
Ancient Cyprus in the British Museum

Essays in honour of
Veronica Tatton-Brown

Edited by Thomas Kiely

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Front Cover: Terracotta figurine of the Goddess with uplifted arms from
Palaepaphos, 7th century BC (BM 1899,1229.1; *Terracotta* A123)

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Finally, we are grateful to the contributing authors for their patience in waiting for the appearance of this volume, which has suffered delays since the idea was first approved in 2006. We trust that the end product, reflecting in all some 60 years of scholarship, is a suitable tribute to a woman who has contributed so much to our understanding of the ancient Cypriot collection in the British Museum.

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Veronica Tatton-Brown, Cyprus and the British Museum

Lesley Fitton

The essays in this volume are presented by colleagues and friends in honour of Dr Veronica Tatton-Brown, who was curator of the ancient Cypriot collections of the British Museum for more than 30 years. While it is not possible to capture the whole of her achievements in this short compass, it nonetheless seems appropriate to begin with a few words about Veronica, Cyprus and the British Museum.

When Veronica Tatton-Brown began working in the Department of Greek and Roman Antiquities at the British Museum in 1974, she was already a specialist in the archaeology of ancient Cyprus. She had completed her doctoral thesis at the University of Oxford on the subject of *The Cesnola sarcophagi: studies in Cypriot iconography and sculpture*, and had published her earliest articles on aspects of Cypriot funerary sculpture. Nonetheless, her first role in the British Museum saw her working extensively on the collections of ancient glass. She rapidly gained expertise in glass studies, making a substantial contribution to the first volume of the *Catalogue of Greek and Roman glass*, published in 1981. She would continue to interweave these two strands of scholarship throughout her long and successful career in the British Museum.

Veronica's long association with ancient Cyprus is reflected in a series of important publications, particularly on sculpture, iconography and the history of early excavators and excavations on the island. There was never any doubt that Cyprus was her academic heartland, even though she never worked exclusively on Cypriot matters and indeed developed immensely wide-ranging knowledge of Mediterranean archaeology. Within Cyprus itself, while the original focus of her work was Cypro-Archaic and Cypro-Classical sculpture, her scholarship over a long career encompassed many periods and types of material culture. This reflected not only the breadth of her knowledge but also the richness of the collections of the British Museum, which provided a perfect home for her talents and interests.

Broadly-based scholarship, accompanied by long and fruitful collaborations with national and international colleagues, allowed Veronica to pursue and elaborate the abiding theme of her work on Cyprus, which was the definition of the distinct local identity of ancient Cypriot art and culture within the wider context of the Mediterranean world. Her work on the sculptural arts of the island was particularly significant in this respect because, certainly at the outset of her career, Cypriot sculpture and coroplastic production suffered from an unjust neglect, often based on inappropriate or ill-informed comparison with the arts of both the Greek world and the Near East. Long before the current generation of Cypriot scholars began to appreciate Cypro-Archaic and Cypro-Classical sculpture in its own terms, as a supreme expression of local piety and of a fascination with perpetuating the individual

through the placing of images in sanctuaries, Veronica, through a series of seminal papers, anticipated and perhaps even inaugurated what is now a standard view of the nature and development of the sculptural traditions of the island.

In an early paper from 1969, Veronica (then Wilson) discussed the grave stele of Aristila from Marion – which typically combines the 'latest' sculptural ideas from late 5th-century Athens with older Cypriot traditions extending in some respects back to the later Cypro-Archaic period – and demonstrated how inappropriate it was to apply the strict framework of Classical Greek art history, either iconographically or chronologically, to a region which had always borrowed widely and freely in order to provide appropriate local models for sculptural forms. Her study of the similarly eclectic Lysi warrior relief which followed in 1970 further reinforced the necessity of studying the development of Cypriot sculpture in a specific local milieu. A later essay from 1984 on the sculptors of Golgoi in the 5th century BC likewise emphasised the unique ability of Cypriot artists to blend a variety of iconographic sources, superficially Greek but with strong shades of contemporary Anatolia and Persia, into a distinct and convincing local product. In addition, a number of short but important works during the 1980s (several in conjunction with Joost Crouwel) explored the development of equestrian imagery by Cypriot artists for their elite patrons, reflecting the growing cultural influence of Assyria but also firmly serving the specific religious and political needs of the emerging city-kingdoms.

