**Archives from Ancient Cyprus**

Mrs Parparinou has kindly asked me to talk to you about archives – ancient archives - in Cyprus. Of course, for an archaeologist every sealed and well-dated deposit forms an archive. I will, however, concentrate on two groups of finds that constitute what is more generally understood as an archive.

Just as in our days, in Antiquity products of an appreciated quality had to be instantly recognisable in the market place. Equally, in order to maintain their popularity and high selling value, these products had to undergo quality control. Today, one does not need to read the label to know that one is buying Nescafe or Coca-Cola (**1**). Despite the fact that the shape of the containers of these commodities has undergone adjustments, following changes in aesthetic tastes, it has always remained instantly recognisable. In the same way, esteemed wine from a given production centre was exported in clay containers, amphorae, the shape of which was characteristic for that and only that particular wine-producing region (**2**).

One of the most famed wines of Antiquity came from the island of Rhodes, as evidenced by the innumerable sherds of Rhodian amphorae, found in most of the ancient world. Rhodian wine was exported in containers of a very characteristic shape, roughly from the Archaic period to the 1st cent. AD, and, as was natural, the shape of the amphora evolved through these 500plus years (**3)**. However, it never lost its basic characteristics and was always easily recognisable as a vessel containing Rhodian wine. The shape guaranteed the origin of the wine; but with a product as popular and as massively exported as Rhodian wine, other things had to be guaranteed: content, quality and the capacity of the vessel itself. This is why during the period of maximum popularity of the wine, roughly from 300 to the late 1st cent. BC, Rhodian amphorae were stamped before baking, with a series of control marks (**4)**. Amphorae from other regions were stamped with similar marks but none with as many and as informative as those of Rhodes. There can be a number of stamps on a given vessel but the crucial ones are those on the horizontal part of the two handles (**5**). One has the name of the eponymous archon of Rhodes, the other that of the so-called fabricant. The eponymous archon was the annually changing ruler of Rhodes, after whom the year was named. The fabricant was either the maker of the amphora (capacity control) or the producer of the wine (quality control) or a combination of both. For simplicity’s sake, we call him or her (because there are many stamps with names of women) the fabricant.

Naturally, during a given year there was one archon, under whom many fabricants worked; and each of these fabricants was active for a fair number of years, working with as many annually changing eponymous archons. Some of these archons are known from other sources, dedicatory inscriptions, ancient texts etc., and the evidence from the Rhodian amphorae can help us fill in many of the gaps in their sequence. This inherent information, however, is forthcoming only if the amphora survives complete, with the two handles in direct relation to each other.

And what, you may well ask, has all this to do with an archive AND Cyprus? I hope that what follows will make it clear. As mentioned already, the stamps on the handles of a given vessel will only yield the precious information they hold, if the vessel is complete, that is, if we can associate an eponymous archon with a given fabricant. However, amphorae, unless they come from a shipwreck, are rarely found complete. Amphorae are transport vessels, their torpedo-like shape especially devised for (**6**) stacking them tightly and safely in the bowels of a ship. However, they are heavy, unyielding and unpractical for other uses, their pointed bases making it impossible for them to stand by themselves. This is why, once they reached their destination, their contents were emptied into barrels, pithoi or other large containers, and the bulky amphorae were often crushed and disposed of. Suffice it mention Monte Testaccio (**7**), the point on the Tiber where the barges bringing amphorae from all over the world into Rome were unloaded, emptied into barrels and then crushed to save space, thus creating over the centuries a small mountain which is still an important feature of modern Rome.

Some of the amphorae were, of course, recycled; and we have the evidence of the 5th century BC historian Herodotos, who recounts that when he arrived in Egypt, he was struck by the fact that, although there was large-scale import of Greek and Phoenician wine, the streets were not littered with empty amphorae – implying that this was the norm in big cities. Inquiring the reason for this he was told that the head of each town had to collect the wine-jars within his district, and to carry them to Memphis. There, they were filled with water, and then conveyed to the desert tract of Syria; and thus, by storing water along the route, kept the desert passage open. But even recycled amphorae were destined to eventually break and thus the essential pairing of the two handles was lost.

And now we come to the role of Cyprus. According to a local funerary custom, amongst the grave goods deposited in a tomb (**8**), there was a pair of standing amphorae placed on either side of the feet or the head of the dead. This custom was almost obligatory, with Rhodian amphorae being particularly popular. We do not know what the amphorae contained: probably local wine, or olive oil or even water but certainly not the original Rhodian wine, since none was found with its original stopper unbroken. (**9**) We find the standard type, the uncommon a half-measure and the even rarer miniature (what I call the tourist souvenir) version of the amphora. Given that these were recycled vessels, they must have been fairly cheap. This is why the custom was widespread especially amongst the poorer classes. And this, in its turn, has meant that an incredibly large number of Rhodian amphorae have survived intact, protected as they were inside the rock-cut ?tombs used by the more populous poor. Because of this custom, Cyprus has the largest collection of complete amphorae outside Rhodes, the centre of production, and Alexandria, the largest consumer of wine.

The information on the paired handles is now being processed with the use of computers and we are now building up an incredible archive of eponymous archons and the fabricants that worked for each. In many cases, it is already possible to date an amphora to the very year of its fabrication. Eventually, we should be able to build a more or less complete list of all the annually changing archons for several hundreds of years. This, apart from its intrinsic historical value, will also help in giving a more precise date to the other objects found together with Rhodian amphorae during excavations.

