

The Mainstream Media and the “Shocking Bad Art” from Cyprus

1870s New York Reacts to the Cesnola Collections

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The original Central Park building of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1880.

Online: <https://www.metmuseum.org/blogs/now-at-the-met/features/2011/this-weekend-in-met-history-february-6>.

When the Metropolitan Museum of Art first opened the doors of its Fifth Avenue building on March 30, 1880, the majority of the exhibition space was occupied by Cypriot art purchased by the Met's trustees from Luigi Palma di Cesnola in two lots, one in 1872 and another in 1876. The two collections amounted to around twenty thousand objects, all finds Cesnola had acquired while serving as US Consul on the island from 1865–1876. After the acquisition of the second collection, Cesnola left Cyprus to become the first director of the Metropolitan Museum, a position he held until his death in 1904. New Yorkers in the 1870s were most intriguing by the works of limestone sculptures from the sanctuary at Golgoi. In the 1880s these objects would become embroiled in a scandal because of the claim that Cesnola had performed intentionally misleading restorations, but before that disgrace and through much of the 1870s, New Yorkers were processing the arrival of an enormous volume of ancient Cypriot objects in a relatively short amount of time.¹

At a time when archaeology was evolving into a proper science, the self-taught Cesnola belonged to an older generation of treasure hunters. His 1878 book *Cyprus: Its Ancient Cities, Tombs and Temples* describes for a popular audience his experiences digging sites and acquiring antiquities on the island, but because he rarely kept field notes, and many sites were known to have been dug simultaneously by teams of local workers when he was not present, details of his published accounts have been determined to be fabricated. Cesnola was more a story teller than a scientist. At one point he explains how he tricked local Ottoman officials into granting permission to export his antiquities, in opposition to the terms of his *firman* (permit). Cesnola served on Cyprus both as American Consul and Russian Consul at the same time. While his permit to dig “forbid the American Consul from shipping anything,” his dragoman Besbes pointed out “There was nothing in those orders about the *Russian Consul*.”

And so Besbes applied for an export permit for the Russian Consul that was readily granted, and within hours the crates were being loaded aboard a chartered schooner bound for Alexandria. (Cesnola 1878: 171–75).²

The Cypriot objects purchased by the Met landed in New York of the Gilded Age, a period defined in part by the meteoric rise of a handful of businessmen who acquired wealth by controlling American industries (Porter 1996). Gilded Age business tycoons appreciated the role competition played in their professional success, and applied the same tool in their philanthropic endeavors. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, incorporated in 1870, was founded by men who “believed in art without knowing very much about it” (Tomkins 1970: 17); men who aimed to elevate American culture to the standards of Old Europe. European art collections such as the Louvre and the British Museum were known for world-famous collections of antiquities—especially sculpture—that had taken centuries to amass. By the 1870s, however, ancient objects were becoming increasingly hard to come by, as archaeologically rich countries began to impose stricter export laws. The acquisition of Cesnola's Cypriot objects provided the young New York museum with a massive collection of original antiquities (and not the plaster casts that were becoming popular) boosting the city's reputation as a center for art.

This article seeks to understand how New Yorkers in the 1870s responded to the astounding number of Cypriot antiquities landing on their shores in the space of four years. Judging by the reaction in the popular local press—that is to say, the mainstream media of the 1870s—it is clear that New Yorkers, in fact, were ambivalent about the acquisitions. While acknowledging the objects held a high value for scholars, initial articles reveal the general belief that the objects did not possess any artistic value. The sculpture especially was disparaged because stylistically it did not resemble the more familiar ancient statues of classical and Hellenistic Greece found in European collections. Furthermore, particularly after the arrival of the second collection, visitors found the quantity overwhelming.

Surprisingly, in spite of the negative reactions to the objects themselves, the press eagerly welcomed Cesnola and was enthusiastic about the acquisition of the collections. This reaction can be linked to a Gilded Age narrative in which accomplishment and success are rewards for hard work, gumption, and intelligence. New York papers presented Cesnola as a self-made man; a shrewd adventurer whose success in unearthing antiquities was directly related to his honor, loyalty, and integrity. New York's acquisition of Cesnola's Cypriot antiquities, furthermore, can be framed in Gilded Age enthusiasm for consumerism and conspicuous consumption, when identity was tied to what one owned. New York's (and America's) collective ownership of the Cesnola antiquities gave the city the instant luster of old-world culture.

