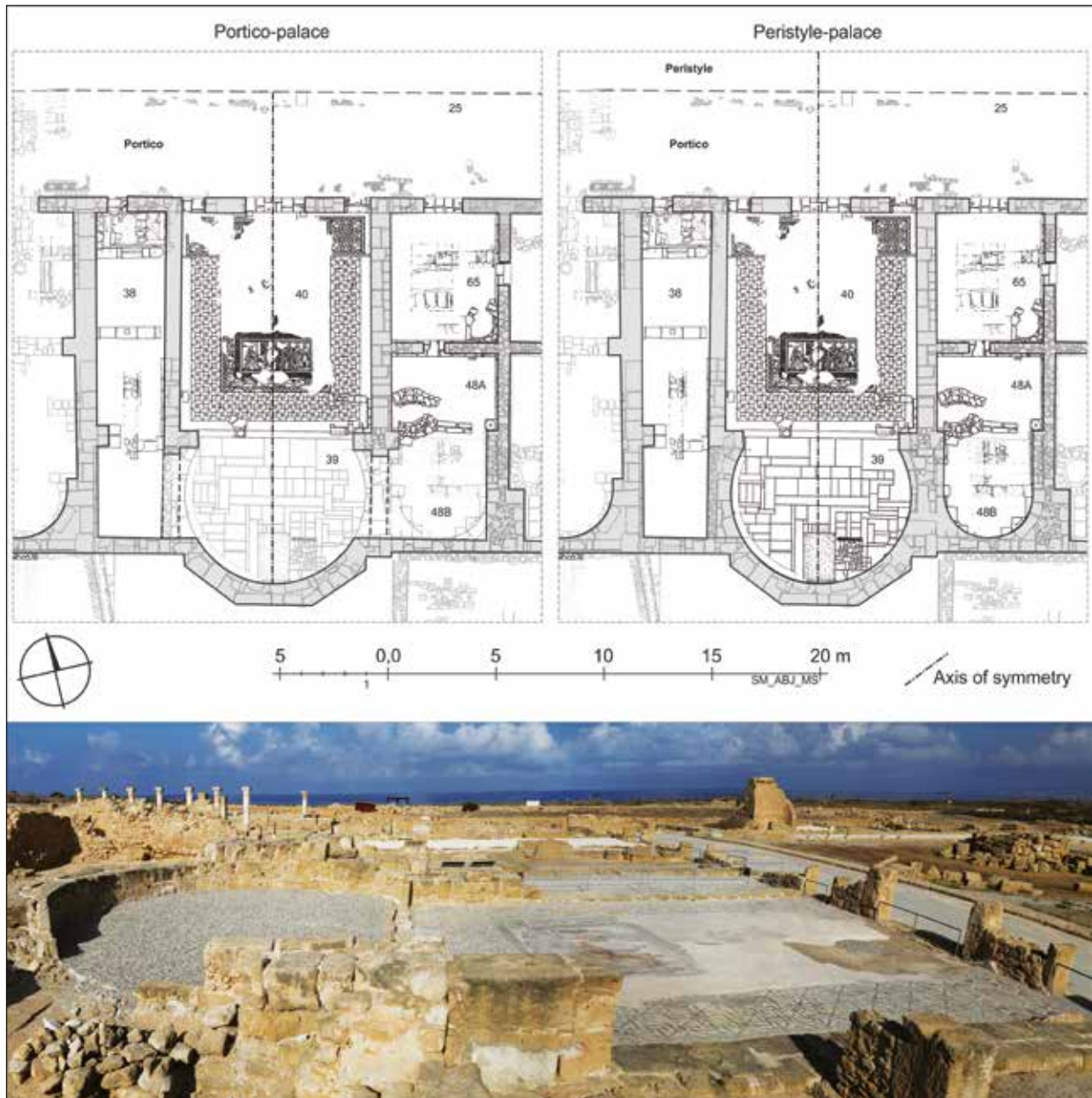


Fig. 10. Official centre of the Villa of Theseus (drawing by S. Medeksza; photo by A. Brzowska-Jawornicka).

nature of the residence – a *palatium* indicating an emperor. The room could have been covered by a ‘standard’ roof above the rectangular part and a semi-dome over the apse.⁵⁷

The design of Room 39 was remodelled during one of the reconstructions of the Villa: the side connections linking Room 39 with rooms 38 and 48 were walled up, thus giving the room a new outline: a much larger section

of a circle, measuring around 2/3 of its circuit. This new form, an almost complete rotunda, permitted covering the room in a much more extravagant way – probably with a dome, although only the lower layers of the walls survived to the present day, which makes it impossible to unambiguously determine the form of the missing upper part.⁵⁸ The transformation of Room 39 strengthened its

⁵⁷ Medeksza 1992, 20, 28, 54; 1998, 30.

