

June 2012

# Ceramic art, craft and tales from Medieval Cyprus

3 July – 23 September | The Fitzwilliam Museum,  
Cambridge  
Cyprus Gallery (Room 22)  
Free Admission

*Exhibition supported by Mr Demosthenis Severis, in honour  
of Mr Constantine Leventis*

*Held in partnership with the Leventis Municipal  
Museum of Nicosia*

Glimpses of Medieval Cypriot life and art will be on show this summer at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, in a special exhibition of ceramics from the 13<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The 47 works from the Leventis Municipal Museum of Nicosia, along with 8 from the Fitzwilliam's own collection, combine colourful glazes with lively 'sgraffito' and slip-painted techniques to provide vivid insights into the life and crafts of Medieval Cyprus.

The display celebrates the long-standing relationship between Cambridge University and the Leventis family, whose members are internationally renowned for their wide-ranging philanthropic activities. The A.G. Leventis Foundation sponsored the creation of the Fitzwilliam Museum's Cypriot gallery in 1997 and in 2008 founded the University's A.G. Leventis Professorship of Greek Culture.

Medieval Cyprus was a melting pot of different cultures, influenced by a succession of invaders and occupiers. In 1191 the island was seized from the control of the Byzantine Empire by King Richard the Lionheart of England, on his way to the Holy Land for the Third Crusade.

Richard sold the island on to the deposed King of Jerusalem, the French-born Guy de Lusignan, and Cyprus was rapidly transformed from a Byzantine province into a Medieval French feudal kingdom that lasted for three centuries (1192-1489). It was in this period that most of the pottery on show was produced.

Ceramic  
Art Craft  
& Tales   
from Medieval Cyprus



Dish © The Leventis Municipal Museum of Nicosia

Press Release | The Fitzwilliam Museum

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The designs on the pots reflect the life-style of the ruling Frankish class. The women wear fashionable western European dress; the men appear in short tunics with falcons on their wrists; there are also possible wedding scenes, dancers and coats of arms. Birds, fish and other animals are also represented, along with floral and geometric motifs.

The technology behind these ceramics derives from Byzantine traditions, but the Cypriot potters exploited their own excellent clay sources and native ingenuity to develop distinctive local styles. These included 'sgraffito' wares, with designs scratched through a thin layer of clay, fired once, then coloured, glazed and fired again. They also were skilled makers of slip-painted wares, creating trails of lighter-coloured clay in decorative patterns on the pots before firing, glazing and firing again. These pots were mostly used as table-wares, though some have been found in graves.

The Leventis Collection of Medieval Cypriot pottery is one of the finest and most extensive in the world. This exhibition provides a rare example to see these ceramics in the UK and to appreciate their unique perspective on medieval Mediterranean life.

Timothy Potts, Director of the Fitzwilliam Museum commented: "We're hugely indebted to the generosity of both Demosthenis Severis and the Leventis Municipal Museum for making it possible to display this exhibition in Cambridge this summer. Visitors will be enchanted by the vivid glimpses of life in Medieval Cyprus offered by these beautiful ceramics, which will have special appeal to the many amateur and professional potters working in Britain. At the same time we're delighted to be able to mark the Fitzwilliam's, and the University's, close and continuing friendship with the Leventis family, through an exhibition that explicitly honours the memory of the late Mr Constantine (Dino) Leventis."

- Ends -

**For further information and images contact the Marketing and Press Office:**  
Telephone: 01223 33294 | Email: [fitzmuseum-press@lists.cam.ac.uk](mailto:fitzmuseum-press@lists.cam.ac.uk)

**Notes to editors:**

**Ceramic art, craft and tales from Medieval Cyprus** | 3 July - 23 September 2012  
The Fitzwilliam Museum, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RB

**ADMISSION FREE**

**OPEN:** Tuesday - Saturday: 10.00 - 17.00  
Sundays and Bank Holiday Mondays: 12.00 - 17.00  
**CLOSED:** Mondays

## **The Leventis Municipal Museum of Nicosia**

The Leventis Municipal Museum of Nicosia collects and displays art and artifacts relating to the history of Nicosia, which was founded during the Neolithic period and has been the capital city of Cyprus from the Middle Ages to the present day. The

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Museum opened in 1989: its aim is to exhibit and project the political, social and cultural history of both Nicosia and Cyprus to both local and international visitors. The Museum hosts exhibitions, lectures, educational programmes and other events throughout the year.

## **The Fitzwilliam Museum**

Founded in 1816 the Fitzwilliam is the principal museum of the University of Cambridge, with collections exploring world history and art from antiquity to the present day. It houses over half a million objects from ancient Egyptian, Greek and Roman artefacts, to medieval illuminated manuscripts, masterpiece paintings from the Renaissance to the 21st century and outstanding collections of applied arts, ceramics, coins, and Asian arts.

Welcoming over 400,000 visitors a year, the Fitzwilliam presents a wide ranging public programme of major exhibitions, events and education activities, and is an internationally recognised institute of learning, research and conservation.

[www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk](http://www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk)

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