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A Phoenician inscription from Cyprus in the Cesnola Collection at the Turin University Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography

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Abstract: A previously unpublished marble fragment from the Cesnola collection at the Turin University Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography bears an incomplete Phoenician inscription, a dedication to Eshmun-Melqart considered lost since 1869 (*CIS I 26*). The inscription allows to interpret the object bearing the dedication as a votive stone bowl from the late Classical Phoenician sanctuary of Kition-*Batsalos* in Cyprus, and it provides the opportunity to retrace the history of the Cesnola collection of Cypriote antiquities at the University Museum of Turin.

Keywords: Luigi Palma di Cesnola; Phoenician inscription; Kition-*Batsalos*; Eshmun-Melqart; Phoenician votive stone bowl; University Museum of Turin.

1 The Cypriote collections at the University Museums in Turin. The Museum of Anatomy and the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography

The events which lead to the actual composition of the Cypriote collections held at the University Museums of Anthropology and Ethnography and Anatomy in Turin are rather complex to retrace. Distinct and subsequent donations between 1870 and 1881 by Luigi Palma di Cesnola and his brother Alessandro to the Royal

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§§ 1, 2 are by Luca Bombardieri; §§ 3, 4 are by Anna Cannavò; § 5 is by both the authors.

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Academy of Medicine are at the origin of the acquisition of this heterogeneous collection¹.

The collected antiquities, in fact, were considered by the donators as ‘accompanying goods’ to the osteological material from their excavations on the island of Cyprus. For this reason, they originally became part of the Craniological Museum collection of the Royal Academy of Medicine. It is possible to trace their steps starting from the meetings of the members of the Royal Academy of Medicine in Turin. A first, brief note can be found in the report of the session dated March 4th, 1870: “La Presidenza annunzia all’Accademia, che è pervenuta senza inconvenienti la cassa contenente cranii fenici, che venne inviata dal sig. cav. Luigi Palma, console generale degli Stati Uniti in Cipro, il quale in considerazione del dono fatto, viene ad unanimità nominato socio onorario dell’Accademia”².

In this note there is no mention of possible archaeological material received together with the *Phoenician crania*. Furthermore, it is not surprising that the attention is focused on the donation of osteological remains, especially when we consider that it is the generous donation itself to justify Cesnola’s appointment as honorary member. News of the donation is recalled by Giovacchino De Agostini, historian and Luigi Palma di Cesnola’s personal friend. He greatly emphasizes it in the biographical account he dedicates to Cesnola, describing the events related to the transfer of “cranii Fenicii e Greci al Museo Antropologico dell’Accademia Medica di Torino, che non ne possedeva nissuno”³. It is possible to suppose that among these were the *Phoenician crania* collected at Idalion, mentioned by Cesnola himself⁴ and already described in an earlier *mémoire* by Francesco Gallo⁵.

As mentioned above, the archaeological material which now constitutes the Cypriot collection at the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography was meant to be accompanying goods for the actual donations by both Cesnola brothers. Such donation consisted of skeletal remains – especially crania⁶. It is therefore useful to first identify two distinct anthropological donations in order to attempt retracing the provenance of the various units of Cypriot antiques that ended up at the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography.

1 Bombardieri 2015: 50–55; Mangiapane, Giacobini 2015: 177–180.

2 *Giornale della Reale Accademia di Medicina di Torino*, Serie III, vol. IX: 225–226.

3 De Agostini 1871: 20.

4 Palma di Cesnola 1878: 77.

5 Gallo 1869: 73–74.

6 Cesnola’s interest on skulls and skeletal remains in general is confirmed by the correspondence and contacts with anthropologists Paolo Mantegazza e Felice Finzi (Bombardieri 2012).

A note by Alberto Gamba in 1881 provides us with useful elements to clarify this aspect. He refers to material given by both Alessandro and Luigi Palma di Cesnola and specifically states that the donation by Luigi includes material coming from the site of *Citium*⁷.

Luigi Palma di Cesnola also refers to the donations to the Academy of Anatomy three times, three additional indirect references to these donations can be found in Cesnola's biographical accounts by De Agostini, Gallo and Roversi. By cross-referencing the pieces of news therein contained, it is not possible to reach a univocal conclusion with regard to their nature and provenance.

