Studies in Mediterranean Archaeology and Literature
PB 184

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Cover: head of a statue in the Neo-Cypriot Style (ca 560–520 BC) from Ayia Irini. Medelhavsmuseet, Stockholm, A.I. 0915. Water colour by Miriam Johannesson

Published by Åströms förlag
Banérg 25 SE 752 37
Uppsala, Sweden
www.astromeditions.com

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ISSN 0283-8494
Printed in Sweden
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Preface

In the history of archaeology it is often the grand campaigns, excavations and events that occur in relation to the great discoveries that are celebrated. Spectacular stories about the finding of ancient palaces, temples and rich tombs are often generously distributed to the public through journals and books. In this respect, The Swedish Cyprus Expedition (SCE) was no exception. Throughout the period of their excavations in Cyprus, 1927–1931, Einar Gjerstad wrote articles that were published in the Dagens Nyheter, the largest newspaper in Sweden at the time. Under headings such as ‘Gold is pouring out of the tombs’ (19 December 1927), readers could follow the excavation, on a monthly basis, of now famous places such as Soli, Vouni, Idalion, Lapithos, Petra tou Limniti, Kition, Enkomi, Ayia Irini and many more. These articles were later published as a book (Sekler och Dagar på Cypern) in 1933. In addition, John Lindros (the Expedition’s photographer) took more than 10,000 images, not only of archaeological contexts but also of life in Cyprus at the time. These images, together with field notes, diaries, drawings and excavation permits kept in the archives at the Medelhavsmuseet, offer a rich and dynamic understanding of the Expedition and their time in Cyprus.

In stark contrast, we have surprisingly few stories about what happened in the period after the members of the Expedition, together with the finds, arrived in Sweden in the winter of 1931. Part of the explanation is, of course, that the often tedious and time-consuming work in archaeological laboratories and libraries is less exiting, but we also suspect that part of the answer can be found in the occasional letters and regular protocols from ‘The Cyprus Committee’, kept in the Cyprus archive. A quick glance tells us that the Cyprus collection was accepted as a possession of the Swedish State in 1932 and it is clear from the beginning that Einar Gjerstad, Eric Sjöqvist and Alfred Westholm were given little support and a minimum amount of money for the gargantuan task of publishing the finds. Included in the insufficient budget was money for safekeeping and conservation of the Cyprus collection. Until 1940 it was stored in a former artillery barracks built in the 1780’s. The primitive conditions and harsh Swedish climate forced Westholm, Keeper of the collection, to write desperate letters to the Committee and to the Swedish heritage board urging better preservation conditions for the finds. In one petition, written in 1939, he refers to the Cyprus collections as ‘the world’s most hideous museum’.

In this grim and inhospitable environment, with no library, no comparative collections at hand, a limited network of international scholars and almost no support from the Swedish state, the members of the Swedish Cyprus Expedition still managed to publish the vast majority of their findings. Most importantly, they also laid the foundation for one of the finest, best documented Cypriot collections in the world.

The Cypriot objects were eventually moved to better locations in 1940, and in 1954 the Medelhavsmuseet was founded, following a merging of the Cyprus collections
with the collections of the Egyptian Museum in Stockholm. The Medelhavsmuseet moved to its current premises, an old banking palace in the central part of Stockholm, in 1982, while objects which are not on display are kept in a designated storage facility at Tumba, some 40km from the city centre. Part of this material, more than 5,000 boxes mostly of pottery sherds, remains unpublished. In light of this and the fact that we will celebrate the 90-year jubilee of the beginning of the Swedish Cyprus Expedition in 2017, work with the Cyprus collections is an ongoing project. This brings us to the background of this volume, which is based on papers presented at the conference Ancient Cyprus Today: Museum Collections and New Research Approaches to the Archaeology of Cyprus, which was co-organised by the editors and held at the Medelhavsmuseet, Stockholm, on 25–27 April 2015.

