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TEXTILE FRAGMENT FROM A WELL
IN THE NEA PAPHOS AGORA.
A PRELIMINARY REPORT

Abstract: *During the 2014 season a late Hellenistic well was explored as part of the excavations on the Nea Paphos Agora. Many special finds, including ceramic vessels, iron and bronze items, and lamps were found. Moreover, on the bottom of the well a piece of textile attached to metal application was discovered. In our paper, we would like to present preliminary examination of that artefact, which is very uncommon considering the rarity of such remains in Cyprus.*

Keywords: *Agora Nea Paphos; textile*

Introduction

Since 2011 the Department of Classical Archaeology of the Jagiellonian University, led by Prof. Ewdoksia Papuci-Władyka, has been excavating the Agora of Hellenistic-Roman Nea Paphos.¹ The city, approximately 1ha in area, is located on the west coast of Cyprus, on a peninsula convenient to ancient sea routes linking Greece, Egypt and the Near East.

Nea Paphos was founded in the late 4th or early 3rd century BC. However, despite many years of research, it has not yet been determined whether Nikokles, the last king of Palaipaphos, or Ptolemy I was the founder.

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The latest archaeological evidence (Bekker-Nielsen 2000, 202; Balandier 2011, 376) has revealed that the town developed gradually throughout the 3rd century BC thanks to the policies that the Lagids followed on the island itself, and beyond its boundaries. In the late 3rd century BC, it became the administrative and economic centre of Cyprus as well as the home port for Ptolemy's main navy. After coming under Roman rule in 58 BC, Paphos retained its position until the mid-4th century AD, when an earthquake destroyed it. Despite rebuilding efforts, the city lost its dominant role on the island, to be finally abandoned in the mid-7th century AD (Megaw 1988, 150).

The Paphos Agora was probably erected with all the architectural features typical of a newly founded Hellenistic city: city walls, a port and a theatre (Młynarczyk 1990, 94–105; Barker 2015, 45; Pl. 1). It was designed as a square, which from around the 2nd/1st century BC was enclosed by porticoes on at least three sides: from the east, south and west (the boundaries of the northern portico have not been identified). Current excavation works are comprised of four trenches: I – in the Agora's centre, where the remains of a large building, possibly a temple, are being unearthed, II – in the eastern portico, III – at the southern entrance to the Agora, on the internal side, and IV – in the south-east corner of the Agora (Pl. 2) (Papuci-Władyka *et al.* forthcoming).

Excavations in the eastern portico have revealed a series of rooms, the construction of which is dated to Augustus's era when the building, and in fact the whole town, underwent a thorough reconstruction. The decision to undertake reconstruction was made following a catastrophic earthquake which struck Cyprus in 17 or 15 BC. At the current stage of the research, it appears that the part of the portico directly connected with the eastern entrance to the Agora was entirely reconstructed, as its Hellenistic remains are few. More Hellenistic structures, which must have been adapted to suit the new organizational layout of the building, survive in the southern part of the portico. One of them is a water well, whose framework remained intact despite it going out of use between the late 2nd century BC and the mid-1st century BC (Pl. 3). Most likely, the upper part of the curbing was converted to form part of the design of room 13 (Pl. 4). The condition of the preserved Hellenistic water infrastructure makes it impossible to precisely determine whether the well was an isolated one, providing a source of fresh groundwater only, or whether it also served as a reservoir. Siting water wells within agora porticoes was common architectural practice in the Hellenistic-Roman era (Papuci *et al.* forthcoming).

The well was 7m deep (Pl. 4). The current fresh water table is 6m below the ground. The over ground structure was built on a square plan with stone slabs forming the reservoir's opening. After reaching the bedrock, the builders dug into it, rendering the well oval in its lower part. At 5.5m below the ground, the shape of the well becomes irregular, which is because the builders encountered a clay deposit providing a natural path for water flow. Interestingly, although this is not the only identified attempt at digging a well in the Agora, it is the first one to have been proven successful. In 2012 a well located in the centre of the square was explored. It seems, however, that being unable to reach the water table, its builders had converted the dug structure into a cistern (Rosińska-Balik and Misk 2016).

