Cypriote Archaeology in the Bloomsbury Area

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The short notice which was given for this conference and its rather informal character dictated a topic for my paper which would not need long and specialized research, but simply reminiscences and general remarks. This is also in perfect harmony with my present-day interests, which focus largely on the past and the future of Cypriote archaeology, with which I have been connected for over half a century. Now is the appropriate time for such reflections. The older generation of Cypriote specialists is depleted and gradually disappearing. Many of us have left the field of excavations and we confine ourselves mainly to excavations in museum storerooms and libraries. Actual excavations have become too costly for many institutions and this is having a serious impact on field archaeology. There is something good in all of this, since it gives us ample time to pay off old debts by publishing our excavations.

To come back to London, to the British Museum, it is first and foremost a very pleasant duty to participate in a conference in honour of Veronica Tatton-Brown, a demonstration of affection and high esteem for a person who has helped all of us on many occasions in our research. I know how tedious it is, when you work in a museum, to have to answer letters from many colleagues who are eager to have information and who almost expect you to do part of their research for them. Veronica performed this duty with patience, generosity and good humour, for which we are all very grateful. In my case I am paying back a small part of her generosity manifested in April 1988, when she organized a very successful international colloquium in the British Museum, entitled Cyprus and the East Mediterranean in the Iron Age, the proceedings of which she edited in 1989. This colloquium was linked to the opening of the A.G. Leventis Gallery of Cypriot antiquities in the British Museum, both those on exhibition in various galleries of the museum, mainly in the section of Aegean art and in the special gallery on Greek and Roman art and life, but also those in the dusty, dark and cold storerooms, made a great impression on me. The Mycenaean vases of the Pictorial Style as well as the ivories, bronzes and gold jewellery from the Late Bronze Age cemeteries, were far superior to anything else from the rest of the Aegean itself in the British Museum collection. It is not surprising that when I came back to my university studies in 1952 and embarked on my research for a doctoral dissertation, I chose as a topic the 'Mycenaean vases of the Pictorial Style'.

I never miss an opportunity to mention an interesting story with regard to the Mycenaean vases of the pictorial style which are now in the British Museum. While working for my doctoral dissertation in the early 1950s, I came across a number of sherds from an open crater which were found by the American Mission at Kourion in 1939 and were kept in the Cyprus Museum. They belonged to a fragmentary crater which was found at Kourion during the excavations funded by the Turner Bequest in 1895 (Fig. 1). On a visit to London I took the fragments which belonged to the Cyprus crater with me and
we agreed with Professor Bernard Ashmole, Keeper of the Greek and Roman Department, that they should be fitted onto the fragmentary crater in the British Museum for new photographs. All the fragments fitted perfectly and I personally was very excited, but I never thought that this would create a major headache for Professor Ashmole. The problem was what to do with the new crater. He explained to me that he could not give the fragmentary crater, which belonged to the British Museum, to Cyprus because it needed an act of Parliament to give away national property and I am sure he was thinking also of the problem with the Elgin Marbles. I observed that there was the same difficulty with us. The following day he came up with a solution: the workshop of the British Museum would make one crater of plaster and paint on it the fragments of the Cyprus Museum. This would stay in the British Museum. Another crater of plaster would have the actual fragments of the Cyprus Museum and those of the British Museum were to be painted on it.

We thus had two vases, partly of plaster and partly of original sherds. I traveled back to Cyprus with the one which included our own fragments. Years later, around 1968, I had the honour and pleasure of taking Sir Mortimer Wheeler, my own teacher and a Trustee of the British Museum, and Sir John Wolfenden, Director of the British Museum, round the Cyprus Museum. I told them in every detail the story about this crater; they looked at one another and proposed a perfect solution: the British Museum would give us their fragmentary crater on indefinite loan.10 We received this the following year and all the fragments are now reunited and the crater is now on exhibition in the Cyprus Museum. Both parties were happy. In return, the Cyprus government provided an important object on similar terms, a Hellenistic jug inscribed with a dedication in alphabetic Greek from the Sanctuary of the Nymphs at Kafizin (Fig. 2).11 Could this serve as a precedent for other similar problems?

