



The Cyprus Museum

CYPRUS TOURISM ORGANISATION

Introduction

The Cyprus Museum is situated in Nicosia and is the Archaeological Museum of Cyprus covering the history of the island from the Neolithic period up to the early Byzantine years.

The museum as we see it today was established in 1935, when the British administration of that time founded the department of antiquities and voted the first relevant legislation regarding the antiquities. Until then anyone could very easily obtain the permission to undertake excavations and export the finds to the country of his desire.

Due to this situation, a great number of Cypriot antiquities are exposed in all the big museums of the world, such as the British Museum in London, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in N. Y., the Louvre Museum, the Museum in Stockholm and Berlin. There are antiquities from Cyprus even in the archaeological museum of Constantinople, which were offered by Luigi Palma di Cesnola, the consul of the United States of that time, after he had taken the authorisation from the Sultan to undertake excavations in Cyprus during the 19th century.

The erection of the building began in 1908 to the memory of Queen Victoria of England, of which Cyprus was a colony at that time.

This is a square building with rooms around and a rectangular courtyard in the centre – the atrium – which is now used as a storeroom and as a space for the restoration of antiquities.

We are in front of the propylaea which recall the facade of an ancient temple. Above the door the commemorative plate is distinguished and on the left is the museum's shop, where you can buy the guides of the museum and of all the archaeological sites in Cyprus, as well as publications regarding the archaeology and the history of the island.

We enter the building, where in the lobby the ticketing office is located.

The museum has 14 rooms and we will start our guided tour of the museum from the first room to the right.

The first room covers the Neolithic period (aceramic and ceramic phase) until the end of the chalcolithic period that is to say from 9000 B.C. until 2500 B.C.

At the locality Aetokremmos in Akrotiri, the excavations which were carried out from 1983 until 1990, brought to light remains from pigmy hippopotamuses and pigmy elephants dating to 10000 B.C. The stone tools which were discovered in the same locality outline life in Cyprus 2 thousand years prior to the archaeological sites of Kissonerga and Choirokitia, that is to say around 9000 B.C. Another important settlement that was brought to light through excavations which started in 1993 is at the locality Sillourokampos in Parekklesia and the finds here date to the period 8200 – 7500 B.C.

In the first and second exhibition case to the right we see objects from this settlement made out of limestone and picrolite.

Excavations have also been carried out at the locality Myllouthkia in Kissonerga since 1989, where clues were discovered placing this settlement to the 9th Millennium B.C.

In the other exhibition cases of the first room the island's Neolithic and Chalcolithic periods (8500 -2500B.C.) are represented through outstanding samples of stone and clay vessels, figurines, domestic utensils, craft-based items, rural tools and jewels. Among them the pre-ceramic stone Neolithic vessels of Choirokitia, the Neolithic clay vessels with the combed decoration from Sotira and Choirokitia, the Neolithic female jewels of Choirokitia made out of hematite, cornaline and other precious stones, the chalcolithic clay vessels of Erimi with the characteristic linear red decoration, the chalcolithic cruciform picrolite figurines from the cemetery of Souskiou and from other regions of Pafos, as well as the chalcolithic clay figurines of Lempa are distinguished. In 1976 in this settlement the so called "Kyra (Lady) of Lempa", was discovered a unique figurine of 32 cm high, made out of limestone dating approximately to the 3rd millennium B.C.

The first inhabitants of the island, who lived in the above mentioned settlements in small communities near the rivers, in order to have the essential goods for their everyday life, sculpted the stones of the river and transformed them into everyday use vessels, tools and figurines. The excavations in these settlements, which were mainly situated on the south-western coast of Cyprus, show us that they had a very developed civilisation, that they had tamed certain animals such as the goat and the pig and that they cultivated the soil. Furthermore, remnants were preserved from wheat, barley and grape. Choirokitia is the best known Neolithic settlement, situated halfway between the Nicosia – Limassol motorway.

Extensive excavations were carried out in this settlement and as we see here on the photos, there was an organised community with a large circular residence and other smaller ones. All these show that there were relationships with neighbouring countries, mostly commercial in order to exchange products. This is indicated by the tools made out of obsidian, a mineral which is not included in the minerals of Cyprus.

