

# POCA 2005

## Postgraduate Cypriot Archaeology

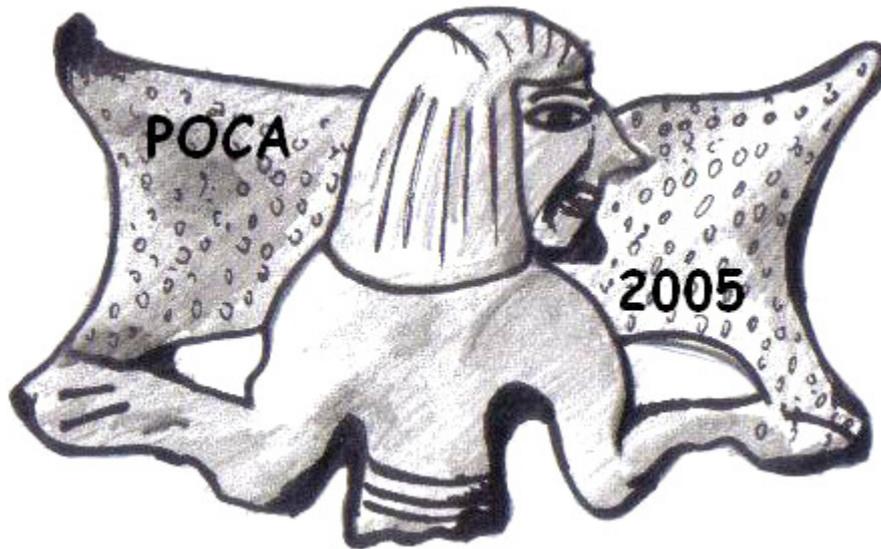
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## THE AEGEAN ORIGIN OF THE ANICONIC CULT OF APHRODITE IN PAPHOS

KATARZYNA ZEMAN

The Cyprus coast is the birth-place of Aphrodite\*, the Greek goddess of love, who according to Hesiod (*Theogony* 188-95) was born from the sea foam and then arrived at the island where Graces clothed her and decorated her with golden ornaments. Scholars also mostly agree that the cult of Aphrodite had its beginnings on Cyprus (Hill 1944; Herter 1975; Karageorghis J. 1977, 2005), except those who, taking Herodotus' Aphrodite-Mylitta to be Astarte or Ishtar (*Histories* I.105 2-3), see her origins even farther East (Röscher 1883; Farnell 1896; Burkert 1985). The fact is the origins and beginnings of her cult were under strong influences both from East and West (Pirenne-Delforge 2001). In this paper I would like to underline one of the possible Aegean elements of her origins – Aphrodite's aniconic cult in Old Paphos.

The temple in Old Paphos in south-west Cyprus is considered to be the most important and oldest of Aphrodite's sanctuaries, dating from the Late Bronze Age and continuing in use until the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD and the official end of pagan cults. It had two phases of development: Sanctuary I was used from the LBA (c. 1200 BC, the transition between LCII and LCIII; Budin 2003: 171) to the Roman period; and Sanctuary II was built in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD. There was probably also a temple of Aphrodite dating to the Archaic period outside of the north-east city gate but it was destroyed by the Persians in 498 BC (Maier 1975: 79). In the 13<sup>th</sup> century AD a sugar refinery was erected here and local people used the former sanctuary as a source of building material (Maier 1975: 69). The remains of Sanctuary I, which is most interesting here, consists of two parts: a covered hall or a colonnade to the north and an open court to the south (Budin 2003: 171). The whole complex measures 67 x 70 m and it was accessible through at least one entrance in the Eastern wall of the court (Maier 1975: 75).

