A glance at an exhibition. *Cipro. Crocevia delle Civiltà.* Torino, Musei Reali (June 2021-January 2022)

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During June 2021 to January 2022, the exhibition *Cipro. Crocevia delle Civiltà* has been opened to visit in the Sale Chiablese exhibition halls of the Musei Reali in Turin (fig. 1).

In the ancient imaginary, Cyprus was inextricably bound to Aphrodite. In different forms of literary and artistic expression down the centuries, the birth of the Goddess and the bond she established with her spiritual home have formed an image of Cyprus that is so strong that it transcends myth and influences our modern perception of the history of this island. Only in recent decades has archaeological research made it possible to return Cyprus to its rightful place as a crucial cultural crossroads in the Mediterranean, to its true cultural identity, to the decisive role it played in trade, and to its development over the millennia.

Centuries of history point to the particularly intense bond and lively interest of Turin and its cultural institutions in the origins of this island. In the city’s long history of studies – from antiquarian research to scientific archaeology – and in the broader scope of its culture, Cyprus has been seen as the Mediterranean hub of a horizon that extends all the way from Egypt to the Near East. It is sufficient to mention the extraordinary contribution of the expeditions and the Egyptian Museum, on the one hand, and the archaeological missions and initiatives for the promotion and protection of the Centro Ricerche Archeologiche e Scavi per il Medio Oriente e l’Asia, on the other hand, to understand the crucial role of Cyprus within this cultural context.

The significance of interests results in the multiple activities that link Cyprus to Turin, first of all with regard to the constitution of the archaeological collections that enrich the city’s museum institutions and the on-field research.

The Cypriot collection at Turin comprises over 1,000 items, dating from the Neolithic period to the seventh century AD. It includes ceramic ware, terracotta and stone statuettes and statues, lamps, jewellery, and coins, as well as a rich collection of glassware dating from the Hellenistic period to the height of the Roman Empire. The collections have been built up by various donations that have been made since the 1840s. This was relatively early in terms of the international interest in Cypriot antiquities, which came to a head with excavations and purchases on the antiquarian market only in the two decades prior to the establishment of the British protectorate on the island in 1878.

Along separate routes and during the course of many years, four main collections of Cypriot antiquities arrived in Turin, according to their distinct origins over time and to the initiative of different protagonists:

1. 1847. Donation by Marcello Cerruti to the Museum of Antiquities of the Royal University of Turin.
2. 1870. Donation by Luigi Palma di Cesnola to the Royal Academy of Sciences of Turin.
3. 1877. Donation by Alessandro Palma of Cesnola to the Piedmontese Society of Archaeology and Fine Arts of Turin.

The first collection to enter the museum, in 1847, came through Marcello Cerruti, the consul of what was then the Kingdom of Sardinia. Cerruti was a Savoy diplomat who held several positions in Libya, Tunisia, and Brazil, as well as in Cyprus. There he purchased many objects, some of which he donated to the Royal Museum of Antiquities in Turin. The collection included about ninety objects (inscriptions, statuettes, and small vases). The materials had been found “partly in Dali partly in Larnaca (the ancient Citium)”.

A considerable part of the Turin Cypriot collection came through Luigi Palma di Cesnola, an emblematic but controversial character, whose personality and activities played a key role in the history of archaeology on the island. The intense “archaeological activity” he promoted on the island and the methods he used to obtain recognition were the offspring of his time, as we can see in his subtle but fierce competition with Heinrich Schliemann.

With hindsight, many decades later, we can assess some of the few positive effects of Luigi Palma di Cesnola’s work, especially in terms of the attention that his ‘discoveries’ – often on the borderline between archaeological evidence and myth – brought about for Cypriot antiquities.
in later generations of archaeologists. However, we also need to consider the damage that his methods of excavation caused, depriving the items he collected of the archaeological context in which they had been found.

The archaeological work of Alessandro Palma di Cesnola can be seen almost like a companion piece to the equally curious and adventurous activities of his elder brother Luigi. Alessandro's work as a scholar can also be seen in his careful work of making his archaeological excavations known: in particular, he had important interactions with the Academy of Sciences of Turin and with the Piedmontese Society of Archaeology and Fine Arts. It was through the latter that, in 1877, he donated to the Royal Museum of Antiquities a collection of about 200 ceramic vases and lamps from Salamis, Kourion and Throni, as well as about fifty glass items from Salamis, dating from the first and second century AD.