The principal aims of the conference can be outlined as follows:
1. To provide an up-to-date view of archaeological research on Cyprus carried out by universities, museums and research institutions around the world
2. To encourage dialogue and promote new research and collaboration between experts on ancient Cyprus by bringing together senior and younger scholars
3. To present the Medelhavsmuseet’s Ayia Irini research project to an international audience of experts. This project is a re-evaluation of the sanctuary of Ayia Irini, arguably the most astonishing discovery of the Swedish Cyprus Expedition. More than 900 boxes containing tens of thousands of unpublished sherd material have been thoroughly examined and recorded. Some of the preliminary results from this study appear in this volume.
4. To promote collaboration between researchers and museum collections. This is especially pressing since the Medelhavsmuseet is constantly in need of being re-vitalised in order to remain an attractive hub for the general public. We are also eager to maintain and extend the long and well-established Swedish scholarly engagement in Cypriot archaeology.

The 31 papers published here cover a time period from the Early Bronze Age (2400 BC) to the end of the Roman era (400 AD) in Cyprus. All were externally reviewed and revised for publication. The volume is divided into three thematic sections, within which chapters are arranged according to the chronological period to which they refer. The first section, ‘Project stories and museum histories’, includes papers which relate to expeditions which subsequently resulted in museum collections or to museum collections and their formation over time. This section, in particular, scrutinises the colonial heritage that is part of most European and North American collections. Contributions to the second section, ‘Ancient places: new perspectives’ present research offering new insights on specific sites. These include cemeteries, settlements and sanctuaries excavated some time ago, such as Lapithos, Enkomi and Ayia Irini, and those where there are ongoing archaeological projects, such as Hala Sultan Tekke, Amathus, Kition and Paphos. Object-oriented papers appear in the third section, ‘Ancient objects: new perspectives’. Subjects and issues tackled in this volume include the study and display of museum collections, site management, archival documentation and data digitisation, new fieldwork and methods of scientific analysis, burial and cult practices, metallurgy, numismatics, maritime transport and fishing and ceramics, metalwork, seals, terracotta and stone sculpture and textiles.

We warmly thank the authors for their time and effort and express our sincere gratitude to those international scholars who took on the task of reviewing the papers. All of them made valuable comments and contributed decisively to the quality of the volume.
Furthermore, we wish to extend our warmest thanks to a number of people and institutions.

Firstly to His Excellency Andreas Kakouris, the Ambassador of Cyprus, and Mr Georgios Loizou, the Deputy Chief of Mission, for their support and great interest in our conference; and Dr Rea Ann-Margaret Mellberg, Cultural Counsellor at the Embassy of Greece in Stockholm, for delighting us with her presence.

Our very special thanks go to the staff at the Medelhavsmuseet and in particular to Kerstin Bergström, Sara Garne, Ann-Kristin Karlsson, Andreas Lundell and Elisabeth Schön for their generous and highly professional help in organising the conference. Nothing would have been possible without them.

We warmly thank the Riksbankens Jubileumsfond for their generous support, which enabled us to host the conference in Stockholm. Our sincere gratitude goes also to the Royal Swedish Academy of Letters, Stiftelsen Enboms Donationsfond, for the generous grant that helped us to publish this volume.

Our warmest thanks and gratitude are of course due to the A.G. Leventis Foundation for so generously supporting archaeological research at the Medelhavsmuseet over the years. It is largely thanks to this support that the Ayia Irini project and the Stockholm conference were possible.

We are also deeply grateful to Dr Sanne Houby-Nielsen and Professor Vassos Karageorghis for their great support in our ongoing research endeavours at the Medelhavsmuseet. Their visionary approach to the study of Cypriot archaeology has, more than anything else, helped us to realise this volume.

Last, but by no means least, we owe a huge debt of thanks to Dr Jennifer Webb, co-editor-in-chief of SIMA publications, for her diligence, hard work, promptness, expert guidance and valuable criticism throughout the editing process. She saved us on many occasions, protected us from many mistakes and it is only thanks to her that this volume could be completed. Through her, we would also like to extend our thanks to Åström Editions for including the proceedings of the conference in their list of publications and enabling us to contribute to the Swedish legacy of publications on ancient Cyprus.

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August 2016