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RECONSTRUCTION OF A FAÇADE OF THE HOUSE OF AION, NEA PAPHOS, CYPRUS

Abstract: *The subject of this paper is a reconstruction of the architectural decoration of a façade of the House of Aion in Nea Paphos. During an excavation carried out in 1997 several pieces of decorated architectural elements were uncovered in room 19, among others the fragments of an arch, a lintel, an engaged column, an impost and two consoles. Those blocks served as a base for the reconstruction of the architectural frame of the main gateway. It took the form of a cantilevered, blind arcade of five spans erected above the main gate. Each span consisted of two engaged columns supporting an arch with a shallow niche underneath it, probably for a kind of decorative element. The reconstruction was based on similar architectural details known from the main room of the House of Aion, the Porta Aurea at the palace of Diocletian in Split, and the western façade of the Felix Romuliana Palace in Gamzigrad.*

Keywords: *Nea Paphos; House of Aion; façade; architectural decoration; blind arcade*

The subject of this paper is a reconstruction of the architectural decoration of a wall whose relics were uncovered in the House of Aion in Nea Paphos, an ancient city on the south-west coast of Cyprus (Pl. 1: 1). The excavations of the house carried out by the Polish Archaeological Mission of the University of Warsaw in Kato Paphos started in 1982 under the supervision of Professor Wiktor A. Daszewski. The richly embellished building was most probably erected in the 4th century AD (Daszewski 1985; Daszewski 1998a, 12–15).

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In 1997, apart from rubble scattered on the late floor, a pit filled with blocks, many of which were decorated, was uncovered in room 19 in the eastern part of the edifice (Pls. 1: 2, 2: 1). The position and mutual configuration of the decorated pieces did not bring any information about their original location except for their relation to the House of Aion. Other finds from that room (e.g. coins) proved that this part of the building was erected in the late Constantinian period at the earliest, probably even slightly later (Daszewski 1998b, 127–129, figs. 6, 7; Daszewski *apud* Hadjisavvas 1998, 691–692; Daszewski 1999, 172–173, fig. 10; Lichocka and Meyza 2001, 168, 201–202, fig. 7).

Members of architectural decoration from room 19 of the House of Aion

13 fragments of architectural elements were found in room 19 of the House of Aion (Pl. 2). They were all carved out of a local stone, calcarenite, and have on their surface very dilapidated remains of a thin layer of whitewash or fine-grained plaster. They are pieces of five types of architectural elements: a lintel, an arch, an impost, an engaged column and a console. The commensurate size of the elements indicates their belonging to the same 'unit' of decoration.

Lintel

Among the uncovered material there were four blocks constituting a fragment of a lintel (Pl. 2: 2). Two blocks originally belonged to the central part of the beam while the other two were corner blocks. The front side of the blocks is decorated with a moulding (fillet, egg and dart, hollow tongue with crescent base separated by reels, bead and reel, fillet). The lateral sides of the corner blocks received a simpler decoration (fillet, *ovolo*, *cyma recta*, *ovolo*, fillet). The top and bottom surfaces of blocks are flat and horizontal; the back one is vertical. The total length of the lintel remains unknown because the side surfaces of the blocks from its central part are destroyed, and most probably the four blocks did not originally create the whole beam.

Arch

Four voussoirs have been preserved constituting less than half of the arch (Pl. 2: 3). Their front side was decorated with mouldings (fillet, *ovolo*, *cyma recta*, fillet, fillet) protruding significantly from the elements. The moulding on one of the blocks is broken: it runs along the arch and

in the lower part of the block the whole profile turns at about a 100^0 angle (an angle between the turned moulding and the lateral side of the blocks is about 5^0). The bottom and side surfaces are flat. The upper one is flat only above the moulding, the rest of it is very irregular and convex – most probably it was embedded in the wall.

Two voussoirs with 'regular' decoration were originally in the middle part of the vault. One, with a broken moulding, was placed in the lower part of the arch, probably lying on the impost.

Column

Two pieces remained from a three-quarter column joined with blocks from the wall: a capital and the upper part of the shaft (Pl. 2: 4). The capital is characterized by a simplified form. In its lower part, there are only two wide plain leaves (only the main nerve is underlined) with a single *cauliculus* between them. In the central part of the capital it divides into two sprouts creating corner volutes above the leaves. A two-fasciae abacus is decorated in the middle with a fleuron/shell.

Consoles

Two consoles of similar size, shape and decoration were found among other pieces of the architectural detail (Pl. 2: 5). The blocks comprise the following parts: one with decoration, being the outer bracket; and another of a roughly rectangular shape which originally was embedded into the wall. Their geometric decoration consists of several fasciae and cyma recta.

Impost

One block found in room 19 took a very interesting although rather modest form without any kind of decoration (Pl. 2: 6). It was characterized by flat surfaces: vertical sides and a horizontal bottom; the upper part was broken in the middle with two surfaces falling outside. The block outline was therefore shaped like a symmetrical pentagon.

The fragments described above were theoretically and temporarily reassembled by Prof. Wiktor A. Daszewski, creating an anastylosis of a single, vaulted niche crowning a lintel presumably above a gateway (Daszewski 1998b, 128; Daszewski 1999, 172–173, fig. 10).

The late Prof. Stanisław Medeksza presented a different idea based on the impost block, which was not taken into account in Prof. Daszewski's proposition. Prof. Medeksza assumed that the impost constituted a base for springers of two adjacent arches and therefore the preserved fragments

originally belonged to a multi-arched arcade consisting of at least two vaults. Unfortunately, his premature death prevented Prof. Medeksza from carrying out a complete reconstruction of the architectural decoration. Dr. Henryk Meyza, present director of the Polish Mission, asked me to continue his study. Thus, the first step I undertook was to investigate the analogies with the decoration from the House of Aion which could have been helpful in recreating the whole design.

Analogies to the architectural decoration from the House of Aion

Niche from the main room of the House of Aion

The niche from room 1 of the House of Aion constitutes an obvious and nearest analogy to the pieces of architectural decoration found in room 19 (Daszewski 1998b, 128; Daszewski *apud* Hadjisavvas 1998, 691–692). They were found in 1982 within rubble lying on the so-called 'Late Roman Street' between the Villa of Theseus and the House of Aion and belonged to the main room of the latter (Daszewski 1984, 294–314). The number of blocks and their arrangement in the rubble allowed a theoretical anastylosis (Mikocki 1992, 135–150) and its subsequent physical reconstruction (Pl. 3: 1) (Medeksza 1987, 227–230).

