

Ancient Cyprus Today Museum Collections and New Research

edited by

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Cover: head of a statue in the Neo-Cypriot Style (ca 560–520 BC) from Ayia Irini.
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The Cypriot fragment at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in the late 19th century

Catherine Olien

Introduction: the archaeological fragment and its place in reception studies*

This short paper has several goals. The first is to situate material from early excavations within new discourses developing in Cypriot studies and art history more broadly. Another is to revisit decontextualised works of art, or to engage a body of material that is unfortunately not of use to scholars in the strictest archaeological sense. Finally, I hope to demonstrate the potential of a receptions-based methodological approach, using primary source material such as unpublished correspondence to highlight the movement, manipulation and discussion of archaeological objects in the modern period. By locating meaning not just at the moments of creation and display in the ancient world, but also in the accounts of ‘discovery’ and display in the modern world, we leave ourselves open to appreciate the full range of possible meanings particular works of art can have to a variety of audiences, and can better understand the way these have shaped the field (Martindale 2013).

In particular, I want to explore the allure of the ancient fragment. Many classics scholars have tackled this topic with respect to text, but here I turn instead to the ancient sculptural fragment (Most 2009). I consider how this variety of fragment manages to be both appealing and problematic. On the one hand, a sculptural fragment symbolises age and antiquity, legitimising its own authenticity and importance by its incomplete appearance. Yet on the other hand, and for the same reasons, it begs to be investigated, reconstructed and made whole once again. Calling for participation, the sculptural fragment encourages the viewer’s imagination to fill in the missing portions, thus resulting in a mapping on—or even merging—of the ancient with the modern via reconstruction (Bohrer 2003).

A survey of historical excavations, restoration efforts and modes of museum display highlights the hopes and burdens that scholars, artists and the public have placed on the sculptural fragment. One could think of the Belvedere Torso or the Laocoön, sculptures that have been romanticised and reimagined from their fragmentary state since the Early Modern period, or the Aegina pediments, which

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have been reconstructed and deconstructed numerous times (Wünsche 2011). Fragments, whether textual or sculptural—and the fundamentally fragmentary nature of antiquity—powerfully captured the public imagination in the 19th century, and it is in this same period that standards for reconstruction began to be canonised. My work here focuses on this key historical moment, building on the precedents set by scholars whose art historical projects have a strong modern receptions component and likewise take the fragment as a central theoretical concept. I am thinking in particular of Elizabeth Prettejohn's (2006) study of the Venus de Milo, which examines how this fragmentary nude shaped modern tastes for nudes and antiquity; William Diebold's (1995) analysis of the Aegina pediments, which outlines changing approaches to restoration of fragmentary sculptures and argues for the preservation and study of the attempts of previous generations; Jean Evans's (2012) monograph on the reception of Sumerian sculpture, a work that touches upon the 19th century fascination with the fragmentary head as potential portrait or replacement for the human body; and Can Bilsel's (2012) book on the presentation of the fragmentary Pergamon Altar in Berlin, which, though not necessarily referencing a stable ancient reality, does reflect 'the scholarly ingenuity and aesthetic disposition of Prussia in the late 19th and early 20th century' (Bilsel 2012: 17). The fragment, it seems, is especially fertile ground for scholars who employ a receptions-based methodology, as reactions to fragmentary material reveal a great deal about the processes by which we mould antiquity in order to construct our histories, our nations and ourselves.

My own contribution addresses Luigi Palma di Cesnola's manipulation of ancient Cypriot sculptural fragments as a means of generating interest in his archaeological finds and own public persona in the late 19th century. I trace the journey and reception of the Cypriot fragments through three parts, allowing Cesnola, who served as US Consul to Cyprus from 1865 to 1877 and was subsequently named first director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1879, to guide the reader through each phase in his various, and more or less legitimate, leadership roles. Part one takes place on Cyprus, with Cesnola as amateur archaeologist. Here, I consider how he went about excavating and selecting sculptural fragments for sale and transportation. Part two, set in the Douglas Mansion in New York, sees Cesnola acting as supervisor of restorations. I examine his goals, methods and results, as well as the initial acceptance or tolerance of his work. Part three then focuses on the intense criticisms that followed, and the media response his restorations and pastiches generated. By considering Cesnola's handling of fragments as an archaeologist and museum director, along with public and scholarly responses to his work, I hope to frame both the causes and effects of fragment fever in the field of Cypriot art and archaeology at a crucial time in its development. I flag changing perspectives on restoration and ideas about new and 'scientific' approaches to excavation that emerged at the end of the 19th century, using Cesnola and his work as a case study through which these changes can be mapped and measured. I also introduce previously unpublished correspondence, mostly from Cesnola himself, giving the reader a chance to hear his perspectives and voice on several issues, in both a professional and personal tone.