During the excavations in Kissonerga at the locality Mosfilia very impressive objects were discovered which we can see them in the central exhibition case. On the photograph the votive jar is shown, as it was found, a clay vessel filled with various ritual (votive) objects that are on display in the same exhibition case. Of the 56 various clay and stone figurines, the most interesting and important one is the clay figurine with the representation of the child birth. It seems that the concepts of the continuation of life, the female figure, the fertility and the maternity were dominating the beliefs of the Cypriots of the Neolithic Period.

We pass in Room No 2 where we see exhibits from the Early Bronze Age dating from 2500B.C. until 1900B.C. Most of the exhibits that we see in this room are vessels and funeral offerings which were found in tombs of the above mentioned period. Most of them originate from the Cemeteries in Vounous, a region situated near Bellapais, in the now occupied District of Kyreneia, and from Deneia in the District of Nicosia. Most of these vessels show an advanced technology in the pottery; they also have an external red polished surface and are decorated with incised linear patterns. In the exhibition cases round in the second room we see votive vessels, jugs and other more advanced and sophisticated vessels that were used either during the farewell ceremony of the deceased, or as personal objects of everyday use that were buried with the dead.

The most interesting objects are those exhibited in the central showcase, which were discovered in the cemetery of Vounous. We see here on our right hand-side clay miniatures of sanctuaries with representations of a certain religious ceremony, with the symbols of the bull and the snakes being in the worshipping epicentre of this period, as well as the flat oblong figurines. In the centre of this showcase is a model of a circular sanctuary, where a certain ritual is also represented. This model of open air circular sanctuary is surrounded by a high enceinte wall with a large entrance being kept from the inside. Furthermore, near the entrance there is a figure trying to secretly see what is happening inside the sanctuary. Perhaps, this indicates that only the insiders were allowed to enter in this space. There are figures standing erect, a figure

seated on a throne, other figures are in a circular space, while another figure is kneeling. There are oxen in closed areas and snakes are drawn on the walls. These two represent life and death respectively: important information on the religious convictions during the Early Bronze Age. In the same showcase there is also a clay model of a ploughing scene as it was done in 2000B.C. In Cyprus, the soil has been cultivated since the Neolithic Period and this model is as described by Hesiod in his writings and as it still survives today in the Cypriot countryside. The ploughshare was of course made of copper.

-Room No 3 contains, selected groups of clay vessels presenting all the stages of evolution of the Cypriot pottery in a continuous succession from the Middle Bronze Age until the end of the Roman Times (1900B.C.– 395B.C.). The most important samples of these magnificent works are by periods: as we enter on the left we see the small vessels of various shapes of the Middle Bronze Age (1900–1650B.C.) with their genuine and rich painted geometrical decoration, the deep bowls with the cloven handle and the cylindrical base and the small jugs with the symmetrical, painted, geometrical, decorative forms on the white emulsion thorough slip of their surface and the ring-shaped vessels with thin walls.

In the right exhibition case are the famous craters, such as the well known “crater of Zeus” where is shown a representation on a chariot, a decoration with octopuses, Zeus and other figures, animals and plants, as well as the stirrup-jars, the bowls, the compasses, the rhyton and other Cypro-mycenean masterpieces of the Late Bronze Age (1650-1050 B.C.) with the composite, harmonious, decorative representations of human and animal figures, geometrical shapes, rosettes and many other floral motifs. This period is characterised by the migration of the first Greeks to the island, who firstly arrived as tradesmen in order to exchange their products with the Cypriots, that is to say copper, and after the destruction of Mycenae they settled here bringing with them their civilisation. In the central exhibition case opposite the Mycenaean objects we also see other small items of the same period which were found in ancient Kition that is located where the town of Larnaka is today. In this showcase a magnificent object dominates, the ritual rhyton, made out of faience whose surface is covered with light blue enamel and decorated with animals running, hunters and bulls as well as rows of continuous spirals. It is dated around the 13th century B.C.

Further down in Room No 3, we see the large amphorae, like the one exposed in a separate showcase in the centre, the amphora of the bichrome ware type (it is called the Hubbard

Amphora due to the donor's name), the jugs, the prochoi, the hydrias, the bowls, the plates, the small animal-shaped and bird-shaped vessels and all the other wheel-made pottery achievements of the Cypro-Geometric Period (1050-750 B.C.) with the rich and symmetrical painted decoration of parallel lines, bands, concentric circles, rhombi, checked, meanders, rosettes, lotus flowers, papyrus and various other floral and geometrical motifs.