Luigi Palma di Cesnola made a vague reference to a skull from Idalion ("Two of the skulls were in good preservation, but in removing them one was crushed through the carelessness of the workmen who held it. The other is now in the Royal Academy of Medicine in Turin"⁸) and to an unspecified number of skulls from Alampra ("On the contrary, skulls were exhumed from then [Alampra, scil.] rather larger than those found at Dali, and believed to have belonged to another race. Such was the opinion of the scientific specialist who examined them, and it is also that of the director of the Anthropological Museum at Turin, where these skulls now are"⁹). A successive reference to the delivery of osteological material from Cape Pyla to Turin is found within the report published by Luigi Palma di Cesnola in the Journal of the Academy of Sciences of Turin, where he described his activity in Cyprus in the period 1873–1876. The same episode is told anew a year later in his book *Cyprus*. In both cases it is described with significantly different details¹⁰.

Among the indirect sources, only Giovacchino De Agostini mentions a set of nine skulls with different provenance ("avendo egli saputo che il Museo Antropologico di quella città [Torino, scil.] mancava di crani antichi, glie ne spedì nove fra fenici e greci"¹¹), whilst Gallo and Roversi confirm Luigi Palma di Cesnola's donation without providing any detailed information. Currently, the most reliable information on the original Cypriote anthropological collection is owed to the reorganization of the museum performed by Domenico Davide in 1958¹², and

⁷ Gamba 1881: 6–7.

⁸ Palma di Cesnola 1878: 77.

⁹ Palma di Cesnola 1878: 93.

¹⁰ Palma di Cesnola 1875–76: 513; 1878: 182.

¹¹ De Agostini 1871: 20.

¹² Loreti, Davide 1959: 263–300. Davide's considerations are based on a catalogue attached by Gamba to his second report dated back to 1886, as well as on a similar inventory by Alfonso Bovero in 1913. The earlier report, which was titled *Catalogo dei Crani e Maschere del Museo Craniologico dell'Accademia, 1886*, is now lost. Davide transcribed and published the

to further researches conducted by Franca Olivieri between 1987 and 1988 on the anthropological collection ascribable to the Cesnola brothers¹³.

Ultimately, the direct and indirect references, along with Gamba's indications, Davide's transcriptions and Olivieri's study, offer some useful hint in order to hypothetically individuate three distinct donations:

1. a first donation by Luigi Palma di Cesnola occurred in 1870, including material from Kition (?) and one skull from Idalion;
2. a second donation by Luigi Palma di Cesnola occurred after 1873, including some skulls from Alampra and calcified osteological remains from Cape Pyla;
3. a third and last donation by Alessandro Palma di Cesnola included a series of skulls from Salamina and Paphos.

As mentioned above, reference must be made to these three donations in order to retrace the provenance of the archaeological material shipped by Luigi and Alessandro Palma di Cesnola and converged into the collections of the University Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology.

Although Luigi Palma di Cesnola does not declare it explicitly, other sources confirm that archaeological finds, which were likely to come from the same funerary contexts where the donated anthropological material came from, were also delivered to the Academy of Anatomy. In the American edition of Cesnola's *Cyprus*, John Taylor Johnston mentions the *Anthropological Museum at Turin* in the list of museum institutions to which Luigi Palma had generously donated part of his collection¹⁴. In the same way, Giovacchino De Agostini and Luigi Roversi both confirm that "preziosi cimeli" and "altre antichità non meno preziose"¹⁵ than those donated in the same period to the Academy of Sciences had been delivered to the Academy of Medicine. If we consider the tight timing of the two donations, we can easily assume that the antiquity chests destined to the two Academies in Turin were shipped at the same time towards the port of Genoa, and from there transported to Turin in March 1870.

However, Luigi Palma di Cesnola's donation of antiquities was initially ignored and, as a result, ended up being confused and forgotten. The first inventory by Alberto Gamba in 1881 still discerns between the two following donations of Luigi and Alessandro Palma¹⁶. Five years later, in the *Relazione dello stato del*

descriptions of numbers 119–131, related to the Cesnola donations. See also Mangiapane *et al.* 2013; Mangiapane, Giacobini 2015.

¹³ Olivieri 1988.

¹⁴ Palma di Cesnola 1878: 451–456; Balm 2016: 49.

