

Cyprus

Crossroads of Civilizations



Double-necked jug, ca. 2100–2000 BC, ceramic,
Courtesy of Department of Antiquities, Cyprus

Scenes from everyday life decorate this unique vessel: women hold babies; a man crushes grapes for wine; people bend over a bread trough, kneading dough; a donkey carries bags on its back; and bulls pull a plow.



Mycenaean krater with dolphin decoration, 1400–1200 BC, ceramic,
Courtesy of Department of Antiquities, Cyprus

On the occasion of the 50th Anniversary of the Republic of Cyprus, the exhibition *Cyprus: Crossroads of Civilizations* offers the American public the opportunity to experience 10,000 years of Cypriot history and cultural production. This first major, comprehensive exhibition to travel from Cyprus appeals to audiences interested in natural history, anthropology and art history, providing a rare chance to view important historic treasures and offering extensive educational opportunities for all ages.

As the easternmost Mediterranean island, Cyprus sits at the crossroads of three continents and throughout history has served as the meeting point of great civilizations. Hittites, Assyrians, Egyptians, Mycenaeans, Phoenicians, Ptolemies,

Persians, Byzantines, Luignans, Venetians and Ottomans have all left their mark on the island's rich cultural heritage. The approximately 220 objects presented in this exhibition range from artifacts of the earliest villages to masterpieces of medieval religious art spanning the years 10,000 BC through the 16th century AD.

After an introduction to the geology of the island, the exhibition continues in eight sections, each covering a broad cultural period. Objects from Neolithic and Chalcolithic villages; the Bronze and Iron Ages; Hellenistic and Roman periods; and Byzantine and Medieval times narrate the unique history of Cyprus. The sections are described in more detail on the following pages to give an overview of the vast scope of the exhibition.

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The Birth of an Island

Geology played a decisive role in the development of Cyprus's natural environment as well as human history on the island. Created by a geological uplift, Cyprus rose from the sea, producing the rugged landscape that has since shaped every aspect of life on the island. Rich in deposits of copper, asbestos, chromite and mineral pigments such as umber and ochre, the exploitation of these natural resources contributed significantly to the cultural development of the island since antiquity.

Early Villages

Neolithic Period 8500-5200 BC

Traveling in primitive boats, the first settlers on Cyprus came from the Syrian shore and the Anatolian coast (modern-day Turkey). Archaeological evidence first attests to human occupation in many parts of the island ca. 8500-8000 BC. In this section, artifacts such as chipped stone tools and carved human figures as well as skeletal remains from the first mammals on the island shed light on these early settlers, whose lives reflect the shift from hunting and gathering to farming and village life.

Dawn of an Age of Copper

Chalcolithic period, 3900-2400 BC

The Chalcolithic (meaning "copper-stone") period saw the rise of one of the most distinctive societies of prehistoric Cyprus: the Erimi Culture. It was a period of population growth and the creation of social hierarchies with high-status goods denoting differences in wealth and position. Ceramic expertise expanded enormously and the first examples of metalwork, using native copper, date from this period. A number of figurines from Chalcolithic villages, depicting seated or squatting women in the act of giving birth, may be an expression of the oldest form of worship on Cyprus, the veneration of the Mother Goddess, source of life and fertility.



Anthropomorphic figurine, ca. 7000–5500 BC, andesite, Courtesy of Department of Antiquities, Cyprus



Vessel in shape of pregnant woman, ca. 3000 BC, ceramic, Courtesy of Department of Antiquities, Cyprus

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Shrine model, ca. 2100–2000 BC, terracotta,
Courtesy of Department of Antiquities, Cyprus

Settlers from Anatolia reintroduced domestic cattle to Cyprus at the beginning of the Bronze Age, about 2300 BC. Cattle assumed great importance in the economic and ritual life of the island. The bull became a symbol of divine power and is frequently depicted in ritual vessels and figurines.