We continue further down in the same room, with the vessels of similar shapes of Cyprus – Archaic Period (750–475 B.C.), among which the jugs of the free field style are dominating with their unique schematised bichrome type representations of bulls, birds, fishes and additional decorative forms. In the exhibition case in the centre are on display elegant and incomparable in technical fineness black polished and red polished vessels, imported from Attica, with mythological representations and other compositions of animal and human figures. In the showcases to the right and left after the Cypro-archaic Period are on display the small plain oinochoes with the thorough white slip and prochoi with the microscopic plastic representation of a Kore with a jug on her shoulder of the Cypro-Classical Period (475-325 B.C.).

Then come next the lagynoi, amphorae, tear and myrrh bottles of the Hellenistic Period (325-50 B.C.). In the last showcases of the 3rd room we see the red glazed bowls and various other vessels of the Cypro-Roman Period (50 B.C. – 395 A.D.) with the characteristic incised decoration of rosettes, animal figures, birds and other motifs. In these last exhibition cases the ceramics are imported from the neighbouring countries and this shows the commercial relationships that had the island.

In Room 4 are on display, exactly as they have been found in the Sanctuary of Agia Irini, all votive clay statues and figurines. These exceptional works of coroplastic art, expressing the deep culture of the religious feeling during the Archaic Times, the period from which they are dated, depict human figures, riders on horses, clusters of bulls and persons, chariots and ships with their crew, Centaurs and various scenes from everyday life. The human figure dominates among all the votives, that usually offers to the sanctuary its clay model, so as to always be under the protection of the god. A humorous attitude is diffused in all figures and in most of them is evident the foreign artistic influence, especially Egyptian. It is worth noting that among all these figures we see here there is only one female exposed in the first row in the centre. The Sanctuary of Agia Irini was excavated by the Swedish Mission in 1929. Around 2 thousand

objects were discovered in their position, circularly set around an altar. Half of them are in the Museum of Mediterranean Archaeology in Stockholm.

We continue in Room No 5 where the progressive development of Cypriot sculpture from the beginning of the Cypro– Archaic Times up to the end of the Roman Period, is represented with many outstanding samples of limestone and marble statues and grand-reliefs. It is worth noting here that we do not have any marble in Cyprus thus most of the statues that we see here are either made of limestone or of clay. The marble statues were very limited in number and were made out of imported marble. The statues mainly depict mainly gods and goddesses, heroes, Kouros and Kores, priests and priestesses, athletes, adolescents, satyrs and other human figures. The grand-reliefs belong usually to friezes of temples and to various pedestals and represent mythological depictions and scenes, which are related to divine and human figures.

The most important in sequence of display are: The early Cypro-Archaic limestone statues with Assyrian and Egyptian influences, mainly on the face. The limestone statues of the 6th century B.C. come next, with the Kouroi and Kores having an exceptional position among them, with their characteristic archaic smile and refined Ionian features on the face, such as the limestone statue of Kouros on a base with lions. In the exhibition cases to the left are on display statuettes made of marble such as Aphrodite with Eros and other deities. Next is the statue of Hercules with the truncheon.

Further down on the left the Cypro-classical male and female heads of statues with the idealistic features of the face, the imposing expression and the irreproachable assiduity in the attribution of the hair that is usually framed with a rich decoration are exhibited. The splendid limestone female head of a natural size statue from the sanctuary of Aphrodite of the Hellenistic Period at Arsos has a strictly symmetrical and idealistic attribution of the refined lines of the face.

Proceeding further down to the right of the room 3 lions and 2 sphinxes from the "royal" tombs of Tamassos, where they were found during maintenance works in 1997, and above them are exposed the grand-reliefs representations of amazons fighting from the complex of temples of Soloi are on display

To the left is the head of Aphrodite of the 4th century B.C. from Salamina with the outstanding classical style. Further down, in the centre, we can admire the exceptional Hellenistic marble statue of Aphrodite of Soloi that reminds the consummate mentality of the Sculpture School of

Alexandria. The limestone altar with the Goddesses Aphrodite, Demeter and Artemis in relief and the representation of the abduction of Persephone are exposed at the end of the room to the left, and to the right we can see the limestone amphiglyphic stele with a representation of the head of Bacchus on the front side and an erotic scene on the other side.

