

Nea Paphos

Ancient Capital of Cyprus



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PHOTOS

Work on Trench II: Rooms with the Office of a Paphos Surgeon ©Paphos Agora Project Archive, Robert Slabonski

Finds of the Office of a Paphos Surgeon: set of instruments, coins, glass vessels and oil lamps ©Paphos Agora Project Archive, Robert Slabonski

The Theseus mosaic ©Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology, University of Warsaw, Maciej Jawornicki

Text and design by Eleanna Avouri

History of Nea Paphos

Nea Paphos was founded around the end of the 4th century BC by the king of Palaepaphos, Nicocles. The location of the new city was ideal for the development of a prosperous harbor. By 294 BC, Cyprus became part of the Hellenistic kingdom of Ptolemy, one of Alexander the Great's successful generals, who became the king of Egypt in 305 BC. Under the Ptolemaic dynasty, Nea Paphos grew at a fast rate: a military base of strategic importance and a harbor supplying the entire kingdom with goods such as timber and minerals that one could find plenty in the nearby mountains. By the late 3rd century BC, it had become the capital of the island and one of the very few centers which had the right to mint coins. Here resided the strategos, the supreme military commander who governed Cyprus in the name of the Ptolemaic kings.

Nea Paphos remained a capital and continued to flourish even after 58 BC, when Cyprus was annexed by Rome. At the peak of its prosperity, around the second half of 2nd and early 3rd century AD, the city received from the Romans a very prestigious title "*Sebaste Claudia Flavia Paphos, the sacred metropolis of all the towns of Cyprus*". Disastrous earthquakes in the early 4th century AD contributed to the transfer of the capital to Salamis. Nevertheless, the city continued to develop as testified by the extended Villa of Theseus and the House of Aion that were still used in the 5th century AD.

During the Early Byzantine period, between the 4th and the 6th century, many remarkable Christian basilicas were built in the city, and its harbor survived through a long period of instability and Arab raids. Under the rule of the Lusignans (1192–1489) and the Venetians (1489–1570), Nea Paphos became an important passage for merchants and pilgrims traveling to and from the Holy Land. The end of the city gradually came under the Ottoman rule of the island (1570–1878), since the population began to move to the safer inland where the present town of Paphos now stands. Under the British colonial rule (1878–1960), Paphos became the capital of its district.

History of excavations

The first archaeological excavations in Nea Paphos date back to 1933 but the site received significant recognition in the 1960s thanks to the accidental discovery of the mosaic floors decorating the House of Dionysus and the extensive excavations that followed, under the leadership of the Cypriot archaeologist Kyriakos Nikolau. Many Cypriots who were not archaeologists were also involved and helped uncover the history of the site. For some archaeology became an important part of their own histories, like Maria Demetriou who worked in Nea Paphos for more than 30 years and who took care of the antiquities like she took care of herself.

Polish archaeological excavations in Nea Paphos began in 1965, with a team from the University of Warsaw headed first by Prof. Kazimierz Michałowski, then Prof. Andrzej Daszewski and Dr. Henryk Meyza. Working in collaboration with the Jagiellonian University in Kraków, the Polish Academy of Sciences and the Wrocław University of Technology, they investigated the residential area of Maloutena. In 2011, the second Polish team of the Jagiellonian University launched new research in the centre of the city, the Agora, directed by Prof. Ewdoksia Papuci-Władyka. She became the director of the joint Polish mission in 2019. Now, in collaboration with the Warsaw University of Technology, the expedition carries out a new project aiming at the 3D reconstruction of the city.

The Cypriot Department of Antiquities manages the Archaeological Park of Nea Paphos, opens it to visitors and ensures the protection and conservation of this amazing heritage. The Park attracts many archaeological expeditions from all over the world that work to further understand over 2400 years of the city's history and its networks with cultures outside the island.

In 1980, the ancient city of Nea Paphos, part of its necropolis, known as Tafoi ton Vasileon, and the Sanctuary of Aphrodite at Palaepaphos, were the first monuments in Cyprus to be inscribed on UNESCO World Heritage List.

The Agora

The Agora was the heart of the city. Here, Paphians would take political decisions, worship their gods or simply shop and gossip. The objective of the Paphos Agora Project was to recover the material traces of these activities and place them in time: When was the Agora created and how was it transformed over time? Was there a Hellenistic Agora underneath the Roman one?

The East Portico

Excavations at the East Portico of the Agora revealed a series of rooms of various functions from the Roman period. Among them a surgeon's office was identified thanks to the intact glass vessels and a toolkit of six surgical instruments which will be on display at a new museum in Nicosia.

