

# Satala Aphrodite

## Case Study

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### Introduction

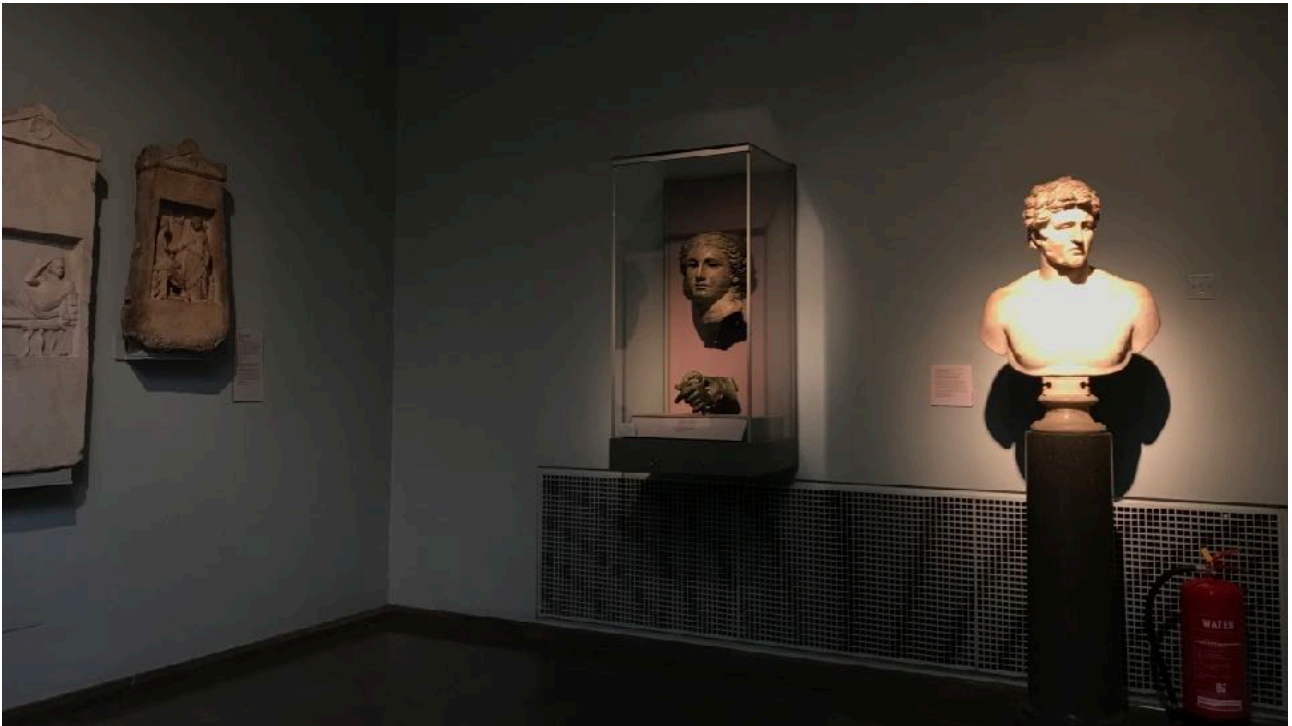
The Satala Aphrodite is a Hellenistic bronze head displayed in a wall mounted glass case over a ventilation grille near the south entrance to room 22 on the ground floor of the British Museum. Its current location and curatorial display reveal little of the complex route by which the head came to be a part of the Museum or of the importance ascribed to it at the time of its acquisition.

The case study gathers material from the Museum archives to tell the story of the Satala head's acquisition and shed light on the context of its original provenance.

This study could be expanded at a later date to explain how the archive material could be linked back to the online collection.

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## Current Display



**SATALA APHRODITE DISPLAY CASE IN ROOM 22**

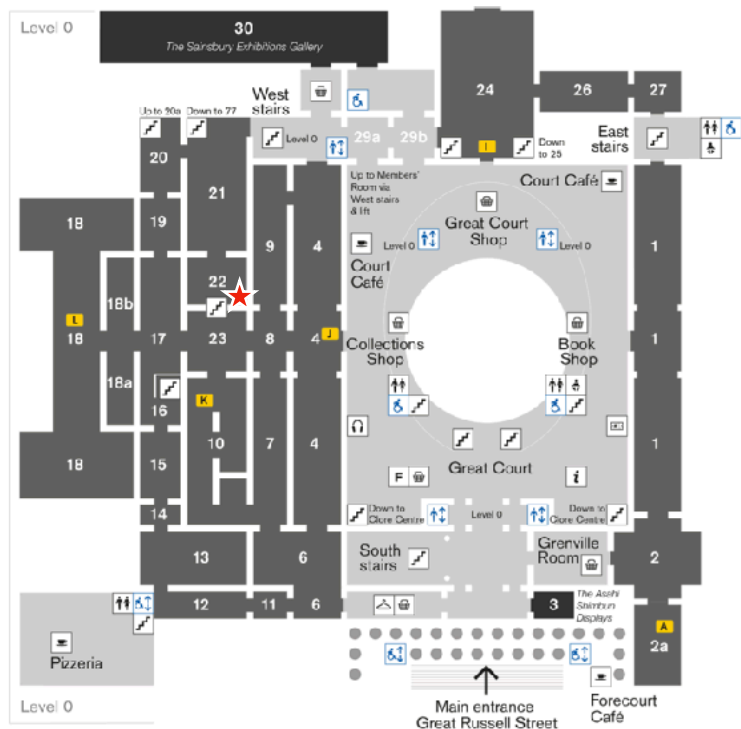
The in-cabinet labelling for the display reads:

Head from a bronze cult statue of Anahita, a local goddess shown here in the guise of Aphrodite  
200-100 BC  
Found at Satala in NE Asia Minor

(Armenia Minor)

A left hand holding drapery was found with the head, showing that it belongs to a full-length figure.

