The pictorial art of Cyprus in the First Millennium BC

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Since the mid-19th century, the pictorial art of Cyprus was not considered to be autonomous or original enough to give rise to independent studies. The big collection "L'Univers des Formes" published in France in 1960 under the direction of the writer André Malraux, General de Gaulle's Minister of Culture at the time, translated into English, German, Italian, Spanish and Japanese, presents the artistic productions of all the great ancient cultures of the Near East and the Mediterranean (Mesopotamia, Egypt, Anatolia, the Phoenicians, the Greeks, the Etruscans, the Roman World, as well as the Celts and the Scythians); yet Cyprus is not reported as such. The Cypriote works mentioned and illustrated are attributed to the period of the birth of the Greek art, Classical Greece, Persia and the Phoenicians. The Phoenician expansion and Carthage testify among others to the integration of Cypriote objects in Phoenician studies, from the *Histoire de l'Art dans l'Antiquité* of G. Perrot and Ch. Chipiez (1885) to the exhibitions about Phoenicia in recent decades (from Palazzo Grassi in Venice in 1988 to that of Paris in 2007). The links between Cyprus and Phoenicia are indeed profound and are often portrayed in figurative arts, as in the case of the so-called Cypro-Ionian metal bowls, the best examples of which occur at the beginning of the Cypro-Archaic period. However, "Phoenician Art" is not as abundant and clearly defined amidst Cypriote artistic production. It should be noted, however, that from the 1980s, several exhibitions have been dedicated to the culture and art of Cyprus.

In the first half of the 20th century, various studies have been devoted to the evolution of Cypriote figurative arts. That of John Myres, related to the study of the Cesnola Collection at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York was brief and almost devoid of illustrations. A decisive step was taken thanks to the Swedish Cyprus Expedition which, between 1927 and 1931, radically changed our knowledge and study methods on the culture, history and art of ancient Cyprus. The study of ceramics, limestone sculpture and terracottas in their discovery contexts, and not as collection objects, was remarkable scientific progress. After three volumes in which the Swedish archaeologists presented in detail the results of their excavations (two of them contained large groups of sculpture in limestone and terracotta), Einar Gjerstad, the director of the Expedition, published in 1948 a synthesis of the Geometric, Archaic and Classical periods that even today constitutes an essential point of reference for every study on ancient Cyprus, even though his classifications of limestone and terracotta sculpture have been challenged and new study
methods have emerged. Thus, the study by Gerhard Schmidt\footnote{5} of Cypriote sculpture and terracottas from the Heraion at Samos has led to a better chronological assessment of these offerings that confirm the prestigious position of Cypriote art in the sanctuaries of East Greece.

The independence of Cyprus in 1960 marked an important stage in the evolution of Cypriote archaeology. Spurred by Vassos Karageorghis, director of the Department of Antiquities from 1963 to 1989, excavations were multiplied embracing the whole island, until the Turkish invasion of 1974, when they were confined to the territory of the Republic of Cyprus. Numerous publications, especially on Salamis and Kition, provided detailed reports of this new research. Studies devoted to terracotta figurines were not overlooked either.\footnote{6} In addition to the \textit{Corpus of Cypriote Antiquities} that is part of the series \textit{Studies in Mediterranean Archaeology}, founded and directed until his death by the Swedish archaeologist Paul Åström, we must also cite the work of V. Karageorghis and J. des Gagniers who in 1974 and 1979\footnote{7} list and discuss Cypriote pictorial-style pottery, classified by its iconography (human figures, animals and monsters, other motifs). In their introduction, the authors point out that the island’s intermediate geographic position between Greece and the Levant hampered the study of the art of Cyprus, and they insist on the absence of a hiatus in Cyprus between the Late Bronze Age and the first millennium BC, which is an important point for pottery decoration. This large synthesis is actually the first comprehensive study on the main areas of the Cypriote pictorial style. However, favouring an approach based on iconographical types, this synthesis discusses only briefly – except for a chapter on the "Amathous style" – the issue of regional styles, the latter having been analysed in recent studies.

