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Press images and catalogue: <https://bit.ly/3GDvtSX>

4,000-year-old Mediterranean cultural treasures go on show in the UK for the first time

Throughout history, islands have been romanticised as remote places quite unlike the mainland. A major new exhibition **Islanders: The Making of the Mediterranean (24 February – 4 June)** will transport visitors back 4,000 years to the islands and sea of the ancient Mediterranean. It will bring to the UK an unprecedented group of over 200 antiquities on loan, most for the first time, from three of the largest Mediterranean islands – Sardinia, Cyprus, and Crete - to demystify the identity of island life and show that the evolution of the Mediterranean world was defined by how connected the islands were across three millennia.



These extraordinary loans will reveal lost island civilisations of trading powers across the Mediterranean that far from operating in isolation, actively sought out new markets to bring the islands wealth and materials to advance their cultures.

Sardinia's famous bronze votive figurines (bronzetti) will be on loan to the UK for the first time from the National Archaeological Museum of Cagliari. The lost 4,000-year-old Nuragic civilization of Sardinia, lasted from the onset of the second millennium BCE (ca. 2000- 1800 BCE) to the Roman colonisation (238 BCE). While the Nuragic civilisation may be extinct and stories of their history now the stuff of legends, the magnificent material culture they left behind is testament to a mighty island society.

No written records of this civilisation have been discovered, it is only through its ancient burial grounds that have yielded up countless unique bronze figurines, that their mythological and religious identity can be understood. Nuragic bronze figurines represented warriors, ships, and imaginary entities belonging to a unique culture.



Bronze figurine of an archer



Bronze 'navicella' boat figurine

Press | The Fitzwilliam Museum

At the peak of its power, the Nuragic culture was defined by megalithic stone towers called nuraghi. Archaeologists estimate that over ten thousand nuraghi once existed across Sardinia, although now only a few thousand survive. **An extraordinary bronze 'navicella' boat figurine** from Orroli, Sardinia, (ca. 1000-700 BCE) with a central mast representing the Nuragic towers, is a symbol of control over sea routes at a time when Nuragic Sardinia was well connected to southern Italy, and other islands such as Cyprus, for maritime trade. The boat is a powerful reminder that the characteristic Nuragic towers were not only visible throughout the island but also a potent cultural symbol. The widespread use of bronze, a metal which was not present in Sardinia, is material proof of the mobility and extensive trade of the Nuragic island people.

A bronze figurine of an archer was excavated at the Iron Age sanctuary of Abini Teti, Sardinia. Discovered in 1865, the sanctuary revealed evidence of a community that was devoted to the smelting and production of bronze artefacts. It is one of the best-known Nuragic cult sites (c. 1000- 600 BCE) due to the incredible number of bronze votives that have been found there.

A unique representation of a figurine pair depicting grief will also be on loan. The figurine of a mourning mother holding her deceased child (1000-700 BCE) originates from the important Nuragic Iron age sanctuary of Santa Vittoria Serri, in Sardinia. The female figure sitting on a stool, holds a naked child on her lap. Her hand is raised in prayer; the child, rests its feet on a stool.

Votive figurines commonly referred to as the 'terracotta army of Cyprus', found at the outstanding sanctuary of Agia Eirini will also be on loan to the UK from the Archaeological Museum of Nicosia, Cyprus, for the first time.

A chance discovery by the Swedish Cyprus Expedition in 1929, led to the excavation of this cultural treasure, the sanctuary of Agia Eirini, in the north-west coast of Cyprus, in use between the Late Bronze Age (1650-1050 BCE) and the end of the 6th ce BCE. The uncovered open- air shrine revealed an astounding 2,000 clay votive figurines, larger than life-size human figures, alongside sphinxes, minotaurs, priests with bull-masks, and horse drawn chariots, such as the one pictured. They were placed as votive offerings in concentric semi-circles around a limestone altar within the large open court of the sanctuary. These clay figures are the most complete representation ever found of Cypriot society of this period.

