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HOW ROMAN ARE ROMAN HOUSES IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN? THE HOUSE OF LEUKAKTIOS (*PTOLEMAIS*, CYRENAICA) AND THE HOUSE OF ORPHEUS (*NEA PAPHOS*, CYPRUS) AS CASE STUDIES

ABSTRACT

Cyprus and Cyrenaica, two regions strongly influenced by the Alexandrian cultural heritage, which came under the Roman rule already in the 1st century BC, are simultaneously both typical and unusual examples of acculturation understood as a mixture of Hellenistic and Roman components. This is reflected in various spheres of life, including the architecture of the houses owned by

members of the urban elite which are investigated in this article. Two residential units – the House of Leukaktios at *Ptolemais* in Cyrenaica and the House of Orpheus at *Nea Paphos* in Cyprus – will be presented to discuss different attitudes towards Romanisation from the perspective of an individual as reflected by particular dwellings.

Keywords: Cyprus, Cyrenaica, residential architecture, interior décor

Prolegomena

The question in the title – ‘how Roman is a Roman house?’ – contains, at least partially, an answer: the house must be Roman. However, contrary to its appearances, a house is not defined as Roman by its geography and chronology alone. We can also read its Romaness through the person of the owner of the house. Being a Roman (*civis romanus*) required some visual signs. During the Imperial Period, urban elite members in the Greek East perceived *Romanitas* as a privilege, so they did want their houses to demonstrate their Roman identity as well as the wealth and social status which would often go hand-in-hand with it.

Whereas some ambiguity and uncertainty always remain when it comes to inferring identity from a house, we can say that it was the architecture of spatial control as well as decoration marking out hierarchies of space (to draw attention to some areas while rendering others ‘invisible’) that might be the indicators of adaptation, assimilation, resistance, or imposition of Roman identity.

Before answering the question posed in the title, it is worth considering the definition of ‘what makes

a Roman house a Roman house’ as articulated by Wallace-Hadrill, who based his remarks on the houses from Pompeii and Herculaneum.¹ In his considerations, Wallace-Hadrill quoted Vitruvius, who, while describing residential architecture, stressed the sharp difference between the Roman and the Greek houses or identified the Roman house by contrasting it with the non-Roman house, where non-Roman meant Greek (or rather Hellenistic). His enumeration was based on the differences stemming from social practice in the Greek and the Roman societies – the major discrepancy would be the presence of a separate area for women, *gynaiconitis*. Then, he focused on two oppositions – the separation between the male and female areas *vs* the distinction between spaces meant for guests and family. Finally, according to Vitruvius, the most distinctive feature of the traditional Roman house would be the sequence of atrium and *tablinum* which corresponded to the aristocratic patronage practice of *salutatio*. In consequence, Vitruvius’s words suggest that the answer to the question ‘what makes a Roman house Roman’ has something to do with this very defined spatial arrangement. However, given that in the houses from Roman provinces, especially in

¹ Wallace-Hadrill 2015.

the eastern Mediterranean, the absence of an atrium was rather a rule than an exception, another definition seems to be needed for the 'Roman house' as an expression of Romanity *sensu stricto*.

Obviously, in the face of the variety and complexity of the residential spaces in the Roman world we cannot speak of an ideal type of the 'Roman house'. It is rather an expression of an inherent cultural identity, an amalgam of architectural traditions and social practices that might enable us to discern a distinctive Roman identity. Typologically, Roman houses are almost endlessly varied. Moreover, the houses differed significantly even within the same town, not to mention the fact that the same house could have been subjected to numerous reconstructions or modifications. Vitruvius observed (*De arch.* VI.5.1–2) that the way of building a house depends on the social status of the *pater familias*. At the same time, he listed *triclinia*, *exedrae*, and *oeci* in one breath (*De arch.* VI.3.8–10), without any suggestion about the Romanness of the *triclinium* and the Greekness of the *oecus*, and he did not distinguish the Greek intruder from the Roman traditional space. He described some important differences between the Corinthian and Egyptian *oeci* or the Rhodian peristyle but treated them as regular features of the Italic practice. Since grand people needed the grandest possible house, they applied all these Greek features just to manifest dignity, not to diminish their cultural identity as members of the Roman elite. Wallace-Hadrill would argue that what makes a Roman house 'Roman' is the suitable layout supporting the 'Roman way of life', or a shared private and public life. The second important factor would be the decoration properly underscoring the dignity of the owner. Finally, the Romanness is guaranteed by luxury, even if its language was developed as an imitation of, mainly but not exclusively, eastern models. To conclude, according to Wallace-Hadrill, Roman houses 'share a language of luxury and it is precisely this luxury that makes them instantly recognisable as Roman'. Going further – as the Roman house is 'at the heart of the construction of the power of the élite',² it had to be inhabited by someone who claimed belongingness to it.

In the Roman provinces, it was the residential architecture which was one of the important aspects that would determine the degree of Romanisation in the society and culture. In this article, I am going to examine

archaeological and epigraphic evidence from two particular residences in the eastern Mediterranean region in order to present individual reactions to the amalgam of the Hellenistic (Greek) tradition and the new Roman reality against their socio-political background.