The whole element was integrated into the middle part of the inner western wall of the main room and placed on a low socle. It consisted of the central vaulted semicircular niche framed with a pair of engaged columns crowned with a protruding broken lintel (Pl. 3: 1). Most probably a statue or another kind of decorative element was placed in the niche (Mikocki 1992, 149).

The bases (Pl. 3: 3) of engaged columns are composed of the plinth, the torus, the trochilus and another torus separated from each other by narrow *taenias* (Mikocki 1992, 147).

The capitals have a very specific shape of a convex calyx topped with an abacus having the shape of two-fasciae with a fleuron in its central part (Pl. 3: 2). The calyx consists of five plain broad leaves with sprouts growing between them and creating sets of two volutes. All the capitals from the House of Aion share a close resemblance, although the one found in room 19 is smaller and simpler than those from the main room. The similarity especially concerns the plain form of leaves creating the lower part of the capitals and the shape of the abacus.

Due to the highly characteristic shape of the capital leaves (large, fleshy and divided only by the main nerve without any pattern imitating the natural

structure of the leaf), the capitals can be associated with others of a similar decoration, called *Kapitelle mit vollen Blättern* (Capitals with solid leaves) or Egyptian-Corinthian capitals known from Rome, Syria and Egypt. The genesis of such capitals lies most probably in Egypt – one of the oldest examples of a capital derived from the Corinthian order mixed with the Egyptian lotus motive (simplified leaves) can be found in the Temple of Augustus on Philae (Pl. 3: 4) dated to 13–12 BC (Mikocki 1992, 147–149; McKenzie 2007, 166–167, pls. 286–289; Czerner 2009, 7, 58, fig. 11). In the case of Cyprus, the link with Egypt and north Africa is the most important. Capitals of a comparable form dated at *c.* AD 300 are known from Alexandria or Luxor (Pl. 3: 5) (McKenzie 2007, 223–227, pls. 389c, 394, 395) and from other Greco-Roman cities along the African coast of the Mediterranean Sea, e.g. in Ptolemais (House of Leukaktios, first half of the 3rd century AD [Rekowska 2012, 173–175, pl. 8.5A]).

Generally, capitals of that type appeared before the end of the 3rd century; they were very popular in the second half of the 4th century and disappeared at the beginning of the 5th century (Mikocki 1992, 147–149). This dating matches the time of the erection of the House of Aion in Nea Paphos, i.e. 4th century (Daszewski 1998a, 12–15; Daszewski 1998b, 127–129; Daszewski *apud* Hadjisavvas 1998, 691–692; Daszewski 1999, 172–173; Lichocka and Meyza 2001, 168, 201–202).

The lintel resting on the engaged columns was found only in few pieces in a poor condition, but they allowed recreation of the original pediment. It consisted of a broken, plain cornice topped with a crowning cornice of a more decorative character (*fascia*, *cavetto*, *fascia*, row of consoles, *cymatium* and corona). Similar mouldings, without any special, unique features, are known from many monuments in the Greco-Roman world (Mikocki 1992, 149).

The analogies with the design of the architectural decoration from the Aion House can be found in two palaces erected in the area of the Balkans: in Split (Pl. 4: 1) and in Gamzigrad (Pl. 4: 2). They were both built in the late 3rd and early 4th century, in the epoch of Tetrarchy (Ćurčić 1993, 70; Breitner 2011, 145). The first one was the palace of Diocletian, a complex which combined an imperial palace and a *castrum romanum*. After Diocletian's abdication (in AD 305), the palace served as the Emperor's mansion (Ward-Perkins 1994, 454–459; Nikšić 2011, 187). The second one was erected by Galerius in AD 298 and named *Felix Romuliana* after the Emperor's mother Romula (Nikšić 2011, 191).

From the point of view of this article, their architectural decoration constitutes one of the most important features. The usage of niches and arcades as the leading idea of the design may be observed e.g. in the interior of the Mausoleum of Diocletian or in façades of both palaces (Mikocki 1992, 145). Many similarities concern the composition of the façades with the main, monumental gates leading to the palaces. In both cases, they were adorned with very rich architectural decoration. An arched, wide gate with two lateral niches beside it is the main element of the composition. Above the gate there are cantilevered arcades supported by columns with capitals made of Proconnesian marble. The style of decorative elements (capitals, consoles, cornices, string courses, etc.) confirms the same origin in one of the imperial workshops. The degree of similarity in both the plan and details might even prove that the same architect or workshop was involved in the erection of those two palaces (Marasović and Marasović 1968, 26; Čanak-Medić 1978, 118; Nikšić 2011, 192).

The pieces of architectural decoration found in room 19 of the House of Aion in Nea Paphos strongly resemble the details from the main façades of those palaces.

Porta Aurea at the palace of Diocletian in Split

In the centre of the main façade (Pl. 4: 1), between two lateral towers, there is a wide gateway closed with a horizontal flat arch, composed of carefully fitted blocks, crowned with a cornice of a rich moulding. Above the lintel there is a relieving arch made of a set of voussoirs decorated with an archivolt. Two semicircular niches were placed symmetrically on both sides of the gate. Their architectural frame consists of a massive, moulded sill, and two side consoles supporting Corinthian pilasters. They bear the conchs separated from the niches by small delicate string courses (McNally 1996, 41).

A massive string course connects the façade with the two lateral towers. It is boldly marked on the wall between the towers and the side niches, taking the form of either a plain or a patterned moulding. Then it fades above the conchs of the lateral niches, probably due to the lack of space for the frame of the conchs[1] (possibly never executed) and reappears

[1] There are certain features of the main façade composition which prove imperfections and haste at the stage of design and construction: the interruption of the string course by the consoles of the arcade, the arch of the gateway and vaults of the side niches. That is why they most probably never received a classical arched or pedimented termination (Nikšić 2004, 167; Nikšić 2011, 196).

in the central part to reach the archivolt above the gate. However, in this part it presents a much more modest form (McNally 1996, 41; Nikšić 2011, 196).