GR 1873.8-20.1 (Bronze 266)(head)  
GR 1875.12-1.1 (hand)












**LOCATION OF DISPLAY ON GROUND FLOOR OF MUSEUM**

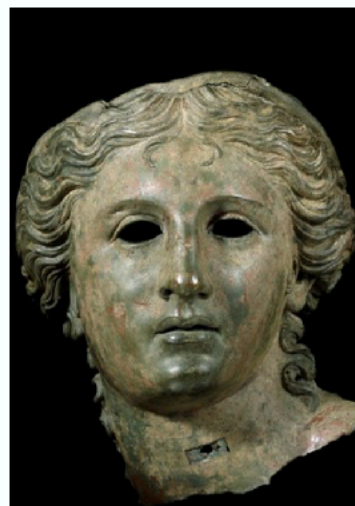
The online record for the piece is located at the following URL: [https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection\\_online/collection\\_object\\_details.aspx?objectId=460418&partId=1](https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=460418&partId=1)

Research > Collection >

## Collection online

### The Satala Aphrodite

Object type	<a href="#">statue</a>
Museum number	1873,0820.1
Title (object)	The Satala Aphrodite
Description	Bronze head from a cult statue of Anahita in the guise of Aphrodite or Artemis. The eyes were originally inlaid with either precious stones or a glass paste, and the lips perhaps coated with a copper veneer. The top of the head was damaged during excavation. The thin-walled casting of the bronze head suggests a late Hellenistic date. <a href="#">+ More &gt;</a>
Culture/period	<a href="#">Hellenistic</a> 
Date	1stC BC
Findspot	<a href="#">Excavated/Findspot: Satala (1872)</a>  : (Asia, Turkey, Black Sea Region (Turkey), Gümüşhane (province), Satala)
Materials	<a href="#">bronze</a> 
Dimensions	Height: 38.1 centimetres
Curator's comments	Found with the hand 1876.12-1.1. Rumours that the body was also discovered but then removed to a secret location are recounted through several letters of the 1870s and 1880s but it has never been located.
Bibliography	<a href="#">Bronze 266</a> 
Location	On display: G22/wc1
Exhibition history	Exhibited: 2001 2 Mar-27 May, London, The British Library, 'Treasures from the Ark: 1700 Years of Armenian Christian Art' 2012, 26th March-17th July, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, Manarat Al Saadiyat, 'Treasures of the British Museum' 2015, 13 Mar-21 Jun, Florence, Palazzo Strozzi, Power and Pathos: Bronze Sculptures of the Hellenistic World
Subjects	<a href="#">classical deity</a>  ; <a href="#">zoroastrian divine being</a> 
Associated names	<a href="#">Representation of: Artemis/Diana</a>  <a href="#">Representation of: Anahita</a>  <a href="#">Associated with: Aphrodite/Venus</a> 
Acquisition name	<a href="#">Purchased from: Alessandro Castellani</a> 
Acquisition date	1873
Acquisition notes	The head was first acquired in Istanbul by a Greek antiquities dealer called Savas Kougioumtsoglou who passed it to another dealer, Fotiades who took it to Rome where it was sold to Castellani.
Department	Greek & Roman Antiquities
Registration number	1873,0820.1



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**SATALA APHRODITE WEB PAGE**

Retrieved 10/10/2019

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## Archive Material

### **British Museum Central Archives**

Original Letters, 1869-72, folios 141, 143.

Officers Reports, 1870-72, 1873-4 folio 3 and passim. 1875-76, folios 91, 301, 329.

Officers Reports [2 volumes in grey box] vol 1, folios 177, 397.

### **British Museum Department of Greek and Roman Antiquities**

Alfred Biliotti Papers Volume. Rhodes, Mausoleum, etc., in particular, part 9.

Castellani papers, CAS 1-7, 1-8, 1-11, 1-50, 1-52, 1-53, 1-54.

Castellani papers green box - loose folios (in the Keeper's office).

Trustees Meetings, 1874, Folios 287, 325.

### **British Library**

Gladstone Papers, Vol. CCCLII, Add Ms 44437, Folios 163, 169

Gladstone Papers, Vol. CCCLIII, Add Ms 44438, Folios 170, 209, 276

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## Secondary Sources

C.T.Newton, 'The Bronze Head of Castellani', *Essays on Art and Archaeology*, pp.400-4 (originally published in *The Times*, 10 April 1873).

Williams, Dyfri. "The Brygos Tomb Reassembled and 19th-Century Commerce in Capuan Antiquities." *American Journal of Archaeology* 96, no. 4 (1992): 617-36. doi:10.2307/505188.

Nezih Baflgelen, "Istanbul Archaeology Museums, from Imperial Museum to the Present" *Mart-Nizan*, March-April 2006, n.14, pp.114-21.

Patrizio Gunning, Lucia, *The British Consular Service in the Aegean and the Collection of Antiquities for the British Museum*, (Routledge 2009).

Cook, F. Brian "Sir Charles Thomas Newton KCB (1816-94) in: Jenkins, Ian, and Waywell, Geoffrey B. (Editors), *Sculptors and sculpture of Caria and the Dodecanese*, British Museum Press, London 1997.

Mitford, T.B., "Biliotti's Excavations at Satala", *Anatolian Studies*, Vol. 24 (1974), pp. 221-244.

On the request for return of this artefact, see: <https://armenianweekly.com/2013/07/18/the-curse-of-anahit/>

Susan Weber Soros, Stefanie Walker (editors), *Castellani and Italian Archaeological Jewellery*, (Bard Graduate Center for Studies in the Decorative Arts, Design, and Culture, 2004).

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## The story of the Satala head

The Head of Satala, or Satala Aphrodite, is a Hellenistic bronze head believed to be from a cult statue of the goddess Anahita in the guise of Aphrodite or Artemis. It was acquired by the British Museum in 1873 and is currently housed in a glass case in room 22. The head, together with a bronze hand displayed in the same case, was found in 1872 near Saddak now in the Gümüşhane Province of Turkey.

At the time of their discovery, Ottoman directives aimed at building up an Imperial Museum, required the pieces to be handed over to the local governor and taken to Constantinople.<sup>1</sup> However, in 1872 the head and hand resurfaced on the open market in Italy where they were offered for sale by Photiades Bey, the then Ottoman Ambassador in Italy who had a passion for buying and selling antiquities<sup>2</sup>. Both pieces were acquired in Rome by Alessandro Castellani, an Italian jeweller and collector, who was at the time seeking to sell his own collections to the British Museum.

The complex story of how the head came to be in the British Museum is revealed by correspondence in the Castellani papers held in the archives of the Department of Greek and Roman Antiquities as well as in the minutes of Trustees Meetings and in correspondence with William Gladstone.

Officers Reports and correspondence between diplomats and Keeper Charles Thomas Newton, reveal a search to establish the provenance of the pieces and to find the rest of the statue from which they were believed to come. Newton, who had been appointed Keeper of Greek and Roman Antiquities following his own service as British Consul first in the Aegean and then in Rome, requested that his former colleague Biliotti be sent to Saddak to investigate the provenance of these pieces. It appeared to Newton that the head and hand must be parts of a single statue and he was keen to find the rest of it and to establish whether other similar pieces might be found in the same location.