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The second case I am going to talk about is a real, even though lost archive. Nea Paphos on the south-west coast of the island was the Hellenistic and Roman capital of Cyprus. There, the mosaics of the House of Dionysos (**10**) are the first in a long line of mosaics that make Nea Paphos justly famous, and they played a primary role in its being declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO. One of these mosaics (**11**) illustrates the rarely represented story of the incestuous love of Phaedra for her stepson Hippolytos. But the extraordinary importance of this floor lies not in the rarity of its theme, but in something else.

When the mosaic was lifted in order to be conserved and reset on solid foundations, an unexpected discovery was made: It was found that, when the floor was being made, in order to level the ground and create the foundation on which to lay the pavement, the mosaicists packed the ground with the ashes and burnt debris from a nearby building, destroyed by fire. By an incredible stroke of luck – for us – this building happened to be the State Archive of Nea Paphos, where all the important records of the island’s capital were kept. Naturally, all the documents, papyri, scrolls or other were destroyed in the fire BUT, the official stamped seals that were once attached to them have survived. Thus, from just under this floor, measuring a mere 4.85 x 3.50 m., a staggering 11.000 seal stamps (not to mention the fragmentary ones) were collected.

The Public Archive kept all kinds of official documents, contracts of every nature, letters, wills etc. (**12**) These were written on papyri, which were then rolled and tied with pieces of string (το λίνον) – here you see examples from the Elephantine. Onto this string, pellets of soft, raw clay (γή σημαντρίς, according to Herodotus) were attached, and then impressed with the signet ring or any other kind of seal of the persons concerned. Naturally all the documents perished in the fire, but it was this same fire that baked the clay hard thus assuring the survival of the seal impressions. These are (**13**) small, irregularly shaped, coin-like object, which are pierced through (by the string), bearing, on the back, the imprint of the fibres of the papyri, and on the front the impression of the seal. The evidence so far shows that the impressions range in date from approximately the mid. 2nd century BC to the 1st century AD.

The seal impressions were discovered in 1970 but, given their very large number, their study is especially laborious and slow, and, other than a handful of very short reports, the corpus of these seal impressions has not yet been published. I am thus grateful to Dr Maria Hadjicosti, Director of the Department of Antiquities, for permitting me to use photographs of some of these unpublished impressions, in order to point out a few reasons why this archive is of paramount importance.

(**14**) Only a very small percentage of the impressions bear inscriptions; but these give valuable information – not only by what they say but also by the way they are written: they are, in fact, all in Greek; however, some use the Cypriot syllabary, which is the earlier way of writing Greek, before the alphabet was adopted on the island. This unique survival of the syllabic script at this late date provides evidence that this antiquated way of writing, despite the fact that it had been replaced by the alphabet in everyday use, survived for use in official documents – very much in the way that, nowadays, we use Classical Greek or even Katharevousa for official degrees and decrees.

(**15**) One of the most important groups of seal impressions is that with portraits of kings and other rulers, many of whom can be identified through coin types and portrait sculpture – precious evidence for the diplomatic and other relations of Nea Paphos with the wider Hellenistic world.

(**16**) Impressions with the official insignia of cities, both within and without Cyprus, form another treasurable group. Here are three of the most interesting amongst the identifiable ones.

That on the lower left shows the Tyche of a city. A Tyche, by the way, for those that might not know, is the equivalent of the Roman Fortuna: the tutelary deity that governed the fortune and destiny of a city. She is easily identifiable as such by the cornucopia (horn of plenty) in one hand, and the rudder in the other. Were it not for the inscription, however, we would never know that this is the Tyche of Ledroi. The kingdom of Ledroi, was the major settlement which eventually evolved into the city of Nicosia. After Alexander the Great and the dissolution of the Cypriot city kingdoms, Ledroi disappears from the record until the Early Christian period. But, here is evidence that the city was still of importance during the Hellenistic period.

As the inscription informs us, the impression on the bottom right is that of the city of Kourion – evidence, for the first time, that the official emblem of Kourion was a bucranium (a bull’s skull).

Equally important: on the seal impression at the top, we easily recognise the celebrated representation of the Temple of Aphrodite at Palaipaphos – well-known from Roman coin-types. But here is evidence that this emblematic representation was already in use during the Hellenistic period.

There are impressions of seals of a variety of guilds and other professional groups. One, for which, I am afraid, I do not have a photograph, depicts the standing figure of Zeus, and bears the inscription *thesmothetwn* (of the jury) and, no doubt, originally sealed a judicial document. (**17**) A fair number of seal impressions with theatrical masks are certainly related to the *Koinon* of Dionysiac Artists, the guild to which belonged all those involved with public spectacles: actors, musicians, dancers, stage designers, etc.

(**18**) There are also seal impressions related to temples or religious institutions: on the left Aphrodite anadyomene, one of the forms of the goddess closely associated with Cyprus. On the top right: a depiction of Isis, a goddess introduced from Egypt, whose cult became one of the most preeminent during Hellenistic and Roman times. And finally, the one on the bottom right shows another Egyptian deity, a minor one this time: the coiled snake-god Agathodemon. However, the objects on either side make me think that here we have something more complex: Agathodemon, as the name implies, is a protecting, benevolent deity. The objects on either side are *piloi* surmounted by a star – this characteristic head-gear of the Dioscuroi, the Divine Twins, who were one of the chief protectors of navigation and travel by sea, and by consequence Commerce. So the seal probably belonged to one of the traders’ guilds of Nea Paphos – a major trading port of Hellenistic Cyprus.

These are but very few examples – remember that there over 11.000 – which I hope have shown you that even without the documents themselves, this is an incredible archive, giving us unique information, pertaining to both within and without the island, on city officials, foreign kings and other officials, religious institutions, professional and artistic guilds, and much more. By consequence, these seal impressions throw precious light on the history, religion, administration and many other aspects of ancient Paphos, Cyprus at large and the Eastern Mediterranean as a whole.