Cyrenaica and Cyprus – parallels within the historical framework

I assume that both houses I am about to present, one at *Ptolemais* and another one at *Nea Paphos*, provide insights into this phenomenon within two regions: Cyrenaica and Cyprus (Fig. 1). Even if only Cyprus can be considered an island proper, both can be treated as examples of insular cultures, provided we understand insularity as 'the quality of being isolated as a result of being in islands, or of being somewhat detached in outlook and experience'.³ What distinguishes these regions within the Roman Mediterranean are some parallels in history, including the 'episode' spanning several centuries when they, as the overseas territories, constituted the core of the empire of the Ptolemies. As such, they were managed by officials sent from Alexandria.⁴ Accompanied by their families, the administrators rapidly joined the ranks of the old elite, contributing to the diversity of the social hierarchy of the urban classes. Just as the new administration impacted the development of urban planning and monumental public buildings, the influx of wealthy people had a significant impact on the development of houses, their layouts, and setting new trends in their decoration. An excellent illustration of this process is one of the most famous residences of the ancient world – *Palazzo delle Colonne* in *Ptolemais*.⁵ The strength of the Alexandrian tradition is evidenced by traditions in architectural decoration which survived in Cyrenaica and Cyprus until late Antiquity.⁶

Even if Cyrenaica and Cyprus were inherited by Republican Rome already in the 1st century BC, it was only during the reign of Augustus that the new Roman political reality was implemented after an unstable period of trouble. Under the Roman Imperial rule, unlike previously, both Cyprus and Cyrenaica were gradually losing their importance and within the Roman Empire were to play a secondary role as a political backwater.⁷ Both regions appear to have been of equal rank in the hierarchy of provinces.⁸ These provinces would not afford

² Wallace-Hadrill 2015, 186.

³ Knapp 2008, 18.

⁴ Bagnall 1976.

⁵ Pesce 1950; Gasparini 2014; Rekowska forthcoming.

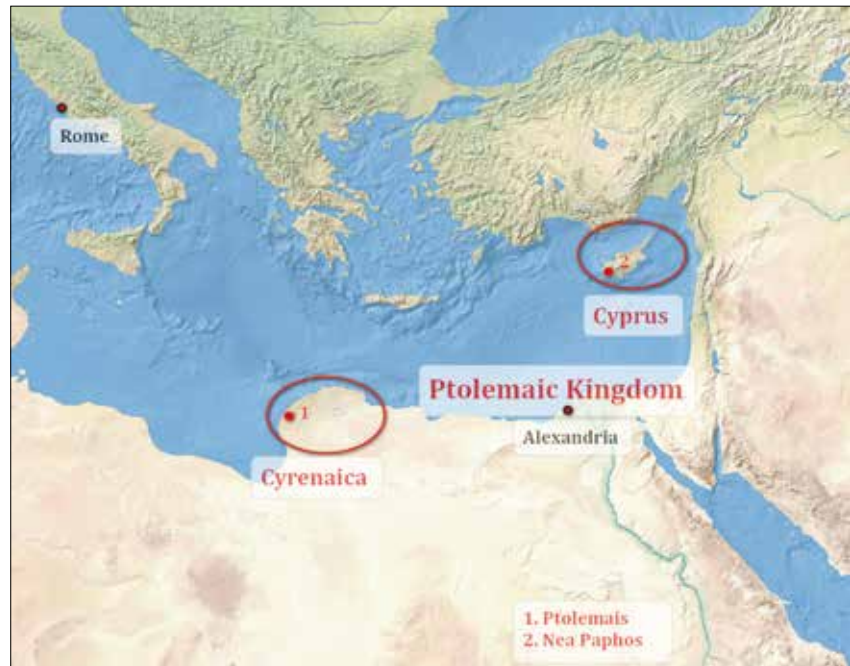
⁶ Pensabene, Gasparini 2017.

⁷ Mitford 1980; Laronde 1988. Since the Augustan Period, both regions had been rarely mentioned in historical narratives;

however, the recent approach and archaeological evidence changed this perspective, especially on the role of Cyprus within the Mediterranean; see Kaldeli 2010; 2013.

⁸ In the Republican Period, Crete and Cyrenaica became a joint province. Cyprus was first incorporated to Cilicia and later was transformed into an independent province; Mitford 1980; Laronde 1988.

Fig. 1. Map of the eastern Mediterranean: Cyprus and Cyrenaica (based on https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/b/b6/Mediterranean_Basin_and_Near_East_before_1000_AD_topographic_map.jpg, accessed 3.04.2020; compiled by M. Rekowska).



one a quick promotion in the senatorial *cursus honorum*; therefore, the pro-consulates of Cyprus and Cyrenaica were not particularly desired by ambitious senators. Even so, representatives of the Roman administration would permanently reside in both regions:⁹ governors (pro-consuls and *praesides*), *legati*, and *quaestores provinciae*, as well as officials directly depending on the emperors, such as *procuratores* and *curatores civitatum*. Over time, more and more lower-level officials were involved in the administration system, and, for reasons both organisational (efficiency) and economical (relative cheapness) in nature, certain daily duties were shifted to local Greek authorities or municipalities.¹⁰ In consequence, there was a relatively low inflow of migrants arriving from Rome. In the early Roman Empire, Roman citizenship was rather rare among the natives of Cyrenaica and Cyprus. Nevertheless, since the beginning of the 1st century AD, gradual Romanisation is clearly visible throughout the material culture, including the residential architecture. Its development is undoubtedly due to the increase in the

well-being of urban residents. As a matter of fact, during the Imperial Period, both regions enjoyed a time of stable prosperity due to the trade in wine, oil, and grain (in the case of Cyprus also the exploitation of natural resources, such as copper or timber, and ship-building).¹¹