In July 1872, *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, a leading middle-class periodical, published "The Explorations of Di Cesnola in Cyprus," written by Hiram Hitchcock, a leading hotelier of the day and a close personal friend of Cesnola (Hitchcock 1872; fig. 2).³ Hitchcock's laudatory and hyperbolic essay became the first widespread opportunity for the American public to learn about Cyprus, Cesnola, and his antiquities. Cesnola's sculptural discoveries are the focus of the article, presented as missing pieces of a cultural puzzle that offers an explanation for the birth of Greek art (and the classical ideal), with Cyprus at the critical center of a wheel connecting Phoenicia, Egypt, Assyria, and Greece. Hitchcock's article is accompanied by several line drawings, mostly of sculpture but also some ceramics and terracotta figurines.

Hitchcock's article furthermore introduces Cesnola's personal narrative. Perhaps most relatable to the American reader in 1872, Hitchcock emphasizes Cesnola's American citizenship and his work, which "contributed to modern knowledge a greater amount of important material than has ever before been produced by any one search" (Hitchcock 1872: 189). Hitchcock then describes Cesnola's unimpeachable and distinguished military record, having fought for the Union in the Civil War where he endured suffering and sacrifice, spending many months in the infamous Libby Prison (Hitchcock 1872: 194). These past accomplishments, according to Hitchcock, prepared Cesnola to succeed in the arena of archaeology: "His ability, military training, good physique, persistent energy, wide knowledge of human nature, and broad sympathies peculiarly qualified him for the work he loved" (Hitchcock 1872: 195). Hitchcock ends his article with a reminder of the size and importance of the collection by indicating Cesnola's antiquities are up for sale. His words light a fire under the American reader by alerting him to the global competition for these antiquities:

But this wonderful collection is especially pre-eminent in that it illustrates the growth of ancient art more fully than any other. It therefore attracts great attention in Europe, where it is considered one of the most important discoveries of the century; and the royal museums have sent their



Figure 1. Cesnola sold thousands of works of sculpture to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in the 1870s, including these three heads found at the sanctuary at Golgoi (Athienou-Ayios Photios). The statues found by Cesnola were thought to provide a "missing link" in the history of sculpture, connecting Assyrian and Egyptian with later, more famous Greek works. These were published in Hiram Hitchcock's 1872 Harper's New Weekly Magazine article on Cesnola and Cyprus.



Figure 2. In July 1872 Harper's New Weekly Magazine published an extensive essay on Cesnola and his discoveries on Cyprus. This article paved the way for a positive reception when, five months later, it was announced that the Metropolitan Museum of Art had purchased Cesnola's collection. The local man next to a colossal limestone head found at Golgoi gives an indication of the scale of the sculpture and reinforces Cyprus as an exotic location.

representatives to inspect it.... It is to be hoped that America, of which the discoverer is a worthy and honored citizen, will anticipate the action of London, Berlin, and St. Petersburg. (Hitchcock 1872: 208)

Hitchcock's article ensures that New Yorkers will be primed to respond positively to Cesnola and the acquisition of the antiquities in three ways: First, Cesnola is presented as a textbook Gilded Age hero, whose (noble) personal biography destined him for (important) discoveries on Cyprus, his good fortune a direct result of his admirable character. Second, by ending his article with the admonition that other institutions were interested in the collection, Hitchcock appeals to the reader who, if left unconvinced by the collection's historical and archaeological value, could instead appreciate the collection as an enormous prize to be poached from would-be European competitors. In fact when Hitchcock's article was published and unbeknownst to readers, John Taylor Johnston, president of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, was already wrapping up negotiations to purchase the first collection. The *Harper's* article ensured that when the Met's purchase was made public, New Yorkers would feel smug satisfaction at having preempted a sale in Europe. And third, Hitchcock's article provided the only detailed account of Cesnola's time on Cyprus until Cesnola's own book, *Cyprus, Its Ancient Cities, Tombs and Temples*, was published six years later in 1878, after both sales had been completed. Both Hitchcock's article and Cesnola's book were published under the umbrella of Harper & Brothers Publishers, and Hitchcock's glowing essay not only served as intentional early marketing for Cesnola's book,⁴ but when the Met's purchase of the antiquities was covered in the press, Hitchcock's biased account was a prime source of information.⁵

