



SOCIETY FOR LIBYAN STUDIES

## **Archive researches on roman housing in Cyrenaica**

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### **Preliminary report**

#### **Aim of the research**

This research has been aimed to give a contribution to the reconstruction of the urban landscape of Cyrenaica in roman times through the study and documentation of the residential architecture.

The archaeological evidence in this field principally comes from Cyrene, Ptolemais and Berenice, but some data from Apollonia as well as Tocra shall be mentioned too.

The history of researches and studies in Cyrenaica shows that only few excavations have been completely published in monographies or detailed reports. Between the first group are the accounts on the House of Jason Magnus at Cyrene (Mingazzini 1966), on the houses at Berenice (Lloyd 1977), and, at Ptolemais, on the Palazzo delle Colonne (Pesce 1950), on the Roman Villa (Kraeling 1962), on the House of Paulus (Kraeling 1962) and, recently, on the Houses in the Insula excavated by the Polish Mission (Zelazowski 2012). Then, between the preliminary and interim reports, we shall quote the papers on Ptolemais by the team of the Society for Libyan Studies directed by J.B. Ward-Perkins (Little 1979-1980, 37-43; Little, 1985, 43-47; Ward-Perkins, Little, Mattingly 1986, 109-153; Little 1990, 23-24), that have operated for a long period in Cyrenaica in collaboration with the Department of Libyan Antiquities at that time directed by R. Goodchild and then by Libyan supervisors.

In addition to the published information, many documents related to the researches made in Cyrenaica during the last century are stored up in several archives connected to the institutions that carried on those past investigations. One of the main important is the Archive of the Society for Libyan Studies in Leicester (UK), but particularly rich are also the Archive of the Centro di

documentazione e ricerca sull'archeologia dell'Africa Settentrionale (CAS) seated in Macerata (Italy) and of the Archivio Breccia in the seat of the Collezioni Egittologiche in Pisa (Italy).

These archives collect many reports, drawings and photos regarding the excavations, the surveys and the restorations carried on in Cyrene, which represents the most documented site, but also in Ptolemais, Apollonia, Tocra and Berenice, with information on the houses discovered during the fieldwork.

The present research has been focused on the archive data collected in Leicester, Macerata and Pisa in order to get new information on roman housing in Cyrenaica. The results of the research will be organized in the form of a data base specialised on housing that would add new evidence to the already published information.

### **The Archive of the Society for Libyan Studies (Leicester, UK)**

This Archive counts more than 1400 entries about Cyrenaica, that consist both in published material and in unpublished documents, mainly represented by pictures taken in the sites. Numerous are the drafts of articles and drawings of the investigated buildings that can often be observed in a bigger scale than the one chosen for the final publication.

Over the total set of Cyrenaican documents, about 950 have been consulted in order to get data about roman housing in the cities of the region.

For what concerns Apollonia, the main results consist in the images of the so-called Roman Public Baths (Goodchild 1976 a, 175-188), a building that underwent several transformations during his life and that probably was built as a private residence in the I century BC, according to the dating of the capitals of its peristyle (Wright 1976, 192-216).



Apollonia, ionic capital from the so-called Public Roman Bath (Casa delle Cisterne Refrigeranti).

(SLS Archive 2012.0320).

Among the documents on Apollonia, apart from several nice aerial photos, a second target has been the Palace of the Dux (Goodchild 1976 b, 245-256; Ellis 1985, 15-25), which can be considered the residence of the governor of the province of *Libya Superior* after the moving of the capital to Apollonia renamed Sozousa at the half of the V century AD.

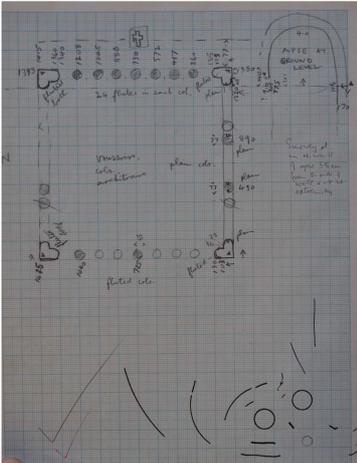
Apart from the aerial photo of the city, the acquired documents on Ptolemais regard the House T (Ward-Perkins, Little, Mattingly 1986, 109-153) and the Palazzo delle Colonne (Pesce 1950). Both of them are large luxury residences that show the élite status of their owners by the architectural layout of the buildings, by the usage of columns in their peristyles and in major rooms, by mosaic floors and marble floor and wall veneering. Due to their size and lavish decoration both of the complexes have been put forward as seats of the governors or major officers of the city in different periods, namely at the end of the III and the first half of the IV century in the case of House T and between the end of the I century BC and the I century AD in the case of the Palazzo delle Colonne.



Ptolemais, Palazzo delle Colonne, detail of a now lost mosaic from the south peristyle range.

(SLS Archive 2014.0066).

Tocra, whose private architecture can be indicated as the less uncovered between Cyrenaican cities, has been documented by plans, drawings and notes that regard also houses and mainly belong to the drafts of the article by Smith on the city defences (Smith, Crow 1998, 35-83).



Tocra, a sketch of a peristyle building from a notebook of plans, drawings and notes by D. J. Smith (SLS Archive 2012.0314).