¹⁵ De Agostini 1871: 20; Roversi 1898: III.

¹⁶ Gamba 1881.

*Museo Craniologico della R. Accademia di Medicina di Torino*¹⁷, written by Alberto Gamba himself (!), the distinction between the two donators disappears and only Alessandro Palma's donation is mentioned. To him is evidently attributed all the material although it arrived several years later and, most importantly, from different contexts.

However, the posthumous history of their dispersion was deemed to continue. In 1913 the Cypriot archaeological and anthropological collections became part of the Museum of Anatomy. At the beginning of 1970's, the surviving (and indistinguishable) Cesnola collection was again divided: the skulls were integrated in the osteological collections of the 'Luigi Rolando' Museum of Human Anatomy, while the archaeological material became part of collections of the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography¹⁸.

In this respect, some aid is found in the official note titled *Trasferimento e consegna di anfore e manufatti antichi dall'Istituto di Anatomia Umana Normale all'Istituto e Museo di Antropologia ed Etnografia dell'Università di Torino*, dated to May 17th, 1972 by Francesco Loreti, then Director of the Institute of Anatomy, and destined to the Dean of the University of Turin. Fortunately, as an attachment to the note there is a catalogue listing 66 objects, sub-divided into seven generic categories ("vasi fittili, figure fittili, vasi litici, lucerne fittili, figure litiche, epigrafi, recipienti vitrei, manufatti in rame o bronzo, minerali"¹⁹). It is undeniably suspicious that in this inventory, some groups (scarabs, cylinder seals), as well as some of the objects clearly described in Alberto Gamba's first inventory of 1881 (two out of four lamps with erotic subject; two birth-giving terracotta figurines) are clearly missing.

It has to be concluded that part of the material was missing at the moment of transfer of the collections. Another final fragmentation of the collection must have also happened in the following decades. This collection was recently object of two MA theses at the University of Turin in 2009 and 2016, respectively by Alessandra Randazzo and Carlo Valenti. Following these recent studies, it appears that the Cypriot collection held at the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography is currently composed of 46 objects, dated from the Early Bronze Age to the Roman period and Late Antiquity on a stylistic basis. The collection includes ceramics

¹⁷ Gamba 1886.

¹⁸ Luigi Rolando Museum Archive, Fald. 6/69. On the formation and history of the collections at the Museum of Anatomy and of Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography in Turin, see Chiarelli, Masali 1978; Rabino Massa, Boano 2003; Giacobini *et al.* 2011.

¹⁹ A photography taken inside the exhibition of the new Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography confirms that, at least since 1972, part of the objects of Cypriot provenance have been on display in the "evolution of cultures and technologies" hall (Chiarelli, Masali 1978: 13, fig. 2).

vessels, lamps, terracottas and a fragment of a possible stone bowl bearing an inscription in Phoenician script.

This last object may be of particular interest for the possibility it offers of retracing the context of provenance and, with more certainty, the cultural context it refers to.

2 The fragmentary stone bowl

With regard to the epigraphic documents, the above mentioned 1972 inventory by Francesco Loreti lists only one object in the group labelled “*epigrafi*”. To date, there is only one such object in the Cypriot collection of the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography.

It is a marble stone fragment of small size with veins of orange-brown. The object, described in the mentioned inventory as “*placca marmorea con breve epi-*



Fig. 1: Marble lug with Phoenician inscription. Collezione Cesnola, Museo di Antropologia ed Etnografia, Università di Torino

grafe punica”²⁰, measures 5,6 x 6,2 x 2,6 cm. and is shaped as a flattened plaque, rounded on one of the short sides and curved on the opposite side. The surface is carefully polished (Fig. 1).

Despite the evident fragmentary state of preservation of the object, the refined surfaces and the position of the fractures suggest it may consist of a lug, probably horizontally set below the rim of a bowl. Similar lugs may be found on small shallow stone bowls dating to the Cypro-Classical period, with four of them placed symmetrically below the rim²¹.

This can be compared with a complete Cypro-Classical stone bowl, probably coming from Amathus²², now at the Art and History Museum of Geneva. This last one is a small shallow bowl of gypsum, with convex sides, raised flat base and flat rim, with four horizontal and opposite lugs and one serving as a spout.

