Unity in Diversity. The Variety of Oil Lamps Found in Different Areas of the City of Nea Paphos, Cyprus

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Abstract

Oil lamps provide knowledge about people, culture, and the organization of space. They are also an indicator of exchange between different regions as a part of traded pottery objects. The case study concerns Hellenistic and Roman lamps found in Nea Paphos, the ancient capital of Cyprus. 112 objects from different parts of the city – including the *agora*, the residential area and the theatre – have been analysed. They belong to different types and fabrics, previously distinguished by a macroscopic study. The differences and similarities between the sites will be discussed to show the distinction between the objects coming from urban spaces with different functions. Moreover, the problem of local and imported specimens will be taken into account to illustrate the potential role of oil lamps in ancient economy. The presence of Athenian, Rhodian, Levantine, Knidian or Ephesian production identified among the lamps from Nea Paphos is a good evidence for the importance of these production centres throughout Antiquity.

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to present the preliminary results of the project conducted on a group of lamps from Nea Paphos, the Hellenistic-Roman capital of Cyprus.[1] The finds come from different parts of the city, which is located on the southwestern coast of the island. Its role during the Hellenistic and Roman periods was quite important, due to the fact that this harbour city, established at the end of 4th century BC[2] or beginning of 3rd century BC,[3] functioned as the administrative and representative centre in Cyprus. It was the headquarters of the authorities, firstly Ptolemaic, and subsequently the Roman governor and proconsul. Its geographical location, at the crossroads of Mediterranean trade routes, made the city experience a great variability in terms of different aspects, including material culture. Despite the fact that the Hellenistic and Roman periods have not been very well investigated, the knowledge gained so far indicates contact with both the eastern and western parts of the Roman Empire. Important information on this topic comes from studies on amphoras, kitchen and table wares,[4] as well from some already published oil lamps.[5]

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Scope of study

The project "Enlightenment in Ancient Times. Research on Hellenistic and Roman terracotta oil lamps from Nea Paphos, Cyprus"[6] started in 2016. Its main objective was to collect as many lamps as possible, and to study them by different and multidisciplinary methods. Most of the lamps included in the present research come from sites located in the protected area of Kato Paphos Archaeological Park (fig. 1). The first site is represented by the so-called Sanctuary of Apollo at Toumballos. This *hypogeum* in the northern part of the Archaeological Park was excavated by an Italian mission conducted by F. Giudice from the University of Catania since 1988.[7] The second area is the so-called Fabrika hill with some residential remains, which was excavated by the French mission from Avignon directed by C. Balandier since 2008.[8] The third one is the Hellenistic-Roman theatre adjacent to the slope of Fabrika hill, excavated by the University of Sydney since 1995, currently under the supervision of C. Barker.[9] Additionally, finds from four tombs located outside the Archaeological Park (area of Ktima) were included in the study thanks to cooperation with S. Raptou, archaeological officer from the Department of Antiquities in Cyprus.

Fig. 1: Location of Paphos on a map of Cyprus and the ancient city plan of Nea Paphos.

The main core of the project, however, consists of materials yielded by the excavations in the area next to the ancient *odeion* used as the agora. It has been explored since 2011 by a mission from the Jagiellonian University in Krakow, conducted by E. Papuci-Władyka, under the license of the Department of Antiquities in Cyprus.[10] These finds have a high scientific value, as they have been carefully collected from the very beginning of the project (every single bucket of soil was sieved).

The total amount analysed is around 1800 pieces, which come from the previously mentioned sites. Further information comes from some published materials of the residential area called Maloutena,[11] and from unpublished lamps of the House of Dionysos and the House of Orphaeus,[12] used as reference assemblages. Additionally, the comparative studies were conducted on the lamps from the Cesnola Collection, acquired in Cyprus in the 19th century and stored in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.[13]

The project focuses on different research aspects. The first aim is the identification and characterization of local (or regional) oil lamps found in the areas above-mentioned above. Their characterization is based on fabric features, combined with typological, iconographical and technological indicators of Cypriot production. Secondly, it tests the hypothesis concerning the presence of objects traded from a long distance in the area of Nea Paphos. Non-Cypriot oil lamps are defined on the basis of similar description as Cypriot ones, and potential places of production are indicated after comparison with published analogies. Moreover, the similarities and dissimilarities between different sites in terms of lamps finds are characterized.