Four months after Hitchcock's *Harper's* article was published, the Met publicly announced its purchase of Cesnola's first collection. Cesnola temporarily relocated to New York in order to oversee the unpacking of the antiquities in the museum's rented exhibit space in the Douglas Mansion on 14th Street, where the Cypriot objects were the star attraction. Of the nearly ten thousand objects included in the sale, the arresting limestone sculptures from Golgoi (around a thousand objects) received the most attention (fig. 3). The ancient Cypriot sculpture featured many large-scale works in an odd blend of familiar Greek and Eastern style. In the 1870s, ideal beauty was equated with Greek art of the classical and Hellenistic periods, and Cesnola's Cypriot sculptures were difficult to relate to the ancient statues in European collections, especially those attributed to famous sculptors such as Pheidias, Praxiteles, and Lysippos.⁶ While specialists interpreted the stylistic blend as an indication of the important role ancient Cyprus had played in the development of Greek art, typical New Yorkers were harder to impress, and newspaper reviews did not help matters. At several points before and after the arrival of the Cypriot objects, New York papers published harsh judgements of the aesthetics of the Cypriot objects.

The New York press prepared their readers for the unfamiliar aesthetics of ancient Cypriot sculpture before it had even arrived in the country. In December 1872, the *New York Herald*

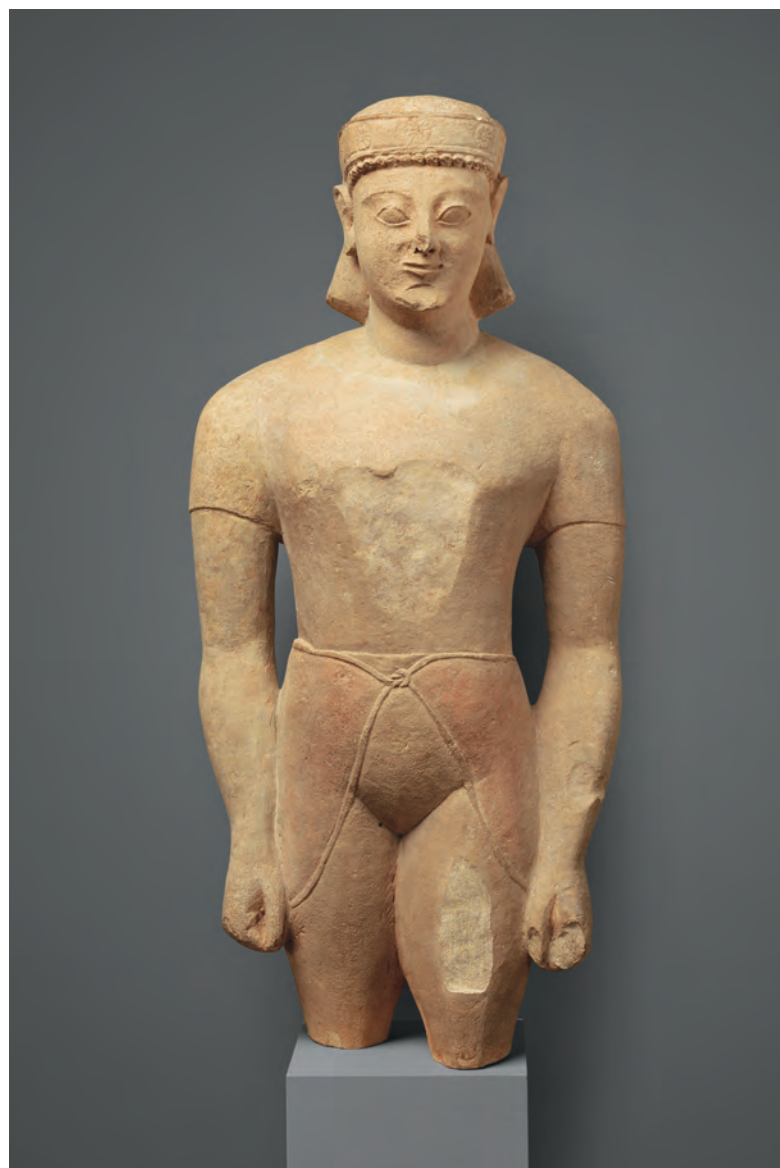


Figure 3. New Yorkers were pleased to have acquired a collection of antiquities that could rival those in Europe, but were unable to see the connection between statues such as this under-lifesize male votary from Golgoi with its undefined muscles and distinctive Cypriot shorts and the more familiar statues of the Greek classical and Hellenistic period. Photograph from Hermary and Mertens 2014: 56; Metropolitan Museum of Art 74.51.2473.