Aphrodite was always portrayed aniconically at her sanctuary at Paphos. That is to say, she was not repre-

sented by a cult statue, but by a baetyl (Tacitus *Historiae* II.3). A baetyl could be a symbol of a goddess; it could have her powers, or represent the goddess herself, just as the cult statue could. In the Kouklia Museum we can see the baetyl from the Paphian Sanctuary II (Fig. 1) which, unfortunately, was not found *in situ* (Karageorghis J. 2005: 30). Although there is no evidence, it is possible that the aniconic nature of Aphrodite's Paphian cult extends back into the Bronze Age (Maier 1975:79, Karageorghis V. 1992: 212). The baetyl from Aphrodite's sanctuary depicted on Roman coins (Fig. 2a) issued in the time between Augustus and Philip the Arab (Maier 1975: 70) may therefore have existed as early as the Bronze Age (Maier 1975: 79). The overall continuity at the sanctuary may support this hypothesis.

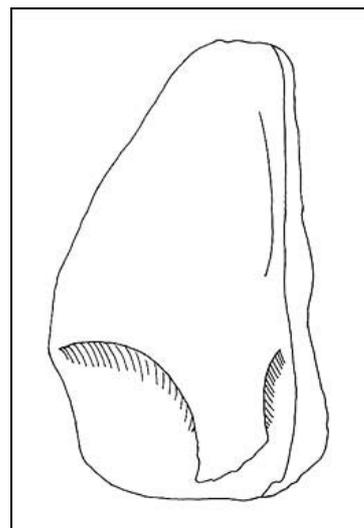


Fig. 1 – Baetyl from Aphrodite's Sanctuary in Old Paphos (drawing by author)

The most well known theory about the origins of aniconic cult in Paphos goes back to the Phoenicians. Evidence of

\* I would like to thank Stephanie L. Budin for all her suggestions.

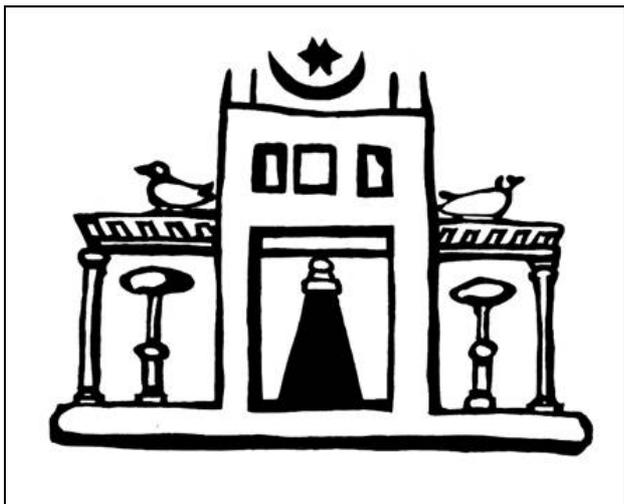


Fig. 2a – Detail from a Roman coin (drawing by author after Maier 1975, fig. 1)

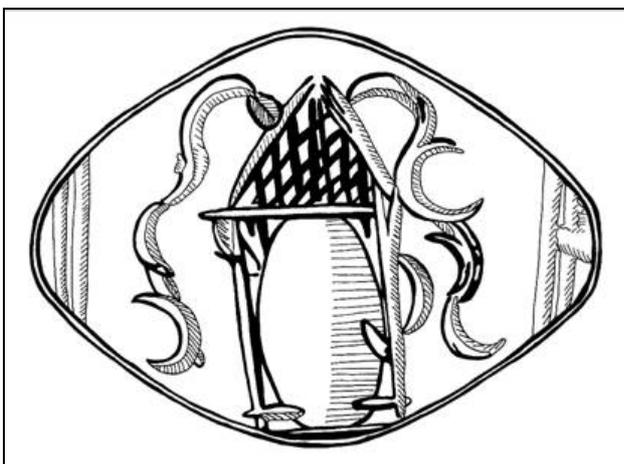


Fig. 2b – Amygdaloid seal from East Crete (drawing by author after Evans 1928, fig. 66)