So much for myself. During my student days interest in the archaeology of Cyprus was rather limited. The only person who still showed keen interest in what was going on in this field was Joan du Plat Taylor. Her position as Librarian at the Institute of Archaeology did not involve any teaching, but she was recognized by all as a Cypriote specialist because of her excavations in Cyprus and also her work on the classification of the collections of the Cyprus Museum in Nicosia. She never missed an opportunity to keep the Institute’s library well equipped with publications on Cypriote archaeology. References to Cyprus were made from time to time by my teachers at University College, but only with regard to the Aegean, a tradition which was deeply rooted in British archaeological scholarship.

This tradition had already started by the end of the 19th century when British scholars started extensive excavations in Cyprus, beginning with the Cyprus Exploration Fund from 1888 and later the Turner Bequest excavations of the British Museum between 1893 and 1896. The Turner Bequest excavations were established with a generous grant from Miss Emma Turner, in order to investigate the archaeology of the newly acquired British territory.12 These excavations were directed by individuals such as Alexander Murray, the Keeper of the Greek and Roman Department, his assistants Arthur Smith and Henry Walters, and the Oxford scholar John Myres. They looked at Cyprus as part of the Aegean world, which they knew well, and for them excavating in the island was a unique opportunity to explore the archaeology of this new British territory and, if possible, to vie with the discoveries of Schliemann in Troy, Mycenae and Tiryns.13 This mentality continued as late as the 20th century in the British Museum. In a recently published book on the history of the British Museum, it is clearly stated that the Turner Bequest initiated a series of excavations in Cyprus since it was ‘one of the few areas of the classical world in which it was now possible to excavate and
acquire material under license from the Government'.

The Classical education of these early excavators in Cyprus no doubt dictated their particular interests. In choosing areas for excavations in Cyprus they opted for those sites which they knew from ancient Greek literature, such as Salamis (they thought that Enkomi was part of Salamis), Palaepaphos, Kourion and Amathus. It is not surprising that their finds were taken to the Greek and Roman Department of the British Museum and not to what was then the Department of Western Asiatic Antiquities. This phenomenon also has a parallel in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, but not in the Louvre, where initial interest in Cypriote archaeology was shown by Orientalists. The Greek bias of the early British excavators is also seen in their preliminary reports. They interpreted the material remains of ancient Cypriote culture either as Aegean or Greek on the one hand or Phoenician on the other, more or less ignoring the indigenous culture. Almost everything Late Bronze Age was regarded as Mycenaean. However, one major benefit as a result of this was the beginning of a proper chronology for the Late Bronze Age in Cyprus, based on the evidence of Mycenaean pottery. The connection of 'Mycenaean' pottery, however, with a Mycenaean colonization of Cyprus in the Late Bronze Age became predominant in the evaluation of Cypriote culture during this period and this was followed and enhanced by the later studies of John Myres, who became the principal specialist on Cyprus in the early years of the 20th century.

This attitude towards the character of ancient Cypriote culture resulted in the fragmented way it was represented in the galleries of the British Museum. Much prominence was given to Mycenaean pottery and all the artefacts which were even remotely related to Mycenaean art, or to those items of the Iron Age which had a direct or indirect relation to Greek art. These were exhibited in the relevant galleries of the museum: Iron Age vases of the pictorial style found their place in the gallery of Greek and Roman life, together with terracotta figurines illustrating everyday life, such as clay models of boats from Amathus, representations of musicians and so on.