An earlier LC parallel, yet comparable in its general features, is kept at the British Museum in London and comes from one of the funerary areas of Episkopi-Bamboula (Site D, T. 89), excavated by the Turner Bequest Expedition to Curium in 1896²³. This last example is a marble rounded conical bowl, with flat base, three rectangular lug handles and one small spout-like feature arranged symmetrically around the rim.

Among the alabaster and stone vases of the Cesnola Collection from the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, two supposedly Phoenician analogous alabaster bowls “with two ears” are said to come from Amathus²⁴. Two additional limestone and alabaster unprovenanced vases from the Cesnola Collection at the Metropolitan Museum also have opposite horizontal lugs²⁵. In all mentioned cases, the position and the joint of the lugs seems to suggest an analogy with our fragmentary example from Turin.

Furthermore, even though noticeably different in dimension and shape²⁶ and not directly relatable to ours, a few bowls with horizontal lugs are known among the votive stone bowls with Phoenician inscriptions originally part of the

²⁰ The inventory document is listed as “Materiale archeologico proveniente da Cipro, già appartenente all’Istituto di Anatomia dell’Università di Torino” and is currently kept in the Archives of the ‘Luigi Rolando’ Museum (Fald. 6/69).

²¹ Gjerstad 1937: pl. XCIV, 6; Gjerstad 1948: 176–177, fig. 39.31.

²² Karageorghis 2004: 115, no. 214.

²³ Murray *et al.* 1900: 80; http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/search.aspx, registration number: 1896, 0201.391.

²⁴ Palma di Cesnola 1903: pl. CXII, 6.

²⁵ Hermery, Mertens 2014: cat. 624 and 625.

²⁶ Lipiński 1995: 434.

Cesnola collection at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York²⁷ and of the Lawrence-Cesnola collection of the British Museum in London²⁸.

3 The Phoenician inscription

The marble fragment of the Cesnola collection at the University Museum of Ethnography and Anthropology in Turin bears a Phoenician inscription, finely engraved on the rim of a stone bowl: the fragment conserves the part of the rim connected to the handle (see § 2).

The inscription, incomplete both on the right and on the left, consists of two words, separated by an empty space; only the first letter of the second word is preserved. The signs are carefully engraved and enhanced in black: H. max. 1.4 cm, L. max 1 cm (for the letter Q). The reading is certain:

]MLQRT Y[

Palaeography invites to date the inscription to the Classical period, and it fits particularly well the first decades of the 4th c.

The best parallels for this inscription – in what concerns the medium of the inscription, the palaeography as well as the text – are to be found in the *Batsalos* series, *i. e.* several dedicatory inscriptions to Eshmun-Melqart, engraved on marble basins and dating from the reign of Milkyaton of Kition (392–362 BCE), discovered by Luigi Palma di Cesnola on the sanctuary site of Kition-*Batsalos*²⁹. Our inscription finds a precise correspondence in the formula attested on some of the *Batsalos* inscriptions, and can then be completed in the following manner: [L'DNY L'ŠMN] MLQRT Y[BRK], “to his Lord, to Eshmun-Melqart. May he bless him”.

4 The identification

We can go a step further and identify this inscription with the one considered lost since the end of the 19th c. and known only through a later drawing by Emil

²⁷ Teixidor 1976: nos. 10, 13 and 15.

²⁸ Kiely, Perna 2011: 109–113.

²⁹ *KitIII* A5–A25 and E3, *KBV* 1005–1025 and 1124; cf. Teixidor 1976, Lipiński 1995. To this series should be added a similar inscription found on the same site a few years later (1894) by J. L. Myres: *RES* 1516 = *KitIII* A28 = *KBV* 1028, cf. Myres 1897: 170–173.

Rödiger and the publication in the *CIS* (through a sketch drawing made by Georges Colonna Ceccaldi), published as no. A13 in Amadasi Guzzo's corpus of Kition inscriptions³⁰. The history of this fragmentary object is paradigmatic of the fate shared by several objects of the Cesnola collection.