Above the string course there is a blind arcade – an ornamental architectural element having no load-bearing function, protruding significantly from the façade. It consists of seven spans. The central one, above the gate, is shallow and rectangular. Next to it, there are two plain spans, and further two of a semicircular, concave shape. The external spans, next to the towers, are plain as well. The width of the spans changes also in relation to their shape – the central rectangular and the two semicircular are narrower than the flat ones.

The arcade is characterized by a very rich architectural frame. Six consoles with parts of the string course between them constitute its base. Their bottom surfaces are the most interesting parts of the brackets: the four outer consoles are provided with acanthus leaves, and the two innermost with horned humanoid heads – satyrs. The consoles originally supported columns that are now missing (McNally 1996, 42). However, they are presented in the 18th century illustrations (Adam 1764, pl. XII): Corinthian columns with smooth shafts creating a cantilevered colonnade bearing the imposts and arches. Their lack resulted in changing the structure of the upper part of the façade, because the once-supported elements (imposts and arches) now constitute a row of brackets.[2] Above the imposts there is a string course of a very decorative character underlining the depth and shape of each span. The arches above the spans creating niches (rectangular or semicircular) are a bit shorter than in the case of plane spans. Their decoration consists of three fasciae and a raking cornice, which connect above each impost, the fasciae by a straight line, while the cornices meet at a point (McNally 1996, 42).

The top of the façade is closed with a crown moulding, on which four pedestals are placed. Their original number and position is unknown (McNally 1996, 42).

The niches in the façade (those next to the gateway and those in the arcade) as well as the pedestals were prepared for the statues most probably representing the gods-protectors of the Tetrarchy (Cambi 2005, 166–167). The shallow central niche of the arcade could have been arranged for a stone slab with a relief or inscription. However, there are no traces

[2] The cantilevered arcade eccentrically loaded the upper part of the wall. Disassembly of the colonnade weakened the structure and caused the wall to lean outward and destroy the voussoirs (Nikšić 2004, 167; Nikšić 2011, 196).

of any kind of a mounting either in the niches or on the pedestals, which might prove that the statues were never installed there (Nikšić 2004, 167; Nikśić 2011, 196).

West Gate of the Felix Romuliana Palace in Gamzigrad

The general composition of the main, western façade in the palace of *Felix Romuliana* (Pl. 4: 2) strongly resembled the north façade of Diocletian Palace in Split – in both cases the arcade is one of the major elements of the design. In Gamzigrad, however, the project was in many ways more complex. The façade (from the second phase of erecting the fortification walls), flanked by polygonal towers (just as in Split), had an outline of a very flat arch, slightly concave in the central part. It was composed of three levels: the bottom one with the gateway and two lateral niches; the central one with a gallery consisting of five spans; and the top one with another gallery of seven spans.[3] Both galleries were arcaded and formed a row of windows and not a blind arcade, which is the first and biggest difference in comparison with the palace in Split. The second one concerns the materials used to erect the edifices. In Split the whole building was made of one type of stone. In Gamzigrad three materials were used: red brick, grey sandstone and white limestone (Breitner 2011, 144–146). Such a solution brought a new factor to the design – the colour. Brick and sandstone were mostly used to create walls,[4] while limestone was generally applied in the decorative elements.

The main façade of the *Felix Romuliana* palace was characterised by a very rich architectural frame. A sandstone socle constituted the base of the building. A massive string course consisting of several *fasciae* separated it from the upper part of the wall erected in the *opus mixtum* technique (one course of stone alternates with three rows in brick). The main monumental gateway was located in the middle of the façade. It was closed with a wide semicircular arch (five wide *fasciae*) based on the string course. Originally there was probably a rectangular stone slab installed above the arch, now missing. Two semicircular niches for sculptures symmetrically flanked the main gate. They stood directly on the string course crowning

[3] The upper part of the façade is reconstructed on the basis of numerous pieces of architectural decoration found during excavations: columns, pilasters, window sills, consoles, *voussoirs*, etc. (Čanak-Medić 1978, 78, fig. 60; Ćurčić 1993, 70, 85, fig. 11; *Nomination* 2005; Breitner 2011, 143–146).

[4] *Nomination* 2005.

the socle and were made in the same *opus mixtum* technique, except for conchs built entirely of brick.

A massive sandstone string course separated the bottom level of the façade from the middle one: the first gallery of a complex structure. It was designed as an arcade of five spans, each containing a window closed with a semicircular arch. Its rich architectural frame, made of sandstone and limestone, partly projected from the surface of the wall (*opus mixtum*). The consoles bearing the outer part of the gallery were incorporated in the string course that created a wide platform on which supports separating the arcade spans were erected. They received a complex form of a window pillar strengthened with two sandstone Corinthian pilasters with a column in front of it protruding from the façade. The columns (Corinthian with fluted shafts) were supported by brackets placed in front of the window pillars. A cornice, characterized by a very rich moulding, rested on these complex supports protruding forward over the columns. Vaults closing the arcade were erected above the cornice: semicircular arches made of brick were carried by the window pilasters. Above the brick arches there were two kinds of vaults termination made of stone: the central and the external spans received a triangular pediment, the other two (between the triangular ones) were closed with another semicircular concentric vault. The triangular pediments received very complex decoration consisting of several parts (the first, semicircular, was placed around the brick arch and made of sandstone; the outer, triangular, was composed of two layers: the inner sandstone and the outer limestone [Breitner 2011, 144]). The round pediments were decorated with archivolts strongly resembling the decoration of the arcade from the *Porta Aurea* in Split (three fasciae and a raking cornice, which connect above each impost, the fasciae by a straight line, while the cornices meet at a point). The whole arcade consisted, therefore, of five spans closed with the cornice supporting either triangular or round open pediments.

The openings of the windows were in the lower parts blocked with stone slabs creating a balustrade. The outer surface of the slabs was decorated with an ornament along the circumference (Breitner 2011, 145).