apologetically suggests that visitors to the collection keep their expectations low: "Whoever expects to realize nearer home the splendors of the Uffizi or the Belvedere Palace will be disposed to regard these figures as the rubbish of an old stone yard. This treasure is not for his appetite." ("Cyprian Story in Stone," *New York Herald*, December 15, 1872: 5) A *New York Times* article in the same month goes even further, predicting the collection would be neither educational nor memorable: "New Yorkers having gazed their fill at the gigantic heads found at Golgos ... will retire from their contemplation no wiser than they were before, and forget all about the matter. It certainly is not easy to understand how this collection can be of much use to anyone in this country. It will excite curiosity, nothing more..." ("Fine

Arts. Metropolitan Museum of Art," *The New York Times*, December 23, 1872: 2). Once the collection had arrived in New York and the exhibits were open to the public, reviews range from polite ("Perhaps they are not of extraordinary merit as sculptures. But many have an extremely noble air and betray fine work." ["Cyprus in Fourteenth Street. General di Cesnola and Those Cyprian Antiquities," *New York Herald*, May 22, 1873: 4]) to blunt ("For the statues, artistically, are worthless, but archaeologically they have a high value." ("The Metropolitan Museum. The Cesnola Collection," *The New York Times*, May 25, 1873: 5). With these reviews in the popular press, it is perhaps not surprising that New Yorkers showed little interest in the Cypriot material acquired by the Met, and the exhibits suffered from low attendance (fig. 4).

We get a glimpse of Cesnola's personal reaction to the lack of public enthusiasm for his Cypriot materials in an August 1878 *New York Herald* article that includes a rare interview, and both the author and Cesnola admit that the antiquities have not attracted much interest with Americans.

To say that the Metropolitan Museum of Art has not been appreciated by the public of this city would not begin to express the degree of apathy shown toward it on the part of the masses. While artists and historical students are coming from England to study and copy the objects exhibited there are intelligent people in this city who do not even know where the museum is situated. ("Relics of Other Ages: Antiquities Found in England's New Possession," *New York Herald*, August 4, 1878: 4).

In the same article Cesnola suggests the exhibit was unpopular because uneducated New Yorkers are only interested in the sensational exhibits of P. T. Barnum (fig. 5):

It is to that unfortunate word "museum" that the General [Cesnola] attributes in a great measure the lack of popularity of the institution. To the scholar "museum" means "temple of the muses," but to the untraveled New Yorker it means Barnum, mermaids, woolly horses and Bowery shows of fat women exhibited by shouting ruffians to the sound of a hurdy-gurdy.

Cesnola's contempt for the "untraveled New Yorkers" and their philistine concept of "museum" is palpable; and surely did not win him any popularity contests with the public.