Such was the situation with the rich collections of ancient Cypriote art in the British Museum until the mid-1980s, when a British classical scholar and a great philhellene, Sir David Hunt, who served as the first British High Commissioner in Cyprus after the Island's independence in 1960, asked Constantine Leventis for help fund the establishment of a gallery of Cypriote antiquities in the British Museum. The idea was novel and hardly palatable to the authorities in Cyprus during the euphoric atmosphere that prevailed at the time. I remember how angry the then Minister responsible for antiquities in Cyprus was upon receiving the news about a large donation to the British Museum to establish a gallery exhibiting Cypriote artefacts; his wish (shared by many others) was that we should claim the return of these antiquities, irrespective of the fact that there was no international law or agreement which could make such a restitution feasible. Gradually the decision of the A.G. Leventis Foundation to finance the creation of a Cypriote gallery in the British Museum was correctly understood. In December 1987, the gallery was inaugurated in the presence of the Duke of Gloucester; the then Minister and the present author, as Director of the Cyprus Department of Antiquities, represented the government of the Republic of Cyprus.

The new A.G. Leventis Gallery of Cypriot Antiquities is the first named gallery of its kind in the British Museum and initiated the far-sighted, ongoing project of the Leventis Foundation to publicize the collections of Cypriote antiquities in the major museums of Europe and North America. This gallery was conceived with great consideration for modern museological requirements, with regard to aesthetics as well as didactic purposes. There is a broad range among the exhibits covering all aspects of Cypriote art, from the Neolithic to the
Roman period, and illustrating many aspects of Cypriote culture (such as religion, economy, foreign relations, social structure, and coinage). The gallery owes much to the hard work and expertise of Veronica Tatton-Brown. Although some 760 objects are exhibited in the A.G. Leventis gallery, many Cypriote items are exhibited elsewhere in the Museum, such as the Mycenaean and Minoan pottery found on Cyprus which is on display in the gallery of Aegean prehistory alongside the impressive jewellery and other finds from Tomb 93 of the Turner Bequest excavations at Enkomi. The collections in the A.G. Leventis Gallery of the British Museum do not appeal only to the general public, but they are also cherished by the huge Cypriote community in the London area, which takes particular pride in learning first-hand about its cultural heritage.

The creation of the new A.G. Leventis Gallery also provided the opportunity for the Greek and Roman Department of the British Museum to bring order to the vast collections in the storerooms. This was undertaken by Veronica, and the result was miraculous. One can now see and study all the tomb groups from the Late Bronze Age and Iron Age cemeteries, the terracottas and sculptures from the various sanctuaries and so on. There are separate storage places for ivories and bronzes. This is a great service to all of us who often bother the staff of the Department for information, photos and the like.

Veronica’s own contribution to the study of Cypriote sculpture is of capital importance. With her doctoral dissertation on the limestone sarcophagi of Amathus and Golgoi, now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, she grasped the intricate problems of this aspect of ancient Cypriote art, for which there are far fewer specialists than for other topics, such as pottery.\(^1\) She continued writing articles about Cypriote sculpture throughout her time at the museum: her article on the Cypriote gravestones of the Archaic and Classical periods is of particular importance.\(^2\) That she did not find time to conclude her study on the sculptures from Palaepaphos (excavated by a British mission in the 1950s), nor to prepare her doctoral dissertation for publication is certainly not her fault; she has given most of her time to helping others, both in the museum and in the Cypriote community in the London area, which takes particular pride in learning first-hand about its cultural heritage.

Another important institution in the Bloomsbury area which played a significant part in the development of Cypriote archaeology, although indirectly, is the Institute of Archaeology (formerly in Regents Park and now in Gordon Square), to which several references were made earlier. My memories of the Institute date back to the period just after the war, when it was housed in the beautiful St John’s Lodge in Regents Park. It would be too nostalgic to recall memories of the lectures by Gordon Childe, Mortimer Wheeler and Max Mallowan at that time. The Institute expanded its premises and its academic pursuits when it was transferred to Gordon Square. I visited its library and Conservation Laboratories as a young archaeologist, only to realize how antiquated were the methods of conservation which I learned in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The Institute in Gordon Square covered a wide spectrum of archaeological courses covering the Near East, Egypt and Anatolia. It also became the best centre for training students in all aspects of practical archaeology. A large number of archaeologists now active in the field of Cypriote archaeology received their training there.