⁵⁸ Medeksza 1992, 27, 35, 37–38, 40, 57; 1998, 34.

form as a throne hall, giving the centrally located owner's seat more impressive architectural background characteristic of the Roman palaces.⁵⁹

As in the case of the entrance zone, the walls of rooms 39 and 40 are thicker than the others. It suggests that this part of the residence was higher than the rest, which introduced a basic strong architectural accent into the shape of the Villa of Theseus.⁶⁰

Only a few decorative elements were excavated in the vicinity of the main hall complex, including a Corinthian capital of a half-column and two fragments of an ornately decorated cornice, but even they point to the richness of the decoration. The rooms were covered with marble cladding.⁶¹ A mosaic depicting the first bath of Achilles was one of the four figure panels decorating the floor of Room 40, while stone paving covered the rotunda.⁶²

The extravagant architectural design and expensive materials used to create the complex of the main hall clearly indicate a special role of these rooms in the whole edifice and at the same time the highest rank of the Villa of Theseus among all the houses not only in *Nea Paphos* but all over Cyprus. Undoubtedly, it was a residence of the most important person on the island.⁶³

***Triclinium* of the House of Aion**

The most distinguished part of the House of Aion was located in the south-western corner of the building and was composed of two rooms. The presumed entrance to the main complex of the House led from Street B to a rectangular vestibule (Room 2), which was open to the main room of the edifice – an almost square *triclinium* (Room 1).⁶⁴ Both rooms were also connected with other rooms: the *triclinium* with Room 3, situated to the north, and the vestibule with Room 5, to the east. The latter was further connected with the portico (Room 16W) of the courtyard (Room 16) placed opposite Room 2 (Figs 2, 11).

The importance of Rooms 1 and 2 is underlined in two ways. Firstly by their size – they are bigger than other rooms of the House of Aion. Secondly by their embellishment – both are equipped with mosaic floors:

the vestibule with geometric panels and the *triclinium* with the most exquisite late antique figural mosaic in Cyprus – a representation of the Greek gods and mythical characters with a unique ideological programme (among others Leda and the Swan, Hermes and Dionysus, Cassiopeia, Apollo, Marsyas, and Aion⁶⁵ who gave the House its modern name).

The exceptional status of the *triclinium* of the House of Aion is also emphasised by a niche located in the middle of the back western wall, recessed in the thickness of the wall. The niche in the form of a small, semi-circular apse arched with a semi-dome received a rich architectural decoration: a frame composed of two Corinthian half-columns surmounted with projecting entablature. Presumably, its interior was filled with a missing statue, which must have been well visible as the niche was placed about 0.5 m above the floor level.⁶⁶ The niche framing the statue and the splendid figure mosaic might have formed a single complex iconographic programme of the edifice, whose correct interpretation may be the key to determining the function and 'nature' of the House of Aion – public or private.

Summary and conclusions

The long duration of the settlement at Maloutena enabled us to study its architecture over several centuries in the Hellenistic and Roman times. This area, reserved for rich citizens of *Nea Paphos*, was used for spacious, richly equipped residences characterised by a wide variety of layouts and decoration, such as different architectural orders, mosaic floors, or wall paintings.

The residences and their embellishment manifested the aspirations of the owners and their families. On the one hand, we can observe the desire to keep up with the latest 'world-wide' fashion and tendencies, while on the other – a strong attachment to the local, old, and verified solutions and schemes. Most of the artistic novelties introduced to the Paphian residences were invented outside Cyprus and brought to the island, which was constantly under external cultural influences. The peristyle house was a Greek invention,⁶⁷ broadly used across the whole

⁵⁹ Medeksza 1992, 19–20, 26–27; Smith 1956.

⁶⁰ Medeksza 1992, 28.