settlers from Phoenicia comes from the 9<sup>th</sup> century BC (Bisi 1986: 341), from sites like Kition or Amathus. The popularity of baetylic cult on the Levantine coast and the presence of such in Amathus where Aphrodite-Astarte was worshipped, make a good argument for Phoenician origins. Particularly significant could be the star of Astarte depicted with the Paphian baetyl on the Roman coins, which is, nevertheless, rather late evidence (Soyez 1972), based probably on the later trends towards syncretism between Aphrodite and Astarte (Budin 2004). But if we consider earlier, even Bronze Age beginnings of aniconic cult in Paphos, there could be an alternate possibility.

Aniconic cult was also a part of Bronze Age Aegean practice, most probably with Cretan origins. On Minoan seals we can see two types of baetylic representations; on both are depicted a naked or half-naked kneeling man or woman a) touching (Fig. 3a or b) holding arms around a

big, rounded or oval stone (Fig. 3b). On such seals there can also be depicted a so-called sacred tree and/or a woman considered to be a goddess or a priestess, suggesting the scene was a part of a religious ritual, probably with ecstatic aspects and connected with fertility. Such representations are known from seals, rings and sealings from Ayia Triada, Kalyvia (Mesara), Sellopoulo (Knossos), Arkhanes, Zakros and Knossos; all have been well described, interpreted and analysed by Warren (1990: 195-201). Very interesting also is an amygdaloidal seal from East Crete with a stone (a baetyl?) inside a circular building with a conical roof, which could be a shrine (Evans 1928: 132) (Fig. 2b). There are also probable baetyls found on the Cretan sites of Vasiliki, Mallia, Gournia, Lasithi and Phylakopi, each having what appears to be one baetyl (Warren 1990: 202-5). We should also remember a trapezoidal altar where a baetyl was incorporated, from the sacred complex of Kephala Vasiliki, which was in use from LMIIIC until the Protogeometric period (La Rosa 2001: 222). Minoan baetyls probably also played a role in ceremonies for the dead (La Rosa 2001: 224-6). While the Paphian baetyl is conical in shape rather than oval or rounded as those represented in Cretan iconography, we should remember that those found *in situ* on Crete have different shapes themselves: rounded (Mallia), cuboid (Ayios Georghios, Lasithi) and plank-conical (Gournia).

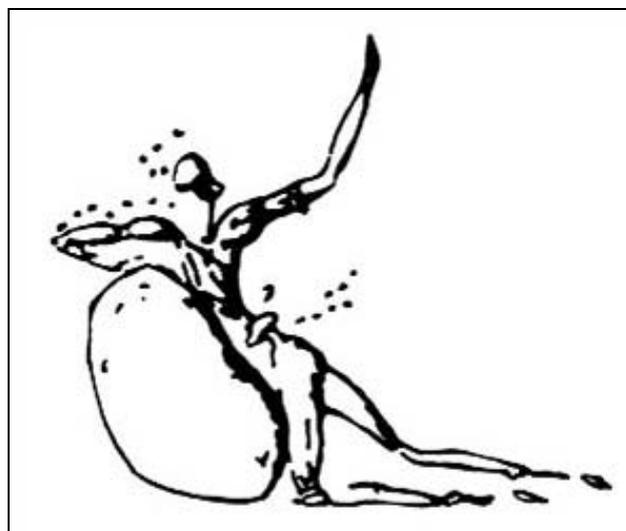


Fig. 3a – Man touching a baetyl, detail from a signet ring (Knossos, Sellopoulo tomb 3) (drawing by author after Popham 1974, fig. 14d)

The date of the erection of Aphrodite's sanctuary in Old Paphos is very close to the date of the arrival of Greek settlers there (Maier 1986: 312-14). There were also strong trade relations between this region and the Minoans and particularly the Mycenaeans even before the possible Aegean migrations (Karageorghis J. 2005: 17). The first trace of such contacts came from the LCI well in Paphos-Evreti from which came a LMIA cup. Then there



