Collections of Cypriote Antiquities in Foreign Museums

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The lack of governmental protection and care along with the lack of education among a poverty-stricken public, especially during the second half of the 19th century, caused serious damage to the cultural heritage of Cyprus. Opportunists, bankers, diplomats and others residing on the island vied with one another in collecting antiquities which they bought from local looters, thus encouraging the plundering of ancient tombs and sanctuaries throughout the island. The collectors, in their turn, sold these antiquities to various museums in Europe and America. Amateur “archaeologists” organized excavations at the sites of ancient cities, like Golgoi and Idalion already in the 1860’s and their booty was taken to foreign museums, like the Louvre Museum in Paris. There was an interest at that time in inscriptions; mainly Phoenician, but Cyprus offered much more, including stone sculpture.

The worst plundering of Cypriote antiquities in an almost organized and systematic manner took place during the last quarter of the 19th century, just prior and after the annexation of Cyprus by the British Empire (1878).

The appointment of Luigi Palma di Cesnola as American Consul in Cyprus in 1865 (he later became Consul of Russia) initiated a ten-year period of uncontrolled “archaeological” diggings in many parts of Cyprus. He lived in Larnaca, but his diggers were active not only in the Larnaca and Famagusta Districts they also excavated at Amathous and Kourion in the Limassol District. He amassed a vast amount of antiquities of all kinds and spent considerable time trying to sell them to Museums in Europe; his ambition was to find a single buyer, whom he ultimately found: the city of New York. He shipped 35,000 objects to America (a ship sunk and its cargo lies between Cyprus and Lebanon).

Cesnola had archaeological ambitions: he sold his collection on condition that a museum would be created and he would become its first director. This is how the Metropolitan Museum came to existence; his collection was “bought by public subscription” as all users of objects of the Cesnola Collection have to acknowledge to the present day. He wrote accounts of his excavations¹ and a monumental catalogue in three volumes², but the information he recorded is far from being credible. In some cases he imagined to have discovered “treasures” (he wanted to imitate Schliemann!) for which he even gave plans (the only plans of all his “excavations”), e.g. the “Curium Treasure”. 
The example of Cesnola was followed on a smaller scale, by bankers and administrators of the new British Colony. A classical scholar from Berlin, Max Ohnefalsch-Richter, came to the island soon after its annexation in order to report on the new British acquisition, but he was soon attracted by the antiquities of Cyprus. He was first appointed as forester by the government and in his spare time he excavated at several places both legally, with government permission and without one; he hired looters and bought from them, exactly like Cesnola had done, whom he accused for his "unscientific" methods. He started a brisk trade of objects not only with Berlin Museums, but also with other museums in Europe. His discoveries were sold as far as the University Museum, University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. But unlike Cesnola, he was a scholar. He presented his discoveries in two volumes.3

Scholars from Great Britain came to investigate the archaeological past of Cyprus in 1890. They excavated various parts of the island, including Salamis, Enkomi and Marion. Most of their discoveries found their way to the main museums of England (The British Museum in London, the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford, and the Fitzwilliam Museum at Cambridge). The reports which they wrote about their excavations are lamentably poor; their finds (thousands of objects of all kinds and periods) were described in general catalogues without reporting their condition upon discovery. It is only now, after 120 years, that there is an attempt to remedy this omission.

An Oxford historian, Sir John Myres, entered the arena of Cypriote archaeology at about the same time as the above or slightly later. He tried to put Cypriote antiquities in order, which was a pioneer work at the time. He carried out excavations on which he wrote scholarly reports. In 1896, he compiled a Catalogue of the Cyprus Museum, with a short account of earlier excavations in collaboration with Ohnefalsch-Richter.4 In 1914, he compiled a Catalogue of the Cesnola Collection in New York,5 which was a scholarly achievement then.

