

MONIKA REKOWSKA

Institute of Archaeology, University of Warsaw
mrekowska@uw.edu.pl
ORCID: 0000-0001-6672-1319

INTRODUCTION TO VOLUME LVIII OF THE ŚWIATOWIT JOURNAL: *HOUSES AND THEIR DECORATION IN THE SOCIAL CONTEXT*

The present volume was inspired by a panel session organised September 5–8 2018 within the frame of the annual conference of the European Association of Archaeologists in Barcelona. The session *You See a Man's Home, You See the Man... Houses and Their Decoration in the Eastern Mediterranean* was prepared jointly by the undersigned, Prof. Patrizio Pensabene (La Sapienza, Università di Roma), Eleonora Gasparini, PhD (independent researcher), and Aleksandra Brzozowska-Jawornicka, EngD (University of Science and Technology, Wrocław). As indicated in the title, the conference was dedicated to researchers interested in the residential architecture and provided them with a chance to exchange ideas and undertake discussion on private dwellings in the post-Ptolemaic provinces against the broader backdrop of the other provinces of the Roman Empire. Thus, the organisers' scope of interest was focused on housing in the Eastern Mediterranean, with special emphasis placed on, but by no means limited to, Egypt, Cyrenaica, and Cyprus (and the Alexandrian influences in these regions).

The study of the Graeco-Roman residential architecture has its own substantial history. However, for a long time, the houses were subjected solely to formal analyses in which their plans and decoration were examined separately. In these studies, the layout of the houses was interpreted through the lens of written sources, mainly the work of Vitruvius. Hence, where interior design was discussed, the main accent was placed on mosaics and paintings with their iconography, while the architectural decoration remained almost completely overlooked. Meanwhile, the architectural decoration can be a good indicator of uses and meanings of spaces and, in the broader context of the complex interior décor, one of the core elements reflecting the taste of their owners. At the same time, it serves as an expression of their cultural, religious, and even political identity.

Only recently, studies of the residential architecture in different regions have shown that it is a very complex and many-sided question, which can be and ought to be analysed not only on the stylistic level but also on the socio-historical grounds. To achieve this goal, the houses' layouts and architectural features

as well as their complex decoration have to be studied as a whole.

The organisers intended to initiate a discussion on residential buildings in this social context, assuming that the houses of both the richer and poorer inhabitants of the Roman Empire, whether living in urban centres or in the countryside, were their 'showcases'. The contributions to the present issue touch upon some important problems concerning transformation of dwellings, global and local aspects of the residential architecture, as well as ways in which the owners of the houses used them for self-presentation. The studies offer some robust, well-grounded conclusions, while at the same time leaving other questions open.

The structure of this volume follows the structure of the session, albeit with a few exceptions. Unfortunately, for various reasons, not all of the speakers could contribute their papers. Moreover, a few additional articles presenting different aspects of the residential architecture within the Mediterranean were included. Thereby, the research results discussed in the collected articles cover a large area stretching from *Magna Graecia* through Cyrenaica, Alexandria, and Cyprus to the coast of Syro-Palestine. The authors deal with different types of dwellings and a wide chronological spectrum – from lavishly decorated residences in provincial capitals to the modest houses in villages and from the Republican Period to late Antiquity. The contributors used diverse research methodologies and approaches. Some of them looked for global phenomena in the post-Hellenistic world, while others dedicated themselves to meticulous studies on specific archaeological sites.

The volume opens with a paper of crucial importance for understanding the relationship between Alexandria and the architectural traditions of Cyrenaica and Cyprus. **Patrizio Pensabene** (*Alexandria, Cyrenaica, Cyprus: Ptolemaic Heritage in Imperial Residential Architecture*) traces features shared between the Cyrenaican and Cypriote architecture and that of Alexandria, presenting evidence for the latter's strong impact on architectural decoration persisting until late Antiquity. The author quotes, *inter alia*, the residences in Marina el-Alamein (Egypt), *Nea Paphos* (Cyprus), and *Ptolemais* (Cyrenaica)

as points of reference for studies on this phenomenon. His research elucidates some trends which, although not entirely uniform, can be traced globally.

The phenomenon of globalisation manifesting itself in a local context is the subject of the paper presented by **Matthias Grawehr** (*A Process of Globalisation? Roman Marble Imports and the Rise of Blocked-Out Capitals in Local Stone*). The author analyses new aesthetic preference for white marble which emerged in the Augustan Period and exerted important influence on the development of local architecture. In his narration, the Corinthian capital serves as a vantage point for reflecting on different attitudes adopted by local craftsmen in response to the new fashion – one of the results of this response was the development of a blocked-out capital.

A 'new' type of the Roman *domus* which appeared in the towns of *Magna Graecia* already in the Republican Period takes centre stage in the study by **Ada Cortés Vicente** (*The Republican Houses of the Roman Colonies in Ancient Magna Graecia. Cultural Exchange from a Western Perspective*). Within the broader framework of the 'Tetrastylon project', she performs an analysis of a hybrid architectural scheme which drew inspiration from both the Greek and the Roman concepts of the residential architecture. The referential backdrop for her research consists of 'the tetrastyle courtyard houses' from *Velia-Elea*, *Crotone*, *Paestum*, and *Heraclea*.