Part one: Cesnola in the field

Working before the discipline of archaeology existed in the modern sense, Cesnola's method of gathering or excavating finds was predictably and heavily biased, and has

since been intensely and repeatedly criticised (Balandier 2001). Rather than adding to this list of Cesnola's well-established faults, I will address just one particular selection bias: his interest in heads and faces. Judging by their prevalence in the archaeological photographs, his publications and the material both now and formerly housed at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Cesnola's collection method was skewed in favour of acquiring the heads of votaries from the temples and associated pits he excavated. Here, he followed a practice established by his contemporaries digging on the island. This behaviour was driven by aesthetic evaluations and preferences. In his first archaeological publication, Cesnola wrote, 'The head, as my friend Mr. Ceccaldi remarked, is the only portion of the body to which the sculptor gave his particular attention' (Cesnola 1877: 130). Cesnola collected heads in stone above all, and described making his selection of those that were especially 'magnificent,' 'colossal' and 'fine.' In his publications, he paid little attention to describing—and presumably, collecting—other fragments, either in stone or terracotta. He consistently illustrated near-intact specimens of limestone votary heads, but only rarely included other types of fragments (Cesnola 1877, 1885). Finds such as pottery sherds and portions of arms, torsos and legs were not deemed important or, perhaps more accurately, they were not deemed valuable. Heads were easier to ship back to Europe and quicker to sell, and Cesnola—on the hunt for the intoxicating, direct encounter with antiquity as well as treasure and profit—took what was most recognisable and most saleable to potential buyers.



Aesthetic concerns were absolutely central to notions of value and marketability. I argue that the Cypriot sculptural head—much more so than the body—fit the preferences of Cesnola, contemporary archaeologists and their potential buyers. Popular and scholarly taste circa 1870 still largely followed Winckelmann's mid-18th century evaluations of Greek sculpture, which praised Classical proportions, style and subject matter. Cesnola's observation that Cypriot sculptors focused above all on the heads or faces of their figures, often leaving the backs flat, rough and unworked, is not an entirely erroneous judgment (**Fig. 1**). In the eyes of Cesnola and his target audience, these pre-Classical limestone bodies failed

Figure 1. Cypriot limestone statuette of a beardless male votary in Greek dress. Late 6th or early 5th century BC. Dimensions 67.3 x 24.8 x 14.6cm. The Cesnola Collection. Purchased by subscription, 1874–1876. Accession Number: 74.51.2634. Courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art (<http://www.metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online/search/242185>)

to measure up to the ideals of Classical Greek marble sculpture that Winckelmann had established and others had since endorsed by praising, buying and displaying Classical casts and originals (Jenkins 1992). The language early scholars used to describe, evaluate and interpret these works has been overlooked as a shaping factor in their reception (Donohue 2005). In late 19th century art historical scholarship, Cypriot sculptures were criticised for being 'foreign', 'flat' and 'crude' and for lacking the convincing sense of motion of Classical sculpture (Newton 1880; Perrot & Chipiez 1884, 1885; Pater 1895). A glance under 'Cyprus' in the index to Charles Newton's 1880 survey reveals the following sub-headings: 'Greek art never wholly developed' and 'subjection to foreign influence.' The firm, fixed stance of Cypriot statues was thought to be a symptom leftover from the 'rigid' and 'blocky' Egyptian style, while a dependency on the model of Assyrian relief sculpture was blamed for the overall flatness of the works. The fact that Cypriot votives wore 'foreign' clothing also made them 'inadequate' in comparison to later Greek works, which were praised for their naturalistic, athletic and elastic nude bodies. The sculptural heads, meanwhile, escaped the harshest criticism. Separated from their clothed, flat bodies, they enjoyed a more positive evaluation, much like Roman portrait busts, which doubtless also had a role in encouraging a taste for ancient faces.