The next string course running along the façade above the first gallery separated it from the top level – the second gallery. Its structure was similar to the middle one – a row of seven windows. The architectural frame of the top arcade was, however, a bit simpler. The consoles bearing the colonnade (eight smooth-shafted Ionic columns) were placed under the string course also constituting window sills. They were decorated with

alternating motives, among others heads of Medusa (McNally 1996, 42; Breitner 2011, 144). The window pillars were not equipped with additional side pilasters. The cornice resting on pillars and columns was also more modest than in the case of the lower gallery. The arcade termination consisted of semicircular arches composed, like in the first arcade, of two parts: the lower, inner made of bricks, and the upper, outer made of limestone. The decoration of the stone vaults was similar to the round pediments from the first gallery. The line of the arches was extended beyond the arcade by incorporating them in another string course. Similarly to the windows of the first gallery, those from the second one were also blocked in the lower part with stone balustrades.

Reconstruction of the main façade of the House of Aion

The general idea for the reconstruction incorporating pieces of architectural decoration found in room 19 assumes that they originally constituted fragments of the main, monumental façade, like in the examples from Split and Gamzigrad. The location of the House of Aion – next to the main street leading from Maloutena (a residential area in Paphos) to the city harbour – may indicate the usage of a special architectural frame around the main gateway to the edifice which had to be placed in the south façade open to the street. The arrangement of the façade takes into account the gate, above which a multi-span arcade could have been placed – this idea, introduced by Prof. Medeksza, was based upon the impost block, pieces of the arc and the engaged column corresponding with the decoration of the main façades from the Balkan palaces described above.

If we use the two façades as the base for recreating the main façade of the house of Aion, the symmetrical and axial composition should be the first and most important assumption. The axis of symmetry should most probably run through the gateway, making the two sides of the façade mirror reflections.

The lowest level of the façades in Split and Gamzigrad consisted of a main vaulted gateway and two lateral semicircular niches. In the case of House of Aion we have pieces of richly decorated lintel described above which could have originally constituted the architectural termination for the gateway. The lintel was composed of a set of blocks and therefore it had to rest on some kind of a girder, e.g. a beam or an arch like in *Porta Aurea* in Split. As we did not find any massive voussoirs, we assumed that the lintel was supported by wooden beams which have not been preserved until our

times. Neither do we have any traces of small side niches, so we presumed that there were no such elements in the main façade of the House of Aion (Pl. 5).

In the palaces of Diocletian and Galerius there were multi-span arcades above the gateway: one level of blind arcade in Split, and two levels of window galleries in Gamzigrad. In both cases the axis of symmetry ran through the gateway and through the central spans of the arcades above, so the total number of their spans was uneven: one in the middle and two or three on both sides. The same composition, a gateway with an arcade of an uneven number of spans above, could have been arranged in the House of Aion (Pl. 5). The position and the width of the gate (149cm) as well as the fragments of the lintel described above remain the only known elements of the door. Obviously, we do not know the height of the gate and the exact relation between it and the arcade above. The proportion of the door opening was recreated basing on Vitruvius' indications (Vitr. *De arch*. 4.6). The level of the arcade remains purely hypothetical, as the analogies from Split and Gamzigrad bring divergent solutions. The specific feature of the arrangement of the arcade requires detailed examination of each piece of the architectural detail found in room 19.

The size of all preserved elements of the arcade, i.e. the column, the arch and the consoles, indicates that once they all created one structure; it means that the columns supported the arch and were not placed outside it, as in the case of the decoration from room 1, where the columns are much bigger than the niche inside them.

The consoles were embedded into the wall by halves of their volume. They acted as the cantilevers carrying engaged columns. The range of the protruding part of the consoles shows the original position of the columns in relation to the wall and to the consoles themselves. The outer surface of the *cyma recta* of the consoles also indicates the outermost position of the column base (Pl. 6: 3).

The original height of the engaged columns and the form of their bases remain unknown due to a lack of fully preserved elements. Since the columns from the niche constitute the closest analogy (Pls. 3: 1, 2, 3, 6: 2), the missing features of the columns from the façade were reconstructed on the basis of the internal supports (their height equals 9.8 modules [Mikocki 1992, 141]).

The capitals of the engaged columns supported the arcade by the impost blocks that formed the two-side base for the springers (Pls. 2: 3, 6, 6: 3). Out of three preserved voussoirs, the one with broken moulding most

probably rested on the impost connecting with the same springer from another arch of the arcade. Together their broken mouldings created a straight, horizontal line above the impost which turned upwards on both sides of the block. The difference between the upper and the bottom surfaces of the voussoirs (the first is crude and the second is smooth) proves that the face of the wall, in which the vault was incorporated, was in a diverse position in relation to the arch: inside the arcade the wall face was set back further than the façade above it. If we correlate it with the position of the consoles and engaged columns, their mutual relation proves unequivocally that under the arch there was a shallow niche. It was framed with three-quarter columns protruding from the wall (engaged with a kind of a lesene having a width equal to the impost) bearing an arch.

Assuming that the bottom of the niche recreated in such a way equals the level of the upper surfaces of the consoles (where the bases of the engaged columns once stood), the proportion of the niche (the width to the height) does not correspond with any example described above (Pl. 6: 1).

In the case of the House of Aion, the comparison of the proportions between both niches: from the main façade and from the main room, shows that the first one is much slimmer than the second one (Pl. 6: 1).

In *Porta Aurea* we had to consider three cases: the side niches next to the gateway, the narrower and wider span of the blind gallery (Pl. 6: 1). In the first one, the niches are quite wide. In the second, we compared the proportion of the semicircular niche underneath the arch, which measures about 7/8 of the whole height of the arcade (the arch with the columns). It turned out that this niche was much slimmer than the niche from the façade of the House of Aion. The wider span of the blind arcade without an internal niche constitutes the third case. It is, however, a specific situation, because the examined shape is created by the inner outline of the columns and arch. The proportions of this circumference are very close to those from the recreated span, but it is a bit lower.

A similar situation occurred in the case of the niche from the main façade of *Felix Romuliana* palace – we studied three types of niches/galleries (Pl. 6: 1). The first ones were the lateral niches next to the gateway, then the first gallery and the second one (the openings were examined). The lateral niches had almost the same shape as the reconstructed span, although they are a bit lower. The windows of the first gallery and the second gallery were much lower than the span in question.