In Cyrenaica and in Cyprus, because of the Jewish revolt (in the beginning of the 2nd century), cities suffered considerable damages. Hadrian invested heavily in rebuilding the cities of Cyrenaica, which gave him the title of *Restitutor Libyae*. But it was the Severan reign that constituted a heyday of the eastern provinces, which resulted from the dynasty's policy being oriented towards the East and the intensification of Romanisation. During this period, an extensive architectural development occurred.¹² The new and 'fresh' trends in the residential architecture should be connected to the ethnic as well as social factors.¹³ Due to the economic prosperity, a class of wealthy owners, joined by newcomers, began to grow in strength, which is visible more through the residential architecture than written sources. For Cyprus, the Severan

⁹ Eck 1972–1973, 235. For a list of proconsuls of Cyprus, see Eck 1972–1973, 250–253; Thomasson 1984, 295–302; 2009, 123–125. Based on the available epigraphic and literary sources, Nowakowski distinguished 63 governors and other 56 Roman officials in Cyprus; see Nowakowski 2010, 5, note 2. For a list of proconsuls of the *provincia Creta et Cyrenaica*, see Eck 1972–1973, 244–251; Thomasson 1984, 361–362. About the administration of the province of *Creta et Cyrenaica*, see also Baldwin 1983, 9–10, 16; Laronde 1988, 1015–1031; on the military presence, see Laronde 2009.

¹⁰ Hopkins 1980, 121.

¹¹ When prosperity was not disturbed by earthquakes or turmoils, such as the Jewish revolt in the beginning of the 2nd century AD. See Horbury 2014 for an extensive bibliography; on Cyprus, see Michaelides 1996.

¹² This is demonstrated by, among others, the expansion of the road network; see Mitford 1939; 1966; 1980, 1332–1337; Bekker-Nielsen 2004.

¹³ Żelazowski in this volume.

Period, due to its great building activity, gained even the label *Severan floruit*.

Both cities, *Ptolemais* and *Nea Paphos*, are of the Hellenistic origin.¹⁴ They owed their prosperity to their rising role as very attractive ports in the Ptolemaic maritime empire.¹⁵ The stationing of the Roman fleet in *Nea Paphos* and *Ptolemais* during the Roman Period seems certain, although their role and meaning as naval bases were strongly reduced.¹⁶ Nevertheless, the peaceful conditions prevailing in the Mediterranean benefitted port cities, whose economy depended largely on safe sea trade. Both port cities acted as centres for the redistribution of agricultural surplus on the one hand and of imported goods on the other. Even if there is an important difference in the formal role that *Ptolemais* and *Nea Paphos* played in the administrative system under the Ptolemaic and Roman rules,¹⁷ one can tentatively assume that they had a similar social structure. It seems probable that the core of the new urban elite grouped people of a similar origin – on the one hand not very numerous officials from the West¹⁸ and, on the other, representatives of the old aristocracy. There must have been a third, increasingly important group of people for whom the financial status went hand-in-hand with their social standing, thus requiring identification with the Roman authorities. In conclusion, we may suspect that during the middle Roman Imperial Period (2nd–mid-3rd century) the society in both cities was truly heterogeneous, even if the ambition of people of a certain financial status identifying themselves with the ruling class was to be seen as Romans. And their houses were to show it explicitly.

In this context, we should ‘decode’ the houses which do not follow the exact Roman model, demonstrating rather a speculation on what *domus romana* may have looked like depending on different factors. When discussing the problem of self-presentation through the domestic architecture, it is nonetheless worth noticing that we should take into account the fact that often

enough members of the elite themselves were identified by researchers on the basis of the houses rather than the other way round – we are not always able to define houses through their owners’ putative social categories, such as ‘curial class’.

House of Leukaktios at *Ptolemais*

The House of Leukaktios is located in the central district of *Ptolemais*, although at some distance from the centre. It was built on a plot close to the *Palazzo delle Colonne*, the most renowned building in the town, which served its owner as a private residence as well as a place for official purposes. The entire insula (E XXI) was built up with houses of similar size and was apparently inhabited by people of a similar status, both social and financial.¹⁹ This is confirmed by the expansion of the dwellings which testifies to a certain sequence of occupation from the Hellenistic foundation, through the peak of their development (from the 2nd to the 4th century), until their decline in the 5th century AD. All the residences represent the same type of urban house organised around a peristyle, with similar décor consisting of mosaics and wall paintings, both complemented by architectural decoration (Fig. 2). In the *Ptolemais* cityscape, these medium-sized houses did not stand out – neither in size nor in their layout or the extraordinary decoration. The House of Leukaktios is, however, exceptional and as such can be subjected to a more detailed analysis – firstly, because its architecture was ‘petrified’ at some moment due to an earthquake (partially destroyed, it was abandoned and never rebuilt, except for fragments of its eastern part used for industrial activities), and secondly, because of inscriptions indicating the owner’s name.

The house’s plan is not entirely regular, although it presents some features typical of residential architecture, with clearly demarcated different parts for inhabitants, guests, and economic infrastructure (Fig. 3).

¹⁴ Młynarczyk 1990; Żelazowski 2012c. *Nea Paphos* began as a settlement already in the 4th century BC; however, it did not become an urban centre until the Ptolemaic administration was transferred from *Salamis*; see Balandier 2014; Mehl 2016, 249; 2019, 475; Vitas 2016.