Part two: Cesnola in the museum

Cypriot heads were collected independently as well as in conjunction with fragmentary bodies, to which they were later (re)joined. One gets a sense of this logic from the following passage, in which Cesnola addresses a votary's imperfect state of preservation: 'As with many of the others the head was found to be detached, but this was a small matter, since in course of time it could be firmly replaced' (Cesnola 1877: 143). His confidence in repairing such 'small matters' is perhaps troubling by today's standards, but his methods were initially accepted among excavators, dealers and museum professionals. Cesnola's well-documented struggle (circa 1870–1873) to find a buyer for his collection had little to do with his restorations, the extent of which was not clear at the time. Although he blamed the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War for the interruption of negotiations both with the Louvre in Paris and the Hermitage in St. Petersburg, one suspects that it was, in equal parts, his personality (which could be abrasive) and a lack of interest in and funds for the enormous quantity of objects Cesnola hoped to keep united in a major sale that prevented the major European museums from acquiring his collection. Views of Cesnola and his professionalism worsened year after year, especially through the 1880s, but the voices of his critics were still relatively quiet in the early 1870s.

After failing to convince the museums in Paris, St. Petersburg, London and Berlin to buy his collection, Cesnola sold it, in two distinct parts, to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. In 1873, the museum's trustees purchased the first of two collections of antiquities and subsequently employed Cesnola to oversee their cleaning, restoration and installation in the galleries. The trustees 'spared no expense' in allowing him to reconstruct objects and prepare them for display (Cesnola 1873). His restoration efforts, which had up until this point been limited to minor sculpted additions and joins, carried out in an effort to make his finds more attractive to potential buyers, began to be undertaken on a wider scale, in a workshop, with several assistants. It was at this time that he sought the advice and approval of

museum professionals in matters of joining fragments and restoring their surfaces. He maintained an especially active correspondence with Samuel Birch, Keeper of Egyptian and Oriental Antiquities at the British Museum. In an 1873 letter to Birch, Cesnola wrote: 'I have nearly finished the arrangement of my collection here ... I have followed your advice, and joined the limbs to the statues, especially the feet ... the great Priest (a Venus with beard) which holds the patera and bird, looks on this pedestal with its feet very handsomely. I do not believe that the climate of New York, has any *bad effect* upon the *stones* at all—at least so far—a German savan [sic] who was here a few days ago suggested to me the idea of *oiling* the statues; as it would *preserve* the *surface* and bring out the colors; I have done nothing however of course, and I would like to have your opinion about it. Upon a fragment I made this experiment, and no doubt so far as I can see, there would be a great improvement if it is durable but I will do nothing until I have your valuable opinion whether it would be right to do so or not' (emphasis original; Cesnola, 28 June 1873, Archives of the Department of the Middle East, British Museum, Correspondence 1868–1881 CA-CHE, no. 938). Cesnola's anxiety, and his eagerness to follow norms set by an institution such as the British Museum, are palpable. Although the treatment of the 'priest' or 'Venus' mentioned here would become a major focus of critics in the next decade, judging from the tone of his letter Cesnola was carrying out rather typical reconstruction efforts of the time—ones that may well have been endorsed by professionals at major institutions (Sørensen 2014: 36).

The results of these restorations were well received by at least one key member of the Cypriot archaeological community. In May 1872, Robert Hamilton Lang, a fellow amateur archaeologist on Cyprus who held posts as both a diplomat and manager of the island's Imperial Ottoman Bank, wrote a letter directed to the attention of the British Museum's Department of Greek and Roman Antiquities, praising Cesnola's unique talents for transforming his statues in a way that would appeal to an American buyer: 'He is busy making noses for the heads which want them and bringing all into an attractive statue for the Yankee antiquarian! In this repairing pieces he is uncommonly clever and deserves richly all the profits which he makes' (Lang, May 10, 1872: Archive of the Department of the Department of Greece and Rome, British Museum, Original Letters Volume 2 L–Z 1869–1872). This crafting of noses, details of which emerged over a decade later when Cesnola was on trial for libel in 1884, is particularly fascinating. One of Cesnola's assistants, a German carpenter named Thomas Gehlen, describes the team's conception and creation of 'national noses,' or additions made to suit Cesnola's diagnostic categories of Cypriot, Greek, Egyptian or Assyrian votives. Gehlen explains, 'I made the nose to correspond to the nation of the figure to be restored ... I adapted them as well as I could to the fragments on which I was working; if the fragments were of a Greek figure I put on a Greek nose' (McFadden 1971: 219–220). Further details are not provided, but it is likely that the assignments of particular 'national noses' to individual statues were made based on the statues' clothing and head-gear.