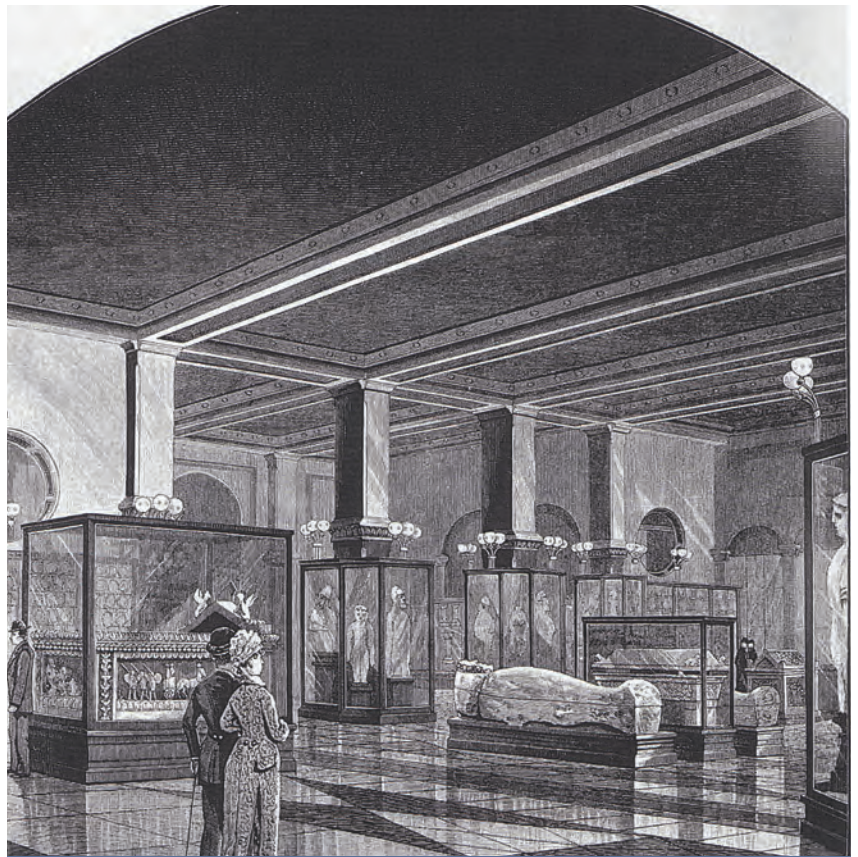


Figure 4. A view of the Cypriot exhibits in 1880. The Cypriot objects filled the main hall when the Met's Fifth Avenue building opened in April of that year. The collection suffered from low attendance in the early years. From Karageorghis 2000: fig. 9.

Nearly two years later, with attendance still a problem, *The New York Times* used a similar logic to explain the public's lack of interest, claiming the collection was intended for a more highbrow audience:

For the Metropolitan Museum is not a picture gallery intended to attract people by the mere pleasure they may experience in seeing brightly colored, cleverly-painted canvases.... Nor is it a place for exhibiting bric-à-brac and laces that will be voted "sweetly pretty" by decorative ladies.... It has a much less popular, and much more responsible place to fill.... ("The Art Museum to Open: Value of the Collection. The Central Park Art Building and Its Contents—the Benefits of the Cesnola and Other Collections—the Dutch and Flemish Masters Works," *The New York Times*, March 18, 1880: 5).

One wonders what Cesnola and the Met's trustees thought of this dismal characterization of the Met and the Cypriot collection's unpopular duty to serve scholars—not engage the public—especially given the article was published less than two weeks before the grand opening of the Fifth Avenue building. The Gilded Age saw the rise of an entertainment industry accessible to all socioeconomic classes. As a result, Americans developed increased expectations for their leisure time (Lears 2009: 248–54). Reading in the local papers that the museum visitors must surrender any (prosaic) enthusiasm to indulge in "mere pleasure" when visiting the galleries surely did not encourage attendance!

With the arrival of the second collection in 1876, the number of Cypriot antiquities in New York nearly doubled, and public aversion shifted from the aesthetics of the sculpture to the overwhelming quantity. New Yorkers began to



Figure 5. Since the 1840s, P. T. Barnum had defined “museum” for New Yorkers, with diverse and exotic exhibits of oddities. Here, a view of the lecture room at the Barnum Museum shows a theatrical performance. The Metropolitan Museum of Art had more esoteric aims and had a hard time competing with the popular appeal of Barnum’s show.

wonder if there were simply *too many objects from Cyprus* at the Metropolitan Museum (fig. 6). A *New York Times* article from February 1880 serves as an example, maintaining that if the Met is intended to be a comprehensive museum aimed at teaching visitors about art, the Cypriot antiquities (at the expense of other important periods of art) were a problem:

Our museum has for its backbone the collection of Cyprian antiquities.... it may be said at once without mincing matters, that as to this collection it is entirely too large.... There are too many of these Cyprian objects. They may illustrate quite exhaustively a certain early period of art, but then it is bad art, and shocking bad art at that. Are they beautiful? Are the Cyprian statues, save with the rarest exceptions either elegant or classic? Archaeologically, ethnologically, they may teach us a great deal, but artistically hardly anything. Exactly the same may be remarked in regard to the Cyprian pottery. Honestly, can any one expiate, unless in pumped up rhapsody, over their beauty?... It may cause a cry of horror, but if nine-tenths of the whole collection of Cyprian pottery, with three-fourths of the statues, were disposed of—sold for money, and that money used for other purchases in proper directions, or exchanges made—there would be more air in the Metropolitan Museum, or at least the place vacated might be occupied by objects of greater artistic value.... The general fault then, to be found in the Metropolitan Museum is that its ambitions has run so far too markedly in particular channels. If top-heavy in one single department, it wants balance in a hundred other directions. (“The Boston Art Museum. Peculiar Features of the Collection,” *The New York Times*, February 22, 1880: 10).⁷

Simply put, New York’s assessment of Cesnola’s Cypriot exhibits can be summed up as follows: it contained too much of a very narrow period and place, it was unattractive to look at and difficult to understand, and “duplicates” in the enormous collection were preventing New York from building a much-needed

universal art collection. Yet, in spite of these published complaints, the Met’s trustees’ support for Cesnola never wavered, and Cesnola was given carte blanche to set up the exhibits as he chose.

It is perhaps surprising that after blatantly rejecting the style and scope of the Cypriot art, the same New York papers seem to have been utterly enamored of their discoverer. Articles typically follow the lead of Hitchcock’s article, connecting Cesnola’s distinguished American narrative with his success at finding antiquities. Nearly every article published between 1872 and 1880 includes the same information about Cesnola: he is an Italian-born nobleman who became a US citizen after fighting heroically in the US Civil War (fig. 7). Cesnola’s bravery in battle and his commitment to his adopted country—admirable character traits to American readers—were then explicitly linked to his success in unearthing antiquities in Cyprus. A *New York Herald* article from January 1873 offers an example of this trend, and a description of Cesnola’s wartime service pivots naturally into his work on Cyprus: “Physical courage and prowess were not the only qualities necessary to success in General di Cesnola’s Cyprus excavations. Practical shrewdness, the kind of acumen known as ‘mother wit’ and a strong infusion of antiquarian genius were among the first essentials.” (“Cesnola, The Cyprus Antiquities in New York,” *New York Herald*, January 29, 1873: 9). In July, the New York-based *Christian Union* reviewed the opening of Cesnola’s first collection in New York, also referenced Cesnola’s honorable Civil War service and American citizenship, then described his “enterprise, patience, sagacity, and generous enthusiasm,” explaining that “difficulties, so far from daunting him, seemed only to develop a keener zeal and perseverance.” (Walter H. Pomeroy, “The di Cesnola Collection,” *Christian Union*, July 16, 1873: 52). Cesnola is presented as a model of the American dream: An immigrant having proven his commitment to his adopted country is then rewarded with great fortune in unearthing antiquities. This personal story, furthermore, reflects contemporary American



Figure 6. This 1907 photograph of display cases at the Met underscores the vast quantity of Cypriot objects on display, leaving New Yorkers overwhelmed. Some suggested selling off the vast majority of the Cypriot objects in order to invest in other areas. From Karageorghis 2000: fig. 8.

business values in which opportunism and quick action are the foundation of success (Lears 2009: 147).

Cesnola himself was no stranger to this particular kind of (self-)promotion. In February 1873, a *New York Herald* article includes the full text of a speech Cesnola had given at a party in his honor (“Reception to General di Cesnola,” *New York Herald*, February 5, 1873: 4). Speaking to Met trustees and other dignitaries, Cesnola plays to his audience: wealthy politicians and industry tycoons of the Gilded Age who had invested in New York’s cultural scene. In his address, Cesnola (perhaps responding to the unenthusiastic welcome his sculpture had met in the press) explains that works of “the best Greek epoch” were simply not available for acquisition; and when they were found, they were snapped up. Instead, Cesnola argues, American museums must rely on Americans to find objects with which to enrich their collections. Such an appeal provides Cesnola with a perfect segue into his collection and the importance it held in the history of art, ending with Cesnola’s offer to serve as the Metropolitan’s own archaeologist-for-hire: “I shall dedicate hereafter my time and studies to one single purpose—namely, that of contributing as much as I can to help you make this museum of art worthy of our great country: and if in my future explorations in the East I

have the good fortune to discover some works of those matchless sculptors—Phidias, Praxiteles and Lysippos—they shall adorn no other museum but that of my adopted country.”⁸