The well in room 13 (S.173) was filled up at one point in time, which is evident from numerous potsherds that fit together even though they were often found at different depths. The well yielded an abundance of precious archaeological material: besides a piece of a lead ferrule with a preserved textile fragment, which is the main focus of this article, large quantities of pottery were discovered: tableware – complete shapes (Papuci *et al.* forthcoming), cooking ware – complete shapes (Nocoń 2016; Papuci *et al.* forthcoming), plain ware and amphorae – very large sherds preserved (Dobosz 2016; Papuci *et al.* forthcoming), almost 60 coins (Papuci *et al.* forthcoming), four oil lamps, a fragment of a mould for casting coin flans, lead sling-bullets, loom weights, sherds of metal pots (Wacławik 2016; Papuci *et al.* forthcoming), glass and other decorations. An analysis of this material, both ceramic and numismatic, made it possible to determine that the well had been filled up between the late 2nd century BC and the mid-1st century BC. Also, finds related with the use of the well itself were discovered at its very bottom, such as a fully preserved lead bucket, which must have been used for drawing water. Another interesting piece recovered is a bronze bracelet, likely simply lost by someone.

The well is an extremely important architectural structure. Its framework clearly comes from an earlier period than the portico, which suggests the Hellenistic chronology of the latter. It is one of rather few clues that the Agora may actually be older than the Roman period (Papuci *et al.* forthcoming).

The textile

The textile fragment was found in a layer of very wet sediment which filled the well. The sediment consisted of external material mixed with clay

in which the well had been dug. The textile itself is attached to a double-layer metal curved-shaped item (3 x 3cm), maybe part of a disc with a hole (0.5cm in diameter). It was probably a piece of a garment. pXRF examination of the metal revealed that the item was mainly made of lead with a large addition of iron.

The textile is preserved due to the presence of metal salts.

The size is *c.* 2.7cm along the warp and *c.* 4cm along the weft. It is made of shiny undyed medium single S-spun (anti-clockwise) linen identified by magnifying the photos, *c.* 13 threads per cm at the warp and *c.* 7 threads per cm at the weft. It seems that the same thread was used for both the warp and the weft. Although the edges were not preserved we could identify the warp and the weft because linen textiles usually have more warp threads. The technique is plain weave, known from the Neolithic period (Pl. 5: 1) (Shamir 2014; Shamir 2015). On the opposite side there is a thread with a knot at the edge (Pl. 5: 2). The quality is medium and the thickness of the threads is uneven.

The textile is probably part of a garment. It resembles linen textiles from the Hellenistic and Roman periods in, for example, the Land of Israel (Shamir 2013), which are plain weave with more threads along the warp than the weft (as opposed to wool).

Loom weights were found at the well. The textile could have been produced on a warp-weighted loom in use during this period and earlier in Cyprus (Barber 1991; Smith *et al.* 2015).

The textile remnant from Paphos is of importance because only a few archaeological textiles from Cyprus are known.