The archaeology of Cyprus thus started gaining respect, which increased dramatically due to the systematic and scientific excavations of the Swedish Cyprus Expedition under Einar Gjerstad (1927-1931), and the subsequent scholarly reports. The Swedish archaeologists also attempted to write syntheses covering all periods of Cypriote archaeology: the first appeared in 1948 and the last in 1972. These volumes have created a solid scholarly basis on which at least two generations of scholars dealing with Cypriote archaeology could rely. It is quite natural that some of their conclusions and typologies have not stood the test of time as a result of more recent excavations, yet their basic contributions are still valid; thus the volumes of the Swedish Cyprus Expedition (SCE) are quoted by all of us to the present day.
In 1935, the Colonial Government of Cyprus enacted the Antiquities Law, and thus the Cyprus Museum in Nicosia came under an official government administration. It was directed by a Cypriote curator (the first one was Porphyrios Dikaios), who was also qualified to carry out archaeological excavations. The British Director of the Department (the first was A.H.S. Megaw) was responsible for the general administration and the maintenance and restoration of ancient monuments, mostly Medieval and post-Byzantine.

The new Antiquities Law provided for the division of excavation finds between the foreign missions and the Cyprus Museum. The same arrangement was applied when the Swedish Cyprus Expedition concluded its excavations in Cyprus. Thus an extraordinary portion of their discoveries was shipped to Stockholm (see below), where subsequently the Medelhavsmuseet was created. Similar were the arrangements with the French Mission at Vounous and Enkomi, under C.F.A. Schaeffer whose part of the material reached the Louvre (at least most of it); the same goes for the objects found by Jean Béard at Ktima (Paphos) and the British excavations at Palaepaphos by Mitford and Iliffe; also numerous vases of the prehistoric period discovered by James Stewart at Vounous, Lapatsa and Ayia Paraskevi (Nicosia) enriched the Nicholson Museum in Sydney and a number of other museums in Europe and America which financially supported his excavations. An American mission from the University Museum, University of Pennsylvania (Philadelphia), under the direction of J.F. Daniel, George McFadden among others, conducted excavations in the area of Kourion and also at Lapethos for a number of years. Some of these excavations were published many years later, but others were not, and much archaeological material, especially from the Lapethos prehistoric cemeteries, still remains unpublished in the store rooms of the University Museum, University of Pennsylvania.

The Antiquities Law was amended in 1964 with the Independence of Cyprus, and now all antiquities found on the island belong to the state. The Cyprus Museum has been enlarged and new district and site museums have been established to house the discoveries from the numerous missions on the island, Cypriote and foreign, which have been active since 1965.

The above introduction was considered to be necessary, in order to explain the reason why so many Cypriote antiquities are nowadays housed in museums all over the world.

1. The British Museum, London

In 1987, a special gallery for Cypriote antiquities was arranged at the British Museum in London. The expenses were borne by the A.G. Leventis Foundation (the Leventis family
originated from Cyprus), and thus this new Gallery was named after A.G. Leventis. Its creation owes much to Sir David Hunt, a British scholar and Philhellene, who served as the first British High Commissioner in Cyprus after the island’s independence in 1960.

One gallery was not enough to exhibit even the most important Cypriote acquisitions of this museum. The main Leventis Gallery contains a representative collection that covers all periods and is exhibited chronologically and thematically. But groups of other important objects from Cyprus like the extraordinary number of Aegean vases (Mycenaean and Minoan) [Fig. 1], as well as gold jewellery from the Enkomi Tomb 93, are showcased as parts of other galleries, together with other Aegean objects, on the ground floor. In recent years, after a fellowship granted by the Leventis Foundation, the vast collections that were kept in store rooms have been treated and better classified thanks to the energy and enthusiasm of the Leventis Fellows, the late Veronica Tatton-Brown, and now Thomas Kiely. 

2. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

When the Cesnola Collection was first exhibited in this Museum considerable controversy was raised among art critics at that time. There were sculptures with heads that did not match the torso, and objects of false provenance. Gradually, as the Museum grew and was enriched with objects of Greek and Roman Art, the “flavor” of Cypriote art diminished considerably and the Cypriote Exhibition was confined to 25 colossal statues along the corridor on the ground floor leading to the cafeteria, and a few objects, mainly of Mycenaean art, which were exhibited in the Greek Galleries. The vast part of the collection found its way to the store rooms. In the 1990s, however, the Museum started making plans for refurbishing all its galleries. I was then asked to serve as a consultant for the new Cypriote exhibition. In the meantime, however, in 1928, a very large portion of the collection, about 30,000 objects, was auctioned and only those considered masterpieces remained. 2,300 objects went to the Ringling Museum in Sarasota (Florida) and most of them are still kept in boxes. While working in New York on the Cesnola Collection, I made several efforts to persuade the authorities to publish this material unfortunately to no avail. Of the remaining objects in the Cesnola Collection about 500 were exhibited in four consecutive galleries, one of them endowed by the Leventis Foundation.

The new exhibition, in accordance with museological rules and aesthetically attractive, was arranged under the guidance of Curator Carlos Picon and Joan Mertens. The new galleries were inaugurated in 2000, in the presence of Glafkos Clerides, the then President of the Republic of Cyprus.
Despite the fact that the provenance of the Cesnola Collection objects often raised doubts, it is undeniably one of the most important collections of Cypriote antiquities outside Cyprus. It features real masterpieces of Cypriote art of all periods, particularly sculptures, like the two richly decorated limestone sarcophagi of the 5th century BC from Amathous [Fig. 2] and Golgoi, as well as other sculptures from the sanctuary at Golgoi excavated by Cesnola. There is a scheme for the proper digital publication of the whole collection and the money has been already provided by various Greek Foundations. Up to now one collection has been published, the Terracottas with 423 entries. The Collection of Sculptures, by far the richest Cypriote collection, richer than that of the Cyprus Museum in Nicosia, was published in 2014, with 635 entries, including all stone objects. I submitted a catalogue for the pottery soon after 2000, but it had to wait its turn and now needs to be rewritten.

3. Musée du Louvre, Paris

This museum started acquiring Cypriote objects before any other of the major European museums (1863), thanks to the excavations in Cyprus of French amateur archaeologists, like Melchior de Vogüé, Edmond Duthoit and the brothers Colonna-Ceccaldi. Later on, they acquired items from Cesnola, Ohnefalsch-Richter and others. As a result of excavations carried out by C.F.A. Schaeffer at Vounous and Enkomi (1934-1974) and by Jean Bérard at Paphos, the museum’s collections were considerably enriched with pottery, Late Bronze Age objects, jewellery, bronzes, seals, etc., exhibited in two special galleries, one for the Bronze Age and the other for the Iron Age, regrettably separated from one another. A well-known object (because of its size) in the Iron Age Gallery is the colossal stone vase from the acropolis of Amathous (7th-5th centuries BC), which entered the Museum in 1866.

Thanks to the rich Cypriote collections in the Louvre [Fig. 3] a number of French scholars specialized in Cypriote archaeology. Apart from excavation reports published by excavators, several other scholars have written about Cypriote antiquities in the Louvre, like Caubet, Yon, Hermary and others.

4. Other French Museums

Apart from the Louvre, important Cypriote antiquities are kept in other French Museums. In particular, the Bibliothèque Nationale should be mentioned, where a very rich collection of Cypriote coins is kept, as well as other objects, mainly metallic, including the famous bronze plaque from Idalion, engraved on both sides with signs of the Cypriote syllabary,
constituting the longest inscription ever found in this script.\textsuperscript{14} The Museum in Toulouse is also worth mentioning, which recently acquired an important terracotta male head, probably from the 1890 excavations of a favissa at \textit{Toumba} (Salamis).

5. Berlin Museums

Even before Max Ohnefalsch-Richter’s activities in Cyprus, the Königliche Museen in Berlin had acquired important collections of Cypriote antiquities through purchases from Cesnola, among others, from 1869 onwards. From 1887 onwards, the Museum purchased from Ohnefalsch-Richter about 1500 objects; others were obtained from antiquities dealers in 1936-1937.\textsuperscript{15} Among the most important items of these collections are some "free-field" vases of the 8th-7th century BC, decorated with pictorial compositions; an early 11th century BC tomb group from Kition, excavated by Ohnefalsch-Richter; and a bronze four-sided wheeled stand of the 11th century BC also from Kition [Fig. 4].

