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*Another Bone Ring from Cyprus
with a Portrait of a Ptolemaic Queen*

Within the scope of salvage excavations at Kato Paphos preparing the site for construction of a large shelter in the Villa of Theseus, The House of Aion, so-called Hellenistic House and the House of Orpheus, a large number of small trenches were opened in 2008. One of them, numbered 416, was situated under the Late Roman floor in the south-east corner of room 82 of the Villa (**Fig. 1**). In the strata preceding the Villa the place is situated most probably on the eastern side of street 9 (**Fig. 2**).¹ This street is best known under the northern part of the eastern wing of Villa, where its very well built western kurb has been uncovered.² The other side of the street is not so well established, the eastern kurb is uneven, probably due to earthquakes and the width of the street cannot be exactly fixed, though it oscillates around 4.40m. The western kurb continues south and has been identified in the sounding under the mosaic of Theseus (1993)³ as well as in trenches under rooms 83 and 90 (H9), in 1978, 2008 and 2003 respectively.⁴ The eastern one was also identified during shelter project salvage excavation first under room 46 in 2002 and later in 2008 outside the south elevation of the Villa of Theseus, opposite room 63.⁵

On the eastern side of square 416 and adjacent 413 to the north (*nota bene* the trenches were joined in 2009 during excavation to the bedrock, undertaken at the request of the architects designing the shelter) the section is occupied by the eastern wall of room 82, with fill-in foundation wider than the wall itself by 8–10cm. It is not clear if this wall belongs together with its foundation to a single phase, as below the Late Roman surface the foundation may not exist. A stretch of stones situated where the foundation should appear was set loose in soil and the stones have fallen out after the soil has dried (**Fig. 3**). A void between plastered wall and the deeper part of the foundation was thus created, which may suggest that an earlier foundation was reused for a Late Roman wall. On the other, western side of this trench, around 10cm below Villa floor a row of stones was found just in front of the section. Traces of this construction may be seen in the illustrated level, just below burnt matter, which could correspond to one of street surfaces (**Fig. 4**).

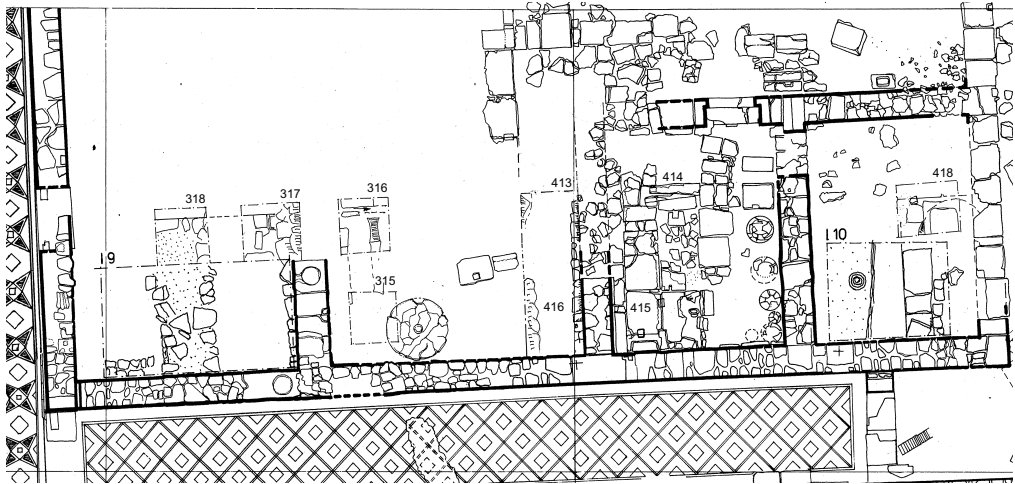
¹ J. MŁYNARCZYK, *Nea Paphos in the Hellenistic Period*, *Nea Paphos III*, Warsaw 1990, pp. 165–166, Figs 16, 20, 21.

² W.A. DASZEWSKI, [in:] V. KARAGEORGHIS, *Chronique des fouilles et découvertes archéologiques à Chypre en 1981*, *BCH* 196, 1982, pp. 734, 736, Figs 102, 104, 105; ID., *Nea Paphos 1991*, *PAM III* (Reports 1991), 1992, pp. 59–61, Fig. 1.2.

