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INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

NAS-10
Patterns in a Mosaic

3 Yishay St.
Abu Tor
Jerusalem, Israel
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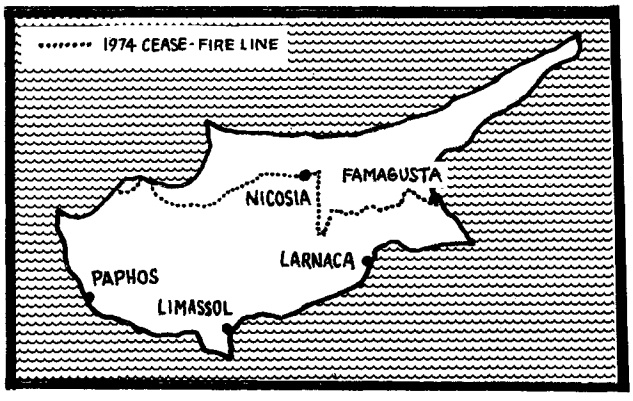
Institute of Current World Affairs
4 West Wheelock St.
Hanover, New Hampshire, USA

Dear Peter,

For anyone interested in the antiquities of the city of Paphos in the Republic of Cyprus, Dr. Demetrios Michaelides is the person to see. As the Paphos district inspector for the Cyprus Department of Antiquities, Michaelides is responsible for overseeing the excavation, restoration, and preservation of every significant trace of ancient human activity over the entire western third of the island-- from the Rock of Aphrodite (the goddess' legendary birthplace) on the southwest coast, to the barbed wire boundary of the Turkish enclave on the northwest. His office at the Paphos Museum is filled with some of the most special finds from the half-dozen foreign expeditions conducted within his district this summer, as well as finds from his more than 200 rescue excavations in and around the city of Paphos itself. History comes to Michaelides in fragments, and it's his responsibility to see that those fragments are fitted into a meaningful pattern for the people of Paphos today.



This task is especially difficult, for as I learned during my visit, Paphos is in the midst of a dramatic transformation that has endangered its archaeological heritage. With an influx of Greek refugees from the area occupied by the Turkish Army since 1974, Paphos has emerged from its traditional isolation to become one of Cyprus' most rapidly growing cities. The government of Cyprus has encouraged foreign investment and the construction of a new highway from Limassol and the opening of an international airport have made Paphos easily accessible. Local developers and businessmen have clearly taken advantage of the changing conditions. Paphos' sandy shoreline, its city center, and its suburbs are gradually being filled with villas, shopping centers, offices, condominiums, and apartment hotels.

Much of this widespread construction has centered on the site of the ancient city of Nea Paphos, whose extensive remains show that this is not the first time in its long history that Paphos has experienced a building boom. During the Hellenistic and Roman periods (c.300 BC- c.400 AD), Paphos was one of the richest and most famous Mediteranean harbor cities. Its praises were sung by such ancient authors as Diodorus Siculus, Cicero, Strabo, and Tacitus; to its name were attached the titles of three imperial

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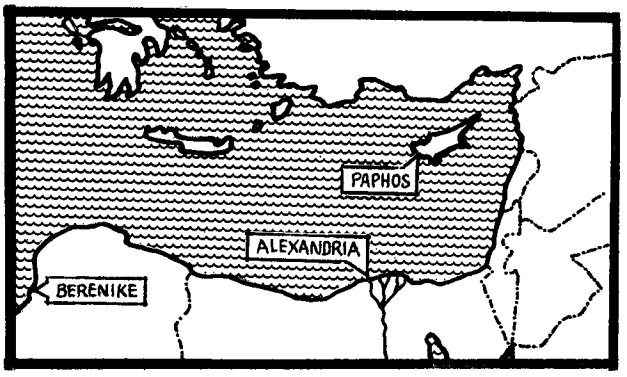

Roman dynasties. From its status as a small, inland Cypriot kingdom at the time of Alexanger the Great's conquests at the end of the 4th century BC, Paphos rapidly became an active paticipant in the emerging Hellenistic cultural koine.