¹⁵ Even if both ports were of importance, only Cyprus was a truly transmarine base (Hauben 1987, 215). See also Młynarczyk 1990; Rekowska 2019.

¹⁶ In *Ptolemais*, it is confirmed only indirectly, e.g. by the inscription CIL VIII 7030 mentioning ‘Caius Julius Libotriarchus classis novae Lybic[a]e’. On Cyprus, see Mitford 1980, 1295.

¹⁷ In the early 2nd century BC, *Nea Paphos* replaced *Salamis* as the capital of Cyprus and maintained this status under the Romans until the mid-4th century AD; see Mitford 1980, 1309–1315. We must notice, however, some controversies about the role of *Nea*

Paphos as the capital during the Roman Period – the discussion (with bibliography) is cited by Nowakowski (2010, 193–196). Even if *Ptolemais* became the capital of *Libya Superior* only after the administrative reform of Diocletian, as a prosperous town it was an important regional (eastern Cyrenaica) counterweight to *Cyrene*, the capital, already in the earlier period; see Goodchild 1961.

¹⁸ To the total number of Romans in *Paphos* should also be added a number of *negotiatores*, attested *inter alia* in inscription; see Mitford 1961a, 41. For more on Roman *negotiatores* in Cyprus and the supposed *conventus civium Romanorum*, see Mitford 1961b, 108.

¹⁹ Insula E XXI was excavated by the Polish Mission from the University of Warsaw between 2001 and 2010; see Żelazowski (ed.) 2012.

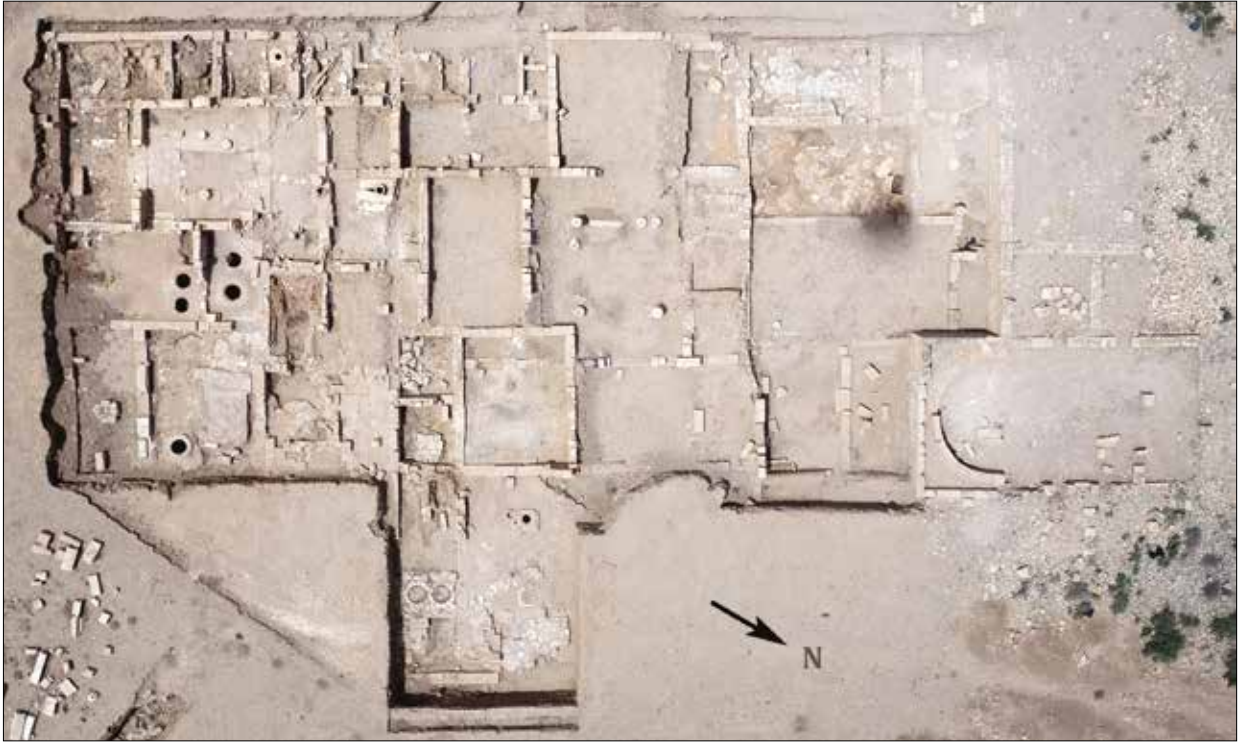


Fig. 2. Insula E XXI at *Prolemais* (photo by M. Bogacki).



Fig. 3. Plan of the House of Leukaktios (based on Żelazowski 2012a; compiled by M. Rekowski).