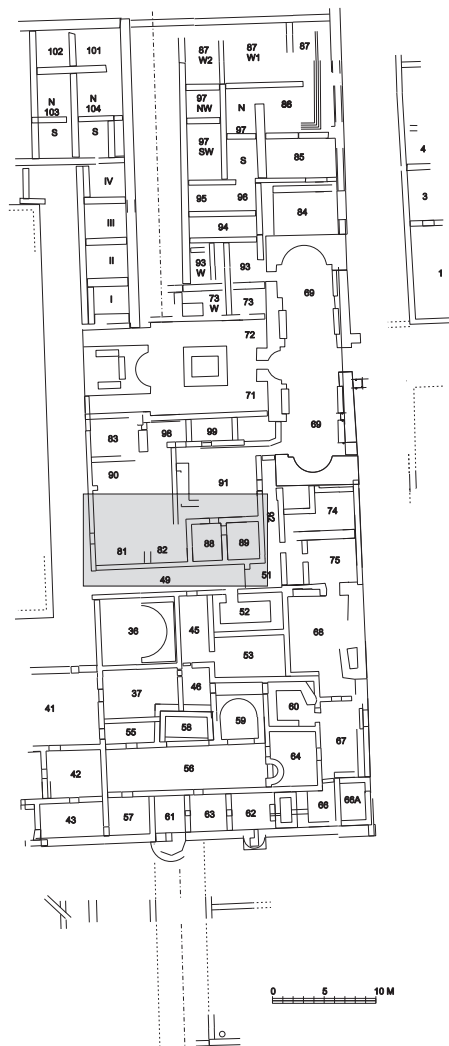
³ W.A. DASZEWSKI *et al.*, *Nea Paphos 1993*, *PAM V* (Reports 1993), pp. 109f. See also: ID. and Z. SZTETYŁŁO, *La région de Maloutena avant la construction de la Villa de Thésée*, *RDAC* 1988/2, p. 200, Fig. 3, where a wall uncovered during earlier conservation of the mosaic of Theseus is discussed. The wall found in 1971 under the tondo of the mosaic – cf. W.A. DASZEWSKI, *Polish excavations at Kato (Nea) Paphos in 1970 and 1971*, *RDAC* 1972, pp. 226–227, Fig. 5 – runs east-west, while in the 1988 paper it was presented as running north-south. The proper kurb, north-south was found later under the eastern part of the labyrinth of this mosaic.

⁴ ID., [in:] V. KARAGEORGHIS, *Chronique des fouilles et découvertes archéologiques à Chypre en 1978*, p. 710; DASZEWSKI, SZTETYŁŁO, *RDAC* 1988/2, p. 200, Fig. 3; H. MEYZA, *Nea Paphos. Season 2008*, *PAM XX* (Research 2008), 2012, p. 288; W.A. DASZEWSKI *et al.*, *Nea Paphos, Season 2003*, *PAM XV* (Reports 2003), 2004, pp. 291–292.

⁵ H. MEYZA, *Nea Paphos, season 2002*, *PAM XIV* (Reports 2002), 2003, p. 257, Figs 1–2; ID., *Nea Paphos, season 2008*, *PAM XX* (Research 2008), 2012, p. 289.



1. Villa of Theseus. Rooms south of the small courtyard 91 and shelter project trenches (Drawing: St. Medeksza, M. Słowińska).



2. Eastern wing of Villa of Theseus and street 9 (Drawing: H. Meyza, after St. Medeksza).



3. Eastern section of trench 416 with discontinuous foundation of eastern wall of room 82 (Phot. H. Meyza).



4. Bottom of stratum with burnt matter, place of find of the bone finger-ring (Phot. H. Meyza).



5. Bezel of the bone finger-ring inv. 17/XII/08, enlarged 3x (Phot. H. Meyza).



6. Bone finger-ring inv. 17/XII/08, side view (Phot. H. Meyza).

Until clear traces of use as a street have not been uncovered on larger area, this interpretation cannot be treated as confirmed.

The context of finding a bone ring was stratum inv. 326/08, which seems to be a compact walking layer covered by a thin stratum of burnt matter continued from softer layer above, inv. 324/08. The stratum below is a bedding-fill of brown soil, inv. 330/08. The strata contain little uncharacteristic pottery and therefore their dating cannot be exact, generally finds belong to Late Hellenistic period with latest pieces of Colour Coated body sherds.

The ring is entirely made of bone (**Figs 5–6**). Its small, oblong bezel is only 2.2cm long, while its width is 1.5cm. The material is porous, particularly in the lower part of the bezel (area of neck in the image), where surface is yellowish and the pores filled black. The hoop is mostly broken away. The bezel is intact apart from minor scratches. Traces of carving and polishing of bezel surface are visible, while on the inside of the hoop cutting traces were not smoothed.

The bezel is decorated with a portrait bust of a woman in relief. Her left profile is presented with high forehead, slightly hooked nose and prominent chin. The neck is long, with two Venus rings in upper part. Draped shoulder is marked off by a groove, while above the neck hair are arranged in schematically rendered so-called melon coiffure, consisting of six (on one side of head) carefully arranged strands of curly hair or plaits, bound by a diadem and secured at the back of head into a double layer flat bun. Strands in front of the diadem may also be viewed as locks surrounding face. The diadem identifies her as a hellenistic queen.