This process began when Nikokles, the ambitious and far-sighted ruler of the Paphian kingdom, moved his court from the old inland capital to an unoccupied peninsula, where he directed the construction of the harbor and town of Nea Paphos, "New Paphos," around 320 BC. There were, of course, good reasons why Nikokles' development plans at Nea Paphos succeeded. The nearby mountains were thickly forested with exceptionally fine cedar for shipbuilding; the lush coastal plain was the site of a famous temple to Aphrodite, and the new city's well-built breakwater and harbor facilities made Paphos a strategic base and vital point of communication for the Ptolemies of Egypt and, later, the Romans in their struggle for control of the Middle East.

Today, the remains of that period of Paphos' greatness are being revealed by extensive archaeological excavations, and a brief stroll from Michaelides' office through the galleries of the museum shows how much archaeology has added to the understanding of Paphos' ancient connections with the outside world. Just beyond the entrance are the pots, flint tools, and stone idols of the region's first human inhabitants, probably migrants from Asia Minor, who settled in the deep inland valleys, around 3000 BC. Next comes a collection of Cypriot Bronze Age pottery and evidence of renewed overseas links: wine mixing bowls and oil containers from Mycenaean Greece. Most prominent, of course, are the artifacts from Paphos' time of greatest prosperity in the Hellenistic and Roman periods. Among them are bronze strigils used by Greek athletes at the city's gymnasium for scraping the sweat and grime from their bodies, a fragmentary marble statue of Aphrodite retrieved from the sea near the modern lighthouse, and a wide selection of Greco-Roman vases, coins, and jewelry.

When I had a chance to sit down with Michaelides and learn about his professional background, I realized how well his experience suits him for his present job. Although he is still in his thirties, his career has already taken him around the Mediterranean and he has already established a reputation as a specialist in Greek and Roman art. Born in Nicosia, he gained his training at the Institute of Archaeology at the University of London and his most formative archaeological experience came during his participation in excavations at the city of Benghazi in Libya in the early 1970's. There, beneath the modern street levels, he helped to uncover the remains of the Hellenistic and Roman city of Berenike, which, like Paphos, prospered through its international trading links. His work on the mosaics and wall paintings of ancient Berenike became the subject of his doctoral dissertation, and subsequently, the focus of his professional career.

When Michaelides talks about the changing styles of Hellenistic and Roman mosaics, he is really talking about the changes in culture itself. By tracing the appearance and spread of particular mosaic motifs throughout the various cities of the Mediterranean and by noting the relative skillfulness with which the musivarii, or mosaic makers, executed their patterns, Michaelides believes that it is possible to reconstruct economic and social changes as well. Although Michaelides' work at Berenike was only the beginning of a lifelong study, his appointment to the post of inspector at Paphos in

1982 was another important step. For someone interested in ancient mosaics, Paphos is a perfect place to work and study, since the lower part of the city down by the seashore, called Kato or "Lower" Paphos, has provided archaeologists with some of the most spectacular examples of Hellenistic and Roman mosaic pavements found anywhere in the Mediterranean world.