Such a variety of solutions in analogous edifices allows many different reconstructions. However, the example from Diocletian Palace of narrow

spans with smaller niches inside seemed the most accurate proposition, used in the final reconstruction as a general indication. The proportions for the reconstructed niche were taken from the closest analogy – the niche from the main room of the House of Aion. The niche, like in Split, was placed in the upper part of the span, right underneath the arch (Pl. 6: 3).

In Diocletian's Palace the arrangement of the blind arcade consisted of two kinds of spans: the narrower with the semicircular/rectangular niche and the wider without it. A similar design could have been used in the House of Aion, but there are no traces of such a solution applied in the main façade. Neither do we have evidence of the arcade being a gallery with windows or of alternating decoration of spans (triangular or semicircular pediment) like in Gamzigrad. That leads us to the idea of the axial composition of the main façade with a blind multi-span arcade and a gateway below (Pl. 5). The axis of symmetry would have had to run through the gate and the arcade central span with an equal number of identical spans on both sides. The exact number of spans remains unknown. For the purposes of the reconstruction we assumed that the minimum must have been five. The main gateway to the House of Aion is not in the middle of the façade, but shifted to the left side. That may indicate that only part of the south wall was originally equipped with a rich architectural frame in the form of a blind arcade described above. The 76cm-wide wall, in our opinion, was capable of bearing the significant burden of the cantilevered arcade (the columns protruding from the façade) which eccentrically loaded the wall.

Apart from the unidentified number of the arcade spans, neither do we know the kind of their termination. In Split outer spans were limited by two lateral towers. In Gamzigrad the galleries were not terminated in any special way, but parts of their decoration (arches or consoles) were incorporated into string courses running along the façade. In the case of the House of Aion, many fragments of cornices have been uncovered during excavation. However, their decoration does not match the mouldings of the pieces of architectural detail found in room 19. Such a situation indicates that there were no string courses running along the main façade of the House of Aion. The architectural frame of the gateway could have been limited in a different way. The meticulous analysis of the pieces of decoration points to the possibility of setting back the part of the wall with the arcade and the main gate in relation to the rest of the façade. If this design is accepted, the outer spans would be terminated by the edge of the recessed part of the wall (Pl. 5).

The differentiation of the wall face position combined with the rich architectural frame gives the façade of the House of Aion three-dimensional spaciousness and a *chiaroscuro* effect, which is especially important and suitable in southern Europe, where sharp light and shade underline all the decorations. This aspect of the design is characteristic of the architecture of the eastern Roman provinces in the late antiquity. Margaret Lyttelton (1974) defined and described this phenomenon as the baroque style in the antique architecture. Monumental edifices, like Temples at Baalbek or Khasne at Petra, are the best examples of this tendency, but, as the House of Aion shows, it may also be observed on a smaller scale. Several other aspects of this trend may be readily used to depict the reconstructed façade of the House of Aion, such as: 'an impression of movement is also given to the façades by the breaking up of the plane of the wall with the introduction of the projections and recessions...'; 'curved pediments are commonly used to crown niches...'; a-tectonic use of the structural elements: '...columns and pediments are not fulfilling the function for which they were intended but are used merely as decoration' (Lyttelton 1974, 11–13).

The main façade of a richly ornamented edifice was usually equipped with a kind of sculptural decoration combined with an architectural frame, e.g. a set of niches with statues or slabs with a relief or an inscription. The niches and the arcade from *Porta Aurea* were almost certainly designed for larger than life-sized statues placed in semicircular niches and decorative stone slabs in the shallow central niche (Nikšić 2004, 167; Cambi 2005, 166–167; Nikśić 2011, 196). Niches flanking the main gateway in *Felix Romuliana* palace served an analogous function. Similarly, the niche from the main room of the House of Aion was most probably intended for a life-sized statue (Mikocki 1992, 149). In the case of the reconstructed arcade from the main façade, the niches were rectangular and rather shallow, which indicates most probably placing stone slabs with some relief decoration. Unfortunately, we do not have any preserved fragments of such elements.

The hypothetical reconstruction of the decoration from the façade of the House of Aion is based on a relatively small number of preserved fragments of the architectural detail. Therefore, it may be considered as too audacious. The analysis of these pieces may also lead to different conclusions and in consequence to another reconstruction. However, the one presented in the paper seems to take into account all the specific features of the House of Aion: the character of the rich building, its location next to the main street connecting the residential area with the city harbour, and the necessity of emphasizing its main façade with suitable architectural decoration.