The bone ring belongs to a group known in several examples from Cyprus and Alexandria, published by L. Marangou.⁶ These rings all have similar profile portraits of ladies with melon hairdress and a narrow diadem, all of them can therefore be identified most probably as Ptolemaic queens.⁷ Our ring belongs to the first class (A) identified by Marangou, more common, with melon hair setting arranged in a bun. There are several features which are specific for our ring. The first is the proportions of the bezel. All other rings have bezels more circular, the oblong field of the Paphos example is similar to bronze pieces. The narrow field enforces shortness of the head and slimness of the neck. The diadem in other cases is represented as a crescent, save in Marangou cat. 5 from Cyprus, represented as a band wider over the head top (perhaps a stephane, as in case of coin representations), while in our case it is straight. Simplified hair locks confirm general feeling of schematism. It may suggest that Paphos example stands late in the sequence of these rings. It has been suggested that venerated queens of the Third century BC were represented on these rings, which may have been manufactured until the end of Ptolemaic rule.

The left turn of the head, mirroring the standard right side represented on coins and seal impressions while copying images on seals themselves makes us wonder if, in spite of more fragile material, the bone rings (and perhaps also ivory ones with shallow relief) were not intended to be used as seals on some soft medium (wax?). As no impression remains of such seal in clay, standard sealant, it is more probable, that these bezels in low relief were just repeating arrangement of other rings, with true seals in their bezels.

Marangou discussing the entire group known in 1971 suggested the development in two lines:⁸ the first from the high relief ivory ring in the National Museum in Athens, standing apart, cat. 1, through the bezel with “classical” idealizing youthful features on a ring cat. 5 from a grave in Cyprus to the mature women in cat. 7 and 4, tentatively described as keeping in vogue with hairstyle of Arsinoe I (now rather identified with Arsinoe II Philadelphus) and Arsinoe II respectively. Marangou consciously refrains from identifying the subject of these portraits. It seems that if any development can be traced, this reflects portraits of the same queen at different age. The series with lampadion instead of a bun seems more uniform. Although that image has no counterpart in other media, it seems probable, that the same person is shown. The differences are attributed to quality and hardness of material – in most cases bone, with one, cat. 6, made of ivory, much more subtle in modelling and possibly with a stephane over its forehead.

⁶ L. MARANGO, Ptolemäische Fingerringe aus Bein, *AthMitt* 86, 1971 [= Ptol. Fingerringe], pp. 163–171, Pls 78–81.

⁷ Other examples J. SPIER, *Ancient Gems and Finger Rings. Catalogue of the Collections: The J. Paul Getty Museum, Malibu CA 1992*, p. 49, cat. 91 (Marangou type B); S. WALKER, P. HIGGS (Eds), *Cleopatra of Egypt. From History to Myth, London 2001* [= *Cleopatra of Egypt*], pp. 62–63, cat. 31–32, entries by P. Higgs (cat. 31 = not listed by Marangou) and S.-A. Ashton, P. Higgs (cat. 32 = Marangou cat. 16); bronze cat. 33–34 entries by P. Higgs; for Athenian Agora inv. BI 815 = Marangou cat. 12 see: D. BURR THOMPSON, *An Ancient Shopping Center: The Athenian Agora, Agora Picture Book 12*, Princeton 1971, Fig. 29 and *Cambridge Ancient History, Plates to Vol. VII Part I*, Cambridge 1984, p. 125, Fig. 161.

⁸ MARANGO, Ptol. Fingerringe, pp. 165–168.

Marangou cat. 4 differs from other bone/ivory rings in its image, but its headdress has, as pointed out by Marangou, relatively close analogy in the Isis coins of Cleopatra I.⁹ Sculpture in marble, from Tell Timai suggests that other queens (in this case probably Berenice II) were also represented as Isis with that type of hairdress.¹⁰

Authors differ which queen it was: Arsinoe II or Berenice II, both reigning in Third century BC.¹¹ In first case in particular the queen represented was venerated long after her death, even gaining on popularity. However, prominent chin fits better other portraits of Berenike, while hooked nose has no clear counterpart among these early queens, and would best fit the profile of Cleopatra VII, as known from coin portraits.¹²

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⁹ J.N. SVORONOS, *Ta Nomismata tou Kratous ton Ptolemaion*, Athena 1904, cat. 1382, 1384, Pl. XLVII, 15, 11; MARANGO, *Ptol. Fingerringe*, p. 169.

¹⁰ WALKER, HIGGS, *Cleopatra of Egypt*, p. 49, cat. 11.

¹¹ Walker and Higgs are in favour of Arsinoe II, see *ibid.*, pp. 62–63.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 177–178, eg. cat. 182.