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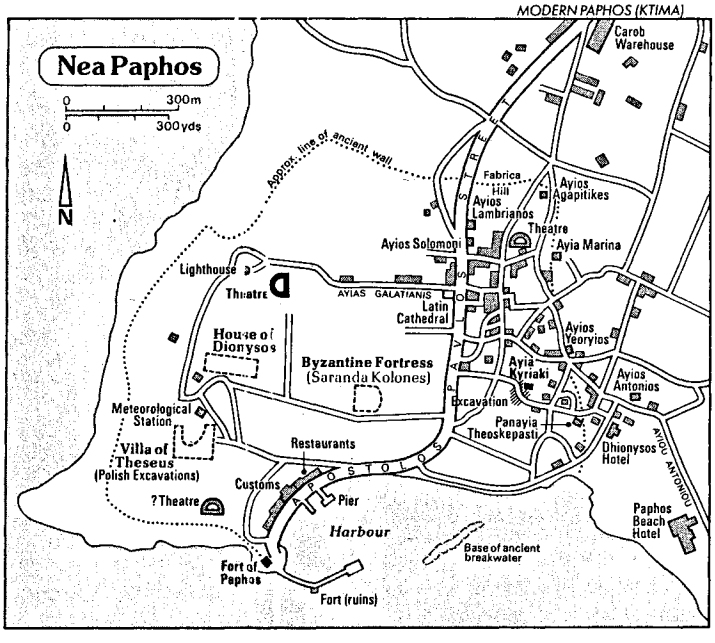
In 1962, just two years after the Republic of Cyprus gained its independence, the village of Kato Paphos remained much the same as it had been for the preceding 1300 years. Only barely connected to the upper town of Ktima, it was a quiet fishing village in which the areas of marshland and ruins were far larger than the area that was occupied. The stones of the ancient breakwater could still be seen rising from the sea at low tide, but the harbor itself no longer sheltered any craft more substantial than the local fishermen's boats. The flat plain that extended to the seashore on the west and to the village of Kato Paphos on the east was used by the inhabitants mainly for the growing of crops and the grazing of sheep. Except for occasional fragments of Greek and Roman sculpture and inscriptions that were turned up by plowing, there were few visible signs of the prosperity of Nea Paphos, the ancient city that had once flourished here and had disappeared at the end of the Roman Age.

That is, until one of the local landowners decided to level his fields. In previous years this landowner had enjoyed the good fortune of finding many well-drafted stones just beneath the surface, but no one had paid much attention to his discoveries, for such stones could be found throughout Kato Paphos, and for centuries they had provided plentiful building material for new houses and terrace walls. But when he brought in a bulldozer for the much larger clearing operations, it uncovered a find that not even he could ignore.

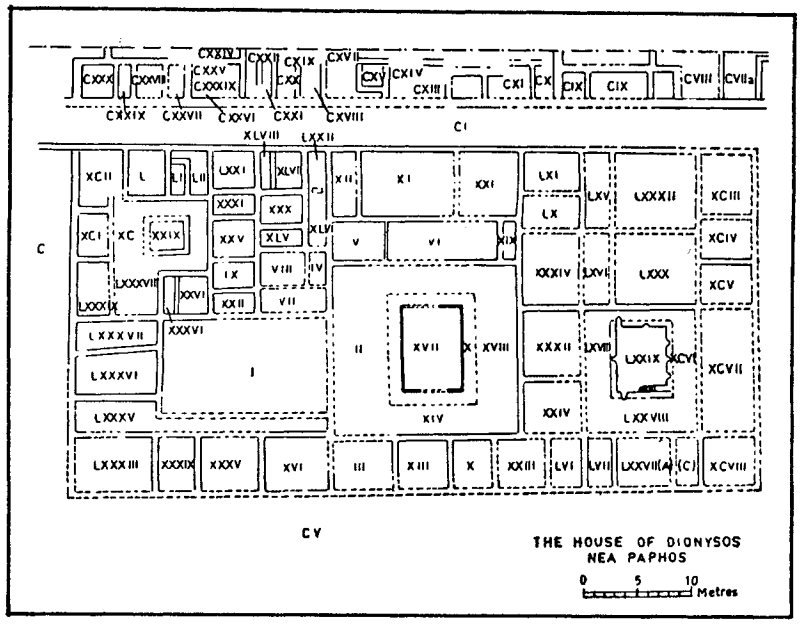
When the bulldozer's scoop dug into the earth, it was clear that something was out of the ordinary here. Clumps of mosaic tiles, in which human figures, birds, and grape vines could be distinguished, lay scattered along the first furrow of freshly turned soil. When the officers of the district museum came down to inspect the damage and reported their findings to the headquarters of the Department of Antiquities in Nicosia, they received instructions to stop all work at the site immediately and to clear the floor carefully on the chance that it could be restored. But when they started to dig, the work quickly became overwhelming. The room with the mosaic was only a small part of a huge building, whose adjoining rooms were also paved with mosaic floors. And in light of their quality and quantity, the assistant director of the Cyprus Museum, Kyriakos Nicolau, was called in from Nicosia to take over the dig.