Discovered by Cesnola during his excavations at *Batsalos* in 1869, the small inscribed fragment of a marble bowl was sketched by Colonna Ceccaldi, who is the source of the *CIS*³¹, and certainly copied by the historian George Bancroft, correspondent for Rödiger in Cyprus³², during the winter of 1869–1870. In March 1870 Paul Schröder went to Larnaka and studied several Phoenician inscriptions kept at the Cesnola diplomatic residence, having at his disposal the preliminary report by Rödiger at the Academy of Berlin³³. However, at the time of Schröder's visit, the mentioned fragment (no. XLIX b in Rödiger's report) was no longer there³⁴.

Whereas Bancroft's facsimile, reproduced by Rödiger, is drawn with a somehow uncertain hand (Fig. 2), Colonna Ceccaldi's sketch, as reproduced in the *CIS* (Fig. 3)³⁵, does not leave any room for doubt: the inscribed fragment in Turin can be confidently identified with the one examined by the two historians and diplomats, which was considered lost until now.

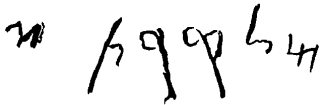


Fig. 2: Bancroft's facsimile of Rödiger XLIX b = *CIS* I 26 (after Rödiger 1870)



Fig. 3: Colonna Ceccaldi's squeeze of *CIS* I 26 (after *CIS* I, pl. VII, 26)

³⁰ Rödiger 1870: no. XLIX b; *CIS* I 26; *KitIII* A13; *KBV* 1013.

³¹ *CIS* I 26.

³² Rödiger 1870: 265–266, “Die Copien sind mir von Hrn. Lepsius [that is, the Egyptologist and linguist Karl Richard Lepsius] mitgetheilt, wir verdanken sie der gütigen Vermittelung unseres correspondirenden Mitglieds, des hiesigen amerikanischen Gesandten Hrn. Bancroft.” George Bancroft (1800–1891), renowned U.S. historian and statesman with a solid education in Classics, served as diplomatic minister in Berlin between 1867 and 1874.

³³ Schröder 1872.

³⁴ Schröder 1872: 333–334, “Die von Rödiger mit b und n [under no. XLIX] bezeichneten Stücke habe ich mit keinem der mir von Hrn. de Cesnola vorgelegten Steine identifizieren können, obgleich ich sein Museum mehrere Tage hindurch genau nach allen phönikischen Schriftdenkmälern durchsucht habe.”

³⁵ Pl. VII, no. 26.

5 Conclusions

An overall analysis of the inscribed shallow marble bowl from the University Museum in Turin demonstrated to be highly beneficial, as it allowed us to collect new data concerning the identification and provenance of this object and contributed – in a broader perspective – to retrace a piece of lost evidence in the fragmented history of the Cesnola collections of Cypriote antiquities.

In fact, the inscribed fragment in Turin can be confidently identified with the inscribed fragmentary marble bowl found by Palma di Cesnola in 1869 on the sanctuary site of Kition-*Batsalos*, the same that was then sketched by Colonna-Ceccaldi, copied by Bancroft and – finally – “lost” in March 1870, when Schröder went to Larnaca and studied several Phoenician inscriptions at Cesnola’s diplomatic residence (see above §§ 3–4).

It can be argued that Luigi Palma di Cesnola included this inscribed fragment within the first donation sent to the Royal Academy of Medicine in Turin at the beginning of 1870, as mentioned in the report of the session of the Academy dated March 4th, 1870 (see above, § 1).

This coincidence in dates is undoubtedly significant both for the history of the collection and for the identification of the object itself. It confirms that among the material donated to the Academy of Medicine in 1870, Cesnola sent a miscellaneous “set of antiquities” from Kition, which included skeletal remains and archaeological objects from different contexts.

By confirming the context of origin of the fragment from the sanctuary site of *Batsalos* at Kition, it reinforces its interpretation as an inscribed lug pertaining to a votive shallow marble bowl: as such it integrates a well-known series³⁶.

Abbreviations

CIS: 1881–. *Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum*. Paris.

KBV: Yon, M. 2004. *Kition dans les textes: testimonia littéraires et épigraphiques et corpus des inscriptions*. Kition-Bamboula V. Paris.

KitIII: Amadasi Guzzo, M. G., Karageorghis, V. 1977. *Fouilles de Kition III: inscriptions phéniciennes*. Nicosia.

RES: 1900–. *Répertoire d'épigraphie sémitique*. Paris.

³⁶ Teixidor 1976; Lipiński 1995.

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