The Gallery and the Town: the Florentine Bronze Age Aegean and Cypriote Collections beyond the Museum walls

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Abstract: Bronze Age Aegean and Cypriote Collections are an important patrimony of the National Archaeological Museum of Florence, arising from old Museum donations, acquisitions and exchanges dating back to the end of 1800 - beginning of 1900. Several rearrangements of the location of these collections occurred, following the history of the Museum and the flood of 1966. As a consequence, many of the findings were conserved in the Museum storerooms and were not accessible to the visitors.

This project is addressed to a full recovery of the archaeological materials through a multiple approach. First step has been the complete systematic study of the material assemblages. As a second step, dedicated exhibitions of selected repertoires were organized in the Museum exhibition galleries and beyond them, in unconventional locations within the city of Florence. The positive feedback of these exhibitions raised up a new interest for the collections and paved the way toward further new initiatives. The traditional exhibitions have been flanked by the promotion of a virtual, interactive gallery (MUSINT) concerning objects not only kept in the Florentine Museum but also in other Tuscany Galleries, in order to offer a wider picture both for specialists and for general public. Along a virtual chronological, geographical and thematic itineraries, the visitor has the opportunity of different choices to explore sections and artefacts according to his own interest.

Both the traditional exhibitions and the interactive virtual gallery aim to ‘open’ and ‘drive’ the collections from the Museum storerooms to the Town. We believe that the proposed approaches can be easily extended to other collections to reinforce their informative value and enhance the attractive potentialities of our cultural archaeological patrimony.

Keywords: Archaeological Collections, Museum of Florence, new technologies

General remarks
This paper has the aim to illustrate how the researches of our team of the Aegean Laboratory in Florence (http://aegean.sns.it) have significantly contributed both to a renewed exhibition and to a new approach towards the Aegean and Cypriote Collections kept in the National Archaeological Museum of Florence since more than one century, from its first creation to the present days. The visibility of the materials has been, indeed, increased by their new form of exposition: a virtual museum (MUSINT) allows its visitors to interact with the objects independently from their tangible location.

The poster presented in this Meeting (Fig. 1) describes the hard life of the Collections of interest, following a chronological course which is extremely interesting and complex. It is schematically divided in seven horizontal sections, marked by a sequence of events. Moreover, in the left side the big pithos from Phaistos is representative of the moving of the collection up and downstairs, from its exposition to its disappearance for the visitors and vice versa, while, in the right side, we may see the coin-box with Aegean seals which,
contrary to the pithos, remained along the whole period identical and positioned in the same room, the so-called “monetiere”, either closed to the visitors or of difficult access.
The starting period
Following our chronological route, in the upper section the first exhibition of the Aegean Collections in the newborn Museum (whose name was Regio Museo Archeologico - later transformed in Museo Archeologico Nazionale) is represented.

Its first director, Luigi Adriano Milani (the complex and not completely clear sequence of events connected to the establishment of the Museum at the end of XIX century are carefully described in CAPECCHI 1989-90), was interested in the creation of a museum in which the objects were collected and exhibited mostly according to their didactic function; on the distribution of the objects in the various rooms of the Museum we may consult the guide that Milani himself wrote (MILANI 1912). This is surely related to the further activity of Milani: he was professor of Archaeology at the Istituto di Studi Superiori (turned in 1924 into the University in Florence). The lessons made for his students were associated to many handmade drawings of objects collected either in the Florentine museum or in other museums and excavations. The so-called Apparati Illustrativi which accompanied his lessons until 1906-7 are preserved in the Library of Humanities of the University of Florence, and constitute an extraordinary document about the history of the archaeological didactics in Italy: for Milani museum and didactics were really two faces of an identical activity. Among the drawings concerning the “Pre-hellenic and Protogreek periods”, two are showed in the poster; two other related to Tiryns and Crete, respectively, in the following images (Figs 2-3). Below the drawings, in the poster, digital figures appear, that obviously nowadays present substitute handmade ones and are surely clearer but with a lower emotional impact.

The flooding and the following location of collections in the storerooms
The second section shows the terrible alluvion which hit Florence in 1966. The Museum was completely flooded in its ground and underground floors and was shortly and gradually reopened with changes in the disposition of its various sections. The poor Aegean and Cypriote collections, in fact very prestigious but not competitive with, for example, pieces as the Greek “Vaso François” or the Etruscan “Chimera”, finished in the storerooms. Our "guiding object", the big pithos, was placed over a wooden temporary support (which sheltered the object from humidity), next to a showcase where Minoan ceramics were confined. Luckily or, better, thanks to the executives and the employees of the Museum, the storerooms preserve perfectly all the
kept objects, divided according to their chronological and geographic ambits, and catalogues with the inventory of single pieces can be easily consulted, obviously only for the authorized persons which may enter the storerooms. Many Aegean objects were restored before this "provisional" location, during the first ten or twenty years of the twentieth century, when they were exposed in Room XVII, but such restorations were made with unsuitable materials (adhesives and fillers) and, among other negative effects, also the original colour was not preserved.

2007-2009: three crucial years for the Aegean and Cypriot collections

After a long period of stagnation, the new life of the Aegean and Cypriote collections started in 2007, when two temporary exhibitions were mounted: one inside the Museum, and the other, which one of us had the fortune to organize, in a prestigious palace of Florence, palazzo Antinori. With both expositions some lots of objects became visible to the public.