An Island of Prospectors and Farmers

Early and Middle Bronze Age, 2300-1600 BC

As the primary component of bronze, copper became a valued commodity throughout the ancient world during this period. The discovery of rich deposits on Cyprus drew many communities to migrate from the Anatolian coast. Over time, the newcomers merged with the indigenous culture to produce a single, unique Bronze Age culture. The use of metal became more widespread in Cyprus as copper was cast into standard shapes (such as axe heads) presumably for the purpose of trade. Bronze Age Cypriots excelled in pottery as showcased in the array of more elaborate vessels, models and figurines in this section. Many of these pieces show a blend of native Cypriot and Anatolian techniques.



Stand for a bowl decorated with lions, bull, and griffins, 1200–1100 BC, bronze,
Courtesy of Department of Antiquities, Cyprus

Cyprus Opens to the World

Late Bronze Age 1600-1050 BC

Cyprus flourished as a center of trade during the Late Bronze Age. Both Mycenaean Greeks and Syrians established outposts on the island. Ceramic production and metalwork reflected the trade and presence of these cultures. This busy mercantile period also saw the first use of written language on Cyprus, a unique blend of linear Aegean and Near Eastern cuneiform (wedge-shaped) writing styles, present on a jar fragment in this section.

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Head of a woman, ca. 625-650 BC, terracotta,
Courtesy of Department of Antiquities, Cyprus



Plaque from a diadem, 1050–950 BC, gold,
Courtesy of Department of Antiquities, Cyprus

The Age of the Cypriot Kingdoms

Iron Age, 1300-300 BC

For a thousand years, Cyprus was divided into at least ten autonomous states. The inhabitants spoke three languages: Greek, Phoenician, and a language indigenous to the island, which scholars call Eteocypriot ("original Cypriot"). The island itself was known by several names: Alashiya to the Egyptians, and Hittites, Ia-Atnana to the Assyrians, and Kypros to the Greeks. The objects in this section reflect the diverse influences

of these cultures and an evolution in ceramics from a preference for geometric patterns into a pictorial style. A highlight of this section is a selection of figures from Agia Irini, a religious sanctuary discovered by Swedish archaeologists in 1929-30, where more than 2,000 terracotta figures—including warriors, centaurs, minotaurs, and charioteers—were arranged in concentric semicircles, surrounding a single altar.

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Cyprus in the Age of Empires

Hellenistic and Roman periods, 310 BC - AD 330

In about 300 BC, Cyprus came under the rule of Ptolemaic Egypt, the Cypriot kingdoms were abolished, and the island became fully a part of the expansive Greek world. Greek power was at its height and the culture spread on Cyprus with the Greek alphabet replacing the Cypriot syllabary, and images of gods becoming more definitively Greek in style. Under later Roman rule, Cyprus prospered adding monumental buildings and grand villas to the Cypriot landscape. Greek culture, however, persisted—in Greek institutions, theaters, religion, language, and art. Objects from this period include marble sculpted heads and terracotta figurines of gods and goddesses (Aphrodite, Apollo, Isis and a Muse); limestone seals; ceramic and glass jugs; and gold jewelry.

Byzantine Cyprus

AD 330-1200

In AD 330 when the Roman Empire was divided into East and West, Cyprus became part of the Eastern Empire, ruled from the city of Byzantium (later called Constantinople). Christianity had spread very early on in Cyprus, planted by St. Paul himself and Cyprus-born apostle Barnabas. The foundation of important monasteries drew many artists from Constantinople; however, many treasures of cultural production owned by the church and wealthy merchants were lost during the period from the 7th to the 12th century due to numerous invasions and occupations by Arab forces. This section includes rare examples of metalwork from Byzantine Cyprus including two jugs, an elaborate lamp, a bronze crucifix, and a weight in the shape of an empress, which was likely imported from Constantinople.