The residence (c. 700 m² on one level) was accessed from the western street through a wide hall paved with a geometrical mosaic and followed by another room with an open *exedra* boasting a carpet mosaic (Fig. 4.A). The heart of the residence was a courtyard with four columns surrounded by rooms of various sizes, decoration, and purposes. The courtyard itself was decorated with a geometrical mosaic pavement (with a medallion with an inscription in the middle) and paintings imitating marble *crustae* on the walls (Fig. 4.B). The large and representative room on its southern side (measuring c. 40 m²) had similarly decorated walls. The room layout, as suggested by a U-shaped mosaic lying around the central panel with a representation of a winged personification holding a *tabula ansata* (with an inscription), seems to indicate its function as a *triclinium* (Fig. 4.C). Possibly, the second *triclinium* was situated on the eastern side of the courtyard, where a somewhat smaller room (c. 32 m²) was located, with similar, although much worse-preserved, decoration (Fig. 4.D). Even if the central panel of the

mosaic is currently missing, its location – central but slightly pushed forward to the front of the room – created a characteristic arrangement for *klinai* to be placed on three sides. The northern wing of the house comprised several smaller rooms with modest decoration. Its character (mortar floor in *opus signinum*, plain paintings with simple geometrical motifs on the walls) shows that they probably served as private rooms (*cubicula*). The room on the western side of the peristyle had the most opulent and sophisticated decoration. The geometric mosaic ‘carpet’ on the floor was decorated with a well-preserved central panel bearing a representation of Ariadne asleep on Naxos, at the very moment when she was found by Dionysus and his retinue (Fig. 4.E).²⁰ On the walls – instead of an imitation of geometric marble *crustae* – there is a colourful composition of panels with depictions of different kinds of figures, mainly local birds, separated by painted Corinthian columns on a red background.²¹ The room has a kind of annex (to the north), accessed through an extremely decorative, monumental tripartite

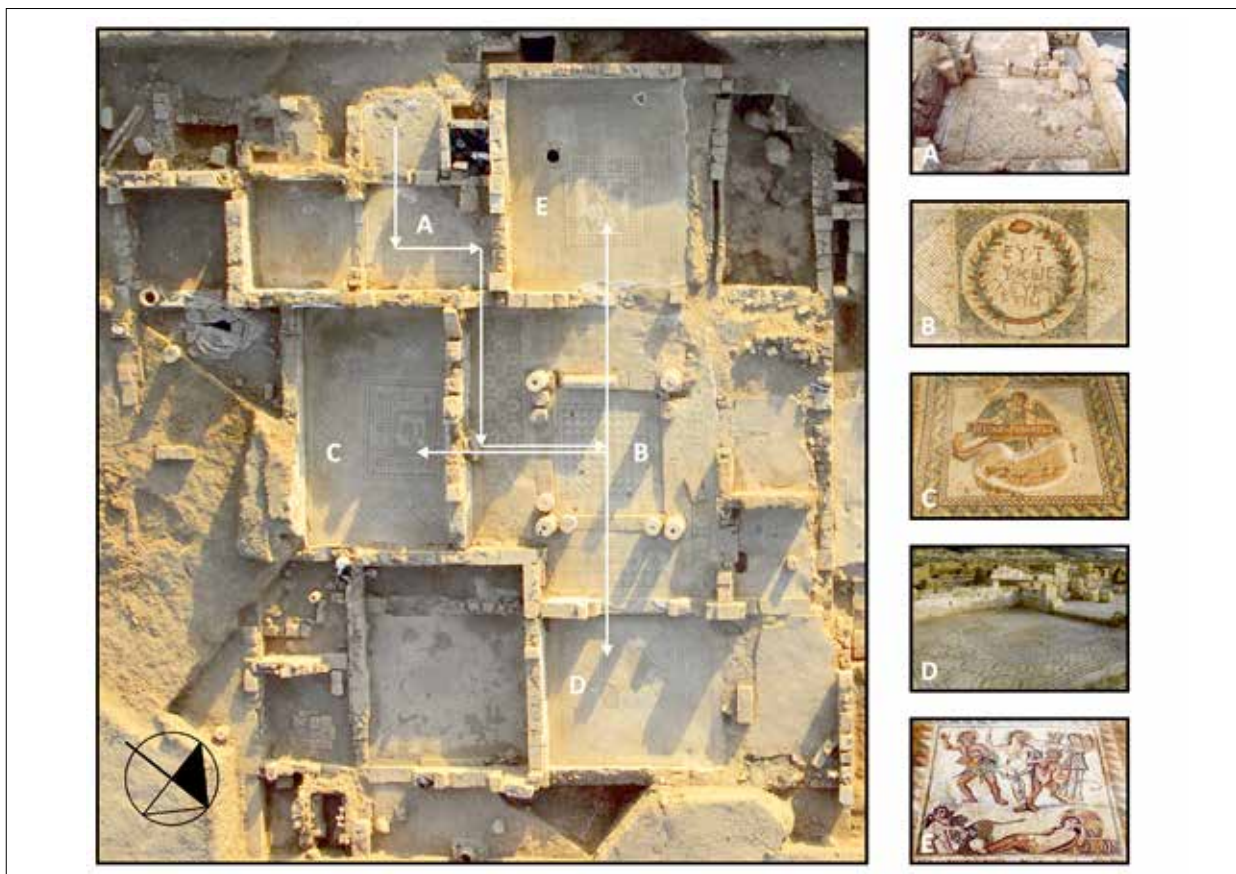


Fig. 4. Space of representation in the House of Leukaktios (based on a photo by M. Bogacki; compiled by M. Wagner).

²⁰ More on mosaics, see Mikocki 2004.

²¹ See Żelazowski 2012b and Chmielewski 2012 for a detailed description of the painted decoration.

passage. Above the north-western part of the house there was an upper storey room decorated with a mosaic (with scenes belonging to the Achillean cycle, as indicated by the preserved legends), accessed from a staircase (located probably in the north-west corner of the peristyle).²² The service area was on the eastern boundary of the insula, completely invisible for visitors.