In Gordon Square students had the opportunity to mingle. The top floor was reserved for the Institute of Classical Studies and thus, perhaps for the first time in the UK, Classical and Near Eastern scholars could mix together and talk. The library was common to both institutions and one could find books on both the East and the West within the same building. Joan du Plat Taylor continued to be the Librarian. I visited her every time I was in London as a young practicing archaeologist, by which time I was free from the complex that I had a guardian, but I knew I had a good friend with whom I shared reminiscences.

Gordon Square was a lively place where one could attend public lectures of all kinds, and I had the honour to give some of them on Cyprus. A scholar who left a great imprint in Bloomsbury was the late Professor Emeritus, Nicolas Karageorghis.
Coldstream. As Yates Professor of Classical, Aegean and Cypriote archaeology he revived the interest in Cypriote archaeology, but in a different way from the archaeologists from the British Museum working in the 1890s. He considered the whole of the Mediterranean as a unified geographical area for research and always had his eyes open to what was happening in Cyprus and the East Mediterranean in general and the interconnections between the Aegean, Cyprus and the Levantine coast. Several young archaeologists had the fortune to have him as supervisor of their doctoral research, on topics directly or indirectly related to Cyprus. 24 It was with great distress that we learned that after his retirement the Provost of University College decided to abolish the Yates Chair which Nicolas held and which had been graced over many decades by some outstanding scholars. My view, which is still shared by others of my contemporaries, is that that decision was wrong and that University College, which is now expanding in size and prestige, should think again of reviving the Yates Chair. The College needs to show that it excels not only in Applied Science, Law and Economics, but also in Classical, Aegean and Cypriote Archaeology, and that it wishes to revive a tradition which bestowed upon it great prestige.

I would like to mention another important contribution made by the institutions in the Bloomsbury area to Cypriote archaeology, through the Conservation Laboratories of the British Museum and the Institute of Archaeology. I remember very vividly the keen interest of the former Director of the Conservation Laboratory of the British Museum, Dr M. Plenderleith, in undertaking difficult cases of conservation of works of ancient Cypriote art. In 1949 Claude F.A. Schaeffer discovered at Enkomi, in Tomb FT1949/2, a magnificent silver bowl with inlaid decoration in gold and niello, which is now in the Cyprus Museum. 25 The bowl, which was in fragments at the time of its discovery and was covered with a layer of green corrosion because of its contact with bronze objects, was too delicate to treat in Cyprus and was sent to Dr Plenderleith in the British Museum. The result after treatment was the strikingly delicate and unique silver bowl inlaid with bucrania and lotus flowers which has found its rightful place in the history of art of the Late Bronze Age.

In 1962, in the excavation of the half-looted Tomb 2 of the Salamis necropolis, we found a silver bowl in the built chamber, which had not been seen by the tomb looters. 26 It was a very delicate object and not much metal was preserved. We could see that its heavily corroded inner surface was decorated with engraved patterns. We sent it to Dr Hodges in the laboratory of the Institute of Archaeology, who not only cleaned and preserved this precious object but also sent us two superb detailed drawings of the palimpsest engraved decoration of this 7th-century silver bowl, prepared by the competent services of the Institute of Archaeology. The Conservation Laboratories of both the British Museum and the Institute of Archaeology never failed to answer questions and to give advice to the Cyprus Museum, and they also trained some of the Cypriote conservators and archaeologists in the field of conservation.