About two-thirds of the unique archaeological finds are now the core of the Cypriot collections of the Stockholm Medelhavsmuseet. 500 figurines remain in Cyprus and are one of the cultural treasures in the Archaeological Museum of Nicosia.



Finds at the Sanctuary of Agia Eirini, Cyprus. © Världskulturmuseerna, Sweden

The exhibition will also reunite for the first time the finds from the unique Early Bronze Age cemetery of Bellapais-Vounous (ca. 2200-1950 BCE), Cyprus. These emblematic objects of early Cypriot art and religion have shaped our understanding of this formative stage of the island's Bronze Age. Amongst the material on show will be objects never before seen in the UK from the Department of Antiquities in Cyprus, elaborate ceremonial 'tulip bowls', vessels decorated with animal protomes, and life size clay models of inanimate objects, contextualised by the Fitzwilliam's Cypriot antiquities.

Other exhibition highlights are:

- A rare **3,500-year-old ox-hide-shaped ingot** on loan from the Heraklion Museum, Crete. The production of bronze in the Mediterranean defined an age (Bronze Age cultures) and Cyprus became the centre of metal production throughout the whole of the ancient world. These copper ingots were a standard form of transporting the raw material, which was cast in special moulds at the smelting site. Ingots were traded across the Mediterranean for making vessels, tools, and figurines. This example from the Bronze Age Mediterranean copper trade linked seafarers from Crete to Cyprus and Sardinia.
- Two rare figurines on loan from the Ashmolean Museum; a **miniature crawling baby**, found in the caves of Psychro and Ida eastern Crete, the only sacred caves that have yielded human figurines in Bronze Age Crete (c. 3200- 1200 BCE); and a copper **figurine depicting the goddess Astarte**, from Cyprus, a deity worshipped from the Bronze Age through classical antiquity. She is shown standing on a miniature 'oxhide-ingot' a copper ingot shaped like the hide of an ox for easy shipping. There are only two more figurines of this kind, a type known as 'Astarte-on-the-Ingot', they represent a goddess associated with metallurgy, thought to ensure the productivity of the mines and protect the island's copper industry at its heyday in the 12th century BCE. This exceptional figurine exemplifies the story of production, trade and dissemination of copper and bronze artefacts from Cyprus to the rest of the Mediterranean.
- Pioneering new interdisciplinary scientific research has shed new light on islanders' lives, their technologies and the mobility and interaction of island people. The research project at the Fitzwilliam investigated the materials, methods of production and use of metal objects from Cyprus, Crete and Sardinia, dating from the Early Bronze Age to the beginning of the Classical period (ca 2000-500 BCE). **The oldest objects investigated were two copper-based toggle-pins** found in the Early Bronze Age cemetery at Bellapais-Vounous, on Cyprus' north coast. This pair presented some of the earliest known examples found on the island.

They were found in position on the shoulders of one of two individuals buried in the tomb, their pointed tips directed toward the head, and with remnants of now-mineralised thread still preserved in their toggle-holes. Our analysis of a **rare "silver-studded sword" carried by the Homeric warriors** found in the tombs of the Iron Age kings of Tamassos, located near foothills of the Troodos Mountains in central Cyprus revealed it to be a high-status object made with a unique mix of iron and decorated with carved ivory plates and silver.

The exhibition curator and Being an Islander project principal investigator, Dr Anastasia Christophilopoulou said

*'Ultimately, we see identity as a form of social expression, our sense of belonging to a group based on similarities and differences. Objects presented in this show reveal that 'being an islander' is a highly fluid state of being, whether consciously or not, both in the past and the present. Islanders regard all aspects of life as inseparable parts of who they are. Their identities are always in a state of becoming, a journey in which we never arrive. **This exhibition brings together three years of research, community engagement and active archaeological and anthropological practice in the Mediterranean islands.** We must picture ourselves in one of these islands, to better understand how these unique objects reveal self-perceptions, community identity and the islands' long histories. A sense of place, geography, natural environment, and the deep connection of the islanders with the sea, make them who they are. Imagine beyond the labels, to be transported to an island setting, where objects, communities and landscape are one.'*

<https://bit.ly/3CHfFxm>

Quotes from the Heads of the International lending institutions:

Dott. Francesco Muscolino, Director of the National Archaeological Museum, Cagliari, said

'For the Archaeological National Museum of Cagliari, the participation in the exhibition and in the connected research project is a great opportunity of underlining the richness and manifoldness of Sardinian Mediterranean connections throughout the ages. The inclusion of Cagliari Museum antiquities, most of which has never travelled to the UK or abroad, gives a substantial contribution in creating comparisons with similar objects belonging to coeval insular civilizations, thus vividly showing the links among some of the main Mediterranean islands.'