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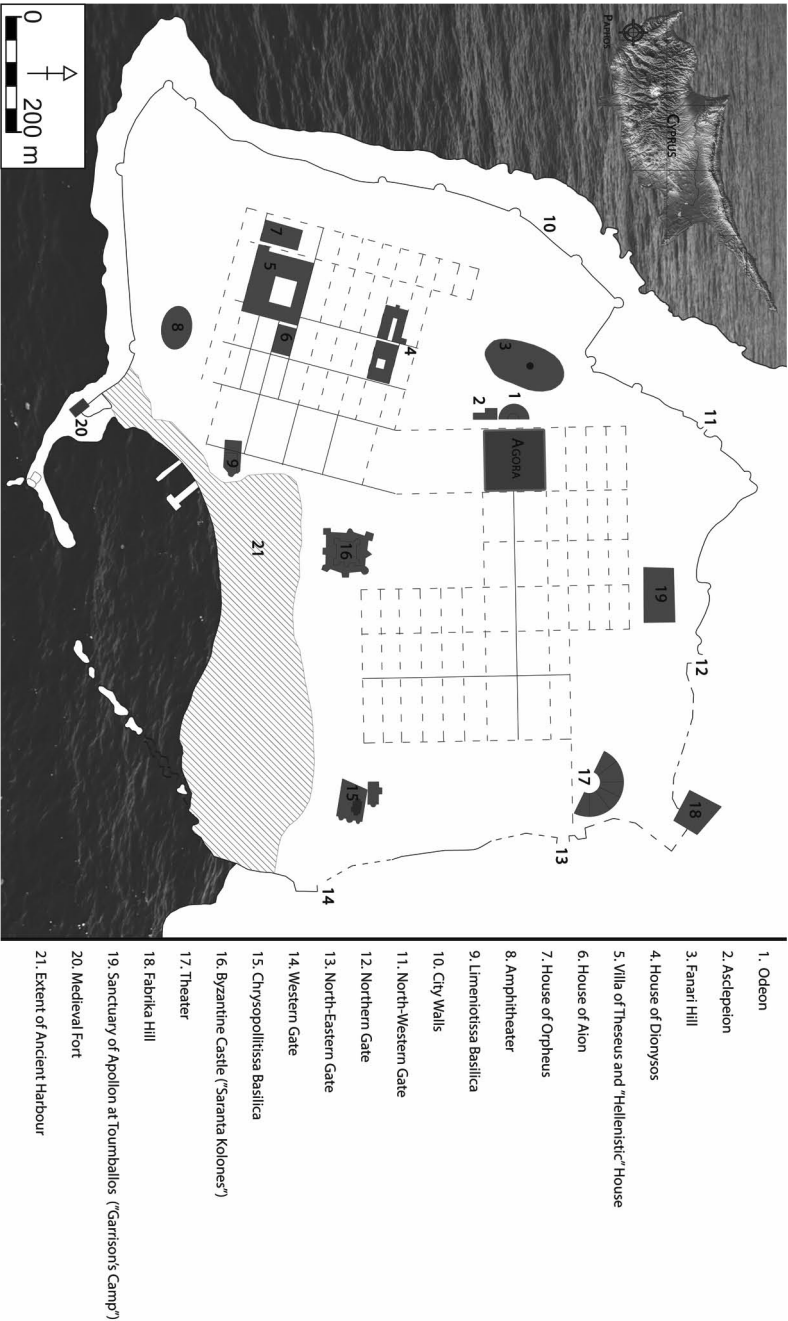
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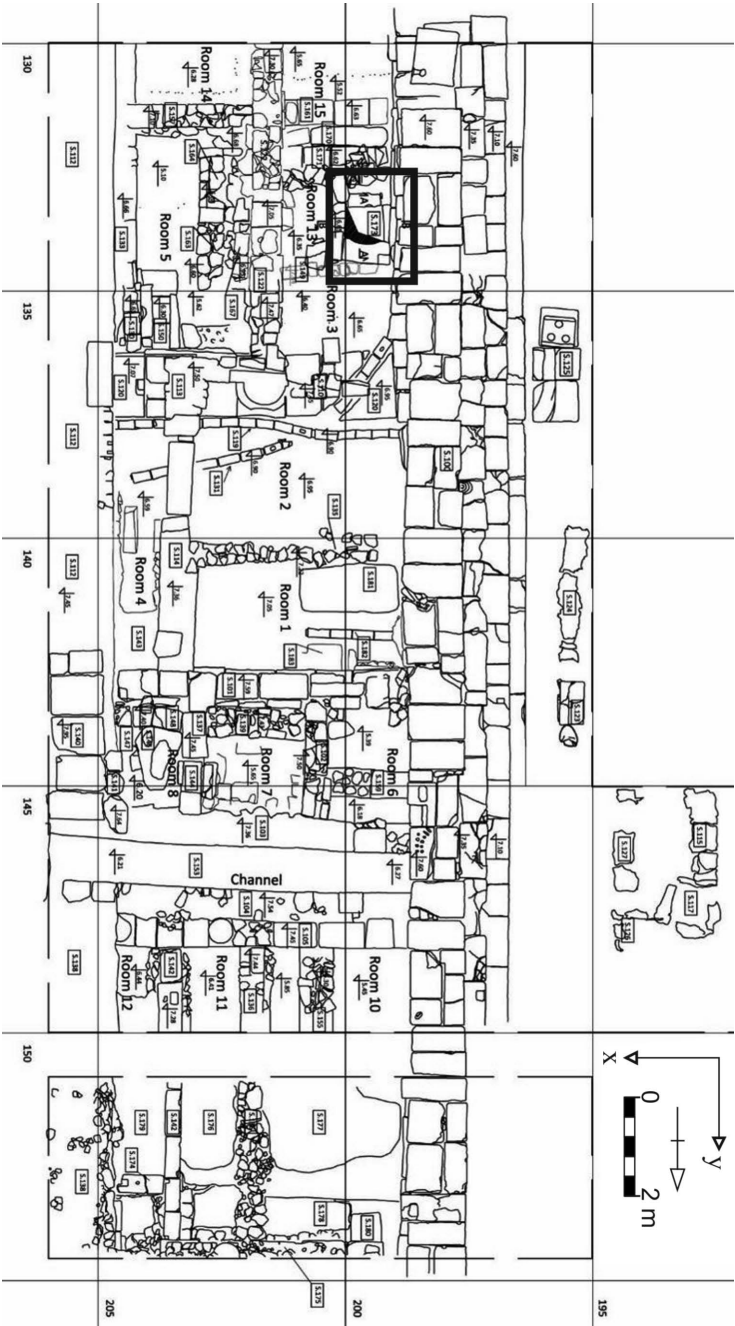