Veronica worked for many years on the sculpture from the siege mound of Old Paphos. Among the more than 2000 or more items of spolia from surrounding sanctuaries were a number of Levantine-style cult objects. Veronica recognised that these figurines, stelai, votive pillars and small altars, more usually associated with the Phoenician sanctuaries of Kition, were in an unexpected context; she suggested the presence of a Phoenician element in the town in the later 6th century BC, alongside a local population with a growing taste for Levantine artistic styles. Her observations underpinned a growing recognition of the multi-faceted and eclectic nature of Cypriot religious iconography, which seems to have transcended the cultural or ethnic boundaries of individual city-kingdoms as defined by language alone. She thus contributed to a increasing realisation that understanding the development of the Cypriot city-kingdoms required a fuller analysis of the diverse and multi-cultural nature of the material record of the island. This would lead to a more nuanced view of the diversity, but also the many interactions, of its local communities, which perhaps did not in fact conform to the exclusive and simplistic ethnic labels once suggested by scholars.

Veronica's short study of Archaic and Classical tombstones from Cyprus in 1986 was the first synthetic account of this

subject and laid a firm foundation for subsequent scholarship. Here again she emphasised their eclectic and archaizing tendencies, which were quite in keeping with a local context, but she also showed how the combination of styles and technique transcended ethnic boundaries within the island to produce first and foremost a distinctly Cypriot look, or *Kuprios charakter*, to borrow Aeschylus' intriguing phrase. She certainly felt the need to protect 'her' Cypriot sculptors from any tendency to see their work as representing an obscure or outlandish backwater of Greek art – as can clearly be seen in the title of her 2000 essay 'Keeping the Greeks at bay'. Here she stressed that the apparent familiarity – to the Hellenist's eye – of many iconographic and architectural features reflects not so much a growing affinity with the Greek world of the 6th to 4th centuries BC, but rather a studied attempt to absorb, adapt, and ultimately control the influences from that world, and to fit them to the representational needs of Cypriot elites. The wisdom of such an approach has increasingly been appreciated, and we might quote the words with which she ends her essay:

Cyprus is always known as a crossroads between East and West. At various periods in its history eastern or western influence held sway, but it seems to me that the Cypriots themselves have always been inclined to accept what pleased them and reject what did not. This stubborn idiosyncrasy is the main attraction of Cypriot antiquities. (Tatton-Brown 2000, 342)

Communicating the archaeology of Cyprus to the general public was a key theme throughout Veronica's many years working in the museum. Without doubt her most significant achievement in this respect was the establishment of the A.G. Leventis Gallery of Cypriot Antiquities in 1987. This was the first gallery dedicated to the display of artefacts from Cyprus anywhere in the world apart from on the island itself. Moreover, while Cypriot antiquities had always been displayed in various contexts throughout the Greek and Roman galleries, this was the first time that the very rich collection in the British Museum was to be exhibited in its own cultural context. It was a project dear to Veronica's heart, and she worked hard towards its successful achievement.

The customary generosity of the A.G. Leventis Foundation provided the support necessary for the Museum to do justice to what is one of the largest and most representative collections of Cypriot objects outside the Cyprus museum. The layout of the gallery by themes rather than periods was designed to emphasise the distinctive nature of the island's culture over some 5,000 years. As in her academic studies, here too

Veronica was keen to display the central elements of the Cypriot character as expressed in objects. The British Museum provided a perfect background for an exploration of the particular nature of Cypriot culture, as well as its receptiveness to influences from its many neighbours and visitors, often from cultures whose works are displayed in adjacent galleries. Thus the visitor is beckoned by the bearded man of Idalion from the surrounding Greek, Roman, Canaanite/Phoenician or Egyptian galleries into the array of styles, cultures and periods that make up the unique experience of a visit to the ancient Cypriot world.

The opening of the gallery was accompanied by a major conference: one of several significant colloquia organised by Veronica during her career. These brought together scholars from all over the world, many of whom had benefited directly or indirectly from Veronica's academic friendship. At the same time, a wider public was addressed in her popular book *Ancient Cyprus*, the first edition of which coincided with the opening of the gallery in 1987. The book was similarly organised on thematic lines, and served the same function: to raise the profile of the ancient cultural heritage of the island through its diaspora of antiquities which, like the Cypriot community itself, has enriched the cultural life of London and the United Kingdom.

Veronica was highly regarded by her colleagues in the British Museum, who viewed her with both esteem and affection. The same combination shines out from the words of the contributors to this volume, as indeed it did from those of its predecessor, volume 35 in the series *Cahiers d'Études Chypriotes*, published in her honour in 2005. In both, colleagues from across the international stage have paid tribute to the truly selfless and helpful attitude that she adopted in her curatorial duties. She took very seriously her role as the link between the collections of the British Museum and the researchers who came to study them, whether established academics or young beginners. She was equally helpful to colleagues, and played a distinctive role in the Department's curatorial team. A characterful spirited presence, she could give a chaotic impression, and rather enjoyed the humour of doing so. Yet she was in fact – as everyone knew – one of the most reliable and conscientious of people. She could sometimes be fierce, but she was also kind-hearted, generous and very human. She contributed a great deal to the spirit of the Department. Many of us remember her time with us fondly, and her colleagues inside and outside the Museum all join in wishing her well.

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