

NEA PAPHOS. 50 YEARS OF POLISH ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS 1965–2015

Exhibition on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of Polish archaeological work in Nea Paphos opens in the Cyprus Museum in Nicosia. It is co-organized by the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology (PCMA), University of Warsaw and the Department of Antiquities of the Republic of Cyprus. It is organized within the framework of the International Museum Day and the European Night of Museums. Rector of the University of Warsaw has given it his honorary patronage. The exhibition will run from 25 May through 30 November 2015. Afterwards it is planned to find permanent home in the site museum in Paphos.

For the past 50 years, archaeologists from the PCMA excavating the UNESCO World Heritage site of Nea Paphos have uncovered important architectural complexes with well preserved wall paintings and mosaics. These masterpieces of ancient art, as well as the more mundane artifacts, illustrate the richness and diversity of life in the ancient capital of Cyprus. More information about the marketplace of Hellenistic and Roman Paphos was contributed recently by an expedition from the Jagiellonian University in Kraków working there since 2011. Lately, the Warsaw team of archaeologists and restorers has worked together with the Cypriot Department of Antiquities toward opening the district near the ancient harbor as an archaeological park for tourists with reconstructed porticoes and restored mosaic floors.

HISTORY OF POLISH EXCAVATIONS IN PAPHOS

The first days of excavations in 1965 confirmed the importance of the site. A hoard of silver coins of the Alexander the Great type was followed by finds of marble sculpture and finely decorated mosaic floors that signaled the discovery of a late Roman palatial residence. Successive seasons of explorations in the southern wing of this building led to the uncovering in 1969 of a figural mosaic showing the Greek hero



Theseus slaying the Minotaur. This became the namesake of the newly discovered structure. After that work concentrated on the official reception area in the southern wing of the Villa of Theseus. More mosaic floors and marble sculptures, including the mosaic of Achilles and a statue of Aphrodite with a sword, were uncovered. The eastern and northern wings were explored in the 1970s and early 1980s, uncovering the mosaic of Poseidon.

The spectacular discovery in 1983 of the mosaic of Aion opened a new stage of the project, which was now devoted to exploration of the residential quarter east of the Villa of Theseus. In the second half of the 1980s, investigations moved to the south of the Villa. Discoveries included more figural and geometric mosaics, places of domestic cult, household equipment buried under earthquake debris. The combined work of archaeologists and restorers led to the reconstruction of one of the porticoes in the main courtyard of the “Hellenistic” House (pictured on the front cover). Research by the University of Warsaw team is being continued in this area.

LIFE AND ART IN THE ANCIENT CYPRIOT CITY



Close to 250 artifacts from Polish excavations go on show at the Cyprus Museum in Nicosia. The exhibition presents major themes: history of Paphos, residential and public districts, official and private cults, symbols of authority, the Paphos mint, building decoration — architectural styles, painting and mosaic floors, water in the service of the inhabitants and everyday life.

The display presents marble statuary, reconstructions of decorated architectural complexes, wall painting, artifacts representing all aspects of everyday life from religious worship to mundane activities, as well as commerce and craftsmanship, symbolic evidence of power and authority attested by coin minting. Multimedia presentations of the fine mosaic floors from the site carry the visitor across the island, to the place where they have been found and are on display, and a 3D model shows the changes taking place on the site in the course of almost a thousand years of development.

ONE THOUSAND YEARS OF HISTORY IN NEA PAPHOS

Between 316 and 309 BC the last native king of the kingdom of Paphos, Nicocles, turned a small fishing settlement into a harbor town that would become the capital of first Hellenistic and then Roman Cyprus. An excellent location on a promontory on the southwest coast of the island, coupled with strategic access to natural resources, like timber for shipbuilding, made Nea Paphos a steadily growing commercial and administrative center.

The city minted coinage and by the end of the 3rd century BC the Ptolemaic governor was most probably residing in Paphos. The Roman province of Cyprus, established in the second half of the 1st century BC, may have been governed from here as well. In the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD, the city was rebuilt on a scale far surpassing anything existing there before. Its importance was reflected in the titles conferred on the city, i.a.

“the Sacred Metropolis of all the Towns in Cyprus”. In the 4th century, following a devastating earthquake of AD 332, the city lost its capital status, but it continued to flourish as a centre of culture and the arts.

By the 7th century, the life of the Christian community (Paphos was an episcopal see from the 4th century AD) was concentrated around churches situated near the harbor and the alleged place of St Paul’s persecution. The abandoned ruins of the western part of the city were gradually forgotten.



Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology, University of Warsaw coordinates Polish archaeological research in the Eastern Mediterranean since 1959 (since 1990 under the present name). In recent years it broadened its scope of interest into the Arabian Peninsula and the Caucasus. Currently has 25 projects in 10 countries Egypt, Sudan, Cyprus, Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Georgia and Armenia.

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EXHIBITION

Nea Paphos. 50 Years of Polish archaeological excavations

Cyprus Museum in Nicosia
25 May–30 November 2015



ORGANIZERS

Department of Antiquities of the Republic of Cyprus
Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology, University of
Warsaw

in cooperation with:

Institute of Archaeology, Jagiellonian University, Kraków
Institute of Mediterranean and Oriental Cultures, Polish
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Faculty of Architecture, Wrocław University of Technology

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