### **The Satala Head as the Catalyst for Acquisition of the Castellani Collection.**

Newton was fascinated by these two rare examples of ancient greek bronze work and they became the catalyst for the acquisition by the Museum of the entire Castellani collection consisting, as well as his famous gold jewellery, '*of bronzes, marbles, terracottas, ivories, carvings in amber, glass*'<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> War Affairs Minister Fethi Ahmet Pasha (1801-1857) in 1846 had assembled the first archaeological collection in Saint Irini in the first yard of Topkapi Palace. During Âli Pasha's tenure as Grand Vizier, these works were rearranged under the title of Imperial Museum with Edward Goold, a history teacher in Galatasaray Lycee placed in charge of them. A significant step was taken in this direction when the then Minister of Education Safvet Pasha sent directives to governors, asking them to collect and send to Istanbul any old artifacts found in the territories of the empire. When Ahmet Vefik Pasha was appointed Minister of Education in 1872, he revamped the Imperial Museum, placing Dr. Ph. Anton Dethier, Head Master of Austrian Lycee in Istanbul in charge. With Dethier, Istanbul Archaeology Museum entered a new and dynamic phase and the export of antiquities was denied to foreign powers. The antiquities were, from then on, to be taken and sent to the museum. Only duplicates could be allowed to be exported by foreign powers.

See: Nezhil Baflgelen , "Istanbul Archaeology Museums, from Imperial Museum to the Present" *Mart-Nizan*, March-April 2006, n.14, pp.114-21.

<sup>2</sup> BM, Central Archives, Officers Reports 1873-4, folio 57, Rome, February 17, 1873: This bronze was recently sold to Mr Castellani by Photiades Bey, late Turkish minister at Florence, and formerly in the same capacity at Athens where he was well known as a connoisseur and collector of Greek antiquities.

<sup>3</sup> Ibidem, Officers Reports 1873-4, folio 57, Rome, February 17, 1873.



**ALESSANDRO CASTELLANI**

Castellani had first approached the British Museum for the sale of his collection in 1865. Although the British government had expressed interest in acquiring it<sup>4</sup>, as late as 1869 no funds had been released.

He appears to have realised at this stage that he needed to make his collection more appetising and he borrowed £4,000 from the British collector William Drake<sup>5</sup> to buy the Satala head and hand<sup>6</sup>. This loan, and the interest payments, put a strain on his daily life as well as on his ability to

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<sup>4</sup> 'Sir,

I am authorised by the Chancellor of the Exchequer to inform you that H.M. Government are willing to purchase your collection of Gold and Silver ornaments and gems now exhibited at the British Museum for the sum of twenty thousand pounds, such purchase to be subjected to the approval of Parliament. If you accept this offer, a vote for the above named sum will be submitted to the House of Commons as early in next session as circumstances will permit.'

BM, Greek and Roman Antiquities Department, CAS 1-60, August 1865.

<sup>5</sup> Sir William Richard Drake (1817 -1890) became a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries on 17 February 1848, and contributed to the periodical *Archæologia*. A Knight Commander of the Italian Orders of SS. Maurizio and Lazzaro, and of the Corona d'Italia, a Knight of the Austrian Order of the Iron Crown, and the 2nd class of the Turkish Order of the Medjidie, he was knighted 6 September 1869 at the instance of Mr Gladstone.

<sup>6</sup> *'Le accludo una autorizzazione in forza della quale la mia collezione di antichità ora in custodia nel Museo Britannico, verrà posta a disposizione di Signor William Drake. Egli ha avuto la bontà di prestarmi una forte somma (£4000) all'effetto di abilitarmi ad acquistare una testa di bronzo di lavoro greco trovata in Tessalia, e la quale per una stranissima sequela di combinazioni, è stata mandata qui in Roma per vendersi, ed è appunto capitata davanti a me. È un capo degno di noi: e noi dobbiamo essere tutti grati a Sir William Drake, il quale mi ha facilitato il modo di fare un acquisto sì importante. La manderò al museo unitamente a dei vasi greci di Capua, ed alle altre due anfore Panatenaiche con i nomi di arconti rinvenute di recente negli scavi di Cere...'*

BM, Greek and Roman Antiquities Department, CAS 1-11, Roma, 1 Ottobre 1872.

collect other material to improve the saleability of his collection. Castellani wrote to Newton that, although he had the opportunity to buy a remarkable Etruscan sarcophagus, without funds, he was unable to make an offer. On 26th January 1873, he alerted him that Wolfgang Helbig<sup>7</sup> was reaching an agreement to acquire this piece on behalf of the Berlin museum.<sup>8</sup> In this letter, Castellani made an offer to Newton: along with the purchase of the entire collection and the head, he would help negotiating the acquisition of the sarcophagus for the British Museum.<sup>9</sup>

Newton took the situation in hand: in January 1873 he asked permission to the Trustees to go to Rome on his way back from Ephesus to examine the collection 'as Mr Castellani has now in his possession a bronze head and other antiquities of extraordinary merit'<sup>10</sup>, he also wrote privately to Gladstone on 15th February 1873 focussing on the importance of the Satala head:

*'This precious relic of the heroic age has been secured by Mr Castellani and it is now offered with the remainder of his collection to the British Museum. I have reported very fully on his offer to the Trustees and recommended it in the strongest manner, not only on account of the sarcophagus, but also because it contains a bronze head of Venus of heroic size which is to my mind the finest example of Greek work in metal I have ever seen, indeed, I may say, the work which in beauty of conception and mastery of execution has most claim to rank next to the marbles of the Parthenon. I trust that the liberality of the Government will enable us to secure this matchless head.'*<sup>11</sup>

Two days later he sent Gladstone a report on the Castellani collection which continued this emphasis: 'A Colossal bronze head of Aphrodite, the finest work of antiquity I ever saw except the sculptures of Phidias from the Parthenon'. Newton noted that the head alone was worth about £8,000 and worried that Castellani would sell elsewhere: 'If the English do not close with him in two months he intends to show the collection at Vienna - the price will then rise, and the bronze head and the sarcophagus will never reach England'<sup>12</sup>.

On the same day he confirmed in his report to the Trustees that Mr Castellani now possessed:

*'a bronze head of Venus of colossal size, of the finest period of Greek art, and in admirable condition. The nose and mouth are perfect, the eyes have been filled with precious stones, the hair over the forehead and the front of the neck are well preserved. At the back of the neck and head the bronze has been torn away, but this injury does not at all affect the front view. Mr Newton considers that this is not only the finest bronze which he ever saw, but that as a work of Greek art, it has more of the manner of the great artists of Athens than any extant sculpture than those of the Parthenon, and it is the more precious because of the works of Phidias in the pediments of the Parthenon the bodies only have been preserved: Mr Castellani's*

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<sup>7</sup> Wolfgang Helbig, was the newly appointed Second Secretary at the Istituto Italiano di Corrispondenza in Rome, today the German Archaeological Institute. He was renown for his commerce in antiquities destined to the Berlin museum and was in competition with Castellani for the acquisition of the objects that appeared on the market. See Williams, Dyfri. "The Brygos Tomb Reassembled and 19th-Century Commerce in Capuan Antiquities." *American Journal of Archaeology* 96, no. 4 (1992): 617-36. doi:10.2307/505188.