The next paper shifts the perspective eastwards, to Marina el-Alamein, a small town situated c. 100 km to the west of Alexandria, which has developed from the 2nd century BC. **Krzysztof Jakubiak** analyses the urban layout and plan of the settlement in the early and middle Imperial Period (*Marina el-Alamein (Egypt): A Topographical Study and the Functioning of an Ancient Provincial Town on the Mediterranean Coast*). The form of the town and its street grid depended on the natural geographical conditions, and thus the urban space was divided into three zones situated along natural terraces between the seashore and the desert. The author examines, *inter alia*, the central part occupied by well-developed residential units. He convincingly shows that most of the houses were built already in the Ptolemaic Period, and during the Roman rule they were subjected to layout modifications and important transformations of their decoration.

Grażyna Bąkowska-Czerner and **Rafał Czerner** focused their research on one of such houses, conventionally named H9 (*House H9 from Marina el-Alamein – a Research Summary*). The authors aimed to trace the alterations of the house diachronically, especially given the distinction between the traditions of the Hellenistic architecture and the innovation brought by the Romans. Thus, one of the largest and earliest residences on the site

was analysed in a very complex and meticulous manner – in terms of its plan, interior decoration, and domestic cults.

Aleksandra Brzozowska-Jawornicka presents three residences at *Nea Paphos* (Maloutena district) which differ from each other in chronology, size, and lavishness of decoration. Despite these differences, the 'Hellenistic' House, the Villa of Theseus, and the House of Aion form the basis for an analysis of the three main elements of the official spaces identified as such because of their accessibility to the public (*Architecture of the Official Spaces of Selected Residences in Nea Paphos, Cyprus*). According to the author, it was the arrangement of the rooms in the specific sequence of entrance–main courtyard–reception room and their decoration that reflect the status of the master of the house.

Monika Rekowska wonders about the Romanity as seen through the houses. The paper investigates the residential units dated to the middle Imperial Period and located in two towns in Cyrenaica and Cyprus (*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*). Both discussed houses reveal different attitudes towards Romanisation from the perspective of an individual as reflected by particular dwellings.

In his article (*Edilizia residenziale nel paesaggio urbanistico di Tolemaide in Cirenaica*), **Jerzy Żelazowski** presents several private houses in *Ptolemais*, Cyrenaica, within the historical framework of the town's spatial development from the 2nd century BC until the middle of the 7th century AD. According to the author, the construction and transformation of private houses emerged from an interplay of various cultural influences associated with the arrival of new residents at different times.

Eleonora Gasparini limits her interest to late Antiquity. She takes a closer look at some aspects of the design of fixed and moveable luxury furnishings in Egyptian, Cypriot, and Cyrenaican residences (*Floors, Architectural Elevations, and Statuary in Late Antique Residences from Egypt, Cyrenaica, and Cyprus: Some Remarks*) in order to show common forms of self-presentation of the urban elites across the Eastern Mediterranean between the 4th and 6th centuries AD. Recognising the residences as a 'building-block' of late antique identity, she seeks a global view on the social life in the world in transition. The basis for her analysis are houses with extensive decoration inspired, on the one hand, by Christianity as well as, on the other, by deep pagan roots of the aristocratic *paideia*.

The next contribution, by **Tomasz Waliszewski** and **Julia Burdajewicz**, deals with Roman houses in rural settlements northwards from Sidon (*Unearthing Houses in Porphyreon and Chhim. Structure, Spatial Development,*

and *Decoration of Domestic Spaces in Late Antique Phoenicia*). The spatial arrangement, social structure, and decoration of the houses in *Porphyreion* (Jiyeh/Nebi Yunis) and Chhim are discussed; however, the authors' main interest is focused on the polychrome decoration found in several houses in *Porphyreion*. The study of the iconography of the wall paintings reveals an important inspiration originating from the urban residences, such as the one in *Berytus*. On the other hand, motifs related to Christianity are borrowed from the nearby churches.

The volume is closed by a presentation of an ongoing project (*A New Project in Progress: Residence as Self-Presentation of Urban Elites. Architecture and Decoration of the House of Orpheus in Nea Paphos, the Ancient Capital of Cyprus. Potentials and Prospects*). The project is directed by **Monika Rekowska** in cooperation with **Demetrios Michaelides**, **Patrizio Pensabene**, and **Eleonora Gasparini**. Their objective is to reinterpret the residence explored under the supervision of Demetrios Michaelides in the 1980s and 1990s. Until now, the house has only been subjected to but a partial study. The new documentation made *in situ* as well as a re-analysis of the former one leads to a redefinition of the house's spaces in regard to both its layout and rich interior décor: mosaics and paintings with special emphasis on architectural decoration.

I would like to extend my gratitude to the colleagues and friends who helped organise the session, as well as to all participants and authors who submitted their contributions.

I wish to express my sincere and warm feelings for all the peer-reviewers who kindly advised on the submitted papers and contributed their time and knowledge to improve the entire publication. These include, in the alphabetic order: Paolo Bonini (Accademia di Belle Arti Brescia 'Santa Giulia'), Serena Ensoli (Università degli Studi della Campania 'Luigi Vanvitelli'), Michał Gawlikowski (Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology, University of Warsaw), Elżbieta Jastrzębowska (Institute of Mediterranean and Oriental Cultures of the Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw), Jacek Kościuk (University of Science and Technology, Wrocław), Grzegorz Majcherek (Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology, University of Warsaw), and Demetrios Michaelides (University of Cyprus, Nicosia).

I am also indebted to the director of the Institute of Archaeology at the University of Warsaw, Krzysztof Jakubiak, who kindly agreed to publish this monographic volume as an issue of the *Światowit* journal and provided all the necessary funding for this publication.

Finally, my special thanks go to Maciej Talaga for proofreading the submitted contributions.