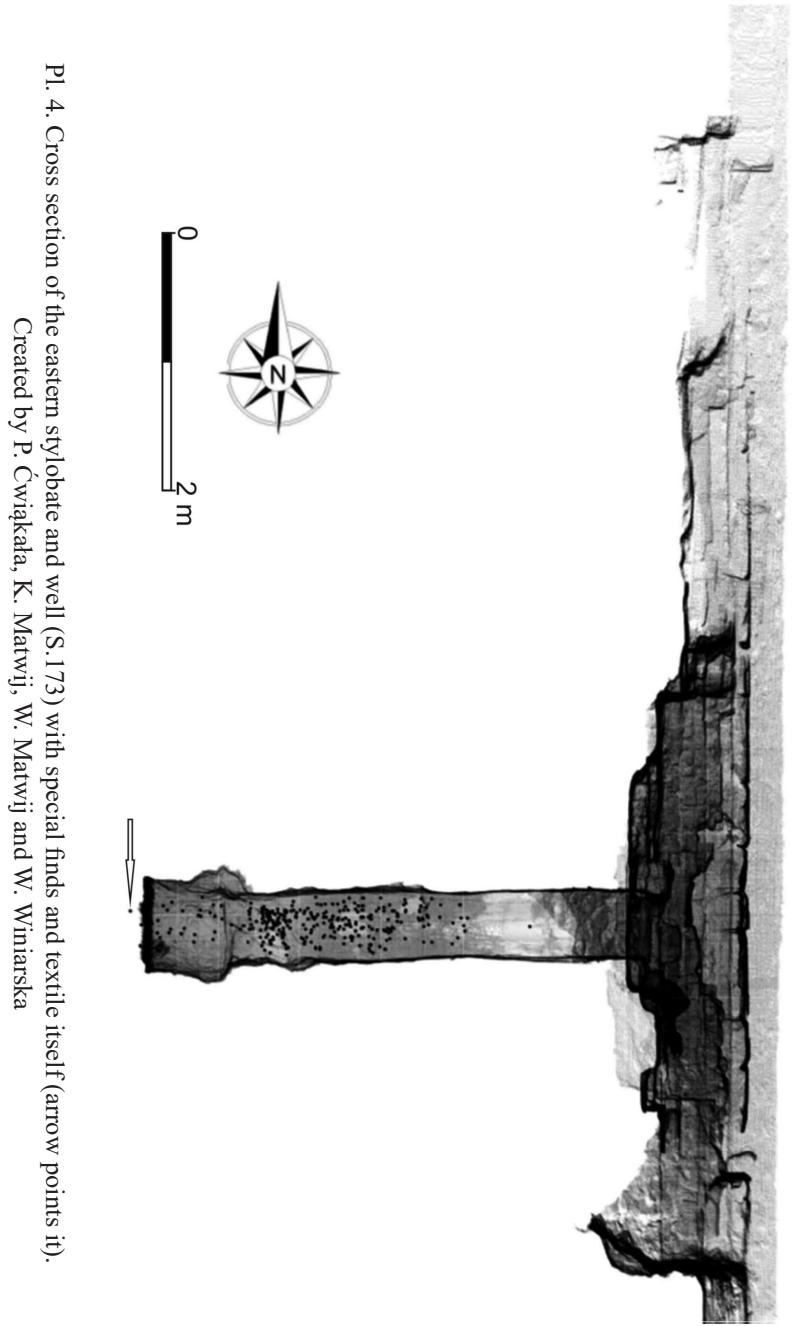
Pl. 1. Plan of ancient Nea Paphos. Reproduced from Młynarczyk 1990, fig. 16, with modification by Paphos Agora Project