<sup>8</sup> BM, Greek and Roman Antiquities Department, Cas 1-8, Roma 26 Gennaio 1873

<sup>9</sup> BM, Greek and Roman Antiquities Department, Cas1-7 and Cas 1-8, Roma 26 Gennaio 1873.

<sup>10</sup> BM, Central Archives, Officers Reports 1873-4, folio 3, January 7, 1873.

<sup>11</sup> British Library, Gladstone Papers, Vol. CCCLII, Add Ms 44437, Folio 169, 15 February 1873 Newton to Gladstone, Private.

<sup>12</sup> British Library, Gladstone Papers, Vol. CCCLII, Add Ms 44437, Folio 163, 17 February 1873.

*bronze shows us how the heads were treated in the school of Phidias and his contemporaries.'*<sup>13</sup>

Yet, he was worried, as he knew that the Prussians were pursuing Castellani for the same collection, and reported on the same day : *'Mr Newton knows that an offer was made to Mr Castellani a short time since by the Berlin Museum for the part of his collection now in London, he has also every reason to believe that it is the intention of Mr Castellani, should the Trustees decline his present offer, to place his entire collection in the Vienna exhibition. With reference to its value, taking into consideration the surpassing beauty of the Bronze head, the extraordinary interest of the Etruscan sarcophagus, the magnificent series of Rhytons and vases, and the number and varieties of the bronzes, Mr Newton thinks that the sum of twenty five thousand pounds would not be an extravagant estimate for this Collection. He is of opinion that if it could secured for this sum, it would be one of the most important acquisitions ever made by the British Museum, and he begs to recommend that immediate steps be taken to obtain from Government authority to treat with Mr Castellani on that basis'*<sup>14</sup>.

Two months later, pressed by Castellani and faced with no answer, Newton wrote again to Gladstone:

*'My dear Sir,*

*I arrived in London on Friday last with Mr Castellani and we brought with us the beautiful bronze head respecting which I wrote to you from Rome. The Etruscan sarcophagus which I also mentioned in my letter has also arrived and is being put together. These two objects are of such surpassing interest that I feel it my duty to use every means in my power to bring them under the notice of the Government ... May I venture to hope that you will honour the Museum with a visit on your return to London. I have no words in which I could describe the charm of the bronze head ... The Etruscan sarcophagus as an example of what I would venture to call art of the Homeric age is a monument of surpassing interest and it will be to me a matter of profound regret if it should pass into any other Museum but our own.*

*I venture to trouble you with this letter because I have reason to believe that the matter of the Castellani purchase is now in a position when it could be favourably dealt with and that this favourable opportunity will never again recur'*<sup>15</sup>

The following day, an article in *The Times* also bearing Newton's signature highlighted the incredible beauty and unsurpassed value of the bronze head to the public:

*'The first impression, in short, produced by this bronze head is that of majestic godlike beauty, simple, but not too severe, with just enough of expression to give the face a human interest, and make us feel that the conception is a product of a human imagination inspired by a divine theme, of a mortal striving to body forth his idea of the immortal...very little more expression would have made this head less divine ... while, on the other hand, a very little less expression might have converted it into a cold, tame, lifeless ideal ... This style we see in its perfection in the works of Pheidias, as we know them in the remains of the Parthenon, but up to this date we have looked in vain in the museums of Europe for a cardinal example of the same style in bronze. The reason for this is obvious. Bronze decays under influences which do not affect marble, and the intrinsic value of this metal has caused thousands of statues to be melted down ... Thus the great works in bronze of Pheidias and Scopas, fused in the mints of*

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<sup>13</sup> BM, Central Archives, Officers Reports 1873-4, folio 57, Rome, February 17, 1873.

<sup>14</sup> BM, Central Archives, Officers Reports 1873-4, folio 64 and passim, Rome, February 17, 1873.

<sup>15</sup> British Library, Gladstone Papers, Vol. CCCLIII, Add Ms 44438, Folio 170, April 9, 1873, Charles Thomas Newton to Sir William Gladstone.



*barbaric conquerors, must have furnished the coin by which their mercenaries were paid, and, for aught we know, may still be circulating in the copper currencies of the Eastern world.*

*The disappearance of the Greek masterpieces in bronze is almost as much to be deplored as the loss of their paintings. Neither the bronzes of Hercolaneum nor the Roman copies in marble of bronze chefs-d'oeuvre which may here and there be detected in sculpture galleries have as yet given us more than a feeble and inadequate idea of those "spirantia cera" which, as the candid Virgil admits, it was the special gift and prerogative of the Greeks to make, and we have had to imagine what the style of bronze statuary in the great age was like, by the study of Greek coins, and of a few precious relics of repoussè work, such as the bronzes of Siris.*

*Therefore it is that the Castellani bronze head has such surpassing interest. It comes nearer to our conception of the work of a great master than any bronze yet discovered; we learn from it more than from any other extant bronze what perfect mastery the ancient sculptor attained over this material, how in his plastic hands it became as clay in the hand of the potter, so that in gazing at the form we forget the material and the absence of colour, and think only of the life which a master spirit has evoked out of the ductile metal'<sup>16</sup>.*

Gladstone bent to pressure. Newton's unprecedented first person public appeal in favour of this acquisition and his private and official letters to him convinced the Prime Minister to release the money for the acquisition of the Castellani collection.

A pencilled note with the date of April 17th, 1873 in the Gladstone Papers at the British Library reads: '*Mr Newton says there is no chance of Castellani's taking less than £27000*'<sup>17</sup>. This price was the final agreed purchase price communicated to and accepted by Castellani. On the 16th of May 1873 Newton wrote to Gladstone to express his gratitude:

*'My dear Sir,*

*The name Aphrodite was originally given to the bronze head by Castellani and has clung to it in common connotation, but I do not think we have as yet any sure ground for assigning either this or another name. Possibly Photiades Bey, the former possessor, may throw some light on this by giving those particulars of provenance which he promised Castellani on selling it... I must take this opportunity of expressing*

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<sup>16</sup> Published in *The Times*, 10 April 1873 and printed in ; C.T.Newton, 'The Bronze Head of Castellani', *Essays on Art and Archaeology*, pp.400-4.