We continue in Room No 6 with exhibits of the marble and copper statues of the Roman Period. Of great interest are the oversized copper statue of the Roman emperor Septimius Severus (119-211A.D.) from Chytroi, the current Kythraea, the copper head of an adolescent statue from Soloi, and the graceful marble statue of the sleeping Eros from Pafos, that recall the perfect in style of the statues of the School of Alexandria. In this room there also exist statues of Egyptian deities, which were discovered in the Temples of Soloi.

In Room No 7 is on display a large variety of selected exhibits, dating from the Late Bronze Age until the beginning of the Early-Christian Times and consists of copper arms, utensils, statuettes, tripods and other metalworking objects, seals, faience amulets and related micro crafts. The most remarkable among them are the copper tripods, the copper bases for vessels, (such as the one we see on the left in the second exhibition case on our left hand side and differs from the tripods stands (bases) because this is based on 4 wheels and is decorated with animal figures on the 4 sides. This base has its own small story, as it had been illegally exported from Cyprus and smugglers of antiquities tried to sell it in various Museums. This copper base was stolen by the Turks and was put for sale by them in 1978 to a museum in Germany, but due to the fact that all the museums knew that it was originating from Cyprus, they informed the Cyprus Department of Antiquities, and thus the object was bought and repatriated).

Further down in the same room we can admire coins, micro crafts, gold and silver jewellery and utensils, copper and clay lamps, osseous, ivory and alabaster works. We can also admire glass vessels and various other objects such as the copper statuette of the horned god, who is identified with the Horned Apollo from Engomi, the copper cluster of two lions mangling a cow and the copper figurine of a cow, of the Cypro-Classical times from Soloi.

Seals and coins: In the next exhibition cases we can admire the collections of seals dating to the second millennium as well as the collections of coins of the Cypriot kingdoms with the very few golden and silver coins dating from the 6th century B.C. to the 4th century B.C. Silver Ptolemaic

Tetra drachmas, which were discovered in 1978 underneath the mosaics of the House of Dionysus during maintenance works, are also exposed.

Other gold jewellery and golden micro objects: In the last exhibition cases of this room on the left side the gold elaborated jewellery dating from the Middle Bronze Age to the Early Christian Times are exposed. There are necklaces, rings, earrings, needles, bracelets, as well as the golden sceptre with the heads of an owl and an eagle on the handle, discovered near the ancient Kourion and dating to the 13th century B.C., and the silver plates of Lambousa. In the showcases located opposite to the right are on display micro objects and micro crafts made of ivory and alabaster, glass vessels such as tear bottles and myrrh bottles, as well as a collection from roman lamps made out of copper and clay. Admirable is the ivory handle of a mirror from Palaipafos dating to the 12th century B.C.

From the centre of this room there exists a passage to the right leading firstly to Room No 8, once we pass in front of the reconstruction of the entrance of the built royal tomb from Tamassos. On the back side which has a view to the underground room, is the representation of an entrance of a burial chamber of a built tomb of the 5th century from Pyla. We go down few steps, where there are burials representations. In the Neolithic Period the tombs were simple pits, where the dead were placed in the foetus position. These tombs were placed near the entrance or even inside the houses.

During the Early Bronze Age the tradition of the tombs with booths and dromos begins. This architecture continues, with some alterations, until the Roman times. At the beginning of the Geometric Period strong influences from the Aegean make their appearance, while in the Archaic Period the monumental built tombs show up also continuing during the Cypro-Classical Period when the symmetry is being stressed and attains higher levels during the Hellenistic and Roman Period.

To the right of the room with the tombs, in Room 9, stone and clay sarcophaguses, bones boxes and burial steles are exposed. A remarkable object is the limestone burial stele with the representation of a warrior in relief, originating from Lysi and dating from the 5th century B.C.