At the time Cesnola gave this address he had already acquired thousands of limestone sculptures on Cyprus, and he surely knew full well that the odds of uncovering any Greek works were next to zero. Nevertheless he tantalizingly drops the names of familiar classical Greek sculptors—names synonymous at the time with “the best Greek epoch.” Everyone present knew that Cypriot sculpture looked nothing like the works of classical Greece, but Cesnola understood his audience: a room full of self-made businessmen who had reaped tremendous financial reward by speculation in business. Antiquities-hunting—a speculative endeavor if there ever was one—was right up their alley.

New York papers also consistently boasted that America had acquired something that Europe wanted. When announcing the purchase of Cesnola’s first collection in November 1872, *The New York Times* couldn’t resist a little triumphant crowing: “The British Museum coveted the collection, but New-York happily comes into final possession of it.” (“Metropolitan Museum of Art, New Building in Central Park—Purchase of Splendid Foreign Collections—The Work of the Trustees,” *The New York Times*,

November 19, 1872: 5). A few weeks later, the *New York Herald* boldly contends that the British Museum had made a devastating mistake in not acquiring the antiquities when they had the chance: “Archaeologists and students of the history of art look on the departure of this rare collection from London with undisguised chagrin, and the management of the British Museum is assailed with unmeasured recrimination for having bargained and chaffered and promised to call again and exhibited” (“Cyprian Story in Stone,” *New York Herald*, December 15, 1872: 5). New York newspapers promoted the narrative that John Taylor Johnston, president of the Met, had “snatched” the collection away from the British Museum, which had been slow to act on recognizing the importance of the antiquities. His cleverness and quick action, American readers are led to believe, secured the collection for the United States.

New Yorkers’ belief that the British Museum had been on the verge of purchasing the collection came in part from London papers, which had indeed expressed disappointment that the collection, on display in London in 1872 while Cesnola sought a buyer, had left London for American shores. In December 1872 *The New York Times* (undoubtedly with smug satisfaction) reprinted an article from London’s *Pall Mall Gazette*:

The shipment of these things to New-York means simply ... mystification of the New-York gaper, and sea-sickness for the European archaeologist. For the most intelligent New-Yorker can get but moderate advantage out of the antiquities of this collection taken apart from their historical place in relation to antiquities of other schools and another aspect; and specimens of these last he does not possess, and has little chance of coming by. And, on the other hand, every serious archaeologist of Germany, France, or England, occupying himself with the intricate and vital question of the development of some of the Greek out of the Semitic and Egyptian forms of art and worship, will henceforth have inevitably to cross the Atlantic, in pursuit of this collection, to fill up the gaps in his knowledge of the monuments upon which everything hinges. The trustees of American museums are more enterprising than those of Cis-Atlantic institutions, and a favorable bargain is concluded or concluding for the immediate transfer of these monuments of Golgos and Idalium to New-York. So much the worse for the science of archaeology.... (“Fine Arts” Treasures from Cyprus—New Statuary,” *The New York Times*, December 8, 1872: 5).

New Yorkers might have felt mild outrage at being characterized as “mystified gapers” with no appreciation for Cypriot antiquities, but this affront was likely mitigated by the acknowledgement in the London paper that American museums were run by more enterprising trustees than those in Europe. In a contest between cultural sensibility and business acuity, Gilded Age New Yorkers preferred superiority in the latter, because success in business could provide the resources needed to acquire a cultural prestige.⁹

New York newspapers promoted the idea that the antiquities were the prize in a competition setting the savvy American businessman who knows when to leap on a good deal, against sluggish and scholarly Old-World Europe, slow to act and resistant to change. Capturing what Europe coveted is the most consistent feature of articles on the Cesnola collection, and was probably built on a fantasy, as there is no indication that the British Museum ever considered making an offer. In February 1880 *The New York Times* ran a letter to the editor signed “An Englishman” who attempts to set the record straight: “I was in London during the year in which the Cesnola collection was there exhibited for sale, and I can state as a fact that the museum authorities then positively declined to acquire it ... a great portion of the London press were in favor of such a purchase, but the museum authorities, justly pretending to