The general study of Cypriote terracottas published by Vassos Karageorghis between 1991 and 1999 was an even greater task, as this publication consists of seven volumes: the first two volumes are devoted to terracottas produced between the Chalcolithic and Cypro-Geometric periods, whereas five volumes\footnote{8} are devoted to Cypro-Archaic terracottas. The typological assessment adopted for those last ones is based on size, method of manufacture, and motifs. A "catalogue raisonné" with remarkable illustrations constitutes yet another major stage in the study of Cypriote figurative arts.

At the same time, three international conferences were held. Their goal was to discuss terracottas (1989), Cypriote sculpture (1993) and images on Cypriote pottery (1996). The initiative was taken by Frieda Vandenabeele and Robert Laffineur, who had created an "intra-university group of contacts for Cypriote studies" in the Netherlands. The results of those three meetings were rapidly published.\footnote{9}
Presenting Cypriote art of the 1st millennium BC means of course to distinguish between imports and local production. The material used is also an important factor. Given the scarcity and poor quality of Cypriote marble, marble sculptures (rare prior to the Hellenistic period) are all made of imported material that is much harder than local limestone. They were most probably transferred to Cyprus in a semi-finished stage (to avoid damage during transportation) and were completed in situ by craftsmen accompanying the sculptor or by Cypriots who had been trained at sculpture workshops in Greece. Thus, the kouros found in a tomb at Marion (stored at the British Museum) can be defined as a Greek work from the Cyclades, yet the anthropoid sarcophagi from Parian marble discovered at Kition and Amathous are of Phoenician types; although some of them were produced by local sculptors, these works cannot be identified as Cypriote.

Objects made of bronze pose more intricate questions. There is no reason to believe that bronze figurines that are relatively few were imported from the Aegean or the Near East, nor that they were made in situ by foreign craftsmen, which at first glance seemed to be the case for the extremely rare large bronzes known before the Imperial period. Thus, the famous "Chatsworth Head" that belonged to Apollo venerated at the sanctuary of Tamassos, had always been regarded as a typical example of Greek art of the severe style, until a new study of one of his legs (in the Louvre) set out certain technical aspects that may indicate the existence of local traditions in the production of large bronzes.¹⁰

Most of the fully-carved works found around the island, whether made in limestone or clay (except for some figurines imported from Greece or Phoenicia), can be defined as Cypriote. The production of statues and terracotta figurines is extremely abundant between the 7th and 4th centuries BC, whereas that of limestone sculptures, both fully-curved and in relief, covers a longer period, from the 7th century BC down to the Roman Imperial period: it is a craftsmanship that was mainly developed in the central-eastern part of the island (around Idalion and Golgoi), where the best limestone quarries are located. Contrary to what is observed in archaic Greek sculpture, signatures of artists are almost entirely unknown in Cyprus. However, a testimony from Pyla near Kition, dating to the 7th century BC should be noticed. If the reading suggested by M. Szynecer is correct, then this is the dedication to Phoenician god Reshef Shed (?) of a mask of Bes made in limestone by a sculptor named Eshmounhillec.¹¹ The fact that the ethnicity of this person is not mentioned suggests that he originated in Cyprus, just like the stone on which the offering was carved. Since no literary text mentions sculptors who worked in Cyprus, it is just the works themselves that help us to understand the evolution of Cypriote sculpture and to try to identify the main workshops that were active on the island.
One of the most frequently debated questions, still after 150 years, is the dating of Cypriote sculpture, especially for the Archaic period. In his synthesis, Gjerstad sought to build on the stratigraphic observations established by the mission he had led. Thus, terracottas found at the small sanctuary of Ayia Irini were the starting point of a new chronology divided in styles, namely "Proto-Cypriote", "Neo-Cypriote" and "Archaic Cypro-Greek". For the stone sculpture, in particular, he added the "Cypro-Egyptian" style to the Archaic period and, for the 5th - 4th centuries BC, the "sub-Cypro-Archaic" and "Classical Cypro-Greek" styles. After the study of G. Schmidt, other studies have also shown that the categories defined by Gjerstad had to be revised. It is actually the notion of 'style' itself, as conceived by the Swedish scholar, based on an aesthetic ground that excluded a large part of the production that is no longer acceptable today. With regard to the terracotta figures and figurines, the succession between "Proto- and Neo-Cypriote" styles that discoveries at Ayia Irini were supposed to illustrate based on a questionable interpretation of stratigraphy, as Sabine Fourrier has shown, products of the "Proto-Cypriote" and "Neo-Cypriote" style found at Ayia Irini are actually contemporary; the first one corresponding to a local (that of the kingdom of Soloi) production, and the second one being imported from Idalion or Salamis. Similarly, regarding the limestone sculpture, Gjerstad's two phases of the "Proto-Cypriote" style are not satisfactory and his argument that "the Proto-Cypriote temperament is active, the Neo-Cypriote is passive" shows the prejudice upon which his theory was built.