Dr. Marina Solomidou-Ieronymidou, Director of the Department of Antiquities, Cyprus said

'We are especially delighted to be a part of this exceptionally dynamic and multifaceted project. Over 50 Cypriot antiquities, from Cyprus' national museums, will be on loan for the exhibition. Tracing the complex identities that emerge from the study of the ancient remains of three Mediterranean large islands, namely Cyprus, Sardinia and Crete, is a truly fascinating endeavour. Insularity and interaction, innovation and tradition, diversity and tolerance can be seen as important elements of island identities.'

'The Mediterranean Sea, which is what makes these lands islands, has been acting through the millennia as a constant force that has enabled or cut off communication, has isolated or opened up, acting sometimes as a silent or at other periods as a loud stimulus for ancient islander communities. Cyprus, the third largest island in the Mediterranean, located at the intersection of three continents, where the Orient meets the Occident, has always been in the crossroads of so many different and diverse cultures. The islands' ancient communities have been in a continuous dialogue with other Mediterranean communities, including those of Sardinia and Crete, we look forward to viewing the cultural objects of these three islands side by side, in a creative dialogue for the first time.'

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For further enquires please contact the Fitzwilliam Museum Press Office:

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#Islanders | 24 February – 4 June 2023 | Admission Free

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Notes to Editors

The exhibition is under the auspices of the Ambassador of Greece to the United Kingdom, the High Commissioner of Cyprus to the United Kingdom, and is organised in partnership with the Ministry of Culture and Sports, Greece; the Department of Antiquities, Ministry of Transport, Communications and Works, Cyprus; and the National Archaeological Museum, Cagliari, Sardinia.

We would also like to acknowledge the generous contributions of Adonis Pouroulis, the High Commissioner of Cyprus in the UK and other supporters who have made the research project and exhibition possible.

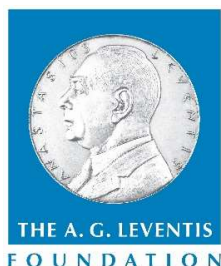
The Being an Islander documentary - <https://bit.ly/3GZ6lHN> using a specific island, Siphnos, Cyclades, Greece as a 'research model' - investigates the theme of insularity as a social construct and as a form of social and cultural identity. It is generously supported by the Stavros Niarchos Foundation. Dr Dimitrios Bouras, an acclaimed documentarist and photographer brings his expertise in anthropological filmmaking and is an active member of our research team. The film is produced with the kind permission of the Ministry of Culture, Greece and is under the auspices of the Municipality of Siphnos, region of Cyclades.

An illustrated exhibition catalogue **Islanders The Making of the Mediterranean**, will be published by Paul Hoberton press, February 2023.

The Fitzwilliam Museum

Founded in 1816, the Fitzwilliam Museum is the principal museum of the University of Cambridge and lead partner for the University of Cambridge Museums (UCM) Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation funded programme. It houses over half a million objects from ancient Egyptian, Greek and Roman artefacts, to medieval illuminated manuscripts, paintings from the Renaissance to the 21st century, world class prints and drawings, and outstanding collections of coins, Asian arts, ceramics, and other applied arts. The Fitzwilliam is an internationally recognised institute of learning, research, and conservation. www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk

The Fitzwilliam Museum, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RB | Free admission Tuesday – Saturday: 10.00 - 17.00, Sundays and Bank Holiday Mondays: 12.00 – 17.00; CLOSED: 24 - 26 & 31 December, 1 & 2 January, Good Friday.



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