From the 1981 Blue Guide to Cyprus

Nicolau's excavations, which continued for the next 16 years, provided the first hard evidence for the opulence of

Nea Paphos' past. The structure, given the name "The House of Dionysos," contained more than 70 rooms on its surviving first story, more than 20 of which were paved with elaborate mosaic floors. The house itself was built according to an architectural plan that was common throughout the Roman Empire. Its central feature was an ornamental pool called an impluvium surrounded by a colonnaded portico. On the western side of this central area was a large room known as the tablinum, which was the salon and reception room of every proper Roman patrician's home. The House of Dionysos was obviously the residence of one of Nea Paphos' most wealthy inhabitants, and Nicolau believed that the mosaics found in it revealed his artistic tastes, religious background, and perhaps his profession as well.



From the 1967 Report of the Department of Antiquities of Cyprus (RDAC).

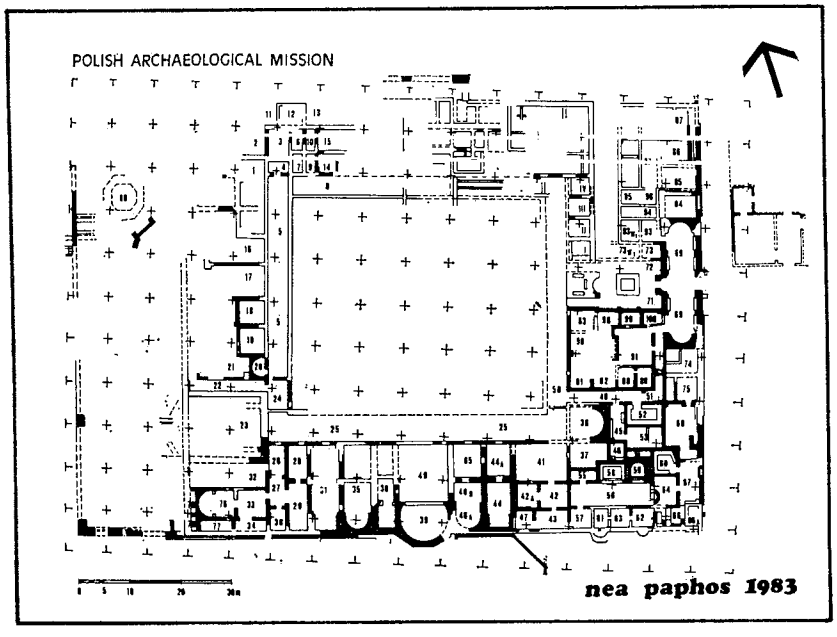
The bulldozer, it seems, had come right down on the tablinum, which here received the rather prosaic archaeological designation "Room I." Although much of the floor was irreparably damaged, the parts that remained or that could be reconstructed prominently featured the god Dionysos, and so gave the house its name. In the center of the floor was a lively scene of a grape harvest, surrounded on three sides by a border of grape vines, and on the fourth side by an elaborate scene of Dionysus' triumphal parade. The god of wine was obviously the patron of the residents of this villa; in the portico itself was a mosaic scene depicting the discovery of wine. On the left, the god was shown-- in accordance with the legend-- teaching the art of wine-making to the aged king Ikarios of Attica. To the right was an oxcart overloaded with bulging wineskins and beyond, a depiction of the inevitable aftereffects of this technological breakthrough. Two shepherds were shown falling to the ground in a drunken stupor, identified by a caption set in black tiles in the pavement as ΟΙ ΠΡΩΤΟΙ ΟΙΝΟΠΙΟΝΤΕΣ, "the first drinkers of wine."