Such layout was designed to create a striking impression upon an entering guest and allowed the owner to monitor the access to particular parts of the house depending on the visitor's dignity and status. Public and private spaces were highlighted by decoration so as to make the circulation pattern readable. The public space was delimited by geometrical mosaics and wall paintings bearing a decorative scheme imitating marble wall veneer (Fig. 4). A visitor entering the peristyle had the opportunity to read the inscription with the greeting to the owner in the centre, and, if he was invited to the

dining hall, he could (or rather would) repeat the same greeting to the owner at the entrance. The northern wing (as well as the upper floor) was inaccessible for non-inhabitants. Only special guests were honoured with an invitation to the rooms in the western wing. The decoration of this part, as already mentioned above, is distinct and has a really intimate, much more informal character.²³ The special character of this room is emphasised by the presence of an annex, connected by a tripartite colonnade entrance with an arcuated lintel (Fig. 5). During the middle Roman Period, this architectural form occurred mainly in monumental public architecture; however, it was also successfully adopted for residential architecture (the earliest examples coming from the 1st century; nonetheless, it gained great popularity in the late Roman Period). In private buildings, such refinement added grandeur to a room and evoked associations with the palatial sphere.²⁴



Fig. 5. Reconstruction of the tripartite entrance (compiled by J. Kaniszewski).

²² Mikocki 2005.

²³ Olszewski 2007; 2010; Chmielewski 2012; Rekowska 2012b; Żelazowski 2012b.

²⁴ Rekowska 2012a; 2012b; Pensabene, Gasparini 2017, 661.



Fig. 6. Two mosaic inscriptions with the name of Leukaktios (photos by M. Bogacki).

Two inscriptions with the same text containing an exclamation 'εὐτυχώς' (Good luck!) and a name of a man 'Λευκάτω' (Leukaktios), are of key importance for understanding the 'Romanness' of the house's owner (Fig. 6). Hence, it is worth to recall the conclusions made by prof. Adam Łajtar, who performed a meticulous analysis of these inscriptions. According to him, Leukaktios was a man of Greek origin, whose name makes a reference to a place – Λευκή Ἀκτὴ or Λευκάκτιον, which literally means 'the White Promontory'. Despite a variety of locations bearing this name, Egyptian Λευκή Ἀκτὴ (promontory on the main route from Cyrenaica to Egypt, c. 190 km west of Alexandria) seems to be the most logical eponym for the Leukaktios living in *Prolemais*. As such, he would not be a descendant of the old Dorian aristocracy, nor a Roman official, but rather a representative of

the new civic elite, whose prosperity possibly depended on the maritime trade with Alexandria. According to the archaeological evidence and stylistic criteria, we can date the house arrangement and decoration to the turn of the 2nd and 3rd centuries; nevertheless, it is quite clear that Leukaktios was not the owner of the house when the mosaics were laid. In both inscriptions, the words 'εὐτυχώς' and 'Λευκακτίω' differ in the colour of the *tesserae* as well as palaeography, which confirms that they were reworked. We do not know in what circumstances – how and when – Leukaktios became the new owner (purchase? inheritance?). However, it does seem plausible that it took place after 212 AD, the date of the *Constitutio Antoniniana*, which granted Roman citizenship to all free men in the Empire. This would mean that Leukaktios, as Marcus Aurelius, was a new *civis romanus*. He must

have been a man of a certain material status, whose career developed in the 3rd century and who aspired to be a member of the urban elite. As such, he decided to keep the decoration of the house, while simply having the name of the addressee of the greetings in the inscriptions replaced.²⁵ Even if he did not choose it personally, he still appreciated the Roman-style design of his residence. Here, the lack of marble was compensated by painted marble wall veneer, as well as white plastered capitals and columns' shafts. Such solution, employed in the Roman residential context, was a decorative sign of luxury.

Therefore, the decoration of the House of Leukaktios cannot be read literally, as a passive reflection of its owner's wealth and status, but should rather be understood as a means of enhancing his position. He would identify with the Roman elites because such identification gave him a sense of belonging to a Roman (better) world as it was expressed by Aristides, who, in a well-known

work *To Rome* (*Or.* 26), enthusiastically described the reality of the Roman domination (especially in relation to the eastern Mediterranean) under the rule of Antoninus Pius.²⁶

House of Orpheus at *Nea Paphos*

Another model of acculturation reflecting the intermingled Hellenistic and Roman traditions is illustrated by the House of Orpheus at *Nea Paphos* (Fig. 7).

The residence is difficult to interpret because of the last period of its occupation, when an industrial activity distorted the original layout of the house.²⁷ Even so, it is a very attractive example of a Roman residence with clearly separated public and private parts.²⁸ The central part of the building is a relatively large colonnade courtyard (*peristylum*), surrounded on four sides by chambers of different characters (Fig. 8). Smaller rooms



Fig. 7. House of Orpheus at *Nea Paphos* (photo by M. Rekowska).

²⁵ Eajtar 2012.

²⁶ Arist. *Or.* 26, 59–66; see also Fontanella 2015, 171–185.

²⁷ These are some preliminary thoughts on the House of Orpheus, excavated in the 1980s and 1990s. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to its excavator, prof. Michaelides, for giving me a chance to deepen research within the project financed by the National Science Center in Poland (NCN

UMO-2017/27/B/HS3/01131) 'Residence as self-presentation of urban elites. Architecture and decoration of the House of Orpheus in *Nea Paphos*, the ancient capital of Cyprus'.