The Collections of the Berlin museums suffered considerably during World War II and many of them found their way to Moscow (see below), from where only a portion has returned. They are now assembled and very well exhibited in the Neues Museum.\textsuperscript{16}

6. Russian Museums

The Cypriote collections in the three largest museums, the State Historical Museum and the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, both in Moscow, as well as the State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg, were formerly very little known. They used to be privately owned and were nationalized after the Russian Revolution. A catalogue of selected objects from all three Museums was published in 2005.\textsuperscript{17} There is a special gallery for Cypriote antiquities in the Pushkin Museum, with representative exhibits from all periods; a funerary limestone relief of the end of the 5th century BC can be distinguished. The museum also possesses a large collection of Cypriote antiquities which were taken to Moscow from German museums during World War II. These are intended for an exhibition in a special gallery.

7. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna

This museum acquired a marble sarcophagus from Soloi (Cyprus), decorated with an \textit{Amazonomachy} in high relief dating to the 4th century BC. It reached Vienna in 1557, having
changed several owners and was obtained by the Museum in 1805. This piece once decorated the garden of the Emperor’s Palace. There are several other important pieces of sculpture, namely a colossal archaic “Kouros” from Pyla on the southeastern part of Cyprus, and a marble statue of Artemis, of the 2nd century BC, found in Larnaca. Most items of this collection, except sculptures, are still kept in storerooms. A catalogue of selected objects has been published.\(^8\)

8. Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto

The Museum acquired its Cypriote collections through gifts, mainly by Sigmund Samuel (early 19th century) and Colonel Falkland Warren, an English officer, who served in Cyprus and had a share of the antiquities found by Ohnefalsch-Richter in the Temple of Apollo at Tamassos. The most important pieces are large-size terracotta figures. There is a Leventis Gallery in this Museum and a catalogue has been compiled.\(^9\)

9. Musée d’Art et d’Histoire, Genève

The major part of this collection was acquired through Louis Castan, a Swiss medical doctor who settled in Limassol in 1864 and became an amateur archaeologist and collector. A catalogue of the collection was published by the Costakis and Leto Severis Foundation.\(^{10}\)

10. National Archaeological Museum, Athens

The museum had acquired a large collection of Cypriote vases from dealers in Alexandria;\(^{11}\) other pieces were donated by the Archaeological Society at Athens. There is a Leventis Gallery in the Museum and a catalogue published in English and Greek.\(^{12}\) A remarkable limestone head of a bearded figure can be distinguished, dating to the early 6th century BC [Fig. 5].

11. The Medelhavsmuseet, Stockholm

In 1931, 771 packing cases with about 13,000 registered objects were shipped from Cyprus to Stockholm. They were given to the Swedish Cyprus Expedition, after the conclusion of their excavations in Cyprus, according to the practices of that time. They were first stored
in army barracks for conservation and study, and in 1982 they found a permanent house in a museum in the centre of Stockholm. The highlight of the exhibition is the group of about 1,000 terracotta statues and figurines from the Sanctuary of Ayia Irini [Fig. 6]. The Leventis Foundation has recently helped the museum to expand and devote more exhibition space to the Cypriote collection. Unlike the Cypriote collections of most museums, those of the Medelhavsmuseet have been properly excavated and can prove to be useful tools for the study of Cypriote archaeology. In store rooms, outside Stockholm, there are numerous sherds and other objects which a team of two scholars - one of them Fellow of the Leventis Foundation - is now studying for publication. Due to space limitations we are unable to provide a detailed account of all Cypriote collections, which can be found in numerous public and municipal museums, as well as at university museums. Below we shall enumerate some of those collections, along with reference to published catalogues (for the cases there is one).

12. The Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford
Karageorghis 2009.

There is a Leventis Gallery and a catalogue: Karageorghis, Vassilika, Wilson 1999.

