



Chemical analyses of Roman wall paintings recently found in Paphos, Cyprus: The complementarity of archaeological and chemical studies

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Archaeometry
Hellenistic and Roman Paphos
Cyprus
Wall paintings

ABSTRACT

The ancient city of *Nea* (New) *Paphos* lies on the south-western coast of Cyprus. It has been a UNESCO World Heritage site since 1980. Archaeological surveys and excavations led on *Fabrika* Hill, on the north-east acropolis of the ancient city of Hellenistic and Roman Paphos revealed the existence of important Hellenistic quarries, water supplies and houses of the same period. An important Roman building was found, with traces of wall paintings in different spaces. In order to confirm the relative chronology of this Roman building given by archaeological stratigraphic and stylistic analyses, as well as technical observations, twenty-five samples of different kinds of wall paintings were collected for chemical analyses of inorganic and/or organic constitutive materials. Frescoes have been identified and all the pigments were of mineral origin. At least two different phases in the Roman building on the northern part of the site and another probably older kind of wall painting on the southern part have been successfully differentiated.

1. Introduction. A Roman building found by the French archaeological expedition at Paphos (*Fabrika* Hill). Archaeological context and aims of the study

1.1. Ancient Paphos: site and archaeological research

The ancient city of *Nea* (New) *Paphos* lies on the south-western coast of Cyprus, 15 km to the west of the famous sanctuary of Aphrodite in *Palae* (Old) *Paphos*. It has been a UNESCO World Heritage site since 1980. If Agapenor is said to have created Paphos on his way back from the Trojan War, no historical evidence can provide the name of its true creator. Could it be Nikokles, the last Cypriot king of Paphos, or Ptolemy, Alexander's general? The beginnings of New Paphos are still being debated (Daszewski, 1987; Młynarczyk, 1990; Bekker-Nielsen, 2000; Balandier, 2014; Vitas, 2016). Despite the fact that different archaeological expeditions (Australian, Cypriot, Italian, and Polish ones) had been led in Paphos (for a synthesis on the archaeological results see Nicolaou, 1966 and Młynarczyk, 1990), the hill on the north-east side of the ancient city of Hellenistic and Roman Paphos (Fig. 1), called *Fabrika* Hill, remained unexcavated until 2008: only the area of the theatre underwent research, being first excavated by Prof. Richard Green and then by Dr. Craig Barker and Dr. Smadar Gabrieli from the University of Sydney. However, the top of the hill and its surroundings

were not researched and remained outside the archaeological preserved area (Green et al., 2004; Barker, 2016). Dr. Claire Balandier was first approached by the former Director of the Department of Antiquities of Cyprus, Dr. Pavlos Flourentzos, to work specifically on *Fabrika* Hill. The French archaeological expedition at Paphos (MafAP: Mission archéologique française à Paphos) was thus created under the auspices of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Avignon University, and the first excavation season on *Fabrika* Hill started on 15th April 2008. The first aim of the expedition was to make an inventory of the archaeological remains and to identify the different occupation layers of the hill. During the first archaeological season, a field survey and some archaeological soundings brought the fact to light that the hill was occupied from the Hellenistic period until modern times (a cemetery, probably dating from the 19th century, was identified on the top of the northern part of the hill).

1.2. New excavations on *Fabrika* Hill by the French archaeological expedition at Paphos: Roman building and wall paintings: archaeological description

Archaeological surveys and excavations revealed the existence of important Hellenistic quarries, of houses of this same period and of what was probably once part of the city wall. An underground aqueduct