<sup>17</sup> British Library, Gladstone Papers, Vol. CCCLIII, Add Ms 44438, Folio 209, April 17, 1873.

Newton advised both Gladstone and the Trustees at this stage. A report dated 10 May 1873 in the Officers Reports volume 1873-4, folio 89, reads: '*Referring to a letter from the Treasury under date 8th of May respecting the Castellani purchase which has been communicated to Mr Newton by the Principal Librarian, he has the honour to draw he attention of the Trustees to the fact that a portion of the Castellani collection is still at Rome, and must be duly received by the Trustees before the purchase can be completed. This portion still at Rome consists of 24 vases, seventeen marbles, of which one is a sarcophagus, and the rest heads, 38 bronzes, 19 terracottas, 4 sculptures in ivory, and one vase in blue glass of unusual size, and in beautiful preservation....Mr Newton thinks that these objects should be packed and forwarded with the same precautions, and through the same channel as the antiquities previously forwarded from Rome since the date of Mr Castellani offer Feb.16.....It will be desirable to ascertain how soon Mr Castellani might be able to return to Rome to superintend his operation, if it is Mr Castellani's intention to prolong his stay at Vienna until the end of the exhibition Mr Newton will submit that it will be desirable for the Trustees to ascertain without delay what other steps can be taken for the purpose of transmitting the objects in question to London*'.

*to you my most grateful acknowledgment of the liberality of the government in respect of the Castellani purchase. It is my conviction that such expenditure, like that of Pericles ... at Athens, will bear fruits long after the generation by which it was incurred shall have passed away. For myself I can only say that the privilege of looking at the bronze head every day is like granting an enormity of celestial pleasure for the rest of my life.'*<sup>18</sup>

Castellani was to be paid £20000 on account for his collection, awaiting for the rest to be sent from Rome<sup>19</sup>. By August however, Castellani realised that in accepting £27,000 he had forgotten to include the cost of transport and insurance. He wrote to Newton specifically about the payment of the transport with Freeborn Ercole and Co from Rome to London of the pieces already acquired by the Museum. He had already received £14,000 but there was disagreement on the remaining £13,000 due to the transport. He asked Newton to intercede with the Trustees as the cost of permissions to let the pieces out of Italy had been high<sup>20</sup>.

In October 1873 Castellani finally received news that the Trustees had agreed to include payment for the transport to London and for insuring the collection; Newton had been working behind the scenes to obtain this result<sup>21</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> British Library, Gladstone Papers, Vol. CCCLIII, Add Ms 44438, Folio 276, Newton to Gladstone, May 16, 1873.

<sup>19</sup> British Museum, Central Archives, Officers Reports 1873-4, 21 May 1873. *'Referring to a letter from Mr Castellani dated May 17, 1873 which has been communicated by the the Principal Librarian to Mr Newton, he has the honour to report that according to the valuation recently made by him in Rome, the value of the part of the Castellani purchase still remaining there and consisting of vases, marbles, bronzes, terracottas, glass and ivories, amounts to £3402. Taking into consideration the whole circumstances of the purchase, Mr Newton thinks that Mr Castellani's request to be paid a portion of the sum due to him on account, is not an unreasonable one. He sees no objection therefore to the payment of a sum not exceeding £20000 on account to Mr Castellani no soon as the Treasury shall have given the Trustees authority to pay for this purchase'*.

<sup>20</sup> BM Central Archives, Original Letters, 1873-5, A-L: Folio 66, Bologna, 4 Agosto 1873. *'Se ella sapesse quante difficoltà ho dovuto vincere per portar via la roba da Roma, quanto danaro ho speso del mio per riuscirvi, Ella si guarderebbe bene dall'impormi altri sacrifici. Facciamo che una sì drammatica transazione abbia poi lieto fine veramente e che non lasci alcuna ruggine tra noi. Ho acquistato in questi giorni delle cose superbe. Vedrà tutto ma sia buono meco!'*

<sup>21</sup>BM Central Archives, Original Letters, 1873-5, A-L: Folio 65, Vienna 11 Maggio 1873. *'Mio caro Signor Newton, Il telegramma del Signor Winter Jones ( then Principal Librarian), e la di lei lettera di questa mane, mi danno comunicazione della decisione presa dal Governo Britannico d'acquistare la mia collezione. Ho scritto al Signor Winter Jones pregandolo di ringraziare in mio nome i Trustees per le molte cortesie usatemi anche in questa circostanza. E lo prego ad un tempo a voler regolare tutto l'affare con Sir William Drake , che in questa circostanza assume di rappresentarmi nella mia assenza. Ella potrà detrarre dalla somma accettata di £27000 il prezzo degli oggetti che dovrò ancora mandare da Roma, regolandosi sulla estimazione da lei fattane sul luogo. Sarà mia cura di farlene spedizione appena tornerò a Roma. Ringrazio Lei particolarmente, caro Signor Newton, per tutto il moltissimo che ha fatto per portare a termine l'affare. Riconosco che senza la sua grande energia e fermezza di proposito, l'Inghilterra avrebbe forse perduto una collezione degna di far parte tra le altre del loro gran Museo. Mi voglia pure ringraziare e salutare il Signor Panizzi che pure ha fatto tanto per appianare le molte difficoltà che incontrammo. La saluto cordialmente insieme alla mia Signora. Tutto suo Alessandro Castellani'*

## Diplomacy and the search for the rest of the statue.

Following the acquisition of the Castellani collection, Newton became obsessed with the bronze head and he made use of his diplomatic connections in the Levant to uncover the story behind the pieces and where they had been found in order to locate the rest of the statue. A series of long reports disentangle the complicated journey of the pieces to the British Museum. Extracts from these provide an interesting testimony of the reach of the governmental agency created through the use of diplomatic personnel and of the methodology of procurement of the collections.

News about the find spot of the statue, was first presented to the Trustees in the Autumn of 1873, a memorandum explained that the Satala head had been found together with a bronze hand and hinted at the possible existence of further portions of an overall statue. Newton suggested engaging embassy personnel to investigate further on behalf of the Trustees.

