

2 **The (Re)Discovery of Cyprus Antiquity in the Eighteenth Century**

A small community of western Europeans settled in Larnaka already in the first years of Ottoman rule on the island, and then gradually grew and organised itself.¹ A milestone in this process is marked by the establishment of stable diplomatic headquarters with the essential aim of supporting Western commercial interests in the trade routes to the Levant. The establishment of diplomatic missions in Cyprus is achieved through the development of a bilateral mechanism linked to the so-called capitular regime. On the basis of the capitulations and subsequent confirmation treaties between the Sublime Porta and other states, foreigners residing in the territory of the empire, and thus also in Cyprus, were subject to the laws of their respective countries (Van den Boogert 2005; Stavrides 2009); although in the Ottoman law the capitular regime was understood as a form of domestic law, the stipulation of capitulations had the result of granting members of non-Muslim communities a *de facto* semi-autonomy regarding their status (Stavrides 2009, 103-4). A capitular agreement between the Ottoman Empire and France dates to 1535, with similar characters a capitulation was made with Great Britain in 1580 and in the following decades the first official diplomatic posts were established in Cyprus; in 1636 Richard Glover, attaché of the British consulate in Aleppo was sent to the new seat in Larnaka, in 1661 Roger

¹ Luke 1969; Pouradier Duteil-Loizidou 1991; Severis 2000; Gilet 2005.

Fowkes was appointed the first French consul in Cyprus (Luke 1969, 88; Pouradier Duteil-Loizidou 1991; Severis 2007, 20).

The framework of capitular agreements and the birth of diplomatic representations clearly constituted the legal perimeter and logistical footholds of a comfort zone within which European economic and commercial interests in the eastern Mediterranean were to develop. The special emphasis on trade routes to East by Jean-Baptiste Colbert initiative soon appears as an alternative to the new trans-oceanic expansionistic policy of Spain and Portugal.² In this perspective, a prominent role was played by the multinational Company of the Levant, which officially established itself in Cyprus from 1636 and throughout the eighteenth century was to remain the fundamental pivot of the trade routes crossing the island (Laidlaw 2010).

The initial need to cultivate European ways and lifestyles in appearances gradually dissipated into assimilation with the island's Greek-speaking *élite*; an indication of the desire to curb this phenomenon is the ordinance promulgated in 1726 instructing French residents in the Levant to wear western clothes, teach their children the French language and - more generally - observe French customs (Severis 2007, 21; Hadjikyriakos 2009; Pouradier Duteil-Loizidou 2012). In fact, however, marriages between westerners and members of Larnaka's wealthy Greek-speaking society were rare, most westerners in the city spoke Greek and, in addition to their mother tongue, adopted the common French-Italian *lingua franca* widely used throughout the eastern Mediterranean.³

Merchant, diplomat, traveller, ethnographer, archaeologist *ante litteram*, these definitions represent an indefinite spectrum and constitute a continuum between *otium* and *negotium* for most of the community of Western Europeans living in Larnaka during the eighteenth century.

In this variable-profile community we list three Tuscan travellers to whom we owe the first circumstantial archaeological reports from the island of Cyprus to Italy. Prolific 'reporters', explicit or unwitting protagonists, Antonio Mondaini, Giovanni Mariti and Domenico Sestini stayed on the island during the second half of the eighteenth century and recounted the island's antiquities with personal eyes and different personalities (Pasta 2021; Bombardieri 2013; 2021a).

² Ames 1996; Dormois 2004; on Jean-Baptiste Colbert and Cyprus cf. also Depping 1855, 580 and Clément 1873, 104.

³ As Mariti (1769, 334) notes "a European who wishes to marry informs his consul, who offers no objection if the man be a merchant or able to maintain a wife, and the woman is a European or the *protégée* of a Christian Power. It is expressly forbidden to a European to marry an Ottoman subject. In that case, the consul could not help him, and would withdraw his protection from both the man and the woman". On the specific regulations and customary behaviours related to weddings see in detail Dakhliia 2016; Hadjikyriakos 2021; Trentin 2019.

The wealth and variety of information that we can glean from their travel accounts is already recognised by contemporaries and still significantly enriches our knowledge of the island in its most varied and disparate aspects, from political chronicle, botany and agriculture, geography and linguistics to ethnography and folklore, archaeology, and antiquarianism.

The spread of archaeological findings on the island is nothing new. Apart from the sporadic finds of coins from Kition (Cizio) by the Florentine merchant Alessandro Rinuccini and the inscriptions transcribed in Cyprus by Ciriaco di Ancona in the mid-fifteenth century, all of which are now scattered and are difficult to attribute (Rinuccini [1474] 1993, 133-4; Calvelli 2009, 33-4, 58-69), during the last phase of Venetian rule, antiquarian interests had already taken on the appearance of a widespread phenomenon in Cyprus. In this period, numerous travel accounts document the exploration of archaeological sites with the explicit intention of recovering ancient remains, which quickly became popular *souvenirs* for pilgrims and, on a larger scale, antiquarian fetishes to be recognised as valuable in the process of ideological legitimisation of the Serenissima's aristocracy (Calvelli 2009, 332-3). Although Cyprus was a privileged source of antiquities to supply the Venetian antiquities market, it remains uncertain to reconstruct the arrival of individual artefacts in Italy during this period.

The only two documentable and conceivable cases are linked to the activities of Giovanni Maria Bembo, captain of Famagusta between 1546 and 1548, and his successor and later lieutenant of the island Giovanni Renier. Bembo is linked by the chronicles to the legend of the so-called *Sepolcro di Venere*, which was placed in Famagusta at his behest (Guazzo 1553); he himself is later attributed with the arrival in Venice of a sarcophagus lid, now part of the Museo Correr collections.⁴ More certain appear to be the news, this time supported by contemporary sources, concerning the shipment of the famous *Sarcofago delle Amazzoni*, found in Soli, sent to Venice by Renier in 1558 and, after a late long journey, today part of the Kunsthistorisches Museum collections in Vienna (Fleischer et al. 1998, 7-9; Calvelli 2009, 154-5).

With the passage of the island under the aegis of the Sublime Porta and during the following two centuries, despite the changed framework of balances and relations with the West, there was no reversal in the activity of rediscovering the island's antiquity, both in terms of scholarly reconstruction and field exploration and exploitation.

⁴ Scrinzi 1899-1900; Hermary 1985; 2015, 202-3; Calvelli 2012, 34.