The only reliable chronological indicators, as we have seen, are provided by discoveries outside Cyprus: the Heraion of Samos and other East Greek sites. These testimonies show that from the second half of the 7th century BC, a considerable number of Cypriote terracotta statuettes were offered in the principal sanctuaries of East Greece that retained close contacts with Cyprus (Samos, Miletus, Cnidus, the cities of Rhodes). In the first decades of the 6th century BC, Cypriote figurines made of terracotta and limestone constituted one of the most popular types of votive offerings throughout East Greece, as well as the Greek emporium of Naukratis in the Nile Delta. The majority of works in clay were from workshops at the area of Salamis.

The fact that limestone statuettes appear in Greek sanctuaries a bit later than those in terracotta, poses the problem of the relative chronology of the two types in Cyprus itself. It is likely that Cypriote stone sculpture of large dimensions was developed later than, and by imitation of, the terracotta sculpture, although this issue is still debated. It is noted that the first elements borrowed from Aegean sculpture relate to the so-called Late Daedalic style, dating around 600 or to the early 6th century BC; yet it was only in the second half of
the 6th century BC that Cypriote sculptors got inspired - by East Greek models. More precise chronological markers are available for the end of the 6th century BC; it can be assumed that the rich collection of sculptures discovered in the siege mound during the English excavations at Palaepaphos-Kouklia are earlier than the siege of the city by the Persians during the Ionian revolt of 498/497 BC. On the contrary, the sculptures found at the palace of Vouni should be dated later than 498/497 BC, after which the palace was built. Regarding the period that followed, the willingness of some Cypriote sculptors to adopt certain elements of the Greek "severe style" (dating to 480-450 BC) allows to suggest a relatively secure dating for an important set of statues and funerary reliefs. However, this is not the case for the Classical period itself. Only a few pieces of sculpture can be securely dated between the mid-5th century BC and around the mid-4th century BC, a moment when without any doubt Greek styles of the end of the Classical and the beginning of the Hellenistic period prevail not only in Cyprus but also throughout Eastern Mediterranean.

Lastly, we possess no firm chronological reference for the long period of Ptolemaic occupation, from the beginning of the 3rd century BC to the death of Cleopatra in 30 BC. The delicate issue of stylistic and chronological classification of Cypriote sculpture of this period was treated by J. Connelly, starting from sculptures that were unearthed at Arsos, Voni, Idalion and Golgoi. The Late Hellenistic statues (around the first three quarters of the 1st century BC) are easier to assess because Cypriote votive sculpture of this period displays some traditional iconographical features, such as the wreath, and because a facial style typical of the Late Roman Republican period is reproduced. It is much more difficult to define the precise chronology for the two following centuries. While sculpture offered to the sanctuaries of the island’s main coastal cities– primarily at the sanctuary of Aphrodite at Palaepaphos, as well as at Nea Paphos, Salamis, Kition, Kourion, Amathous – is now in bronze or marble, limestone sculpture is still very popular for a large number of inland sanctuaries, around Idalion, Golgoi, Voni, close to Kythrea, and Lefkoniko, northwest of Salamis.