Another Department of the British Museum which had and continues to have close links with Cypriote archaeology is the Department of the Middle East (formerly Ancient Near East and before that that Department of Western Asiatic Antiquities). A great scholar who served as a Keeper in this Department was Dr Richard Barnett, whose vast knowledge of Mediterranean archaeology is well known. Not only did he honour me with his friendship for a long period of time, but he was for me a constant source of wise advice and valuable information. He was directly involved with Cypriote antiquities and wrote several important articles on Cypriote objects in the British Museum, as well as visiting the island regularly. 27 His successor as Keeper, John Curtis, and Dominique Collon always reserved a warm welcome for visitors from Cyprus. Dominique continues to write and advise us on Cypriote glyptic art of the Late Bronze Age.

Although Cypriote archaeology does not have the same high position in British universities which it had two or three decades ago – this is a general phenomenon in all universities of Europe, mainly because of the bleak possibilities in the jobs market – there are still many opportunities in the Bloomsbury area. The proposed scheme to create a large museum to shelter all the collections of University College, the Panopticon, particularly the Petrie Museum collection as well as other important holdings, is certainly an initiative in the right direction to continue the strong tradition of archaeological study in the area. Further, in 2007, the Institute of Archaeology opened its A.G. Leventis Gallery of Cypriot and Eastern Mediterranean archaeology, which will aid future generations of students and researchers. Finally, as the project of publishing the Cypriote collection in the British Museum progresses – and our Foundation will support it as much as it can – Cypriote archaeology will receive a further boost in Bloomsbury.

In my student days the British Museum supplied University College with eminent Professors such as Bernard Ashmole and Martin Robertson. The transfer of all the classical and archaeological libraries to the spacious Senate House has provided Bloomsbury with a unique, quiet centre, where one can find more books on archaeology and the ancient world assembled under the same roof than anywhere else in the UK, with the exception, perhaps, of Oxford. In this respect, however, I and my contemporaries will not forget the cozy atmosphere of the Hellenic Library in Bedford Square, with that particular smell of old books. There was no central heating in the 1940s and only those who arrived early could secure a table near an electric fire which allowed us to survive the cold days of winter. 28

As an outsider now, but as somebody who has had close links with University College, the Institute of Archaeology and the British Museum, I believe that all these institutions should join forces to research the civilization of the Mediterranean and thus keep up a long and brilliant tradition. In November 2004, the Department of Classics of University College, in collaboration with the A.G. Leventis Foundation, organized an international conference on the humanities, mainly involving Classical scholars who are products of Gower Street. I was among the oldest, if not the oldest. It was a happy occasion, and brought back memories of more than half a century ago, of life in London with its many material restrictions and its dark fog, but richly blended with much spiritual opulence in Bloomsbury, where the ancient gods are still worshipped.
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Notes
1 See Karageorghis 2007.
4 Karageorghis 2007.
5 Karageorghis 2007, 36–7; see also, Vermeule and Karageorghis 1982.
7 Murray et al. 1900, 73, 81 and fig. 127.
8 See BM Trustees minute of 12 October 1968; Karageorghis 2007, 39–40.
9 GR registration number 1969, Lot. 1; Mitford 1980, 175-176, cat. no. 236.
11 On which see Fitton 2001.
13 Note the chapter introductions in Murray et al. 1900.
15 For a discussion see Steel 2001; also Fitton 2001.
16 Walters 1929; Jenkins 1985.
19 Tatton-Brown 1986.
23 [Ed.] This is now being addressed by the Cyprus Digitisation Project generously supported by the A.G. Leventis Foundation. The first part of this initiative, comprising 1800 objects from Enkomi, was launched late in 2008. Material from other sites, such as Kourion, Amathus, and Marion will appear in the course of 2009, while further bodies of data will be added at regular intervals in the near future. See: (http://www.britishmuseum.org/system_pages/holding_area/ancient_cyprus_british_museum.aspx)
25 Schaeffer 1952, 128–9, 379–89 and colour pl. C (between pp. 380–1); C.M. Inv. 4.207.
26 Karageorghis 1967, 14, no. 71 and 19–20; pls X–XII; Appendix II, 129.
28 Karageorghis 2007, 16–33

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