But the story of Palma di Cesnola and the Museum of Antiquities in Turin did not end there, for in 2005, over a hundred years after these important donations, Professor Arturo Palma di Cesnola, Alessandro's grandson – the son of his second son Alerino – donated a collection of 357 objects (ceramics, terracotta, lamps, glass, jewellery, and more) to the Museum of Antiquities in Turin. These items had been kept at the family property, thus respecting the will of his grandfather, who had wanted his collection to be kept in a museum where it could be seen by all.

Further ‘minor’ collections from several museums in the Turin region have been also included in the exhibition, along with archival materials from several cultural institutions like the Museo Egizio di Torino, the Archivio Storico of the University of Torino, the Accademia delle Scienze di Torino, the Museo Camillo Leone at Vercelli, the University Museo di Anatomia and the Museo di Antropologia e Etnografia, and the Museo Regionale di Scienze Naturali.

Additionally, a set of significant loans joined the collection of exhibited objects from important partner Italian and foreign museums and institutions that granted their collaboration to the exhibition project: the Department of Antiquities, Cyprus, granted the loan of objects from the Cyprus Museum and the Kourion Museum, along with relevant loans that arrived in Torino from the British Museum in London, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Medelhavsmuseet in Stockholm, the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge, the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Wien, the Museo Archeologico Nazionale in Cagliari.

The exhibition is patterned across the lines of an homogeneous path organized into seven thematic sections (TH 1-7) highlighting major aspects of Cypriote history and culture under a diachronic perspective, together with transformations of archaeological approaches to early Cyprus, and five chronological sections (CH1-5), focusing upon the development of Cypriote society from deep Prehistory to Late Antiquity, from village-based communities through the emergence of urban entities, from the policies of city-kingdoms to the role of Cyprus in the framework of Roman empire and beyond the Early Byzantine period. In such a perspective, the exhibition path leads to a coherent visit alongside the following sections:

TH 1. Cyprus in Turin. From treasure hunting to collections. The history and formation of historical collections of Cypriote Antiquities in Turin.
TH 2. From villages to empires: the Cypriote society through time

CH 1. Villages. Seafarers, foragers and the birth of settlements in Cyprus (Neolithic to Chalcolithic).

CH 2. Communities. From village-based to complex communities (Early to Middle Bronze Age).

CH 3. Cities. Urban society and international Mediterranean networks (Late Bronze Age).


CH 5. Cyprus and the empires. From Hellenistic to Roman and Late Antique periods.

TH 3. The woman and the goddess. The woman role and female imaginary in the island of Aphrodite (fig. 2).

TH 4. East & West. The pivotal role of Cyprus in the Mediterranean trade networks across the millennia.

TH 5. Languages, scripts and administration. People and administration systems through time and space.

TH 6. Religious ideology and cult.


Besides the exhibition of selected objects from the Musei Reali collections and loans from Italian and foreign museums and cultural institutions, the visitors’ path is enriched by immer-

Figure 2a — A view from the exhibition path of TH 3, “The woman and the goddess. The woman role and female imaginary in the island of Aphrodite” (credits Daniele Bottallo / DB Studio per i Musei Reali di Torino).
sive digital tools. The use of new technologies, with specific reference to 3D technologies have a great relevance.

In a broader perspective, the use of technologies democratises museum curatorial practices, facilitating audience participation and experience.

Specifically, the creation of 3D prints of selected artefacts increases museum access and enhances perception of and engagement with ancient Cyprus material culture, while a dedicated touch-screen set in section TH 6 allows for an immersive visit of the Middle Bronze Age site at Erimi, investigated by the Italian Erimi Archaeological Project research team.

Finally, as an additional visitor experience the video-art installation *Here let me stand* by the Cypriote artist Marianna Christofides has been set-up in TH 1 hall. Christofides, working on the theme of British colonial heritage, has created a video using the photographic plates from the volume *Cyprus Antiquities – Excavated by Major Alexander Palma di Cesnola* (1881). In the video, these static images are brought together in a slow, continuous and never-ending sequence. The images of the antiquities in the tableau portrayed merge indistinctly in an imaginary collection, thus creating a striking contrast with the actual Alessandro Palma di Cesnola volume set-up in the same exhibition room.

![Figure 2b — A view from the exhibition path of TH 3, “The woman and the goddess. The woman role and female imaginary in the island of Aphrodite” (credits Daniele Bottallo / DB Studio per i Musei Reali di Torino).](image-url)