From the Archaic to the end of the Ptolemaic period, the most common iconographical type is that of the standing male figure whose body is rarely naked, contrary to the Greek custom, and who wears a crown on his head or, until the 5th century BC, features other hair styles that reflect his occupation or social ranking. The presence of a beard on medium and large-size statues indicates the age and high status of these figures that we may call "dignitaries" [Fig 1]. Representations of infants become more common during the Classical period. Young boys are portrayed sitting and are referred to as "temple boys", whereas
older boys are depicted standing. Most of these series come from sanctuaries dedicated to male deities, usually identified with Apollo: Idalion, Golgoi-Ayios Photios, Malloura, Tamassos, Voni and Lefkoniko. Among the few comparable female sanctuaries, we should mention the sanctuary of Aphrodite at Arsos, where the majority of female statues, ranging in time from the Archaic to the Hellenistic periods, are standing, draped and adorned with many jewels. Similarly to the previously mentioned male figures, these female statues are presumably depictions of highly-ranked women who sometimes had an active role in the local cult of Aphrodite. Yet, in many cases, we should hesitate to identify these female representations as depictions of the goddess herself, an identification that would pose the general question of divine iconography in Cypriote art.

After the famous Late Bronze Age representations, for example at Enkomi, of the bronze statuettes of the "horned god" and the ingot god, a new series of images appeared in the Early Iron Age, during the second half of the 11th century BC. They portray a female deity with uplifted arms. These terracotta figurines depict richly adorned women whose divine nature is suggested by the high crown (polos) on their head. They occur throughout Cyprus during the Late Geometric and Early Archaic periods, yet they are most common at the sanctuary of Aphrodite, Palaepaphos: in this case it is hard to think of them as reproductions of the cultic statue, for we know from representations on coinage and from a text by Latin historian Tacitus (Histories 2.3.1) that the goddess was represented in the temple by a "baetylus", a single conical stone. Another iconographic series of Near Eastern origin portrays a goddess of desire and fecundity in the form of a naked woman holding her hands to her breasts. She is usually portrayed on moulded terracotta figurines that are flat on the back, known as "Astarte plaques". Most them are found at Kition and Amathous, where they also occur on one of the short sides of the famous sarcophagus found by Cesnola and stored at New York. At these and at a few other sites the "Great Goddess" is also represented, especially at the end of the Archaic period, in the form of a double-headed figure placed atop a stele that portrays Egyptian goddess Hathor. The popularity of this representation at Amathous is evidenced by the depiction of the Hathoric head painted on small amphorae and other locally-produced vases. Towards the end of the Archaic and in the Classical period a new type prevails: that of a woman draped in the Greek manner, with a chiton and a himation, richly adorned and wearing a tall crown decorated with floral motifs, sphinxes, doves or human figures. The depiction of such heads on 4th century BC coins confirms the divine nature of these women, while on one statue of the Cesnola collection found at Golgoi-Ayios Photios, the presence of a small Eros on the arm of a female figure testifies to its identification with Aphrodite. However, images of naked or semi-naked Aphrodite in the tradition of Praxiteles’ creations in Athens of the 4th
century BC is barely attested in Hellenistic and Roman Cyprus. Meanwhile, some terracotta statuettes from Vouni and Mersinaki clearly portray Athena, whereas the limestone sculptures from Pyla, depict Artemis, the huntress and goddess of nature.