From the evidence of the style of the mosaics, Nicolau determined that the house was constructed in the late 3rd century AD and he further hypothesized that it was the residence of a wealthy winegrower or wine merchant whose cultural connections were firmly with the traditions of the Greco-Roman world. As the excavation proceeded, the entire complex of rooms was uncovered and charted, with the private living quarters surrounding another pool to the east, and the kitchens and workshops to the northwest. In all of the rooms that were paved with mosaics, the Classical influences were obvious, among them scenes of Hippolytus and Phaedra, Ganymede and the Eagle, Narcissus gazing at his own image, and in the entrance hall in Room III on the south, a mosaic welcome mat bearing the words ΚΑΙ ΣΥ "And you," ΧΑΙΡΕ, "be well."

The excavation of the House of Dionysos was just the beginning of discovery in Kato Paphos, for it made clear to other scholars what treasures could be found just

beneath the surface of the ground. In 1965, a second project was begun with the arrival of an expedition of the Polish Center for Mediterranean Archaeology in Cairo, which received a permit to excavate the plot of land that lay to the southwest of the House of Dionysos. The director of the Polish excavations, Dr. Kazimierz Michalowski, was certainly no stranger to impressive Roman architecture, having previously excavated at Alexandria in Egypt and at Palmyra in Syria, but his finds at Nea Paphos matched any that he had uncovered before. The structure that he and his colleagues excavated proved to be the largest of its kind ever found in Cyprus, and in it were more of the elaborate mosaic pavements that provided the building's cultural connections and date.

This structure was clearly not a private residence, but a public building. Around the four sides of a huge open courtyard or parade ground were complexes of separate architectural units, which included a monumental gateway on the eastern facade, a complete bathhouse in the southeast, and in the center of the southern wing, a large reception room that terminated in a smaller chamber in the form of a semi-circular apse. As Michalowski and Dr. Wiktor Daszewski, who succeeded him as the director of the excavations, searched for architectural parallels with other Roman buildings excavated around the Mediterranean, they recognized that this structure was probably the residence and administrative headquarters of the Roman governors of Cyprus, who controlled the island's resources from the time of the Roman conquest in 58 BC until the shifting of the capital to the city of Salamis (just north of modern Famagusta) sometime during the 5th century AD.



From RDAC 1984

Here too the mosaic floors and their motifs suggested a modern archaeological name for this structure, which was called "The Villa of Theseus." Along the southern edge of the courtyard ran a 56m long geometric mosaic that ended in a small chamber with a circular mosaic depiction of Theseus killing the Minotaur. And in the south, in the central apse that Daszewski subsequently suggested might be the official reception room of the governor, was a scene showing the infant Achilles' first bath, attended by his mother Thetis, his father Peleus, and a personification of immortality, here identified as "Anbrosia."

The discoveries at both the House of Dionysos and the Villa of Theseus provided Kato Paphos with its first two tourist attractions and protective roofs were built over the mosaics to insure their preservation and appreciation by a growing stream of foreign visitors. But beyond the advantages for Paphos' tourist industry, the mosaic houses also provided a tangible point of identification for the local Greek population with their ancient cultural heritage. And in the summer of 1974, at the time that the Turkish Army was staging its amphibious landings on the northern coast of the island, the antiquities of Paphos gained a modern symbolic significance as well. A squadron of jet fighters of the Turkish airforce swooped down over Kato Paphos, dropping bombs on

the customs house and the medieval fort in the area of the harbor, and then onto the mosaics in the House of Dionysos.