⁶¹ Medeksza 1992, 28–29.

⁶² Daszewski, Michaelides 1988, 60–63.

⁶³ Medeksza 1992, 20, 62.

⁶⁴ Lichočka, Meyza 2001, 155; Mikocka 2018, 124.

⁶⁵ Selected literature concerning the interpretation of the iconographic programme of the mosaic from the *triclinium* of the House of Aion: Daszewski 1985a; Deckers 1986, 145–172;

Daszewski, Michaelides 1988, 13–77; Bowersock 1990, 49–53; Olszewski 1990–1991, 444–463; Balty 1995, 275–289; Quet 2006, 511–590; Kessler-Dimin 2008, 255–281; Olszewski 2013, 207–239; Ladouceur 2018, 49–64.

⁶⁶ Daszewski 1984, 294–314; Medeksza 1987, 227–230; Mikocki 1992, 135–150; Daszewski 1998b, 128; Daszewski *apud* Hajisavvas 1998, 691–692.

⁶⁷ Hales 2003, 207.

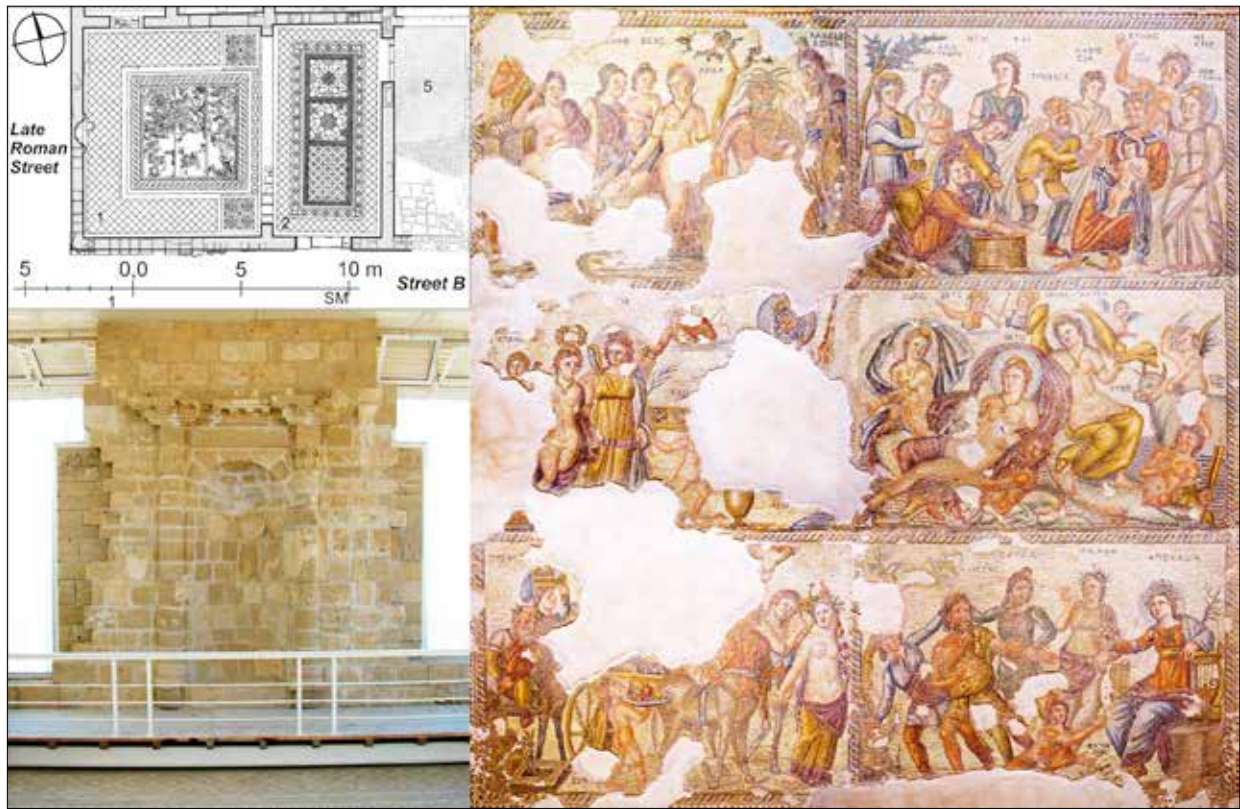


Fig. 11. *Triclinium* of the House of Aion: the plan, the niche for a statue, and the mosaic floor (drawing by S. Medeksza; photos by A. Brzowska-Jawornicka, M. Jawornicki).

