

## 5 **Archaeology in the Largest Realm: A Prelude to Exploiting Potential**

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Presenting the large eastern island to the western reader meant proposing itineraries, describing its fauna and flora, ports and markets, designing routes enriched with anecdotes. But it also meant questioning the relationship between present and past, between present-day Cypriots and classical Greece. Hints of mythology and ancient cults, starting with that to Venus, appear in the *Viaggi* by Mariti spread throughout the island. But we find ourselves in a very different atmosphere from the rise of European philhellenism and, only a few years later, the ‘Greek dream’ by Gabriel de Choiseul-Gouffier, the future French ambassador to Constantinople and author of *Voyage pittoresque en Grece* (de Choiseul-Gouffier 1782; Pasta 2021, 20-1). The same emerging philhellenism that, one century later, becomes a political tool in the strategy of asserting the island’s Hellenic identity and its aspirations for *enosis* with Greece, as mentioned above.

Mariti’s more succinct pages contain no appeals to liberate Greece and assess with resigned detachment the hiatus that divides today’s Cypriot Greeks from their illustrious ancestors. As the counter-song to pro-Hellenism, the negative judgement of the Turkish administration and its nefarious effects on the culture, economy and very life of Cypriot communities remains a lens through which to make a resigned assessment in Mariti, more polemical in Sestini (“the Turk is always the oppressor and the Greek is timid, and also uninformed, according to the standard of all islanders”) and, finally, more heart-

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felt in Mondaini's words ("One may hardly detect good sentiments still surviving among some of them, and a shadow of that vivacity, which was typical of the Greek peoples") (Sestini 1788, 141; Mondaini 1786, 7).

The evidence that most constitutes novelty and represents a turning point in the relationship with the island's antiquity is certainly the shift from erudition to participatory observation. This change does not only imply access to sources of a different nature (literary, historical, but also 'archaeological'), but – and this is more relevant – it implies the vivification of Cyprus' past, thanks to antiquities that now take on an extra dimension, that of tangible evidence. Not just second-hand mentions, but first-hand observations based on objects and, above all, contexts. The discovery of the context, as is the case with Mariti's archaeological expertise in Larnaca, allows placing at the same level the personal direct record alongside that of ancient geographers, historiographers, mythographers. The vivification of antiquity with new sources, objects and actors is certainly the positive aspect of a medal that contains a negative one in the extraction and exploitation of these objects.

The possibility of observing today the survivor of an archaeological donation as remote as Mariti's to the Accademia Etrusca di Cortona, as well as the possibility of tracing its route and landing backwards, represent a fascinating acquisition. But, more significantly in this episode is its paradigm of a transformation (Bombardieri 2019). From the cocoon of the traveller and the scholar the archaeologist and the collector emerge together. The former closed in observation or in the roiling of disputes, the latter ready to take a broader and vainer flight. It is interesting that, while the collector's vanity takes shape in the guise of Mariti, on the other hand, we can observe those who seem to shy away from vanity, as is the case with Mondaini, and go through their time without clamour, hiding in some hold instead of on the bridge of fame.

Albeit with different perspectives and *modus vivendi*, the shift from erudition to archaeology is evident in the profile of European travellers staying in Cyprus during the eighteenth century. With the passing of the years and the passage of travellers, a different approach and an equally varied perception of the antiquity of the island and its memory emerges. The Russian monk Barski in the 1730s neither mentions nor notes anything, although he was faced with the remains of the urban fortification of ancient Kition in all their monumental evidence, for instance. None of this enters his gaze, does not catch his attention, and is not recorded in his narrative. A few years later, Pococke's viewpoint is different (Pococke 1743). He even transcribes and publishes a series of ancient epigraphs that he cannot understand, for the sole reason of his obvious interest in passing on a trace of antiquity. His interest is thus eminently driven by a sense of wonder and

fascination for a past as mysterious and indecipherable as the inscriptions he transcribes. In Pococke's account, observations on the erudite reconstruction of the island's antiquity prevail, which is, after all, but a stage in the journey to the East, a chapter in a broader narrative. The English traveller's annotations, however, remain largely the result of a "distant observation", which claims to be objective and which, perhaps for this reason, never overflows into first-person participation. An embankment and a boundary are set without any possibility of compromise between the observer and the object.