Concluding, Cyrene data-set has shown several interesting images of many private buildings of the city. It was possible to look at details of the capitals, of the Syrian arch, of mosaics and marble floors from the House of Jason Magnus, which is one of the biggest and richest houses of the city, with its maximum extension dated between the end of the II and the beginning of the III century AD (Mingazzini 1966). Images of the House of the Propyleum, of the House of Hesychius and of the mosaic of Dionysos still *in situ* in the House of the Mosaic of Dionysos were also available, as well as the House with Portico measured sketch plan dated in 1971.

Aerial photos showing the Agora and the domestic buildings on the slopes toward the Apollo Sanctuary during the excavations and the restorations of the Thirties were other interesting documents the archive revealed.



Cyrene 1947, the Agora area from west. In the foreground the *atrium* of the House of the Propyleum. (SLS Archive 2012.0165.0007).

## **The Archive of the Centro di documentazione e ricerca sull'archeologia dell'Africa Settentrionale (CAS) (Macerata, Italy) and the Archivio Breccia (Pisa, Italy)**

The Caputo and the Pernier Archive Groups of the Centro di documentazione e ricerca sull'archeologia dell'Africa Settentrionale (CAS) at Macerata as well as the Archivio Breccia at Pisa maintain many documents related to the researches that the three archaeologists carried on at Ptolemais and Cyrene from the Twenties until the Forties.



Cyrene 1936, Evaristo Breccia analysing the newly uncovered remains of the House of Jason Magnus. (Breccia Archive, MS 362).

Even if the major works by Caputo took place in Ptolemais, the private architecture of this city is not documented to a great extent between the Caputo folders, apart from the Palazzo delle Colonne, since the excavation of this building by Pesce took place when Caputo was Controller of the Antiquities in Cyrenaica. Nevertheless, these data have been collected in the monography on the Palazzo (Pesce 1950).

More interesting are the documents on Cyrene excavations and restorations of the Agora and the Gymnasium areas, where many private buildings are located. Some of them are the already mentioned élite dwellings, as the House of Jason Magnus, the House of the Doric Peristyle, the House of Hesychius, the House of the Propyleum, the House of Dionysos Mosaic.

All of the complexes show several building phases with the major growth in the mid-imperial period, apart from the House of Hesychius which is mainly a V century AD residence, and the House of the Propyleum, whose main features can not go beyond the early imperial period.



Cyrene 1936, House of Jason Magnus during the excavations of the Upper Peristyle while the Lower Quarter was still under the Decauville railway. (Breccia Archive, MS 362).



Cyrene 1934, House of Hesychius, excavation of the cistern. (CAS - Fondo Pernier F I 5. 27).

But a second typology of housing has been documented by the archive data too. It consist in the modest domestic and artisan quarters that grew inside the squares of the no longer functioning public spaces of the Agora and the Gymnasium during the last centuries of life of the city, maybe already from the end of the III century AD.

The archive data on these buildings are of crucial relevance since only few remains of them are still *in situ*, while the main part of the housing have been demolished in 1929 in the Agora and 1938 in the Gymnasium, in order to bring the two squares back to their original monumentality dated to the late Hellenistic or early Roman periods.

## Final remarks

The Archive research has allowed relevant steps forward the knowledge of roman housing in Cyrenaica. Many unpublished data on the field situation before the actual set of the sites have been acquired, that can help to better understand the architectural layout and the phases of the buildings this research investigates.

The biggest information comes from photographs taken during the excavations of the Italian Archaeological Mission at Cyrene in the Thirties, when buildings like the House of Jason Magnus, the House of Hesychius, the House of the Doric Peristyle, the House of the Dionysos Mosaic or the House of the Propyleum have been investigated, both as they were new discoveries or in order to complete the works already undertaken during and just after the First World War.

Some new data have also been found in the typescript annual reports of the Mission by G. Oliverio, L. Pernier, C. Anti, E. Breccia, who were in charge of the researches in Cyrene. These reports have been partly published in a recent volume on archive documents concerning the archaeology of Cyrene (Luni 2014), but since in this publication not all the years have been completely included and there is not a special focus on houses a most accurate research in the archives has allowed to get more data on the researched topic.

For the other cities of the province less are the available materials, principally because of the total loose of R. Goodchild archive documents. Infact the first documented investigations in Ptolemais, Apollonia and Tocra took place when he was the Controller of Antiquities of Cyrenaica in the Fifties. But the later works carried on by the Society for Libyan Studies at Berenice (Lloyd 1977), Tocra (Jones 1983, 109-121; Buzaian 2000, 59-102; Bentaher, Buzaian 2006, 163-172) and Ptolemais as well as by the University of Michigan at Apollonia (Goodchild, Pedley, White, Humphrey 1976) and the Oriental Institute of Chicago at Ptolemais (Kraeling 1962) constitute a good set of published data on the buildings that were investigated. Nevertheless, the archive research has allowed to get more information about these sites too, specially by good-quality images of the buildings or of now lost architectural details. Between them we shall quote the mosaics and *opera sectilia* floors of the Palazzo delle Colonne, which represent a key feature in the investigation of private architecture in Cyrenaica.

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