Methodology

An important aspect of the research was its multi-level methodology. The first step was the macroscopic analysis, conducted to get information concerning particular types represented by each lamp, its chronology, decorative motif and, last but not least, its fabric. The fabric is determined on the basis of similar clay features such as colour, shape and size of inclusions, voids, hardness, the feel of the surface and surface treatment, the feel of the fresh break and colour, defined by using the Munsell Soil Colour charts from 2009. Proper terms used for description were taken from Orton's 'Pottery in Archaeology'[14] and slightly modified.[15] On the basis of macroscopic analysis, lamps were first divided into macroscopic groups (MGs). They are usually consistent with chrono-typological divisions and decorations. As a result, the macroscopic group may be interpreted as a group of products corresponding to specific types, which were manufactured by contemporary workshops in the same area. The artisans used similar fabrics and decorations. The comparative study, using published lamps from different sites and collections, allowed us to propose a provenance for each macroscopic group. The next step was sampling for an archaeometric study.[16] Even if several macroscopic groups were distinguished, only the most representative were selected for analysis.

Fig. 2: Handle of a Roman lamp intended to be pierced (from Theatre, no. 2401).

They include 64 samples from 11 groups from the agora. Most of them are dated to the Hellenistic period and only two belong to the early Roman production. The selection depended on financial limits, as well as on the dimensions of the groups and fragments themselves. Some imported groups and some of unidentified provenance were too small to be sampled and then get representative results. They were omitted together with examples of non-defined provenance or fragments too small and light to be sampled.[17] At this stage of research, four groups have been suggested as Cypriot and seven imported. Table 1 shows the list of the analysed groups, number of samples, chronology, type and suggested provenance.[18]

The samples were subsequently investigated using wave dispersive X-ray fluorescence at the Fitch Laboratory at the British School at Athens. A few samples per group (around four to nine) were taken to create objectively reliable sampling groups. As oil lamps mainly represent the so-called fine wares, the chemical method was the best solution to apply. Additionally, other groups of pottery found in Nea Paphos were investigated so far by using the same method[19] in the Fitch Laboratory, so a reference database is also available and reliable. After the results of WD-XRF, the most problematic samples were investigated further by thin-section petrography and Scanning Electron Microscope analysis.

In the final stage, the results of the macroscopic analyses and proposed provenance were verified by using the results of laboratory methods. As the archaeometric analysis was conducted only on the lamps from the agora, the material from other sites was investigated macroscopically and matched to the groups by comparative study.

Preliminary Results and Discussion

The first results of the macroscopic research are very promising. It has been possible to define the local (or regional?) production of Nea Paphos, which still today is not evidenced by archaeological remains.[20] No workshops producing oil lamps or other

Fig. 3: Early Roman lamp with a depiction of a Siren (from Agora, no. PAP17/II/1624/L2).

fine wares have been identified in Cyprus so far. The only doubtful and isolated case is a Roman structure interpreted as a lamp kiln, which lies in the area of the city of Marion-Arsinoe, to the north of Nea Paphos.[21] Moreover, the local/regional provenance of some groups could also be confirmed by the fact that specific shapes and features frequently occur at all sites. Other evidence for production are moulds[22] and some technological features, such as traces of tools on handles intended to be pierced (fig. 2). Fabric similarities among the groups identified as Cypriot suggest a continuous use of the same clay sources throughout antiquity, even if this remains to be confirmed by archaeometric analysis. There is also a high homogeneity in terms of the decoration observed among objects interpreted as local, especially in the early Roman period (Macroscopic Group XI). It seems that a specific repertoire of ornaments and depictions were used. A typical feature for lamps from the 1st century AD is a single central motif depicted on a discus, usually with popular animal or floral motifs such as birds, rosettes with different number of petals, or wreaths. Among figural scenes, the Siren (fig. 3), Silenus' mask, and Eros were identified. All these motifs are known from lamps found all over the island or even beyond, so they cannot be connected with Paphos only. But, together with other features, such as fabric and type, they create specific products that seem to be typical for the city/region. These are lamps dated between the mid-1st and mid-2nd century AD, with rounded bodies that are usually unslipped and with a simple series of ovules on the shoulder (fig. 4).