Pl. 2. Orthophoto map coupled with architectural plan of the Nea Paphos Agora. Trench II is located in the middle of the eastern stoa. Created by K. Rosińska-Balik

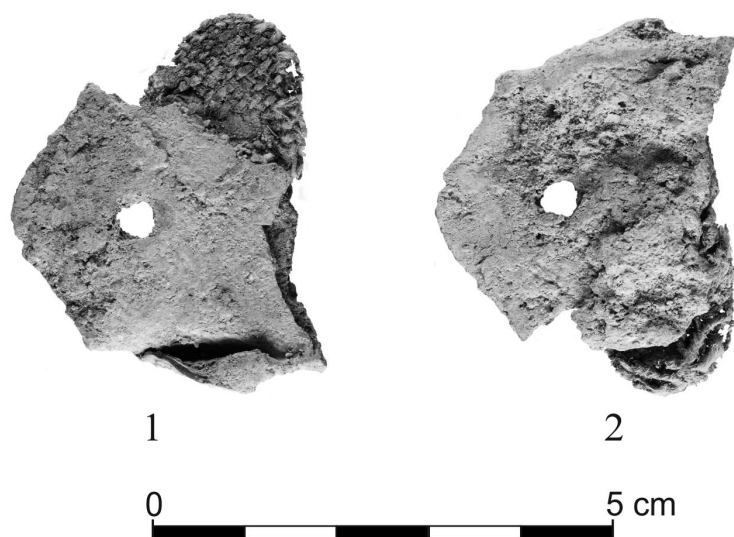
Pl. 3. Trench II with marked well S.173. Drawn by K. Rosińska-Balik





Pl. 4. Cross section of the eastern stylobate and well (S. 173) with special finds and textile itself (arrow points it).

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Pl. 5. 1 – Plain weave tabby; 2 – Athread with a knot at the edge. Photo by A. Oleksiak