Head of Apollo, Hellenistic period, 310–30 BC, marble, Courtesy of Department of Antiquities, Cyprus



Bronze cross, AD 900–1200, Courtesy of the Holy Bishopric of Morfou

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Majolica bowl with fruit and flowers, 1400–1600, ceramic,
Courtesy of Department of Antiquities, Cyprus

This piece was an import from northern Italy. Under Venetian rule, links between Cyprus and Italy grew closer, and trade in fine Italian ceramics flourished.



Icon of St. Mamas, 1500s, tempera on wood,
Courtesy of the Holy Bishopric of Morfou

The young Christian martyr Mamas, patron saint of shepherds, was widely venerated in Cyprus. He is always depicted carrying a lamb and riding the lion that was said to be his companion. Western influence can be seen in the angle of the saint's head (traditional icons face the viewer head-on) and in the lion, which bears a strong resemblance to the Venetian lion of St. Mark.

The Eastern Frontier of Christendom

Medieval period 1191-1570

Cyprus was captured by crusaders during the Third Crusade and became a crusader-state under Guy de Lusignan, the Frankish crusader-king of Jerusalem. The Lusignan dynasty ruled for nearly three centuries, overseeing a medieval golden age. This section displays examples of glazed pottery, a major industry of medieval Cyprus. In 1489 the last Lusignan queen,

Venetian-born Caterina Cornaro, handed Cyprus over to Venice. An "Italian-Byzantine" style flourished in the production of religious icons and in the work of painters who combined Eastern and Western techniques. Nine painted icons are on display in this section, including one double-sided portable icon.

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Figurine of woman with infant , 1450–1200 BC, terracotta,
Courtesy of Department of Antiquities, Cyprus



Jug , Roman period, 30 BC–AD 330, glass,
Courtesy of Department of Antiquities, Cyprus

For thousands of years, Cyprus has been a crossroads of civilizations. In recent centuries it has continued in that role—a meeting-point of cultures and an object of desire for empires. Today, Cyprus draws visitors from around the globe and welcomes archaeologists from many nations, whose discoveries help to piece together the history of this remarkable island and its role in the story of humankind.

Curator's Biography

Dr. Sophocles Hadjisavvas worked for the Cyprus Department of Antiquities in various capacities since 1973. He assumed the role of director in 1998. Although he officially retired in 2009,

Dr. Hadjisavvas took on the organization of this important exhibition. His extensive field experience includes excavations at Ncssebur and Preslav in Bulgaria as well as at the "Tombs of the Kings" in Paphos, ancient capital of Cyprus. Dr. Hadjisavvas also conducted excavations at the Phoenician necropolis of Kition, and since 1984 he has directed the excavations at Alassa, an important Late Bronze Age settlement. Educated at the University of Sofia in Bulgaria and Cambridge University in the United Kingdom, he received a Ph.D. from Sweden's Göteborg University in 1992. Dr. Hadjisavvas has lectured around the world and published dozens of works reflecting his expertise in Late Bronze Age Cyprus, ancient metallurgy, and wine and olive oil production throughout Hellenic history.

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Head of a youth, Hellenistic period, 310–150 BC, marble.
Courtesy of Department of Antiquities, Cyprus.



Vessel in shape of grapes, ca. 3000 BC, ceramic.
Courtesy of Department of Antiquities, Cyprus

EXHIBITION SPECIFICATIONS

Number of Works:

Approximately 220 objects including artifacts, sculptural figures, jewelry, metalwork, ceramics, and paintings

Curators:

Sophocles Hadjisavvas, Ph.D., former Director of the Cyprus Department of Antiquities

Requirements:

High Security, approximately 4,500 square feet

Participation Fee:

\$65,000

Booking Period:

12 weeks

Shipping:

IA&A makes all arrangements; exhibitors pay outgoing shipping costs within the contiguous United States

Publication:

Exhibition catalogue

Availability:

June 2011 – May 2012

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