

The Museum of Byzantine Culture presents the temporary exhibition *The “polyphonic” tradition of the 19th century: Jewels and weapons from the collections of Andy Antotsiou and Antonis Souliotis*.

The Museum, continuing its multi-year collaboration with private collectors, presents interesting continuities and discontinuities in the traditions of the 19th century through special jewels and weapons from the collections of Andy Antotsiou and Antonis Souliotis.

The exhibition presents characteristic jewelry by geographical area (Macedonia, Thrace, Evia, Boeotia, Attica, Aegean, Crete, Dodecanese, Cyprus and Ionian Islands), but also as groups of jewelry that illustrate the basic techniques of construction and decoration which are explained through information video of the Cultural Foundation of Piraeus Bank. Also on display are weapons that illustrate the diversity of armaments of the Balkan warriors and the independent Greek state.

The multilingual names of the objects, but also their construction and decoration techniques enrich our knowledge of the economic and social relations of the period, the imports of objects from Central Europe and the East and the rich and varied local production.

Agathoniki Tsilipakou - Anastassios Antonaras

The “Polyphonic” tradition of the 19th century. Jewels and weapons form the Collections of Andy Antitsiou and Antonis Souliotis

A series of objects, both everyday objects and weapons, mark the interesting continuities and discontinuities that emerged in the 19th century and especially in its second half.

The creation of the independent Greek state in 1830 enabled a part of the Greeks to live and create freely. In the areas of present-day Greece that remained integrated in the Ottoman Empire, the coexistence of various ethnic groups continued to be the rule. This coexistence as well as the interactions among the inhabitants of these areas are obvious in the tangible remnants of their culture. And if the presence of these everyday objects refers to a peaceful coexistence, the weapons remind us that the relations of the inhabitants were not always good.

The names of these objects as well as the production techniques and their decoration often do more than enrich the “biography” of the objects themselves. They also further our knowledge about the economic and social relations of the period. The names of the objects testify to the “polyphony” that prevails in the area. Greek-speaking, Albanian – speaking, Turkish-speaking, Slavic-speaking, Romanian-speaking, Vlach-speaking people not only contribute linguistically to the naming of these objects but also seem to use and understand the words and names of their foreign-speaking neighbors.

The techniques and decoration of our objects give indications as to whether they are products deriving from Central or Western Europe or from the East or simply reflect the local tradition and betray the disposition of the local craftsmen to imitate similar foreign objects.

Ioannis Motsianos



The “Polyphonic” tradition of the 19th century:

Jewels and weapons from the Collections of Andy Antotsiou and Antonis Souliotis

June, 15th– September, 18th 2022

Organization

Museum of Byzantine Culture

Collaborating institution

Piraeus Bank Group Cultural Foundation

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Συνεργαζόμενος φορέας:



Χορηγοί επικοινωνίας:



Biography of a collection

Many years have passed since I began my collecting activity, but I still remember with a lot of affection and love how it started.

I was seventeen years old, I had just come of age and my grandmother Kyriaki Soulioti opened a casket at my paternal home in Veria and handed me the family heirlooms of our ancestors from Souli, as well as objects from the Macedonian Struggle of my grandfather Antonis Souliotis, son of Nicolas (1879-1947). It was with great honor and awe that for the first time I witnessed the history of my family.

In the dreamy and carefree years of my youth I was confronted with something so heroic and so great that it was going to change my character, my way of life and my thoughts.

Thus began my interest and love for Greek tradition and history and I developed deep feelings for everything Greek. These recollections led me to engage in the search for collectible items.

The liberation struggle (1821-1829), which is a historical event of unique importance, inspired me most due to my Souliote origin. And so I started collecting objects of this heroic period but also objects of the 19th century in general.

At first I had neither the knowledge nor the means for this endeavor. I became a regular visitor of all the ethnological museums and collections in the country. The objects themselves spoke to me but I did not understand them. Slowly, day by day, with valuable assistance from the publications and albums of major publishing houses but also my discussions with renowned people in the area, I began to acquire the knowledge that helped me to study, understand and hear, but also to truly love these objects that although lifeless they carry a valuable and unique history, they have in them the flame, the will and the hope for the independence and the liberation of the Greek nation from the Ottomans.

That is how I started. Always having as a guide first the knowledge, then the careful search and finally the financial possibility and for forty years I have been looking for forgotten historical relics and I am happy I have had the opportunity to discover them, to preserve them and to save them from the decay and oblivion of time.

Over the last fifteen years, many of the items in my collection have been presented to the public through exhibitions, which have enabled many of our fellow citizens to see them, touch them and learn more about them. Because history is not only taught and heard, but also seen and touched.

Antonis Souliotis



Harbi (filling rod), 19th c.
A. Souliotis collection



Balkan kariofili with carved barrel, 19th c.
Antotsiou Collection



Niello decorated palaska (gun powder cartridge belt boxes), 19th c.
A. Souliotis collection



Double, niello-decorated kiousteki (bridal chest and waist ornament) from Florina, 19th c.
A. Antotsiou Collection



Niello-decorated kiousteki (chest ornament) of the Sarakatsani, 19th c.
A. Antotsiou Collection



Forged kemer (large belt buckle), 19th c.
A. Antotsiou Collection



Roka-pistol, 19th c.
A. Souliotis collection

A collector is, above all, one who collects stories. In my childhood, some household objects that had survived ruthless recent wars whispered to me, if I listened carefully enough, stories about ancestors who had lived in the same place but in other times and claimed their share of immortality from me, since, as it goes, no one dies unless he is forgotten. And my city, Thessaloniki, a chameleon city that changes cultures like petticoats and a dragon city that dominates the roads from the East and the Great Rivers to the West, motivated me to look under the frenzy of post-war reconstruction for a multi-layered past that was now lost. So, as a child in elementary school, I started gathering from the city's bazaars whatever my pocket money allowed me to buy, with the certainty that along with each object I saved a part of the soul of the people who had used it.

Later, when I became more systematically involved in folklore as part of my studies at the Department of Medieval and Modern Greek Studies of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, I found that the functional objects of my homeland had many similarities with those of other countries, both in the East and the West, with which historically, geographically, economically and culturally Greece has always been closely related, either through conquests, or due to voluntary or compulsory immigration, nomadic movements and trade, or simply by choice.

This constant mobility of people and ideas between the East and the West contributed to the homogenization of all aspects of everyday life. Additionally, all kinds of craftsmen who roamed from Russia to Europe without restrictions, contributed significantly to the formation of common aesthetics in a wider cultural environment.

In summary, the functional objects of 19th century Greece are perhaps the most prominent field in the comparative study of the intercultural exchanges that shaped today's society.

Andy Antotsiou



Belt with buckle decorated with enamels and gems with filigree date 1826
A. Antotsiou Collection