²⁸ The presentation of the plan refers to the house from the turn of the 2nd and 3rd centuries. Several architectural relics witness its earlier and later phases; see Rekowska *et al.* in this volume.

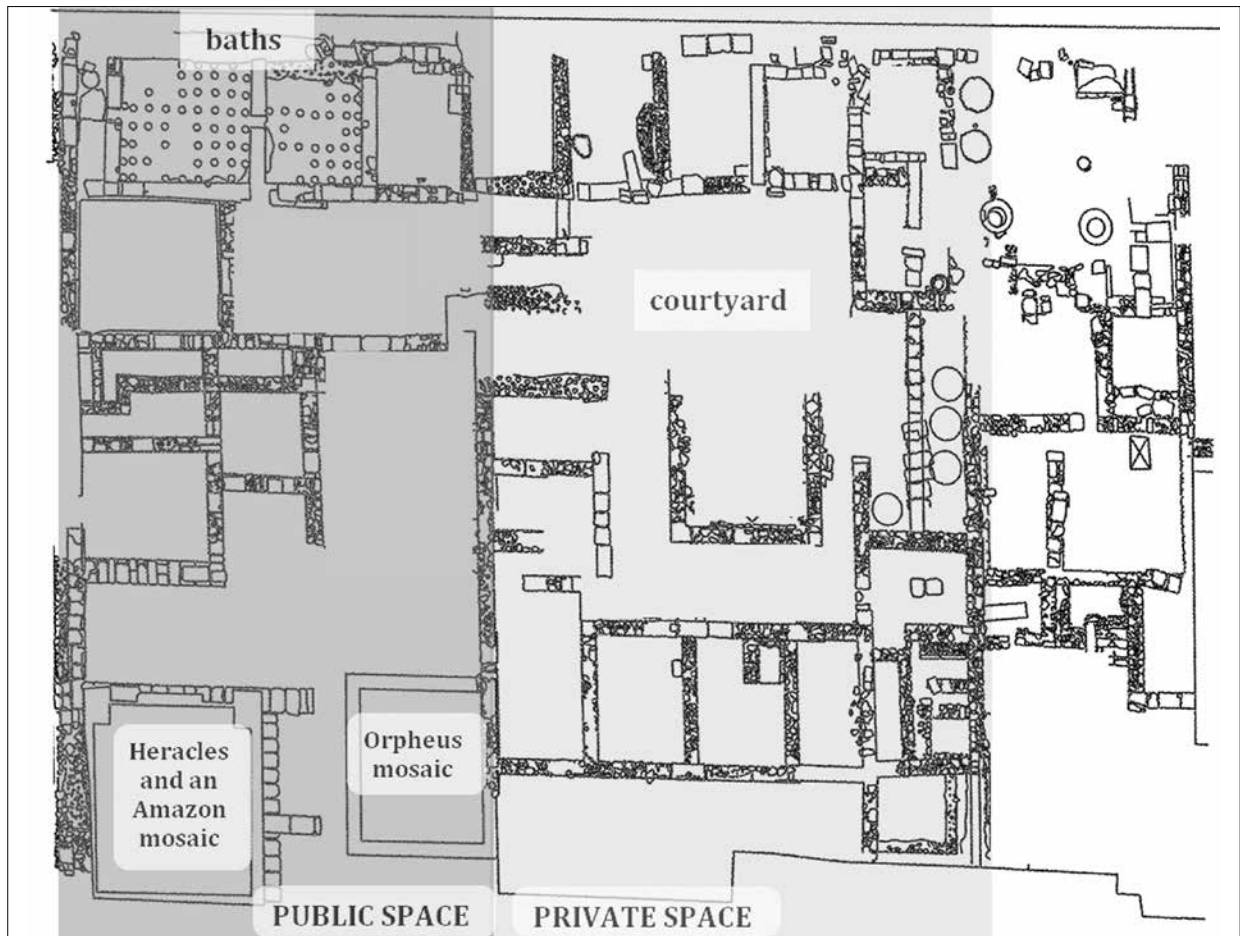


Fig. 8. Plan of the House of Orpheus (after Michaelides *et al.* 2019, fig. 1.2).

on the western side of the courtyard are modestly decorated, which indicates their private functions (*cubicula*?). Further to the south, one can see the remains of stairs leading to the upper floor of the residence.²⁹ This part seems to be accessible rather to family members and close friends only. The northern wing of the house has evidently a diverse, much more official character, being a space of representation for the owner (Fig. 9). In its western corner, one can find two chambers decorated with figurative mosaics. In its eastern corner, a thermal bath complex with well-preserved heating constructions (*hypocaustum*) in two rooms was located. Both rooms with mosaics *in situ* have a rich appearance. The larger one (7.0 × 6.5 m) is decorated with a mosaic with two

figural panels set in a large geometric field. Panels with Heracles with a lion and an Amazon by a horse are lying back to back, and the arrangement of these panels resembles the dining room layout (*triclinium*). A monumental tripartite entrance which leads into the room imparts a solemn and official character to it.³⁰ The other, smaller, room (4.25 × 5.10 m) is also decorated with a mosaic, this time depicting Orpheus seated on a rock and surrounded by beasts.³¹ Even if the myth of Orpheus is much more frequent on the mosaics in the West than in the East, this type of representation apparently belongs to the Eastern tradition.³² In addition to the two figural mosaics which date to the late 2nd or early 3rd century AD, another mosaic with a geometric monochrome pattern

²⁹ On an attempt at an interpretation of the house layout in historical perspective, see Rekowska *et al.* in this volume.