Fig. 3b – Man holding arms around baetyl, detail from a signet ring (Arkhanes, Tholos A) (drawing by author after Sakellarakis 1967, fig. 13)

are also 86 sherds in LHIIIA:2 style, several LMIIIB stirrup-jars and 343 examples of LHIIIB-style found throughout the remains of the Old Paphos (Maier and Karageorghis 1984: 55, 71). There are also examples of Aegean, especially Cretan, influences in the sanctuary of Aphrodite itself. First of all is a *larnax* found *in situ* in the south-western part of the colonnade (Maier and Karageorghis 1984: 96). Two Aegean style horns-of-consecration found, unfortunately not *in situ* (Maier and Karageorghis 1984: 99), also indicate strong Western influences. There was also one LCII pithos found in the Paphian Sanctuary that bears on one of its handles an impression of a cylinder seal with Aegeanising features (Maier and Karageorghis 1984: 96). The popularity of goddess with up-lifted arms figurines at the end of LBA and in CGI in Paphos is also significant (Karageorghis 2001: 325). They are well known from Mycenaean Greece, but even more so from Minoan Crete. The Cypriot examples are in type known from Crete, from sites like Gazi, Gourmia, Kaphi or Kephala Vasilikis (Budin 2003: 178).

The above examples show that an aniconic cult would not be an isolated example of Aegean influences in Aphrodite's cult in Paphos. They also show that there were several points in the history of the Paphian cult when such Aegean influence could have affected the goddess's iconography. Aniconism may have entered when Aegean influences were first being felt during early trade relationships; or when the earliest Aegean immigrants arrived at Old Paphos; or even later, when there was increased contact between Cyprus and the Aegean in the early Geometric period, concomitant with the popularity of the goddess with up-raised arms images.

That the Bronze Age residents of the Aegean may have spread aniconic aspects of cult is also supported by a separate case scenario, that of Arcadian Hermes. The god Hermes appears on the Linear B tablets from both Pylos (Gulizio 2000) and Knossos (Nosch 2000). The similarity of dialects between Arcadia and Cyprus (the Cypro-Arcadian dialect) suggests that this mountainous region of Greece was populated by a people closely related to those who migrated to Cyprus at the end of the Bronze Age. Here in Arcadia, Hermes was also worshipped with a strongly aniconic cult, where human worshippers put big stones near the crossroads, the terrain of the god of travel. They saw in those rocks Hermes himself, and these are the origins of herms, pillar-like statues of Hermes with just a head and genitals. In this instance it may be worth noting that Aphrodite's first sanctuary in the Aegean was also devoted to Hermes. This was Kato Symi in Crete, in use since MM times (Pirenne-Delforge 2001: 174). It was not their only common shrine: Aphrodite and Hermes were also worshipped together in Argos (Pausanias, 3, XV.10-11) and Samos. Their common origins in Crete may have led to a similar spread of aniconic imagery both east and north. In any case, the spread of aniconism in Hermes' cult shows that the Aegean origin of aniconism in Aphrodite's cult at Paphos would not have been unique.

In mythology we have two stories about the foundation of the Paphian Sanctuary. According to Homer the Cypriot king of Paphos, Kinyras, was the founder of the first temple of Aphrodite (Homer, *Iliad* XI.20). Tacitus claimed that it was Kinyras's father, king Aerias (Tacitus, *Historia* II.3). Kinyras is considered to be an Eteocypriot or a person of an Oriental origin (Karageorghis J. 2005: 15, 43). On the other hand, Pausanias states that it was the Greek Agapenor from Tegea, who, after the Trojan War settled on Cyprus, became the king of Paphos, and built the sanctuary for Aphrodite (Pausanias, 8, V.2). As in those myths, Aphrodite was a Cypriot goddess who took many aspects of her cult not only from the East, but also the West. In this case we should look to western, Aegean, even Cretan origins.

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