Hellenistic world. The transformation of the classical peristyle surrounded by four porticoes into a pseudo-peristyle closed by walls with embedded half-columns may be observed, as written above, in the Alexandrian residential district as well as in the Paphian 'Hellenistic' House and came to *Nea Paphos* most probably *via* very strong links between Cyprus and the Ptolemaic Kingdom. These Alexandrian influences in Cyprus seem to be crucial during the Hellenistic and early Roman times, and can be observed in several other cases. The extensive use of the so-called Alexandrian style of architectural decoration constitutes the most obvious phenomenon: Alexandrian Corinthian capitals, cornices with modillions, or mixed orders are just a few manifestations of this trend, all of them present in the Paphian architecture, including the residences.⁶⁸

Apart from the trends from the Greek culture, many Roman influences may be observed in the Paphian residences, for instance the incomplete peristyles in the Villa of Theseus or the House of Aion bear strong resemblance

to the courtyards known from, among others, Pompeian houses.⁶⁹ Such an arrangement, with at least one plain wall instead of a portico, could have been a common solution in the entire Graeco-Roman world in a situation where there was not enough space to introduce a complete four-portico court.

The atrium, being a key part of the house entrance, is another purely Roman invention seen in *Nea Paphos*. The monumental entrance zone of the Villa of Theseus, with a vestibule preceding the atrium which leads to the grand peristyle, forms a perfect example of the classical arrangement, in this case enlarged greatly due to the rank of the residence, whose design was inspired by the architecture of Roman imperial palaces.

Emphasising the official areas is understandable and characteristic of all the residences, not only in *Nea Paphos* or Cyprus but irrespective of time and place. They were the representational areas where the owner wanted to 'show off' in front of his guests. Paphian residences are no exception. This demonstration could take various

⁶⁸ Guimier-Sorbet, Michaelides 2009; Brzowska-Jawornicka forthcoming.

⁶⁹ Hales 2003, 153–154.

forms. The owner of the ‘Hellenistic’ House decided to use as many various architectural orders as possible: in two courtyards five different styles may be observed. As if that was not enough, the main courtyard was designed as a Rhodian peristyle with porticoes of two different heights. The designers of the Villa of Theseus built the biggest residence not only in *Nea Paphos* or in Cyprus. It is one of the biggest palaces in the whole eastern part of the Roman Empire, with strongly underlined official zones and furnished with imported architectural decoration. The youngest of the analysed residences, the House of Aion, cannot match the previous ones in terms of size, but it was still very richly decorated with its main façade modelled on the elevations of the Balkan imperial palaces and its *triclinium* floored with one of the most impressive mosaics of late Antiquity.

Most of the architectural decoration from the analysed residences was carved in Paphian workshops from local stone, calcarenite. The imported pieces of architectural decoration are rather rare – such an extravagance was available and reserved only for the wealthiest Paphian citizens from the top of the social ladder, like in the case of the owner of the Villa of Theseus. Importation

of ready-made pieces of architectural decoration resulted also in the introduction of new trends on the island – trends which could have been later taken over by local workshops and developed into regional variants of general stylistic currents, as shown, for instance, by the Alexandrian architectural decoration.

The residences of Paphian Maloutena constitute examples of local architecture in an average town of the Graeco-Roman world. They were built according to regional traditions on the one hand, whereas on the other they followed the world’s latest trends. While analysing the residential architecture, one has to always keep in mind that the appearance of a given house is the result of individual choices, decisions, and tastes of its owner and local specificity. The particular location of Cyprus on the crossroads of cultures was a reason behind its bigger neighbours’ constant interest in the island. In consequence, it brought about a fascinating mixture of the prevailing influences of the Greek *koine* and the *Romanitas* with an admixture of the Orient. This complex Graeco-Roman world, composed of many cultures mutually influencing each other,⁷⁰ is reflected in the Cypriot art and architecture, including the rich houses of the local Paphian elite.

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⁷⁰ Hales 2003, 208–209, 24–243, 245–247 with references to further literature.

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