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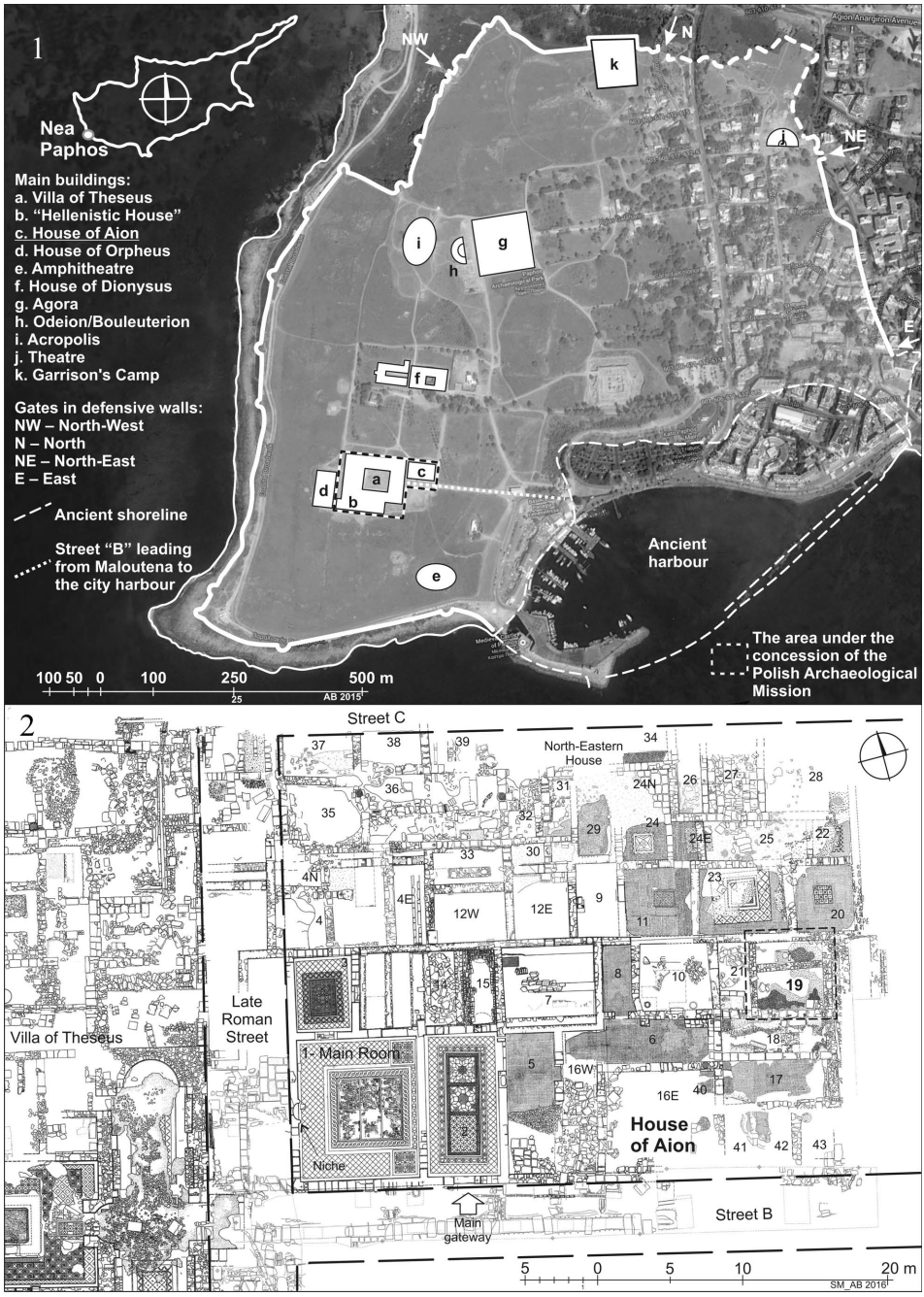
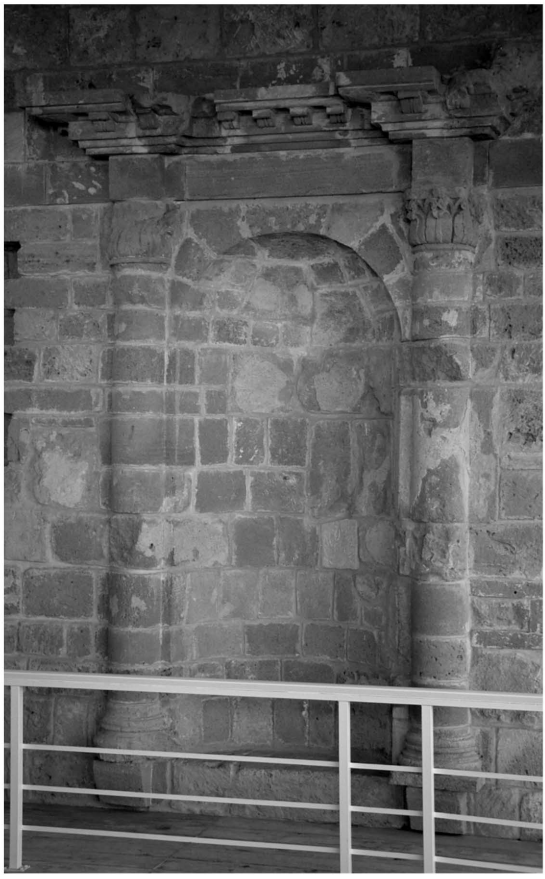


Pl. 1. 1 – Plan of Nea Paphos during Hellenistic and Roman times. Based on S. Medeksza 1998, 37, fig.1; Google Earth (status as of Oct. 5th, 2014);
2 – Map of the House of Aion. Processing by S. Medeksza, M. Słowińska and A. Brzozowska-Jawornicka

Pl. 2. 1 – Room 19 of the House of Aion during excavations: the rubble with pieces of architectural details. Photo by H. Meyza; 2 – Lintel; 3 – Consoles; 4 – Arch; 5 – Engaged Column; 6 – Impost. Photo by K. Woszczyńska



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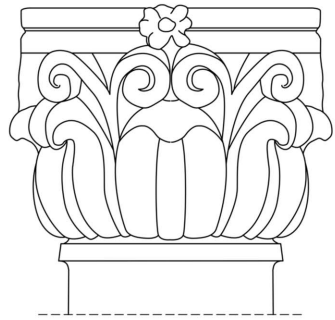

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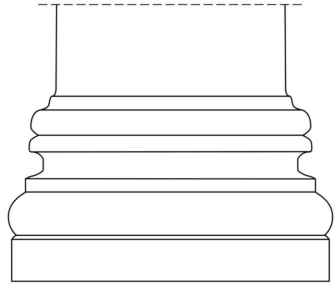

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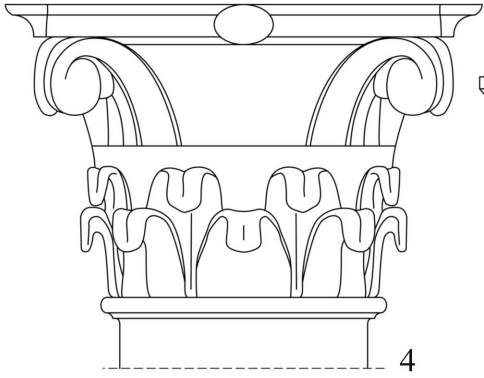

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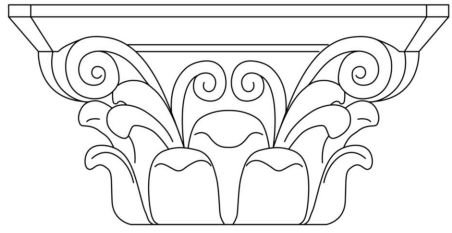