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Today, more than eleven years later, one would never suspect that the antiquities of Kato Paphos had been the focus of international conflict, at least from the surface appearance of things. The mosaics in the House of Dionysos have been completely restored and are now protected under an impressive closed structure, far more substantial than the corrugated roof that protected them up to 1974. I'm quite sure that this new building is not-bomb proof, but that is not the essense of the change that has taken place. As I drove down with Demetrios Michaelides to see the progress of the modern digging, I discovered that the emphasis today is on a concerted attempt to integrate antiquities into the development of the modern city, not just to encourage additional excavations and the discovery of isolated finds.

In its own way, this change in attitude came as a result of the Turkish bombing and the symbolic danger to the archaeological heritage that the Turkish occupation caused. The antiquities sites in the northern part of the island are now beyond the control of the Department of Antiquities, and intense efforts have been made since 1974 to protect, preserve, and restore the most important sites over which they still have authority. This has not been the effort of the Greek Cypriots alone; the war damage to the Paphos mosaics began a process of international involvement in the archaeological exploration of Paphos that has dominated the present Department of Antiquities development plans. The reconstruction of the shelter over the House of Dionysos was, in fact, financed by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees. And in 1981, UNESCO entered the picture. After having sent a mosaic restoration expert to repair the mosaics, the officials of that increasingly controversial international organization included Paphos on the World Heritage List, designing a master-plan for the protection and preservation of the city's antiquities.

Clearance of the northern city wall of Nea Paphos.
View to the southeast.

As the first step in this wide-ranging program, Michaelides has undertaken the task of clearing the line of the ancient city walls. All around the area of modern Kato Paphos, vertically-cut outcrops of bedrock mark the boundaries of the city's fortifications, established and maintained from the 4th century BC to the 5th century AD. Over the intervening millennia, with the decline of the city, those ramparts have been filled with earth and rubbish, which Michaelides is now clearing by a combination of careful excavation and earth-moving equipment. This project is intended to delimit the planned archaeological park but from another perspective,

it seemed to me to be an ironic reenactment of the first act of King Nikokles when he established the city here in the 4th century BC.

Just inside the line of fortifications lie the vast, empty fields of the northern section of Nea Paphos, which have been gradually purchased from their owners over the last ten years by the Department of Antiquities. Chance finds and occasional excavations here have underlined this area's archaeological importance. On the plain below the hill on which the modern lighthouse stands-- a hill that may be the site of the ancient city's acropolis-- the remains of a Roman theater have been uncovered and restored. And the discovery of an inscription that describes the honors bestowed on the city's gymnasiarch, the director of the municipal gymnasium, is a clear indication that the most characteristic structure of every large Hellenistic and Roman city might be found in the immediate vicinity.

There are certainly enough indications of ancient structures in this area. More than twenty years of excavation in Kato Paphos have taught the archaeologists working here how to recognize potential finds. As Michaelides pointed out, the surface here is noticeably uneven, a sure sign of buried walls. And if that weren't enough of an indication, the entire area is littered with ancient architectural elements. But Michaelides assured me that there are no immediate plans for excavation, no matter how promising the prospects might be. The Department of Antiquities is no longer reacting to sudden, unexpected discoveries. By purchasing this land and preventing construction, it has protected it from any possible damage. There will be plenty of opportunity to excavate here when the UNESCO master plan reaches a more advanced stage.