³⁰ About the mosaic with Hercules and an Amazon, see Nicolau 1980–1981; 1983.

³¹ About the mosaic with Orpheus, see Michaelides 1986; 1991.

³² Michaelides 1986, 480–481.



Fig. 9. Space of representation in the House of Orpheus, the baths in the foreground (photo by M. Rekowski).

made of greenish-grey *tesserae* was found in the southern part of the house.³³ *Nota bene*, the house must have originally had more mosaic decorations, as attested by numerous small fragments of mosaic pavement found within it. The décor of the rooms is complemented by wall paintings – several walls kept the painted decoration in the lower register, and, in addition, a great number of fresco fragments have been recovered from within the whole residence. These colourful fragments show plain or elaborate polychrome floral, geometric, and figural designs. Just like in the case of *Ptolemais*, here we also deal with a house whose owner is (probably) known by the name. The text of a Greek inscription found on the mosaic in the House of Orpheus mentions the Roman

trianomina of ‘[...]ος Πίννιος Ρεσπιτοῦτος’ (Fig. 10).³⁴ Even if the verb following the name (‘εποίη’) could be interpreted as a signature of the artisan, according to the discoverer it relates rather to the commissioner. Also, the prominent position of the inscription makes it more likely that the name belonged to the patron rather than the artisan.³⁵ Hence, the hypothesis that at some point the house was owned by a person with a very Roman-like name – [Tit]os (or [Gai]os) *Pinnios Restitutos*³⁶ – seems very reasonable. Since citizenship itself was not so common among the islanders,³⁷ the name would rather point to a Roman official living at the back of the Villa of Theseus or, for instance, a senator who settled there after retiring from his political

³³ Even if its western part is currently missing, the preserved bedding allows one to estimate the size of the room to be no less than 6.45 × 4.9 m; see Michaelides 1991, 7–8. Nevertheless, we must leave some room for uncertainty regarding whether this room belonged to the house in question.

³⁴ Michaelides 1986, 485–486.

³⁵ Dunbabin 1999, 275. Such hypothesis is nowadays fully accepted; see Cayla 2018, 370.

³⁶ The name of Pinnios Restitutos is well-attested in Roman epigraphy; see Michaelides 1986, 485, note 84: ‘There are reasons to believe that the man named is not the mosaicist but rather the owner of the house who commissioned and paid for the mosaic. Whatever the meaning, this is a rare type of inscription which remains, so far, unique in Roman Cyprus’.

³⁷ Relatively few Roman citizens have been attested on the island; see above note 16. See also Mitford 1980, 284; Fejfer 2013, 169–170, note 4; Lund 2015, 240, note 49.



Fig. 10. Mosaic inscription with the name of Pinnios Restitutos (photo by M. Rekowska).

career. This is even more likely given the Latin graffiti discovered on one of the walls in the south-eastern part of the house, which can also confirm the presence of the Romans from the West.³⁸ It was in response to their needs that the baths, a very Roman yet not frequent element of the houses in Cyprus,³⁹ were built. The organisation of the baths followed the order of bathing based on the gradation of temperature,⁴⁰ even if their regularity was disturbed by the fact that they were incorporated into the previous buildings.⁴¹

Given the above facts, we are able to conclude that the owner of the House of Orpheus, a Roman citizen coming probably from the West, adapted a model cherished by the old urban elite whose roots dated back to the Ptolemaic Period. Thus, not only did the elite's members preserve their own identity, but in a way they provided a source of *Romanitas* for other members of the Paphian community.

Summing up

Both houses demonstrate how the provincial elites' understanding of their Roman identity could be manifested in the Eastern Mediterranean. However, both express different meanings through diverse means. Leukaktios from *Ptolemais* apparently wished to be seen as a Roman (even if the evidence for his citizenship is vague). Pinnios Restitutos, the owner of the House of Orpheus,

was apparently a Roman citizen who, by the choice of decoration and the theme on the mosaics, intended to send a message to his guests confirming his thorough Greek educational background, which in this period was an upper class privilege. He also chose Greek to commemorate his Roman name on the mosaic because Greek remained the language of high culture. At the same time, his house with baths defined the essence of his *Romanitas*.

In the Roman (provincial) world, assimilation of the local elites generated a kind of standardisation. However, different models of assimilation are discernible, depending on ethnicity, individual taste, personal ambitions, and, last but not least, financial assets.

The model of Romanisation based on the aspiration of the provincial elites to enter into the new networks of power can be controversial;⁴² still, it seems quite clear that the house, as a sanctuary of private life and at the same time a means of representation, remains in the centre of the question. The Roman cultural and social language created something distinctively new; nevertheless, in the eastern Mediterranean provinces this language was an interpretation of the Greek, Hellenistic, and Roman traditions. In such a case, the concept of Romanisation was not only complex and multifaceted but often elusive. However, to answer the title question, it should be emphasised that both houses were undoubtedly very Roman, since they were inhabited by the Romans, whether by self-identification or by origin.

³⁸ Michaelides 1993, 747; Herscher 1995, 288.

³⁹ In Cyprus, 16 baths dated to the Roman and early Byzantine periods are known, of which only five are related to private residences; see Christodoulou 2014.

⁴⁰ Yegül 1992, 354.

⁴¹ Some preliminary remarks about the baths are noted by Christodoulou 2014, 92–93, figs 14–16 (see also the previous reports cited there – 98).

⁴² Millet 1990.

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