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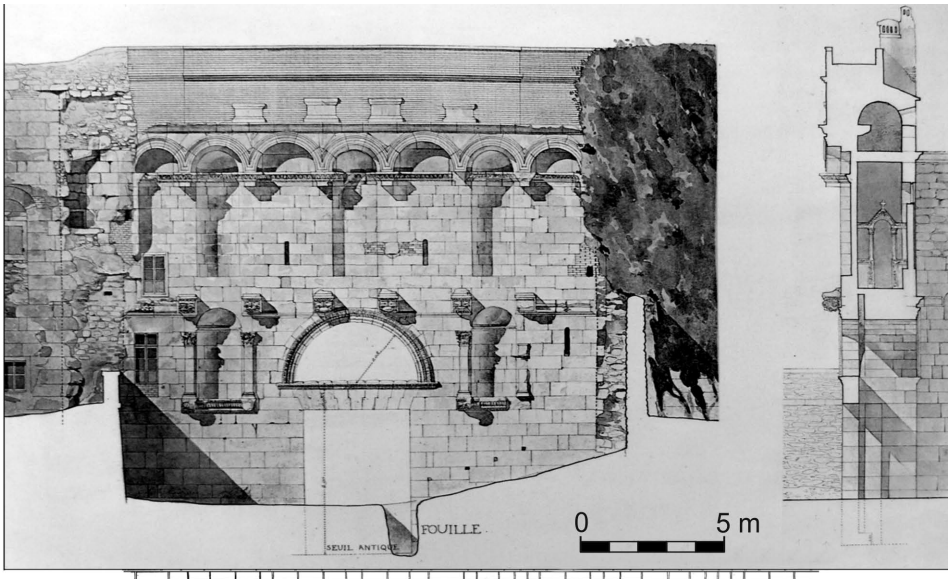
Pl. 3. 1 – Niche from the main room of House of Aion. Photo by the author; 2 – Capital of the engaged column; 3 – Base of the engaged column. Drawings from the archives of the expedition; 4 – Capital from the Temple of Augustus on Philae; 5 – Capital from the 'Imperial Chamber' (Temple of Amun, Thebes). Drawing by A. Brzozowska-Jawornicka based on McKenzie 2007, 166, pl. 287 and 223, pl. 389c



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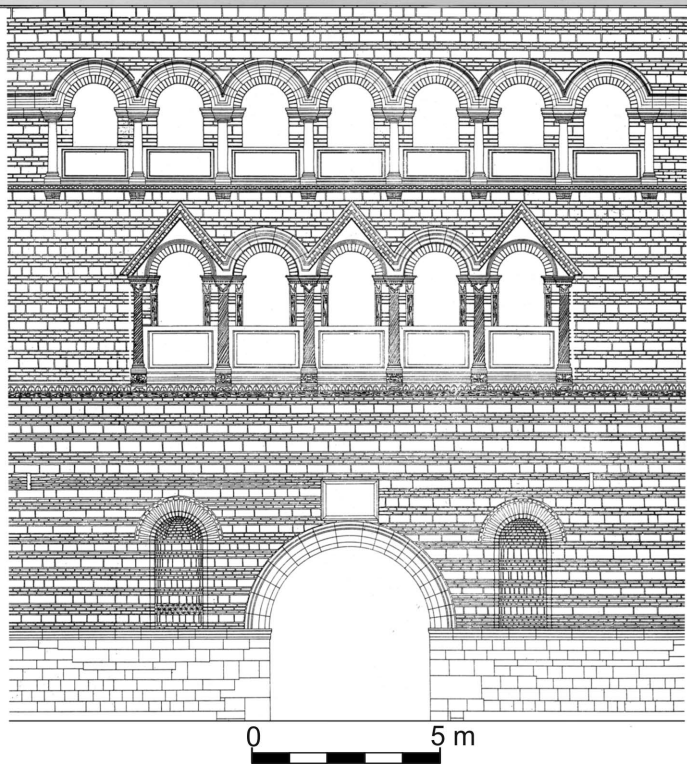