Figure 7. Cesnola’s military career in the Union army was a compelling part of his narrative, and newspaper articles about his antiquities frequently describe his service in detail as a prelude to his archaeological discoveries. Metropolitan Museum of Art 67.29.

know better, refused to listen.” (“Letters to the Editor, Cyprian Art,” *The New York Times*, February 25, 1880: 3).¹⁰

This spirit of acquisition and competition plays into the Gilded Age as an unprecedented era of American consumer culture. For the first time, Americans came to understand that what they owned (as opposed to church and family) defined the “good life” (Guarneri 2017: 193–95). Advertisers (hired by manufacturers) defined the desirability of possessions, and the acquisition of such possessions, consumers were told, affected upward social mobility. Hitchcock’s 1872 article was—plain and simple—an advertisement for Harper’s Publishing House, but also ultimately served as an apparatus for promoting the Cypriot antiquities as desirable status objects to a newly minted consumerist culture. Acquisition of the collections in the 1870s became a consumerist aspiration in which identity and status was based on object and ownership, on a city-wide (and even national) level.

Cesnola’s ancient Cypriot objects were presented in the press as something that Europe coveted desperately, but had been acquired by New York because of the astute business sense of the Met’s Board of Trustees, proving that New York could build in a decade what had taken European collections centuries to achieve. Furthermore, the acquisition proved that cultural credibility could be bought. Within this framework, the prestige of acquisition and ownership of Cesnola’s antiquities overshadowed

both lack of visual appeal and antipathy from a disinterested public. In *Gilded Age New York*, it was not contradictory to call the ancient objects “shocking bad” and “rubbish from an old stone yard” while at the same time framing their discovery as the rightful spoils for a noble and deserving adventurer, and their arrival in America as the befitting reward for savvy New Yorkers. In this narrative of the Gilded Age, fortune smiles on hard-working and shrewd individuals, and a consumerist culture sanctions the acquisition that would help elevate America to the same level as her aspirational cultural peers in Europe.

Notes

1. The scandal is well documented, as it was a cause célèbre in 1880s New York. These events and many other aspects of Cesnola's life are thoroughly documented in McFadden 1971 and more recently by Marangou 2000. After Cesnola's death, the Cypriot objects languished. Several hundred “duplicates” from the collection were sold in 1916 and 1926 (Hermay and Mertens 2014: 22) and by the end of the twentieth century, very few objects were still on display. In 2000 the collection received an updated exhibit and publication (Karageorghis 2000) that for the first time explicitly acknowledges the problematic history of the collection.
2. While Cesnola's actions have been forgiven by some because of the relatively relaxed archaeological standards at the time, even his contemporaries assumed *Cyprus, Its Ancient Cities, Tombs and Temples* would be followed by a more scientifically rigorous publication of his time in the field on Cyprus, but such a work was never written.
3. According to Mott (1938a: 391) available circulation numbers suggest *Harper's New Monthly* was an exceptionally popular magazine with an unprecedented circulation of 200,000 by the beginning of the Civil War.
4. Mott (1938b: 10) claims *Harper's New Monthly* was founded solely for the purpose of advertising the firm's books.
5. As a further conflict of interest, George W. Curtis, a trustee at the Met from 1870 to 1889, had ties to the Harper's house, serving as the political editor of *Harper's Weekly* the entire time of his trusteeship.
6. Cesnola himself was especially interested in the sculpture and compared it to more famous works of Greek sculpture, probably to increase its value (Karageorghis 2000: 4).
7. The article goes on to say that if the entire collection were offered to the Louvre as a free gift and the only requirement was that they had to display the whole collection, the Louvre would turn down the gift, because the collection is so repetitive!

8. Cesnola's offer was at first accepted, but a financial depression beginning in 1873 prevented the deal from gaining any traction.
9. To add to the hype of ownership, New York publications also consistently point out that the Met had shown astute financial judgment in their purchase of the two collections. Publications were inconsistent with the exact price paid (most put it in the neighborhood of \$50,000–\$60,000 for each collection) yet all agree that the antiquities were worth much more.
10. Representatives from the British Museum visited the first collection while it was on display in London, but never made an offer.

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