This is not to say that these efforts were responsible, even by 1870s standards. Cesnola was above all concerned with the visual impact of the sculptures, not hesitating to pair fragments (or invent entirely new ones) that were visually convincing when joined, but in fact completely unrelated in terms of their archaeological context. He claimed to have excavated systematically, but he was not consistently present at the digs he directed. Despite his claims to the contrary, one has to assume that specific find spots and other details were not recorded. His team of diggers, employed strictly as labourers, had no role in record-keeping. The reality

was that, back in New York, Cesnola solved the problem of abundant fragmentary material by joining statues that fit reasonably well and attempting to disguise his work as much as possible. Still, the antiquities had a relatively peaceful initial public reception, and in 1876 the Metropolitan Museum of Art purchased a second major group of Cesnola's antiquities.

Part three: changing perspectives and the ensuing backlash

As the years went on, however, Cesnola faced increasingly harsh criticism. The results of his restorations were disappointing to many critics, and his blatant dishonesty made matters worse. He was attacked in a variety of official and unofficial publications and subjected to ridicule in cartoons (Fig. 2), which lampooned his inappropriate handling of fragments (Feuarent 1880; Cook 1881). Foremost among his critics were the French antiquarian and antiquities dealer, Gaston L. Feuarent, and the American art critic, Clarence Cook, who not only criticised his restorations but even called into question the authenticity of many major works in the Cesnola Collection. To make clear the significance of these charges, and the associated cartoons and pamphlets, it is useful to bring in two earlier and better-known comparisons.

In the early 19th century, scholars, museum professionals and archaeologists began to place a new value and emphasis on archaeological context and accuracy in reconstruction. By the end of the 19th century ideas concerning the appropriate 'scientific' approach to excavation, restoration and display were shared among American and European scholars and institutions. Seen against the backdrop of



Figure 2. Cesnola appears in the popular New York journal, *Puck*, November 28, 1883. Courtesy of HathiTrust (<http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015049004248;view=1up;seq=200>)

these new professional norms, Cesnola's work represented that of an amateur. Archaeology was no longer a place for amateurs: it was a professional pursuit. I suggest that Cesnola is a useful marker for indexing changes in the field. He boldly and heavily restored his collection of fragments at a time when the trend was to leave objects unrestored—the most famous example here being the Parthenon marbles, which, even after a parliamentary review in 1857, were left in their fragmented, incomplete state of perceived perfection. When joins or reconstructions were made, celebrated artists were often employed, as had been the case with the Aegina marbles, reconstructed in 1816 by the Danish sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen, so that the resulting work, a combination of ancient and contemporary, may have been seen to have both an increased merit and accuracy.

It was against this backdrop that, in 1880, Feuardent issued his first major challenge against Cesnola, in a piece entitled 'Tampering with Antiquities,' published by the *Art Amateur*. In this article, Feuardent outlined what he considered to be standards for honesty and authenticity in handling restorations, but which were, nevertheless, relatively new principles. For instance, he drew attention to a need for transparency when restorations have been made to objects on display in museums: 'It is indeed a fundamental principle that no matter how or where a restoration is made, it must be indicated without reserve on the antique object' (Feuardent 1880: 48). Considering that object labels were by no means universal in Western museums by this date, it is a bold request, in many ways ahead of its time. He is likewise clear and firm when it comes to the role ancient objects have in the construction of knowledge: 'Antiquities, especially of this class, need not be 'beautified;' they are only valuable because they teach us the customs and manners of the people who made them, and they must be absolutely trustworthy in the information they give' (Feuardent 1880: 50). To borrow the helpful language of Ian Jenkins (1992) in his analysis of the contemporaneous, similarly tension-ridden situation in the British Museum, Feuardent seems to fall on the side of the serious, emerging 'archaeologist,' rather than the 'aesthete,' who believed the museum was a place to appreciate, promote and produce neo-classical values and ideals of beauty.

Feuardent's closing attack, in which he faults Cesnola's handling of ancient fragments, is worth quoting in full: 'In fixing together fragments which are honestly believed to have belonged to each other, good work may be done; though it is important to indicate the condition of the object when found, to prevent any possible misconception. But to amalgamate various pieces, strangers to each other, in order to complete an object, and not publicly to indicate it, is not only bad faith, but positive vandalism. To endeavor to increase interest in a collection by deceptive alterations or restorations can only be called a miscalculation, a profanation, or a fraud' (Feuardent 1880: 50). Feuardent calls for a rigorous discrimination on the part of the restorer, to join only pieces that would originally have been part of one sculpture, and takes a strong stance against dishonesty and irresponsibility in restorations. By extension, in naming Cesnola's shortcomings and casting doubt on the validity of his restorations, Feuardent is effectively declaring the Cesnola Collection fraudulent, and Cesnola a vandal.