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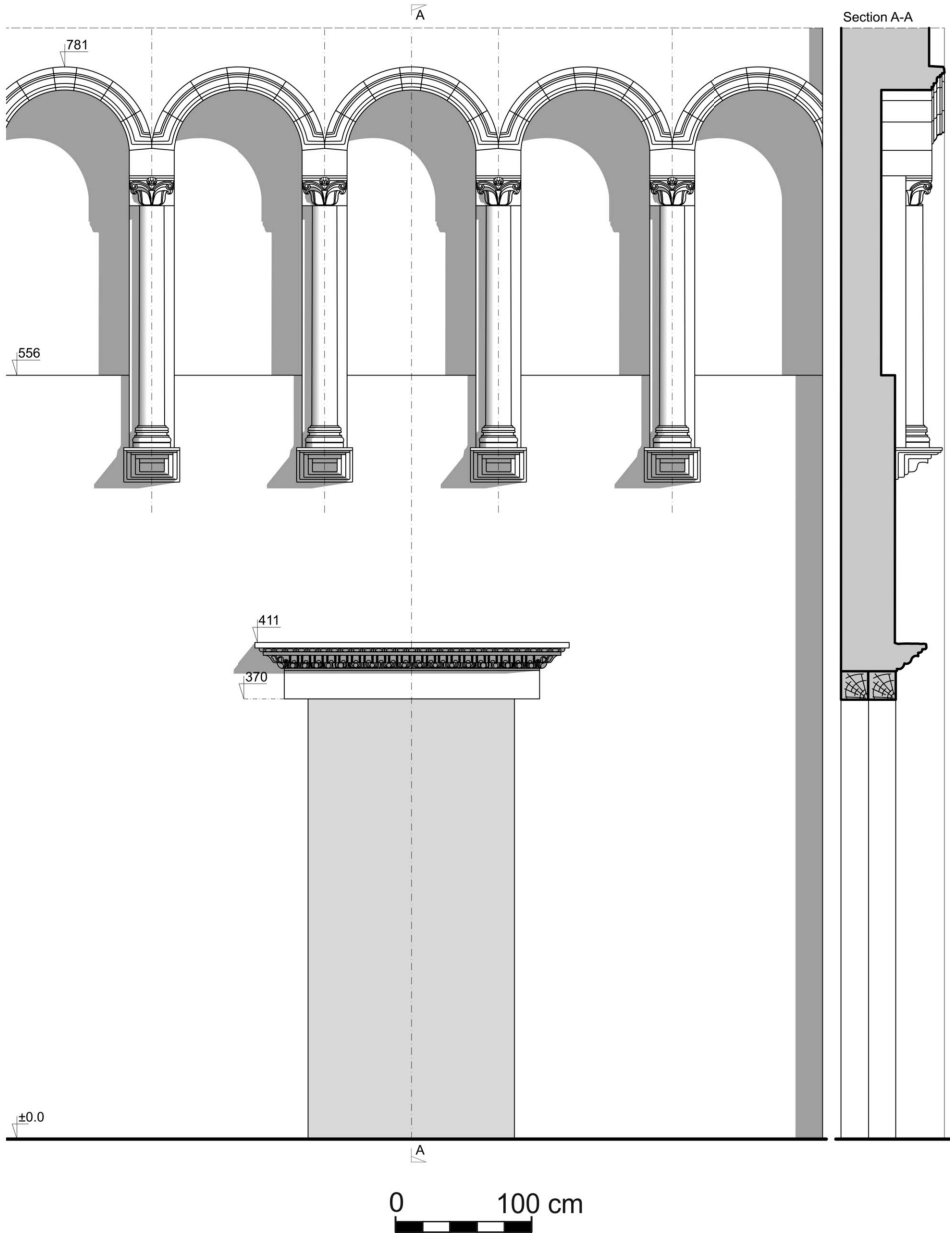
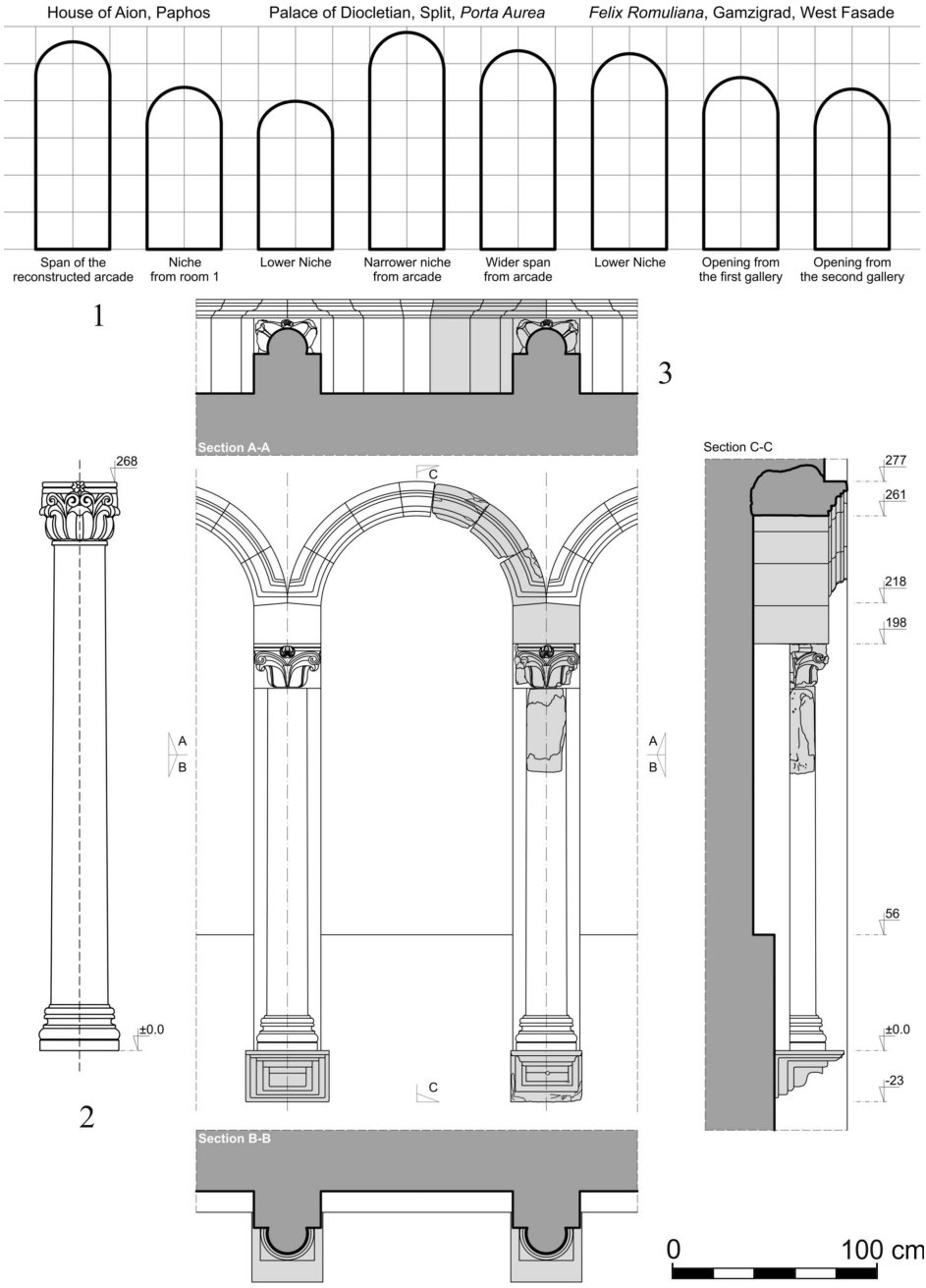
Pl. 4. 1 – *Porta Aurea* at the Palace of Diocletian in Split. Reproduced from Hébrard and Zeiller 1912; 2 – West Gate of the *Felix Romuliana* Palace in Gamzigrad. Reproduced from Nikšić 2011, 197, fig. 8



Pl. 5. Reconstruction of the recessed part of the main façade of the House of Aion.
Drawing by A. Brzozowska-Jawornicka



Pl. 6. 1 – Comparison of the shapes and proportions of the niches from the House of Aion, the Palace of Diocletian in Split and the *Felix Romuliana* Palace in Gamzigrad; 2 – Engaged column from the main room of the House of Aion. Drawings from the archives of the expedition; 3 – Reconstruction of the span from the arcade from the main façade of the House of Aion. Drawing by A. Brzozowska-Jawornicka