To the left of the room with the tombs, in the Room No 10, which is dedicated to the Cypriot writing, there are clay and copper plates and various inscriptions on marble and limestone bases and steles, in which the development of the Cypriot writing and epigraphy from the Late Bronze

Age until the end of the Roman times is shown. Until today, the most ancient sample of writing dates from 1500 B.C. and is presented on the upper part of a small clay plate which was found in Engomi of Ammochostos. Other important items are: 1) A clay cylindrical seal discovered in 1967 and bearing a graven inscription, the text of which covers in total 27 lines and 2) a part of a clay plate, which was found in 1953 and is 9.5cm long, 9cm wide and approximately 2 cm thick and is inscribed on both sides. Both of the above were discovered in the archaeological site of Engomi and are dated from the end of the 13th century B.C. Another important object, unique in its type, discovered in the locality Skales of Palaipafos (cemetery of the Geometric and Archaic Times) is represented by one of the three copper obelisks that were found together; by its cavity there is an inscription in the Cypro-syllabic writing, constituted by five graven points. There is also a copy of a copper plate written in the Cypro-syllabic writing (the prototype is in the National Library in Paris) which reports an agreement done between the city of Idalion and physician Onasilos and his brothers for the free of charge healing of the war's injured and in exchange the King Stasikypros and the city of Idalion would offer them state land or/and money. This agreement is dated in 470 B.C. and gives us a sample of the political situation that prevailed in Idalion during the beginning of the 5th century B.C.

We will walk up through the wide steps we used earlier to go down in order to proceed to Room No 11, where on display are the finds from the "royal" tombs of the necropolis of Salamina including the wooden bed and a throne decorated with ivory, heads of statues made of raw clay, which are attributed to the members of the family of the last king of Salamina Nikokreon and recall the style of the statues of Lysippos, a unique in its kind copper cauldron with busts of heads of sphinxes and griffins around its edges, and various copper components from chariots that were discovered in the dromos of the "royal" tombs with skeletons of horses (it was the custom to sacrifice the horses and leave them together with the chariot of the king in the dromos in front of the tomb, in order to accompany him after death. It appears that the life after death was among the convictions of the inhabitants of Cyprus in antiquity).

As we are in room No 11 and look opposite at the bed, on our right hand side is the library of the Museum and on our left is Room No 12, where through photographs, representations and other material the historical development of the metallurgy in Cyprus is exposed. It is possible that copper (cuprum in Latin) is also relevant to the name of Cyprus. The extraction of copper began in 3500 B.C. and continued with great zeal until nowadays. The Troodos range of

mountains is still rich in sulphurous minerals until today. We see here the representation of the ancient galleries of the mines, the tools they were using for the extraction, the mining and smelting of copper. Further down on display are objects made of copper, such as the ingot which weighed approximately 39 kilos and which was used for the commercial transactions of Cyprus with other countries. It was the monetary unit of the island for many years during the ancient times. In the last exhibition case moulds are also on display, with which the arrows, tools and other objects used in their everyday life, were made of copper.

Furthermore, this room periodically hosts exhibitions from recent excavations of the Department of Antiquities or other foreign archaeological missions in Cyprus.

Returning to Room No 7, we proceed to the next room which is Room No 13. Here on display are marble statues which were discovered in the Roman Gymnasium and the theatre of the archaeological site of Salamina. These statues depict Nemesis, Ygeia, Asklepios, Aphrodite, Zeus, the River God, Meleagros, Hermaphrodites, Aphrodite with the dolphin, Artemis, Isis, Hercules and Apollo with the lyre. We see on the photographs on the wall the archaeological site of Salamina, as it was in 1974 before the Turkish invasion.

And we arrive in the last Room No 14, where in the exhibition case to the right there are groups of various clay figurines from the Bronze Age, with the flat oblong figurines depicting schematized women, as well as the figurines of the goddess of fertility with the infant on her lap – the Kourotrophos, of the Cypro-Mycenaean Period; further down to the right are the figurines of horses, riders and warriors with a round shield, of the Cypro-Geometric and Cypro-Archaic Period, and the figurines of the Kores of Tanagra of the Cypro-Classical Period. Proceeding towards the exit we see on display in the exhibition cases to the left certain Greek matrixes, the moulds that were used for the manufacture of figurines and scenes representing child birth. These clay figurines show us the importance of the Goddess-Mother who protected the pregnant women and the importance she played in people's life. In the next showcase there exist clay theatre masks as well as figurines of tragedy and comedy actors. In two spots of the large exhibition cases the objects from 2 representations of open air sanctuaries discovered in Menoiko and in Kakopetria, where the Gods Baal-Ammon and Athena were respectively worshipped are on display.

We conclude here our guided tour of the Museum during which we have covered the most important items that you can admire here. In this limited space, the Museum covers the history of the island dating from the 9th millennium B.C. until the Early Christian Times. After this short guided tour you can go on your own around the Museum and study the various exhibits with greater attention.

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