*'Mr Newton submits the enclosed memorandum which has been placed in his hands together with the accompanying photographs by Mr Hinschfeld a young German archaeologist who has been recently residing at Athens. It appears from Dr Hinschfeld statement that when at the close of last year the bronze female head recently purchased by the Trustees from Mr Castellani was at Constantinople in the hands of an Armenian dealer called Savas Kougioumtsoglou who also then possessed a hand represented in the enclosed photograph.'*

*-The photographs could not be located in the archive- 'The dealer stated that both head and hand had been found in the earth ... in a part of Armenia recently included in the kingdom of Cappadocia. A photographer of Constantinople named Abdullah who sent photographs both of the head and hand to Dr Hinschfeld informed him that he thought it not improbable that the Armenian dealer possessed other portions of the bronze statue to which the head belonged. So far as Mr Newton can pledge from the photographs, the hand seems to be in the same style as the head and may very well have belonged to the same statue. With regard to the story of its discovery in Armenia, Mr Newton has no sufficient ground for either belief or disbelief. The truth in cases of this kind is hardly ever ascertained....It seems to Mr Newton that it might be as well if steps were taken to ascertain whether the Armenian dealer has any more pieces of the statue. Mr Hughes, the current General Secretary of the Embassy, might be able to make private enquiries on behalf of the Trustees. Mr Hughes is well acquainted with oriental languages and having been consul at Erzeroom would probably know the locality where the head is said to have been discovered'.<sup>22</sup>*

In his report to a museum committee meeting on 28th March 1874 Newton submitted letters from Biliotti from 22nd December 1873 and 4th March 1874 which stated that he had received information that the large bronze head in the Castellani collection in the Museum had been found, together with a hand in bronze, at or near Satala in Armenia, and suggested that interesting discoveries might be made where these objects were found.<sup>23</sup>

Keen to know more about the head, Newton explored with the Foreign Office the option of giving Alfred Biliotti, consular official in Rhodes, leave to visit Saddak to find out if the rest of the statue or other equivalent pieces, could be found there. After a preliminary request to go to the place

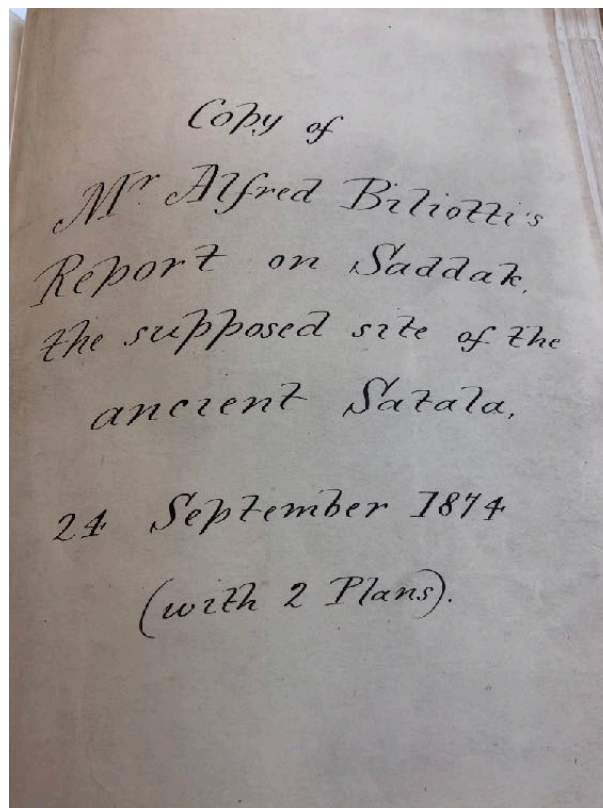
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<sup>22</sup> BM, Central Archives, Officers Reports, 1873-74, Department of Greek and Roman Antiquities, 1 of 2 volumes in a grey box, folio 177, 5 October 1873.

<sup>23</sup> BM, Department of Greek and Roman Antiquities Trustees Meetings, 1874, Folio 287, March 28th, 1874.

described by Photiades Bay to make enquiries, Biliotti was granted leave and a sum of money to travel to Satala to establish the truth about the statue.

In July 1874, Newton reported on Biliotti's researches. Satala, modern Saddak was a miserable modern village covered with majestic ruins. The bronze head had been found in the ground of a field surrounded by a ditch at the foot of a hill contiguous to the Roman Baths. Due to the risky location, Biliotti had been unable in the first instance to explore the field, but had pointed out that such an exploration could only be carried out in the summer. Newton felt that *'though it would not be expedient at the present time to apply to the Porte for a firman for exploring Satala, it would be well that Mr Biliotti should visit the site and that his travelling expenses which he reckons worth £20 should be paid by the Trustees'*. Should the Trustees agree to this recommendation, the trustees should write to the Foreign Office requesting a leave of absence for Mr Biliotti, as Satala was located outside his consular district<sup>24</sup>. The trustees authorised a sum to allow Biliotti to go and explore the area on their behalf and arranged for his leave with the Foreign Office.<sup>25</sup>



In September 1874, Biliotti sent a long and very detailed report on the area where the statue had been found; he had alerted the locals that any other findings would be of interest to him<sup>26</sup>.

*'In conclusion I may state that, if my visit to Saddak is productive of no other result, there is one attained which I consider very important. I am now known to the inhabitants, several of whom have more or less profited by my presence amongst them. Having promised them handsome rewards for any antiquities worth having,*

<sup>24</sup> BM, Central Archives, Officers Reports, 1873-74, Department of Greek and Roman Antiquities, 1 of 2 volumes in a grey box, folio 397, 9 July 1874.

<sup>25</sup> BM, Department of Greek and Roman Antiquities Trustees Meetings, 1874, folio 325, 11th July 1874.

<sup>26</sup> BM, Greek and Roman Antiquities Department, Alfred Biliotti Papers Volume. Rhodes, Mausoleum, etc. , part 9, Journey to Satala and the bronze statue. The report is also extensively published in the article by T.B. Mitford, "Biliotti's Excavations at Satala", *Anatolian Studies*, Vol. 24 (1974), pp. 221-244.



which they may bring to me, I am convinced that as the discovery of those in question have received no, or adequate compensation, they will bring straight to me any relics which may be discovered here after. It now remains for the Trustees of the British Museum to decide, whether it is more convenient to wait for this eventuality or to lose no time in securing, by excavations on the spot, those objects of art which may still exist at Saddak, and which in spite of all precautions may be lost to them in consequence of some unforeseen circumstance.'<sup>27</sup>



**BILIOTTI'S PLAN OF SATALA**

Due to the risky location, Biliotti had been unable in the first instance to explore the field, but had pointed out that such an exploration could only be carried out in the summer. Newton felt that *'though it would not be expedient at the present time to apply to the Porte for a firman for exploring Satala, it would be well that Mr Biliotti should visit the site and that his travelling expenses which he reckons worth £20 should be paid by the Trustees'*. Should the Trustees agree to this recommendation, the trustees should write to the Foreign Office requesting a further leave of absence for Mr Biliotti, as Satala was located outside his consular district.<sup>28</sup>

Biliotti's posting was moved from Rhodes to the territory of Trebizond giving him a foot in the door should further archaeological finds emerge, but by then the hostility of the Ottoman government to the export of antiquities combined with the cost of carrying out antiquities, discouraged the Museum from pursuing excavations at Satala.