During the second part of the Archaic period, numerous images of male deities are carved in limestone. The main type derives from the Greek iconography of Herakles, in the form of either a bearded or a beardless figure wearing lion’s skin, holding a club or an arrow in some of the earliest representations. More frequently he is depicted taming one or two small lions [Fig. 5]. These images illustrate the protective power of a male god whose cult was very popular throughout the island. At the inland sanctuaries mentioned previously, Herakles is identified with Apollo, the latter being portrayed in his classical Greek form by a statue at Malloura, whereas at Kition he probably coincides with Reshef Mikal, the city’s great god and protector of the royal dynasty until the Classical period, as is demonstrated by the coins bearing his effigy and by the deposit of sculptures discovered by the Swedish Expedition at the site of Bamboula. A special version attested at Amathous adopts the image of the Egyptian god Bes with horns, portrayed as a master of lions in a series of sculptures that were unearthed in the lower city, near the port. Quite different is the image of a seated god with ram’s horns (or with a ram’s head in older examples), made in limestone or terracotta. As with previous deities, the name Zeus Ammon that was given to him is conventional. This type of offering occurs at the same inland sanctuaries as the ‘Herakles’ statuettes discussed above. In the Hellenistic period these two sets of imaginary figures are replaced by that of a horned - one dressed in goat’s skin, with obvious relations to the god Pan: this figure is protective of nature and herds.

Recent research on the art of Cyprus has been promoted in various ways. On the one hand, there are the collections of large European and North American museums: following the catalogues of the Louvre and those edited by Vassos Karageorghis, part of the rich Cesnola collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art was published in the form of a CD-rom for the terracotta figurines on the museum’s website, and in the form of a traditional paper volume for the limestone statuettes. On the other hand, by studying the production of statues and terracotta figurines from the perspective of local workshops, Sabine Fourrier opened a new way of research with important implications for the history of that period. As with the Greek cities of the Aegean, the workshops of the main Cypriote kingdoms produced sculpture in a distinctive style, subsequently offered to the sanctuaries of the major cities in their territory, thus providing valuable information on the geographical expansion of Cypriote kingdoms. The study of regional styles in pottery is also very promising, as shown in Anna Georgiadou’s unpublished thesis on pottery workshops of
the Geometric period. Finally, the link between figurative art, politics, society and religion constitutes a growing area of research, bound to further develop in the future. Numerous of these studies are published in two major journals, *BASOR*\(^{37}\) and the *Cahier du Centre d’Études Chypriotes*.\(^{38}\)

Following after the corpus of the gold coins of the kings of Cyprus\(^{39}\) the corpus of Cypriote silver coins contributes to the discussion of important issues that lead to the understanding of the history and culture of Cyprus between the 6th and 4th centuries BC.
List of illustrations

The images that follow are available in the digital version of the present article in the website *Kyprios Character*. You can view the images by following the link: [kyprioscharacter.eie.gr/en/t/AF](http://kyprioscharacter.eie.gr/en/t/AF)

**Fig. 1**: Statue of a "dignitary", sanctuary at Golgoi-Ayios Photios, second or third quarter of 4th century BC. *New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art 74.51.2460* (Hermary, Mertens 2014, no 12). The Cesnola Collection, Purchased by subscription 1874-76.

**Fig. 2**: Terracotta statuette from a tomb at Palaepaphos, towards the end of the 8th century BC. *London, British Museum 1899.12-29.1* (Cat. Terracottas A 123).

**Fig. 3**: Hathoric stele (fragmentary) from the acropolis of Amathous, beginning of the 5th century BC. Limassol, District Museum AM 805. Photograph EfA (Ph. Collet).

**Fig. 4**: Statue of Aphrodite holding Eros, sanctuary of Golgoi-Ayios Photios, second half of 4th century BC. *New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art 74.51.2464* (Hermary, Mertens 2014, no 357). The Cesnola Collection, Purchased by subscription 1874-76.

**Fig. 5**: Statue of "Herakles" holding a small lion, sanctuary of Golgoi-Ayios Photios (?), second half of 4th century BC. *New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art 74.51.2660* (Hermary, Mertens 2014 no 320). The Cesnola Collection, Purchased by subscription 1874-76.
Endnotes

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