He was not the only influential member of the art world to hold these opinions. In 1881, Clarence Cook published a document entitled 'Migrations and Transformations of Certain Statues in the Cesnola Collection,' making a tight case against Cesnola's restorations and their various phases. He wrote, 'These fragments, if left untouched, would still have possessed a certain archaeological value, but the cruel and ignorant treatment to which they have been subjected has deprived them of all scientific

value whatever. As for artistic value, they never had any' (Cook 1881: 37). With these remarks, Cook seems to straddle the line between the 'archaeologists' and 'aesthetes,' and ultimately asserts that Cesnola's fragments are valueless to both camps. Cook's arguments extended far beyond the controversial restorations; he also sought to prove that Cesnola had falsified the find spot for the majority of his objects, and had even been tricked into buying forgeries made by locals. An associated pamphlet, 'Migrations and Transformations of a Statue in the Metropolitan Museum of New York, numbered 39 in the Catalogue,' illustrates a bearded votary (headless in all but one instance) that received particularly shocking treatment in Cesnola's workshop. In this example, it is not just the public whom Cook highlights as the victim of Cesnola's methods. Rather, the statue itself is victimised, suffering disastrous makeovers and botched procedures, with a result reminiscent of Frankenstein that aptly illustrates Cesnola's utter failure in his attempt to restore the sculpture to its original glory.

Feuardent's efforts to discredit Cesnola likewise continued into 1881, when he circulated several 'cards,' or short, illustrated pamphlets, that drew attention to Cesnola's inconsistent accounts and problematic, ever-changing sculptures (Fig. 3). Early in the next year, the debate between Cesnola and his critics inspired something of a public spectacle (to say nothing of the later public interest and coverage that ensued when Feuardent brought Cesnola to trial on charges of libel in 1883). In an effort to protect both Cesnola and their museum, the trustees of the Metropolitan

