

Martin Eckert

# Die Aphrodite der Seefahrer und ihre Heiligtümer am Mittelmeer

Archäologische Untersuchungen  
zu interkulturellen Kontaktzonen am Mittelmeer  
in der späten Bronzezeit und frühen Eisenzeit

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## Summary

By examining the sanctuaries of Aphrodite in the Mediterranean, it was the objective of this study to acquire the basic criteria and diagnostic characteristics which could be relevant for a systematic study of harbor sanctuaries altogether. Therefore, in this study I also examined the predecessors of Aphrodite, the Anatolian, Near Eastern, Egyptian and Cypriot love-goddesses, which, comparable to Aphrodite, were also endowed with martial and maritime competences.

The seaward sanctuaries of the goddess in Cyprus, which can be regarded as contact sanctuaries in the context of international seaborne trade, were modeled in the Bronze Age as open-court-sanctuaries at nautically significant waypoints or in harbor-cities as urban multifunctional temple-complexes. These buildings accommodated a variety of economic, social and religious features like workshops for metal, cloth, ceramics, jewelry or furniture, they held shrines, altars and hearths, offered banquet halls and gardens. Except for the Minoan temple in Ayia Irini on the island of Keos, there are not similarly distinguishable specialized structures in the Bronze Age Aegean, because such functions presumably were integrated in the existing Minoan palaces and villas. Despite otherwise clearly Anatolian, Egyptian and Syro-Canaanite influences in Minoan culture and religion, the Near Eastern love goddess in her native appearance could not establish herself in the Bronze Age Aegean. Nevertheless, after the cultural gap caused by the invasions of the Sea Peoples, in the geometric and archaic period Near Eastern seafarers and traders resumed travel to the Aegean and Central Mediterranean and founded sanctuaries of the seafaring goddess of love and war at the major junctions. In the Orientalizing period the Greeks now quickly adapted the goddess, albeit in a discrete form, as Aphrodite. The seaward sanctuaries of Aphrodite, which date back to the geometric and archaic period, can therefore often be regarded as indicators for early Phoenician sea-routes and trading posts. Another indicator for the Near Eastern connection is her male counterpart, which is, in the beginning, usually Zeus as the equivalent to the Near Eastern storm god Baal Saphon (Zeus Kasios), the taumorphic male god in Cyprus, or the Egyptian Amun (Zeus Ammon). Sometimes a Young God superseded the storm god, in later times the goddess was worshipped together with Hermes, Ares, Apollo, Pan or Dionysos. Insofar Aphrodite initially appears as a visitor to the older Greek goddesses Hera, Athena and Artemis, but also because of her character as an astral goddess, her early cult sites in harbor-cities might be situated intra-urban, on the Acropolis or on the peak of a mountain. From

the geometric to the classical period her Greek sanctuaries are prevailingly established extra-urban at nautically significant coastal sites with resources of fresh water, or peri-urban, close to the city in the area between the seaward fortifications and the harbour. These extra-urban or peri-urban sanctuaries follow the building plan of the Cypriot-Near Eastern open-court-sanctuaries with a hearth or an altar and a simple shrine, or develop into multi-cellular *oikoi*, which include, next to the holy of holies and the altar, a courtyard or a *stoa*, also *hestiatoria*, a banquet hall or several rooms for ritual feasting and dining. In some sanctuaries only non-bloody sacrifices were offered, among the deposits of bones in the cult-places with bloody sacrifices predominate sheep and goat, fish and mussels, and completely absent or marginal are the remains of pig. Some sanctuaries also held workshops and storage-rooms, divination was practiced to forecast the prospects for the continuing sea voyage, and the ancient sources provide indications that these sanctuaries were also associated with (sacred) prostitution and other forms of unbound love.

Typical artifacts in these sanctuaries are oil-lamps, incense-burners and drinking-vessels laid down as votives. The figural votives depict the ›naked goddess‹ created in either a simple snowman-style, or on molded Astarte-plaques, sometimes the goddess also appears seated or winged. Other figurines represent the ›Goddess with uplifted arms‹, and in the classical period she appears with a turreted crown (*kalathos*). In Cyprus and Rhodos there are also reliefs, terracotta-models of shrines, or pieces of jewelry which show a ›woman in the window‹. Significantly less often than the sexually offensive naked goddess presenting her breasts appears the pregnant *dea gravida*, or a woman holding a child (*kourotrophos*). Depictions of vested male and female adorers often carry a tambourine, a dove, flowers or fruits like poppy and pomegranate. In Cyprus often appear musicians and dancers around a tree. Further iconographic elements are sphinges, trees of life, lotosflowers, pigeons, bulls, lions and panthers, snakes, turtles, and later, goats, swans and dolphins. Other finds contain parts of female clothing, trappings and jewelry, spindle whorls and loom weights, jars for ointment and perfume-flasks, representations of the male and female genitals or of the sexual act, but also anchor votives and weapons like arrow- and lance heads. Within the sanctuaries or in surrounding graves there are concentrated finds of foreign imports, especially egyptianizing products of phoenician craftsmen, such as ivory carvings, silver bowls, beads, seals and amulets, scarabs and figurative representations notably of the Egyptian Bes or Pataikos, of Sekhmet and Nefertem, Hathor, Isis and Amun, of Melqart, Baal and Reshef, Qadshu, Anat, Astarte and Kybele, of the *potnia theron* and the Master of Animals.