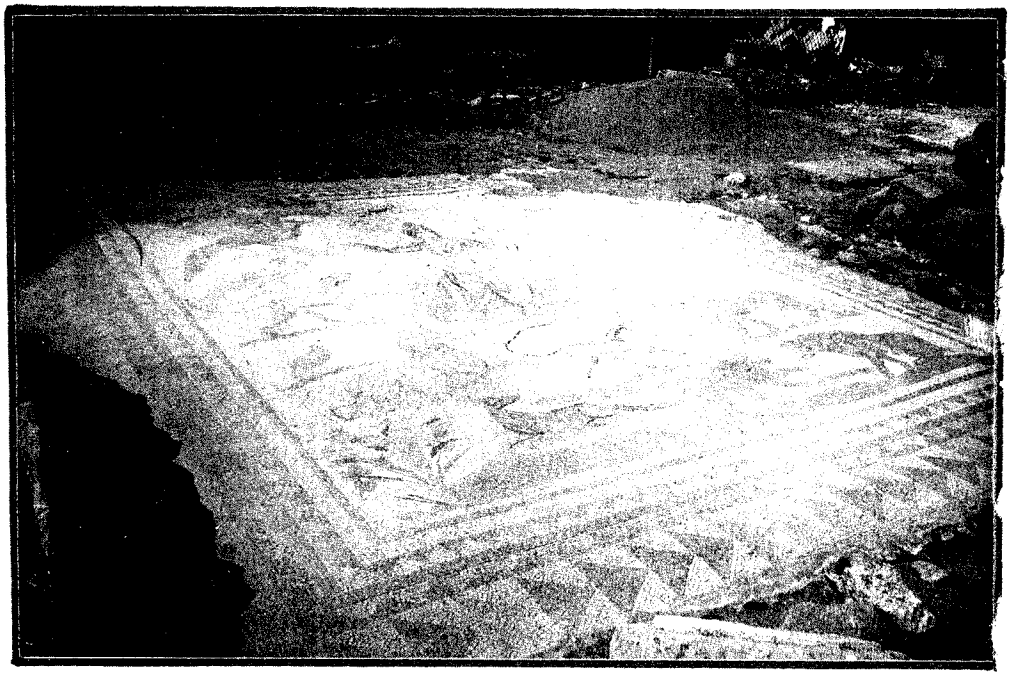
That is not to say that there is no digging going on today in Kato Paphos; when we drove around to the area of the mosaic houses, I could see the steady progress that has been made in recent years. In addition to the excavation of remains from the Hellenistic and Roman periods, archaeological research has also concentrated on the later periods of the city's history. Near the church of Ayia Kyriaki within the built-up area of Kato Paphos, Athanasios Papageorghiou, the Department of Antiquities' curator of Ancient Monuments, has uncovered a succession of Byzantine churches beneath a level of Crusader structures. And at the mound of ruins known as Saranda Kolones, "The Forty Columns," A.H.S. Megaw, the last director of the Cyprus Department of Antiquities under the British administration, has returned to complete his excavation of the Crusader castle that dominated the area of the harbor in the 12th century AD.

For Demetrios Michaelides, though, the heart of the matter is still in the Classical periods, and he brought me to a fenced-in plot of land just to the west of the Villa of Theseus to show me the results of an excavation that he has been conducting for the last three years. The fact that ancient mosaics could be found here was no secret; as early as 1942, a detachment of British troops stationed in Paphos was digging an air raid shelter on this spot when they uncovered an elaborate pavement, which they were instructed to cover back up. In 1978, when Kiriakos Nicolau was completing his work at the House of Dionysos, he made some preliminary efforts to find that mosaic, and when he located and uncovered it, he found that it was a two-paneled composition depicting an Amazon standing by her horse and Heracles doing battle with the Nemean Lion, both scenes executed in a style that rivaled the pavements in the other mosaic houses of Nea Paphos.

When Michaelides took over the position of inspector in 1982, this mosaic floor was something of an orphan, exposed to the elements, but with no architectural or historical context. For a mosaic specialist like Michaelides, this was a personal challenge to fit this floor into the pattern of Paphos' cultural history that the other

mosaic houses have already provided. And after three seasons of digging, "The House of Orpheus,"as it's now called,is no longer an orphan. The pavement depicting the Amazon and Heracles proved to be just the entrance hall to another spacious Roman villa, which is, like the House of Dionysos, built around an impluvium and peristyle. And in one of the rooms that lead from this central area, Michaelides uncovered the elaborate mosaic floor that gives this house its name.