The first and bigger exposition, lasting from December 2007 to June 2008 at the National Archaeological Museum in Florence, was organized by the Management of the Museum and the Superintendence of Archaeological Heritage in Tuscany, in memory of Paolo Emilio Pecorella (Fig. 4), concerning materials from Aegean to Mesopotamia, which were exhibited according to the different provenance areas (Figs 5-6). In the poster the attention is focused again on the pithos, which represented one of the more attractive pieces of the Cretan section. As a consequence of the Exhibition a book was published, comprehensive of scientific papers by specialists followed each one by a single catalogue of the exhibited objects (GUIDOTTI, LO SCHIAVO, PIEROBON BENOIT 2007).

Fig. 4 – Paolo Emilio Pecorella and the exhibition poster (Museo Nazionale Archeologico of Florence)
The second smaller and more specific exhibition, going on from December 2007 to February 2008 at Palazzo Antinori in Florence, was confined to lots of Aegean and Cypriote ceramics concerning wine and symposium sets/service (Il vasellame da simposio e il servizio da vino nelle Collezioni egeo-cipriote del Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Firenze, supervised by A.M.Jasink, G.C.Cianferoni, L.Bombardieri, S.Ferranti): this exhibition, although small and lasting only three months, was very significant because object kept hidden in the Museum were showed to international people visiting one of the most prestigious palaces of Florence (Fig. 7).

Nevertheless, after these transitory appearances all the material returned, even if only for a brief period, as we will see below, in the storerooms.

Starting from the paper written inside the publication concerning the above quoted Exhibition in the Museum (JASINK 2007), we had the idea to extend the partial catalogue of Aegean materials to the whole Aegean patrimony kept in the Museum, but not usable for visitors. The fifth section of the poster is focused just on this Catalogue (JASINK, BOMBARDIERI 2009) that, for the first time from the acquisition of this material by the Museum, furnishes a complete description for the single objects, divided in four sections: Crete, Continental Greece, Cyclades, Rhodes. In this occasion cleanings and restorations of single objects were activated as it has been recorded in the photos which illustrate the book.ieh a first digital interactive database available on line. An innovative instrument was added to the traditional publication: a digital interactive database of the catalogue, hosted on-line on a web site specifically dedicated by Firenze University Press (http://www.fupress.net/collezioniegee/search.php) and available also in the web site DBAS, created by the Aegean Laboratory (http://dbas.sciant.unifi.it).

With the exhibitions and this publication the Collection has begun to exit from the Museum.

**MUSINT and the new collections exhibition in Room X of the Museum**

One year later we started with the MUSINT project (http://musint.sns.it), as described in the sixth section of the poster. MUSINT is an interactive Museum about the Aegean and Cypriote collections kept in five Museums of Tuscany (Museo Archeologico Nazionale of Florence, Museo dell'Accademia Etrusca of Cortona, Museo Archeologico of Montelupo Fiorentino, Museo Nazionale di San Matteo of Pisa, Antiquarium del Dipartimento di Scienze Archeologiche of the University of Pisa): among them the richest collection is represented by the materials of the Florentine Museum, but it seems of interest to make available to the
visitors also the objects of museums that generally are unknown to the standard tourist. MUSINT, as an interactive instrument, may be used according to the interests of the visitor. Five areas (with Cyprus added to the original catalogue), and the succession of periods along the 2nd Millennium BC, the different productions (ware, glyptic, lithics, small sculpture, weaving instruments, larnakes, painted plasters) may be selected; historical introductions, photos and maps of the different sites are presented, with rendering of hypothetical reconstructions and drawings by computer graphics. Combining the traditional drawing techniques with the
use of the computer and computer graphics produces reliable virtual or static reconstructions. The images presented here are a fusion and interaction between digital and manual artistry techniques (Figs 8-9).

![Image 1](image1.jpg) ![Image 2](image2.jpg)

Figs. 8, 9 – Reconstruction of the Mycenaean citadel of Athens and the cross-section of Anemospilia sanctuary (P. Kruklidis)

Particular routes are provided for young visitors, with animated personages as guides. The core of MUSINT is undoubtedly the file of each single object, represented, in many cases, with a 3dimensional model that the visitor may rotate as much as he likes. For some objects, when a traditional restoration procedure is impossible to be performed, a virtual restoration is proposed. MUSINT, for its own typology, is a project that may be continuously implemented and we think this is its major quality. In parallel with this virtual museum also a publication has been edited, as shown in the poster, concerning not only MUSINT but also other experiences and researches of interactive museology (JASINK, TUCCI, BOMBARDIERI 2011).

**The new exhibition of Aegean and Cypriote collections: a first step looking at the future**

Our poster shows in the last section the tangible results obtained through our complex research and detailed analyses for these Collections: an entire room in the Museum is now dedicated to this material, Room X at the second floor (Figs.10-11), which represents for the visitor the starting point of an itinerary along the Greek world and its archaeological patrimony. A second room is planned shortly.

![Image 3](image3.jpg) ![Image 4](image4.jpg)

Figs. 10, 11 – Showcases and *larnax* of Room X (Museo Archeologico Nazionale of Firenze)

A parallel work of restoration is under way and we go on working on the interactive aspects and data processing turned to the updating of the virtual gallery. Beginning from the traditional exhibitions up to now
the realization to 'open’ and ‘drive’ the collections from the museum storerooms to the town is really advanced. We may conclude how our complex research has allowed to reach two aims: the first to make the Museum available to everybody, the second to incite people to visit the physical splendid archaeological Museum in Florence, where now at least a room has been arranged with Aegean artefacts. This testifies the great contribute of new technologies to the safety of the Collection.

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