<sup>27</sup> BM, Greek and Roman Antiquities Department, Alfred Biliotti Papers Volume. Rhodes, Mausoleum, etc., part 9, folio 51.

<sup>28</sup> BM, Central Archives, Officers Reports, 1873-74, Department of Greek and Roman Antiquities, 1 of 2 volumes in a grey box, folio 397, 9 July 1874.

The bronze hand that Newton had alluded to in his earlier report re-emerged in an Officers Report to the Trustees in June 1875 having been purchased by Castellani and gifted to the Museum.

*'Mr Newton has the honour to submit to the Trustees the following present which is offered to the Museum by Signor A Castellani:*

*A bronze hand.*

*This hand is said to have been found with the beautiful bronze head from Satala which Signor Castellani purchased from Mr Photiades Bey and afterwards sold to the Trustees. Mr Newton has no doubt of the accuracy of this statement, because the hand corresponds perfectly in style with the head and has undergone the same rough treatment, evidently with a view to breaking up and melting the bronze.<sup>29</sup>*

Almost two years after Newton had contacted him, Hughes, the General Secretary of the Embassy in Constantinople finally responded in a private letter:

*'I got hold of Alishan<sup>30</sup> whom I found thoroughly acquainted with all the particulars concerning the history of the head. The hand of the statue is still I believe in the possession of a Greek 'Baccal' named Savas who is also a speculator in Antiquities. It was he who obtained the head from the Turk or Kizzilbash of Sadaka in Armenia to who entrusted it to Photiades, who was then starting for Rome, for sale. Photinos, as you know, sold it to Castellani. + Savas received about 5000 francs.*

*He is a difficult man I am told, to deal with + will probably want a great deal of money for the hand.*

*Some months ago you sent Biliotti to Satala in search of the statue. He made excavations but failed to find it - although he was aided by the local Turkish authorities . Now the very man, an Armenian, who severed the head from the trunk of the statue was in my room here two days ago. He was brought to me by Alishan who has been entrusted with the secret which is known to only 2 or 3 other persons. They are afraid of Biliotti and the Turks. The story is a most curious one, as told to me by Alishan and the Armenian but I am pledged not to divulge it. You must communicate on the subject with Alishan. I will give any assistance in my power, but I don't wish to have anything to do with the money part of the business. Not only is the statue (of which you have the head) in existence, but a companion statue quite uninjured can be had. The Ambassador must ask leave to purchase and bring away the statue as a special favour from the Sultan. In the present temper of the Turks as regards antiquities it can be done in no other way.*

*Sir H Elliot tells me that he will not object to ask this favour as far as regards the fragment or trunk of which the British Museum actually possesses the head. But he won't ask for the other statue ... I foresee many difficulties ...<sup>31</sup>*

Hughes letter reopened the tantalising possibility that the rest of the statue might be found. In correspondence in French addressed to Newton whilst he was at Athens, Alishan invited him to visit Satala together to inspect the chamber where the bronze statue was located. This visit would need to be made in absolute secrecy. Once the Keeper had satisfied himself that the statue existed, a firman would be needed for its removal.

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<sup>29</sup> BM, Central Archives, Officers Reports, 1875-6, folio 91 Department of Greek and Roman Antiquities, 22 June 1875.

<sup>30</sup> Ghevont Alishan was a prominent member of the Armenian diaspora and an active Armenian patriot and promoter of the Armenian language both classical and modern. Ordained as a Catholic priest, he was a prolific historian, philologist, poet, and writer. Born in Constantinople in 1820, he was educated from the age of twelve in Venice. In 1852 he visited a number of European cities including London, Oxford and Cambridge.

<sup>31</sup> BM, Greek and Roman Antiquities Department, Alfred Biliotti Papers Volume. Rhodes, Mausoleum, etc., part 9, Therapia, 26 August 1875, Hughes to Newton, private.

*... 'It would not be possible to clear the entrance of the subterranean chamber without employing workmen for removal digs, that such proceedings would certainly be reported to the Pasha of Erzeroom and that the interference of the local authority would cause the affair to fail altogether'.<sup>32</sup>*

When Newton declined this invitation because of the difficulty of travelling in a season when the roads were barely passable, Alishan reiterated his conviction that the statue existed. Newton was not optimistic that the local authorities would grant a firman sufficient to allow the excavation to uncover the statue and suggested that Alishan would attract less attention visiting Satala alone. Proof of the existence of the statue might be achieved by making a paper impression of the inscription believed to be present on the base of the statue.

*'The story may be true and yet the difficulties in verifying these facts may prove insurmountable, or again the story like many such stories ....might be entire fiction. Should the Trustees themselves not feel justified in risking £30 by guaranteeing the travelling expenses of Mr Alishan, this might be proposed him conditionally, on his producing satisfactory proof that he has visited Satala and actually seen the bronze statue. One of these proofs would be of course a copy of the alleged inscriptions'<sup>33</sup>.*

Alishan's story was never substantiated and it is unclear as to whether the rest of the bronze was ever found. Instead, by this stage, documentation in the archives reports numerous difficulties in dealing with the Ottoman authorities and ever-increasing complications in being able to export findings from excavations back to the museum.

More recently, the Satala head has been the subject of a restitution request by the Armenian people<sup>34</sup> and has become one of a number of contested artefacts in the museum. Yet, we have no sense of its importance, its influence, or its incredible story, from the label attached.

## Conclusions

The implemented case study has shown controversial findings about the selling and acquisition of antiquities in the Ottoman Empire that need to be contextualised in the historical period in which they have occurred.

In particular the study has shown that the journey of the head from the Ottoman provinces to the British Museum was enabled by an established network of connected individuals. Charles Thomas Newton, Dominic Ellis Colnaghi, Alessandro Castellani and Photiades Bey were all linked to each other through diplomatic and personal connections.

Colnaghi, Newton's former assistant in Mytilene who had remained a loyal friend, was appointed as British consul in Florence at the same time as Potiades Bey became the Ottoman representative there and they operated in the same diplomatic circles. Newton and Castellani corresponded extensively and following his diplomatic posting in the Aegean, Newton maintained

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<sup>32</sup> 25th August 1875, 1 September 1875 and 2 October 1875 Alishan to Newton, Biliotti Papers, 1864-75, BM, Greek and Roman Antiquities Department.