According to Michaelides, the first elements to emerge were the animals. Clearing the mosaic inward from its border of multi-colored triangles, he distinguished the depictions of a lion, hyena, bear, panther, bull, dove, tiger, eagle, peacock, and deer. The separate members of this menagerie seemingly had little to do with each other; each was shown almost as a cut-out, with no attempt at a common background. But when he found the serene, stately image of Orpheus playing his harp in the center, the message of this mosaic became clear. Orpheus, according to the myth recorded by the Greek poet Pindar, was the greatest musician of all times. His harp was personally given to him by the god Apollo, and with it, Orpheus could make even wild beasts stop their fighting and sit quietly by his feet.



The Orpheus mosaic

By the 2nd century AD, when the House of Orpheus was last occupied, the myth of Orpheus was interpreted in various ways. For some it symbolized civilization's ability to still human passions, while for others, it represented the triumph of Roman civilization over the "barbaric" peoples of the world. Michaelides found a certain confirmation for this latter, prosaic interpretation, for the House of Orpheus itself lay in the shadow of the looming Roman governor's palace just to the east. Even more significant was a clue concealed in the mosaic. The name of the musivarius, spelled out in black tiles at the top of the picture, was Latin rather than Greek, the common language of Cyprus for the previous 600 years.

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Michaelides has no easy explanation for the sudden abandonment of the House of Orpheus in the 2nd century AD. The most likely reason for its destruction was an earthquake known to have affected Paphos during this same period, but that natural disaster alone does not explain why the villa's owners did not come back and rebuild. Two centuries later, a similar phenomenon occured at the Villa of Theseus and the House of Dionysos; both structures were destroyed by earthquakes in the late 4th century, briefly

occupied by squatters, and then abandoned completely to become covered with soil and overgrown with weeds.

By that time, the Roman world had undergone a far-reaching transformation, in the acceptance of Christianity in place of the Classical traditions, and, perhaps even more important, in the breakdown of the Hellenistic and Roman overseas trading links. The prosperity of Paphos, like that of most Mediterranean harbor cities, was based on its vital economic connections, and when the socio-cultural system that supported them began to disintegrate, natural disasters such as earthquakes merely helped the disintegration along. In the 5th century AD, the capital of Cyprus was shifted to Salamis, a city more advantageously located to support itself on the agricultural produce of the island's rich eastern plain. And from that time, Paphos declined in importance, eventually to become the quiet fishing village that the British found when their Mediterranean fleet dropped anchor off Paphos in 1799.

The archaeological rediscovery of Paphos' early period of expansion in the Hellenistic and Roman periods is not just of antiquarian interest; echoes of the past can be discerned in the historical circumstances of Paphos' modern rise. The arrival of the British fleet and their de facto annexation of Cyprus as a strategic Middle Eastern outpost less than a century later were just the first steps in a process of growing economic and cultural connections to the west that would ultimately result in Paphos coming to life again. Like Nikokles in the 4th century BC, the British administrators saw that the future of Paphos depended on its foreign connections. In 1891, the first modern carriage road was paved to connect the upper town with the harbor, and in 1908, the harbor itself was thoroughly dredged. Many years would pass before Paphos would have an international airport and be closely connected to the western, industrialized economies. But the steadily increasing impact on Paphos of western cultural traditions--among them, western archaeological and historical understandings-- was a clear sign that "Hellenization" in its modern incarnation was coming to Paphos again.

Being a part of an international economy naturally requires a certain payment, and for Paphos that cost may be exacted in the loss of its identity. As in the past, the same sources that offer Paphos its prosperity can also threaten to overwhelm it with imported myths, histories, and styles. In that respect, the last piece to be fitted into Paphos' archaeological pattern is the significance of the archaeological work itself. It remains an open question whether the ambitious plans for the restoration of ancient Nea Paphos will be merely another form of cultural assimilation, or whether Demetrios Michaelides and the other archaeologists working in Paphos will enable the modern inhabitants of the city to maintain their own identity in the midst of Paphos' second great boom.

Best Regards,

Neil

Received in Hanover 12/18/85