The Hellenistic Agora

The discovery of two buildings, that were probably a temple and a warehouse from the early Hellenistic period, shows that the area which later became the Agora was in use from the very beginning of the city's existence. Recent excavations revealed that the Agora was founded in the 2nd century BC. It was much larger than originally believed: a square with sides of about 160 meters, one of the biggest agoras known from the Hellenistic world.

New questions

As the research evolved, new questions have been set, aiming to explore also the area outside and around the Agora and locate structures, such as harbors or workshops, that participated in the broader economy and trade network.



Maloutena

In the area of Maloutena, luxurious residences with elaborate mosaic floors were brought to light. Polish archaeologists and architects assisted in salvage excavations, before building a protective shelter for the mosaics. Salvage excavation is usually conducted before the construction of buildings and roads over archaeological sites to record and preserve archaeological information. At the time, they also explored the Hellenistic traces of the city that are buried under the Roman residences, built after the destructive earthquakes.

Villa of Theseus

After 150 AD, started the construction of the largest residence known from the Roman period in Cyprus, including more than a hundred rooms. The impressive mosaic floors depicted scenes from the mythology such as the fight between Theseus and the Minotaur. The painstaking craftsmanship behind the creation of the mosaics reveals the presence of highly skilled artisans.

Archaeologists wonder: Who resided in this house?

The villa was eventually abandoned in the early 7th century AD.



House of Aion

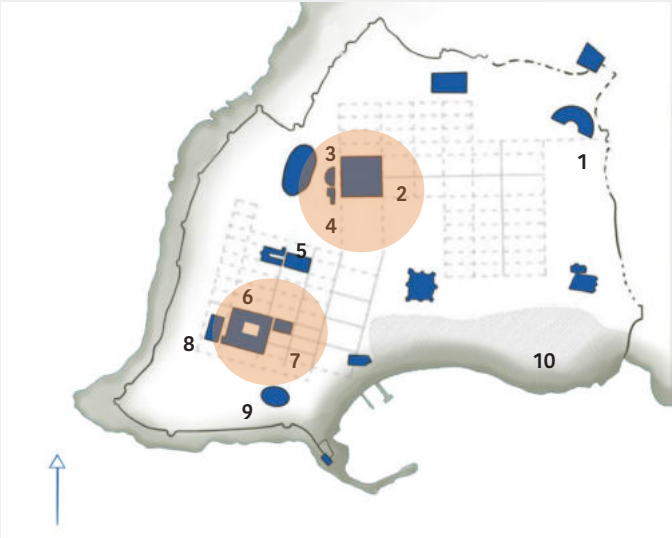
It was built in the 4th century AD and the mythological themes depicted on its mosaic panels provide a unique insight into a historical period when Christianity co-existed with the previous religious cult.

The house was named after a central mosaic panel where the god of eternal time, Aion, in the company of Zeus and the other gods, as well as the personification of Krisis preside over a beauty pageant between the mortal Cassiopeia and the Nereids.

Scientific analysis & technology in archaeology

Excavation is only a part of archaeology today. Many other studies take place in scientific laboratories. Archaeologists join forces with scientists from chemistry, physics, biology or geology, to study what is not visible on naked eyes (e.g. chemical or biological composition of substances) using advanced microscopes and imaging techniques. We can learn when, how or where an object was made in order to better understand the tangible and intangible aspects of life in the past. There are specialisations such as bioarchaeology and archaeobotany that focus on health, disease, diets, and crops through the analysis of human, animal or botanical remains.

Digital technologies are important tools for archaeologists. Unmanned Aerial Vehicles, for example, known as drones, allow the use of techniques such as aerial photography and photogrammetry. These techniques enable precise measurements, mapping of extensive areas and creation of 3D models. The new Polish project will create a 3D model of the archaeological park of Nea Paphos. We will be able to see the streets and buildings of different historical periods, so that we better understand how the city functioned and changed over time. It will also be possible to study structures and landscape features that normally remain out of sight from the ground.



- 1. THEATER
- 2. AGORA
- 3. ODEON
- 4. ASCLEPEION
- 5. HOUSE OF DIONYSOS
- 6. VILLA OF THESEUS AND "HELLENISTIC HOUSE"
- 7. HOUSE OF AION
- 8. HOUSE OF ORPHEUS
- 9. AMPHITHEATER
- 10. EXTENT OF ANCIENT HARBOR

Foundation of Nea Paphos	Cyprus becomes part of the Ptolemaic Kingdom 294 BC	Nea Paphos becomes capital of Cyprus	Erection of the East Portico of the Agora	Cyprus is annexed by Rome 58 BC	Earthquake. Collapse and end of use of the East Portico 126 AD	Construction of the Villa of Theseus 150 AD	Sebaste Claudia Flavia Paphos	Construction of the House of Aion	Salamis becomes the new capital of Cyprus
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