Aside from the local/regional products, the high presence of non-Cypriot lamps has to be underlined. The significant number of imported objects suggests that at least for some periods, lamps were traded. Moreover, the changes in the composition of imports and trade directions can be observed in time. Statistical analysis is planned to complete the view of the lamps' distribution and to verify the hypothesis concerning the lamp

Fig. 4: Early Roman lamp with ovules on shoulders (from Agora, no. PAP17/II/1520/L1).

trade, and to show exact number of lamps representing particular macroscopic groups. Any potential differences between assemblages found in different areas of the ancient city will be investigated in respect to the function of the area in which they have been found: for example, we may expect more imported objects from the agora contexts. As far as the distribution of the groups and other potteries, in general, a great variety of objects from daily life can be observed in the whole area of the city.[23]

Despite the important results achieved until now, some problems have to be considered and discussed. First of all, there is a high macroscopic similarity between Cypriot materials and those defined as Cilician or Syrian. It was already mentioned by J. Hayes in his catalogue of lamps in the Royal Ontario Museum: "The thin Cilician fabric of Roman Imperial times approximates to that of Cypriot lamps";[24] "A fair number of Cypriot-style lamps of the 1st century AD have been found in Syria and the neighbouring regions and the question of a Cypriot or mainland origin naturally arises. If such lamps were made in both areas, there is no clearly visible difference in fabric among them".[25] Examples of Cypriot early Roman lamps clearly show that the form of the lamps and iconography itself are not very helpful when establishing the place of production, as we know examples of the same forms and motifs from all over the Mediterranean. Moreover, the same decoration can be used for different types, so it is also a poor chronological indicator. Macroscopic fabric analysis can be a better indicator of the provenance. However, it should be conducted by a researcher on the excavated material itself, and completed with laboratory methods. The latter demands good recognition of the chemical composition of objects and the raw materials from different geographical regions. Fortunately, more and more pottery is being investigated by archaeometry nowadays, so the reference database is getting better.

For now, the best solution is the implementation of an integrated methodology to gain various data, which are helpful to obtain as reliable a result as possible. Such integration helps to define the specific combination of different features (fabric, form, decoration) that reflects the manufacturing process and can result in the identification of a particular workshop. It is suggested in the case of Macroscopic Group XI (compare above) and will be confirmed hopefully by the results of archaeometric analysis.

Another problem is that the materials come from sites excavated with different methods, which makes it difficult to compare the samples in terms of number. A possible solution could be therefore a comparative analysis carried out for intact objects only (complete lamps are difficult to be missed even during excavations without sieving). In this perspective, a comparative statistical analysis will be done to reveal potential dissimilarities among assemblages from different parts of the city.

No. of Macroscopic Group	Amount of analysed samples	Chronology*	Type	Suggested provenance
Macroscopic Group I	9	4th/3rd c. BC	saucer lamps	"Cypriot"
Macroscopic Group II	4	3rd c. BC	watch-shaped	"Attic"
Macroscopic Group III	5	end of 3rd – 2nd c. BC	watch-shaped	"Rhodian"
Macroscopic Group IV	7	3rd – 2nd c. B.C.	watch-shaped	"Cypriot"
Macroscopic Group V	4	3rd – mid-2nd c. BC	watch-shaped	"Cypriot?/ Levantine?"
Macroscopic Group VI	6	mid-2nd – mid-1st c. BC	mould-made	"Phoenician"
Macroscopic Group VII	7	mid-2nd – mid-1st c. BC	mould-made	"Knidian"
Macroscopic Group VIII	5	mid-2nd – mid-1st c. BC	mould-made	"Ephesian"
Macroscopic Group IX	6	mid-2nd – mid-1st c. BC	mould-made	"Cypriot"
Macroscopic Group X	5	1st c. AD	volute lamps	"Levantine"
Macroscopic Group XI	6	1st c. AD	volute lamps	"Cypriot"