This boundary seems to be crossed with ease and even unprejudiced tranquillity by Sestini, and, above all, by Mariti only a few years later. The care with which Mariti reconstructs and reweaves the fabric of Cyprus' earliest history is measured both in the heatedness of his *Dissertazione*, born and consumed by the polemical spark of a scholarly dispute, but above all is recorded in his personal participation. A major reason for the success among the readers of his travel accounts, this first-person participation provides Mariti's account with an additional involvement and truthfulness and is the effect of the warmth of his 'up-close gaze'. This different gaze transforms the island's ancient traces - even those not seen by Barski and distantly observed by Pococke - into novelties, the evidence into archaeological discoveries. His participation thus takes the form of expertise, and the emphasis increasingly shifts to the novelty of the discovery. Within his narrative, from the *Viaggi* account to the *Dissertazione*, the increasing importance of archaeological discovery, and even more so of the direct testimony that can be provided, becomes clearer and clearer. In this sense, the 'archaeological expertise', the 'site inspection' with Niebuhr in 1766 and - above all - the episode of discovery and donation in 1767-76 are illustrative, suggesting a step further in a new direction. The head of the statue of the emperor Caracalla and the coins that Mariti says he saw unearthed "then passing into the hands" of the British consul Timothy Turner and from this hand to his own, constitute a lot, a small private collection of exploited antiquities that is formed on the island. The same can be said of the Greek and Latin epigraphs collected by Sestini fifteen years later, one of which through Sestini himself "is found at Mr. Cav. Ainslie, British Amb. at the Ottoman Sublime Porta" (Sestini 1788, 144). This archetype soon became common use and part of the broad and well-known phenomenon of diplomatic collecting, which already seemed to be a habit in Cyprus at the end of the eighteenth century, as witnessed by the French consul Benoît Astier, a collector of coins (Yon 2011, 38; Gilet 2005) and which would obviously have famous champions in the following century, as observed at the beginning (Goring 1988; Marangou 2000; Bombardieri 2015). The same short span in which Mariti's small Cypriot collection was formed and donated marks the gradual opening of new horizons in 'diachronic' collecting



**Figure 14**  
 Imagined medals elaborated  
 by Olfar Dapper (1688, 288, Pl. IV).  
 The imagined Kourion coin described  
 by Antonio Mondaini is illustrated  
 on the second row from the top

of Oriental antiquities in Italy, as witnessed for instance by Cardinal Stefano Borgia's collection in Rome (Langella 1999; Di Paolo 2012, 22-4). In this sensible time of changes, Mondaini seems to stand a step backwards. He also refers to medals (coins) describing ancient Kourion in his *Lettera* (Mondaini 1786, 28). But, while Mariti observe, collect and donate his lot of real Roman coins from Kition, Mondaini shape his description of the Kourion's coinage around second-hand (unverified) information, i.e. the imagined medals elaborated by Olfar Dapper a century before [fig. 14] (Dapper 1688, 288, Pl. IV).

Mariti, an archetypal collector, is already a typical collector and clearly expresses his subtle vanity as an inherent characteristic of the collector of artefacts. Vanity seeps from his proclaimed generosity, equal only to that of his friend and consul ("[of the coins] on my return to Tuscany I also made a new distribution") (Mariti 1787b, 30) and is definitively realised by promoting the donation to the Accademia Etrusca di Cortona in 1776.

As expected, the increasing dimensions of collections through time reflect a parallel gradual increase in the dimensions of collectors' vanity and appetite for exploitation. While a century before Mariti formed his collection through a generous donation, in the paradigmatic case for Luigi Palma di Cesnola (Bombardieri 2015; 2021b), the emphasis on his archaeological discoveries becomes a narrative of his fight against the rest of world, including potential colleagues, critics and somehow the destiny itself! A fight with a well-deserved final reward: the archaeological treasure. In other words, extractive archaeology has found its cradle and the space for its development.