The relations between Athens and Cyprus during the classical period

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The relations between Athens and Cyprus during the classical period

Raptou, Eustathios

The recording of written sources and archaeological evidence from the end of the Archaic to the beginning of the Hellenistic period (end of 6th-4th century BC) proves that these two centuries were significant for the establishment of Hellenism in Cyprus, at a difficult time when Persian dominance was getting rougher. The Greek Cypriotes, descendants of Achaeans that settled on the island at the end of the Late Bronze Age (12th century BC) lived among the other inhabitants, isolated from their metropolis. Thus they shaped an idiosyncratic Hellenism, radiating influences from the East and the West. Contrary to other areas of the East that came into contact with, and were influenced by the Greek civilization, the close relationship of the Cypriotes with the Greek mainland attested from the Late Archaic period, which is clearly reflected on the material culture, also brought deep changes in the culture and heightened the residents’ awareness, irrespectively of their ethnic background; thus from the beginning of the Hellenistic period, Cyprus was considered a strong part of Hellenism. The strongest representative of the Greek culture was of course the city of Athens, a city that from the end of the 6th century BC until the 4th century BC dominated economy and trade, arts and literature, and was also a symbol of the fight for independence from the Persians, showing determination in claiming the Greeks’ best interest. Inevitably, the culture of the island during the Classical period was formed on Athenian models. It must be noted though that Athens was not the only representative of Greek culture that influenced the island, since the Cypriotes first came into contact with the Ionians. The island’s close relationship with Ionia prepared the ground for accepting the classical civilization and the full Hellenization of the island.

Despite the importance of the facts that would determine the historical course of the island and the formation of its culture, the evidence available for the subject under study is mainly insufficient, especially regarding written sources, which are restricted to short reports of historical texts, poetry and rhetorical speeches. The lack of written sources is even worse especially when it comes to Cyprus itself regarding the evidence we would expect to find from the inside of local kingdoms. On the contrary, archaeological research, especially of the past few years, allows us to some extent to minimize the gap created by the lack of written sources.

A short reference to the island in the Persians of Aeschylus gives the impression that at the
beginning of the 5th century BC Cyprus was already in the centre of attention of Athens. In this play that was taught in 472 BC, Salamis of Cyprus (Persians 894) and its metropolis, Salamis of Attica, are mentioned as the causes of grief for the defeated. The connection of the two areas at that time, the period followed the Persian Wars, is not just a simple literary medium but marks the entrance of Cyprus in the map of Greek political interest and claims. The failure of the Ionian revolt, which was supported by Athens and in which the Greek cities of the island participated, had proceeded in 499 BC. With their participation in the revolt, the Cypriotes recognised that the interests of the Greeks against the Persians were common in Ionia and Cyprus and they revealed that the sense of common ancestry with the Greeks had been established in the Cypriotes’ consciousness.

Nevertheless, despite the importance of the situation on the island, the historians of the antiquity are extremely thrifty, and the important facts that took place on the island did not occupy a large part of the historiography. During the 5th century BC, according to various sources, Cyprus became a field of competition and war conflicts as a part of Athens’ politics for restricting the power of the Persians. A series of military missions in the first half of the 5th century BC, the one under the leadership of the Athenian general Kimon in 451/450 BC being the most important, would not lead to Greek dominance in the eastern Mediterranean, not until the Treaty of Callias (499 BC) that ended the attempts of Athens and officially left Cyprus under the Persians’ sphere of influence.

Before the end of the century, tragic poetry again provides evidence that can be explained as powerful signs of the Athenian interest for Cyprus. In Helen of Euripides, taught in 412 BC, where Teucer the oecist of Salamis appears, this interest of Athens is promoted and could be hiding some expectations for upgrading the role of the city of Athens in the international scene through an alliance with Evagoras I, the mighty king of Salamis. An overview of ancient literary sources reveals that the relation of the mythical heroes of Attica with the island was a popular subject for the poets to remind the long-established relationship that connected the two areas. Works pertaining to Cyprus with special reference to Salamis showed clearly some political positions, since the citizens’ support was necessary for conducting military operations; they also showed the existence of a warm public in Athens that was interested in Cyprus, which was going through tough times under Persian occupation. Of course, during this period, Salamis was most probably the most powerful city-kingdom in Cyprus especially with regard to its economic level, since it possessed great sources of wealth and an advantageous geographical position. The rise of a king with friendly feelings towards Athens was fortunate and promoted the interests of both cities. It is no coincidence that most of the relevant written sources available refer to
the period of King Evagoras' reign (411-374 BC) and his successors', when the relationships of the two cities culminated in many ways.\textsuperscript{10} The three orations that the orator Isocrates dedicated to the royal family of Salamis, i.e. Evagoras, \textit{To Nikokles and Nikokles or Cypriotes}, that addressed to Nikokles, successor of Evagoras I, include political theory rather than historical evidence and are thus studied by scholars with caution.\textsuperscript{11}