Tab. 1: Macroscopic Groups selected for WD-XRF analysis.
* Proposed chronology based on analogical finds from different areas of Mediterranean and finds from Paphos.

Conclusion

Thanks to the first results we can point out that there is a variety of lamps around the whole area of Nea Paphos. For now, local lamps seem to predominate, even if a significant number of lamps seem to be imported. The samples taken from the agora finds were used to confirm their non-local provenance and to define a particular place of production. The analysis is still in progress and the further steps are planned. The statistical analysis will be implemented especially on the precisely collected finds from the agora, in order to get a more relevant picture of the lamps' distribution. Despite difficulties and a lot of work still missing, the integrated approach to studying oil lamps will hopefully give further good results and open new perspectives on these objects.

Notes

[1] Lund 2015, 20.

[2] Maier – Karageorghis 1984, 224; Młynarczyk 1990, 67.

[3] Bekker – Nielsen 2000.

[4] Papuci – Władyka 2020.

[5] Młynarczyk 1987; Młynarczyk 1992; Młynarczyk 1995, 207; Młynarczyk 1998.

[6] The project is financed by the National Science Centre, Poland, grant PRELUDIUM 10, no. 2015/19/N/HS3/01810.

[7] Giudice 2009; Giudice 2012.

[8] Balandier 2012, 201.

[9] Barker 2016.

[10] The project is financed by the National Science Centre, Poland, grant MAESTRO 6 no. 2014/14/A/HS3/00283.

[11] The material was studied thanks to the courtesy of Dr. H. Meyza and Prof. J. Młynarczyk in March 2015.

[12] The material was studied thanks to the courtesy of Prof. D. Michaelides and the director of the Department of Antiquities, Dr. M. Solomidou-Ieronymidou in June and September 2018.

[13] The material was studied in June 2017, thanks to the courtesy of Ch. Lightfoot, Curator of the Greek and Roman Art Department in the MET Museum and with financial support from the Faculty of History of the Jagiellonian University in Krakow.

[14] Orton – Hughes 2013.

[15] These modifications were made by E. Marzec, M. Kajzer and K. Nocoń for the purpose of the publication of pottery from the Paphos Agora Project, Papuci – Władyka 2020.

[16] This part of research is especially important, as only several lamps from Cyprus were analyzed by laboratory analysis so far; compare Daszkiewicz – Raabe 1995; Oziol 1995; sampling was possible thanks to the Department of Antiquities, Cyprus that issued proper permission.

[17] It was necessary to take around 5-6 g of each sample.
[18] The table gives only general information that comes from macroscopic studies. As laboratory analysis is in progress, detailed description was reserved for the final project publication with integrated results.
[19] Marzec 2017; Marzec et al. 2018.
[20] See also Młynarczyk 1978; Młynarczyk 1992; Młynarczyk 1995; Młynarczyk 1998.
[21] Najbjerg 2012, 244 f.
[22] Few moulds were found during the research among the lamps from theater and Toumballos (one of them is published, see Bussière – Malfitana 2009). However they are dated to the late Roman times. Unfortunately, the author did not study two late Hellenistic moulds known from the House of Dionysus (see Nicolaou 1972, 315).
[23] Papuci – Władyka 2020.
[24] Hayes 1980, 72.
[25] Hayes 1980, 75.

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Fig. 1: Based on J. Młynarczyk's research (1990) with modifications by the Paphos Agora Project. – Figs. 2–4: © Paphos Agora Project.

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