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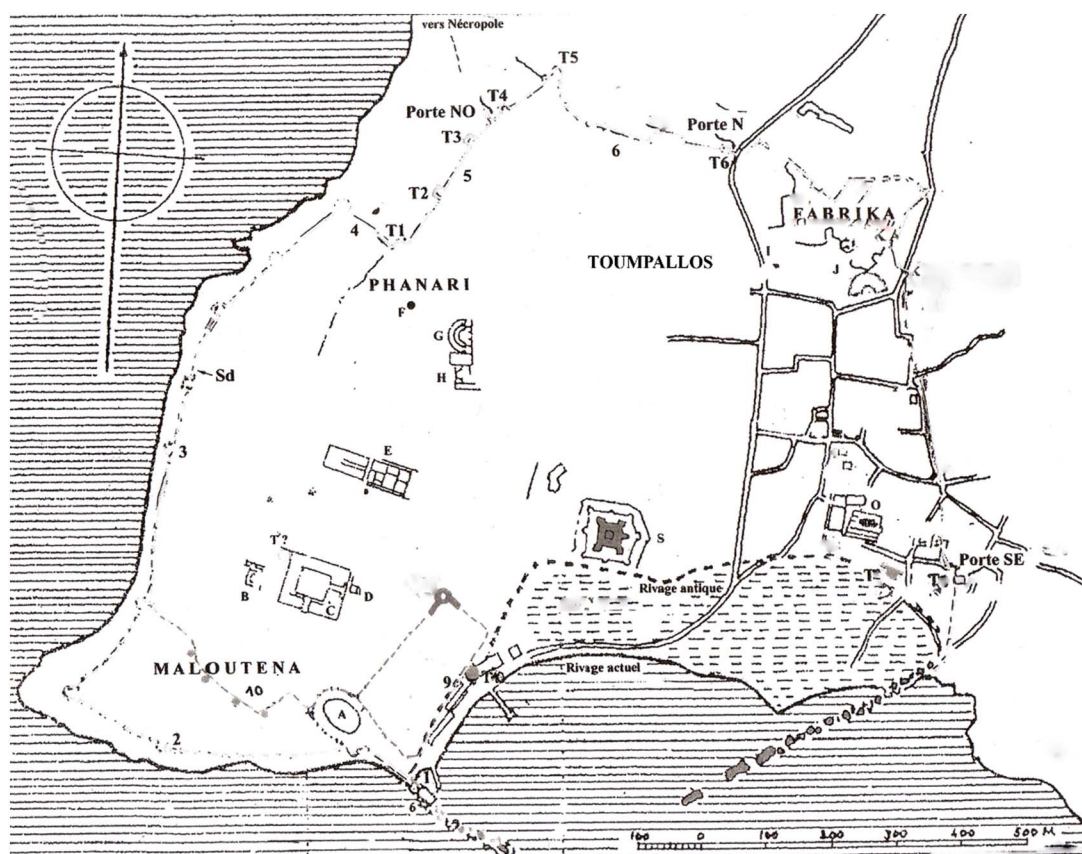


Fig. 1. Map of the ancient city of Paphos with location of Fabrika Hill (after Balandier and Guinrand, 2016).

opening onto a large cistern used in the 2nd century AD, together with an important Roman building, were also found (Balandier, 2015; Balandier and Guinrand, 2016). In 2009 the southern wall of this Roman building was unearthed at the foot of the northern edge of the hill (Balandier 2011–2012).

A trench opened against the northern face of this wall revealed traces of wall paintings. Many pieces of red lines on a white background were found (Fig. 2).

In 2010, another wall was found 3.50 m in front of this first wall with the remains of a window and a doorway (Fig. 3).

The north face of this wall still bore wall paintings but of a different style (Figs. 4 and 5): red square panels separated by green and blue frames (colors not visible on the picture, only on detail).

The continuation of the excavations (2010 to 2016, except 2013) brought to light the fact that these remains belonged to a large building, circa 20 m long east/west but whose eastern and northern limits have not yet been accurately defined. At least nine spaces (rooms and courtyards) were identified (Fig. 6).

The excavation of Space 1 reached as far as the foundation of the building and indicated that it had been completely filled after the collapse of the south wall (Balandier, 2013–2014; Balandier and Guinrand, 2016). It appears that the building was built at the beginning of the 1st century AD and that the fill of the room dates from the Tiberian times.¹

It is probably at that period that the building was partly damaged by an earthquake or by the pressure of the ground soil. Space 1 was completely filled with debris and abandoned: the window and the doorway were closed and the space situated to the north of it displayed wall paintings of a new kind: red panels with green frames. It seems that this space was first an open space (given that there was the window)



Fig. 2. Samples of fragments of wall paintings from Space 1 (©MafaP).

and then became a closed space. This new room (Space 0) opened onto another space (Space 2) through its eastern wall, giving access to other spaces (Spaces 3, 5, 6, 7) to the south of an open space (main courtyard). No floor remained but its level to just above the bedrock in Space 0 could be restituted. The excavation of the doorway showed that it had probably been narrowed in order to strengthen it after the damage to

¹ Ceramic evidence was studied by Sandrine Elaigne (CNRS, Lyon).

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