<sup>33</sup> BM, Central Archives, Officers Reports, 1875-6, folio 301, 10th May, 1876. There is a further entry on this point in Folio 329, Jan 25, 1876, that reads: 'Referring to the Minutes of the Trustees under date May 13th (or 18th, unclear), 1876 respecting the alleged discovery of a headless bronze statue at Satala in Armenia, Mr N submits copy of his letter to Mr Alishan and of Mr Alishan's answer ...Mr N is not prepared to recommend any further action in this matter at present'.

<sup>34</sup> Mano Sakayan, The Curse of Anahit, 18 July 2013, in *The Armenian Weekly*: <https://armenianweekly.com/2013/07/18/the-curse-of-anahit/>

a close interest in archaeological discoveries in the Levant through his own diplomatic connections and informants in the region.

Castellani was keen to include these significant pieces to secure the sale of his larger collection to the British Government, and the Satala head provided exactly the kind of 'headline' artefact that could galvanise the sale. When Castellani purchased the pieces in Rome, he did so from Photiades Bey. Diplomatic involvement in the dealing of antiquities was therefore not confined to the European powers, instead, the lure of antiquities seemed to transcend loyalty to country.

Historical evidence shows that all of the figures involved in the export and sale of the head and hand were perfectly aware of the difficulties and risks of selling and acquiring antiquities from the Ottoman Empire in this period but that none of this deterred their trade.

In fact both head and hand, considered two unique and very rare examples of surviving ancient Hellenistic bronze sculpture, were able to be sold privately in Italy, thus escaping inspection by the Ottoman authorities.

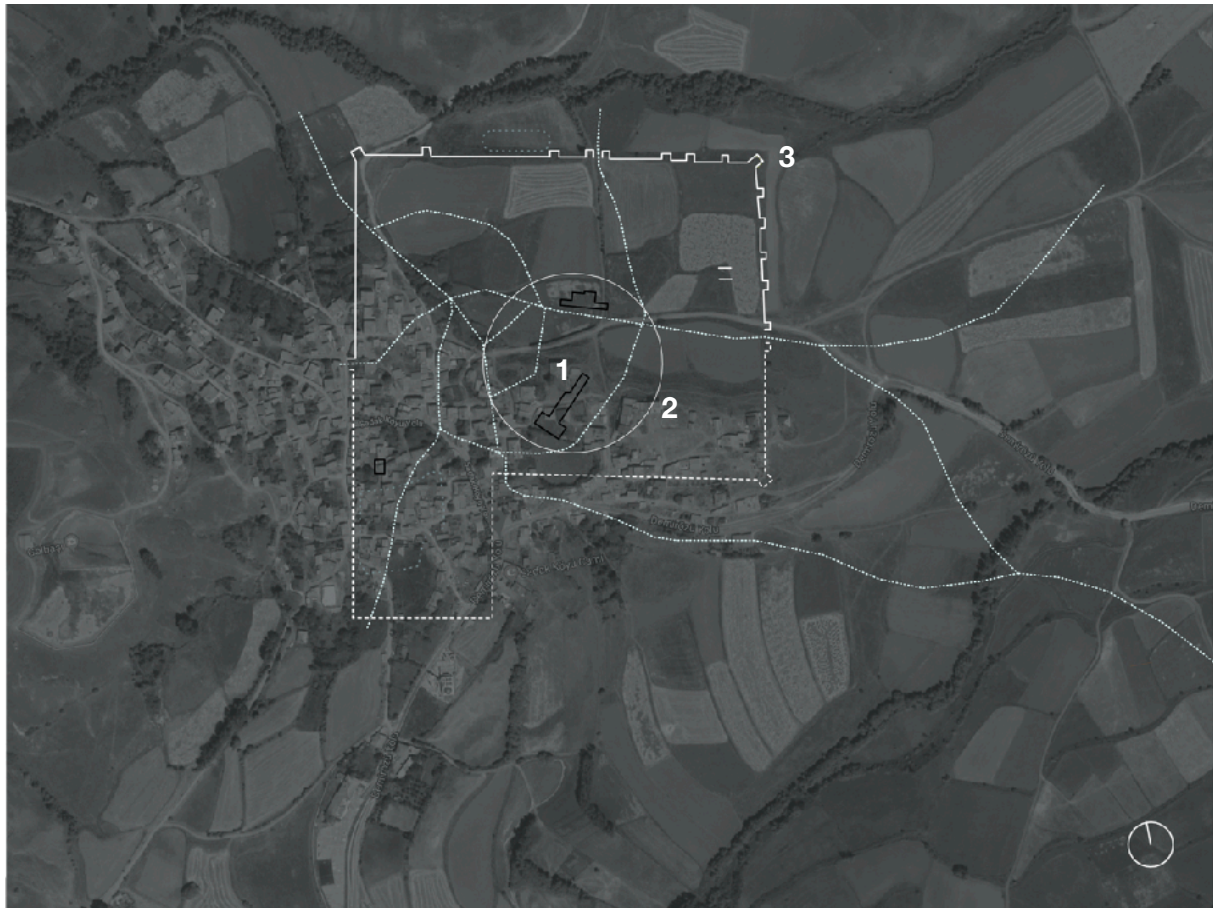
The archival documentation does not show direct evidence of collusion, however it highlights a clear connection between the British diplomatic machine and the trade of antiquities. This has to be read in the context of the European race for the construction of the national museums whereby significant pieces became of interest to a number of possible buyers at the same time with similar acquisitions modalities. It is in this context that practices and methodologies described in this work, need to be understood.



## Find Spot

Latitude	Longitude	Radius
40.0265	39.5980	100m

Source: BM, Greek and Roman Antiquities Department, Alfred Biliotti Papers Volume. Rhodes, Mausoleum, etc., part 9, Journey to Satala and the bronze statue.



**PLAN OF SATALA OVERLAID ON SATELLITE PHOTOGRAPHY OF SADAK (© GOOGLE MAPS 2019)**

- 1 Location of Biliotti's excavations
- 2 Find Spot (100m radius)
- 3 Extent of Roman Camp of Satala

## Provenance



**KNOWN ROUTE OF HEAD FROM SADAK TO LONDON VIA CONSTANTINOPLE AND ROME PROVENANCE CHAIN**

Date		
1864	Yousseuf	Sadak
	Kizzilbash of Sadaka	Sadak
	Governor General of Erzerum	Erzerum
	Savas Kougioumtsoglou	Constantinople
	Potiades Bey	Constantinople
1869	Alessandro Castellani	Rome
1873	British Museum	London