14. The Ashmolean Museum, Oxford
There is a Leventis Gallery. Catalogue by Frankel 1983.

15. The National Museum of Ireland and the University College, Dublin

16. Eretz Israel Museum, Tel Aviv
17. The Nicholson Museum, University of Sydney


18. The Archaeological Museum of Odessa


19. The Archaeological Museums of Istanbul

Catalogue by Ergüleç 1972. The Cypriote collections have been recently refurbished.

20. The National Museum of Denmark, the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen


21. Italy


22. Belgium

Catalogue by Laffineur and Vandenabeele (eds), 1990.

23. San Francisco Bay Area Collections


24. Badischen Landesmuseum, Karlsruhe

25. The Hunterian Museum, University of Glasgow


There are numerous other museums and collections, mostly private, in Europe, America and Australia, some of which have their own catalogues. They are too many even to enumerate here. I hope that this will be done one day, with information about collections and their contents.

As a Cypriote, I very much regret that a great part of the Cypriote cultural heritage is scattered throughout the world. I hope that all those invaluable items kept in foreign museums, if properly exhibited and published, will generate interest for further research on the island’s past, and will promote Cypriote culture among the general public including members of the Cypriote communities living abroad. I also hope that one day some of these antiquities – which are of national importance – will be repatriated, or returned on long-term loan.
List of illustrations

The images that follow are available in the digital version of the present article in the website Kyprios Character. You can view the images by following the link: kyprioscharacter.eie.gr/en/t/AE

Fig. 1: The British Museum, London: Ivory box from Enkomi T.58 (1896); decorated in relief. Length: 29cm. Early 12th century BC. Accession no. 1897,0401.996. Photo courtesy of © the Trustees of the British Museum.

Fig. 2: Metropolitan Museum of Art: the “Amathus sarcophagus”. Limestone. First quarter of the 5th century BC. From the north necropolis of Amathus. The Cesnola Collection, purchased by subscription, accession no 1874-76 (74.51.2453).

Fig. 3: Musée du Louvre, Paris: Terracotta model of a ship with crew. Inv. No. AM 1972. Middle Cypriote II ware, circa. 1850-1750. Height: 16.7cm. Provenance uncertain. Photo courtesy of the Museum.

Fig. 4: Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Antikensammlung: Bronze four-sided wheeled stand from Kition (?). Inv. No. Ant. Misc. 8947. Height: 40cm. Late Cypriote III/Cypro-Geometric I (1050-950 BC). Photo © Ingrid Geske.

Fig. 5: National Archaeological Museum, Athens: Limestone head of a kouros. Inv. no 1832. Height: 30cm. Early 6th century BC. Photo © Kapon Editions.

Fig. 6: Medelhavsmuseet, Stockholm: Group of terracotta sculptures and figurines, from the sanctuary of Ayia Irini. Excavated by the Swedish Cyprus Expedition. Circa 7th century BC. Photo by © Ove Kaneberg.
Endnotes

1 Cesnola 1877.
2 Cesnola 1885; 1894; 1903.
3 Ohnefalsch-Richter 1893.
4 Myres, Ohnefalsch-Richter 1899.
5 Myres 1914.
7 For a short account on the Cypriote collections of this Museum, see Karageorghis 2004a, 54-77; see also Crewe 2007.
8 Karageorghis 2004a, 68-77.
9 See a catalogue of selected objects: Karageorghis, Mertens, Rose 2000.
10 Karageorghis, Merker 2004.
11 Hermary, Mertens 2014.
12 Karageorghis 2004a, 95-103.
14 Dacaudin 1987; Masson 1961, 235-244.
15 See Karageorghis 2004a, 22-29; also Brehme, Brönner, Karageorghis, Platz-Horster, Weisser, 2001, in English and German; this catalogue includes an account of the gold and silver city coins in the Münzkabinett.
17 Karageorghis 2005.
18 Bernhard-Valcher et al. 1999.
19 Karageorghis 2003a.
20 Karageorghis 2003b.
21 Nicole 1908, 318 entries.
22 Karageorghis 2003b.
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