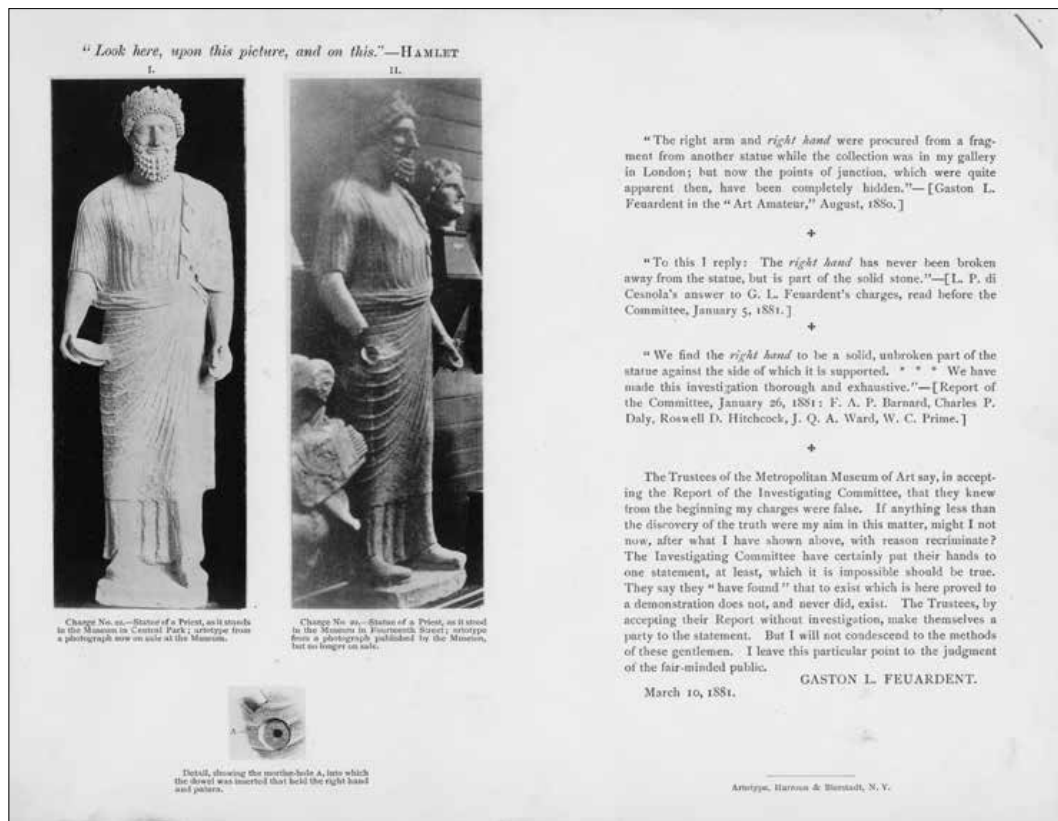


Figure 3. G.L. Feuardent's Card No. 1 (reverse), 1881, the first of a series of short, illustrated excerpts circulated by Feuardent in an effort to prove Cesnola's inappropriate handling of restorations. Courtesy of Musée du Louvre

Museum of Art removed two sculptures from display (the 'Aphrodite and Eros' and 'Figure holding a horned head') and, placing them 'on special exhibition' under 'special light', invited a committee of sculptors to inspect them and confirm that they were authentic and their restorations proper. An article from *The New York Tribune* (27 April 1882) provides an abundance of detail. For instance, the sculptor Robert Ellin and his assistants report that they came to the museum with 'hammer, chisel, and files' and were 'allowed to wash, cut and file those two statues (Nos 32 and 39) to our hearts' content.' The quest for the truth had clearly come to overshadow the importance of proper care for the sculptures.

One aspect of the report raises a particularly interesting question, and an even more fascinating answer. The reporter asks, 'It is alleged that the different parts of these statues are not of proportion ... If the statues are monoliths how do you account for this?' Sculptor Launt Thompson responds, 'Why, Art was in a very primitive state between the Egyptian and Phoenician periods, to which these statues belong, and a great many of these works are, of course, badly modelled. Even to-day, in New York, may be seen many statues which do not observe the strictest laws of proportion' (*The New York Tribune*, 27 April 1882). The mixed or 'primitive' style of Cypriot art is again highlighted, as it was in major handbooks, but functions here as a defence of their irregular appearance and authenticity rather than as an assertion of their shortcomings. Ultimately, the sculptors ruled unanimously in favour of Cesnola, who was allowed to keep his job, if not his reputation.

Conclusion

By 1888, things were looking bleak for Cesnola. Speaking of his experiences on Cyprus, he disclosed his regrets to Alexander H. Murray, Keeper of Greek and Roman Antiquities at the British Museum: 'My dear Mr. Murray, I assure you on my word of honor as a gentleman and honest man, that more than once I regretted that I have been Consul there, and made any discoveries!!! I have been abused by scoundrels ... in such a way, that my life has become unbearable. For the last three years however the great success of this installation has shut the mouth of my detractors, and as many friends here say, I am building for myself a monument which will remain forever after I am dead and gone' (Cesnola January 1888, Archive of the Department of Greece and Rome, British Museum).

Indeed, today several rooms (including the A.G. Leventis Foundation Gallery) of the Metropolitan Museum of Art attest to this monument, and are filled with the heads of Cypriot votaries. Although the installation of finds has naturally developed over the last hundred years to support new aesthetic and didactic preferences, in certain ways the 19th century history of the fragments still invades the galleries, affecting their modern reception. For one, the very presence of so many limestone heads results from the peculiar circumstances of their excavation. While serving as US Consul to Cyprus between 1865 and 1877, Cesnola collected sculpted heads rather than full bodies because they were easier to ship and to sell, being more in line with contemporary tastes. Additionally, the museum displays numerous Cesnola pastiches—that is, works that his assistants assembled but which were not originally part of the same ancient sculpture. The visitor is appropriately warned on both labels and in guidebooks, as Feuadent would have wished, that 'the head and body may not belong together' (Karageorghis 2000; Hermay & Mertens 2014).

While this necessarily raises questions, museum visitors can nevertheless appreciate these modern pastiches for being products of a very particular moment in the history of archaeology. As Jean Evans (2012: 78) writes, ‘visual reconstructions of the past survive longer than the ideas that they were originally meant to support.’ Cesnola’s reconstructions, carried out and put on display at a turning point in the history of the field, were perhaps outdated even at the time of their installation, but nevertheless illustrate a captivating and colourful history of the reception of ancient Cypriot art in the modern world.

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