The connection of the two areas as shown through mythological tradition cannot be historically rejected. The rich material from a tomb in Salamis dated to the early 11th century BC provides evidence for the trade between Salamis - and Cyprus in general - and the Aegean, Crete and Athens, during the years that followed the island's colonization by the Achaeans; and most likely this material is where the historical truth lies about the origin of the Salaminians, and consequently of the other Greek Cypriotes, from the Achaeans.\textsuperscript{12} Besides trade, some written sources of Late Antiquity report the survival of ancient cults in the city, emphasizing on the elements that reveal the ancient roots of customs, like human sacrifice. One of these is the worship of Aglauros, daughter of the mythical king Cecrops that might indeed reveal the connection of Attica with Salamis since prehistoric times and the participation of Athens in the establishment of the city.\textsuperscript{13} Moreover, the existence of common burial practices between Attica and Salamis, as those are identified in the classical necropolis of the city, could be used as further evidence for the historicity of the lasting relations between the two areas.\textsuperscript{14}

Judging by the connection of Athens with northwestern Cyprus and the kingdom of Soloi in particular, as is presented in tradition,\textsuperscript{15} Athenian involvement in the colonization of Cyprus may not be limited to the east coast of the island. Athenian heroes, the sons of Theseus, Akamas and Demophon, act like heroes-oecists and are the pioneers of the Greek penetration in this area. A whole peninsula is thought to have been named after Akamas and the city of Soloi also seems to have been founded by Akamas and his brother, Demophon.\textsuperscript{16} There is a second foundation legend - also of Athenian origin - about the city of Soloi. According to this legend, Solon the lawmaker was the one who suggested moving the older city, Aepeia, to a more favourable position; as a result the city's name changed in honour of the Athenian lawmaker. The historicity of these traditions cannot be confirmed archaeologically; however, it is possible that the Athenians had been active in the area from an early stage, because of the rich copper deposits. The wide propagation of the cult of Athena in the area of Soloi [\textbf{Fig. 1}], even though current evidence does not allow its association with the period of Mycenaean colonization, is a strong element displaying the ideological orientation of the area towards Athens.\textsuperscript{17}

Besides its contribution to the search of the historicity of mythological traditions,
archaeological research also portrays the continuity and the gradation of contacts between the two areas. Economic transactions led to a better acquaintance between peoples and gradually to cross-influences in the artistic production of local workshops and to changes in the way of living, the mentality and the behavior of the island’s inhabitants.

The recovery of Greece from the cultural stagnation caused by the collapse of Mycenaean palaces is associated with the opening of free communication routes with the East Mediterranean and Cyprus. The ports of the island, especially those of the south and the east coast, certainly played an important role due to their favourable position along the trading routes to Syro-palestine. A stop at Cyprus was necessary for the supply of provisions and raw materials, such as copper. Furthermore, the island was the ideal meeting place for the Greeks with the peoples of the East, as well as a base for ventures. Cyprus would also play a decisive role in the formation of the Greek culture and art, assisting the distribution of the technological achievements and the creative spirit of the East to the West.\footnote{18} The first seamen who sailed towards the East in the Geometric period are the Euboeans, followed by the Athenians.\footnote{19} The ports of Cyprus have yielded numerous Attic vases of this period,\footnote{20} the most important corpus being that of tomb 1 of the Royal Necropolis of Salamis (8th century BC) that included a large number of Attic sympotic vessels of the Middle Geometric period [\textbf{Fig. 2}]. This find has been interpreted as the burial of an Athenian female member of aristocratic origin, possibly a princess, married in Salamis and accompanied in her grave by objects from her homeland.\footnote{21}

The discovery of Athenian trade amphorae of the SOS type, dating to the 7th century BC, at the main ports of the island, such as Salamis, Amathous and at Phoenician Kition, confirm the connection between Athens and Cyprus at a period when contacts with the island were not systematic.\footnote{22} Gradually, and with greater progress from the second half of the 6th century BC onwards, contacts between the island and Greek cities become more frequent and the quantities of Greek pottery increase.\footnote{23} Attica plays an important role in the trade and circulation of products and so do the cities of East Greece, especially the islands. Commercial vessels transferring commodities are possibly of Ionian and of other origins, and trade is facilitated since Ionia and Cyprus are both parts of the Persian Empire.\footnote{24} During the first half of the 6th century BC, Attic pottery gradually increases in Cyprus and by the end of the century it can be found in the most important centres of the island, such as Marion, Kition, Amathous and Salamis.\footnote{25} At the same time, Cypriote works of art, mostly limestone statuettes and terracotta figurines, travel to the Aegean, and the sanctuaries at the cities on the coast of Asia Minor and the islands, such as Rhodes, Cnidus, Miletus, Samos and many others, receive hundreds of dedications from Cyprus.\footnote{26} The relations of Cyprus with
Greek cities were primarily economic; however, they also led to cultural contacts, exchange of ideas and to the acknowledgement of the common origin between Cypriotes and Greeks. These connections had a profound influence on Cypriotes; thus the aesthetic change that is traced in the artistic production of the island is a sign of the big changes that would occur in art and, later, in society.27

In the second half of the 6th century BC, Cypriote art displays clear influences from Greek art, with the appearance of the so-called Cypro-Greek style.28 The artistic links of the Cypriote workshops seem to develop mainly with Ionia and it is evident that Ionic elements tempt the Cypriotes over this period of time. However, at the same time the influence of insular and Attic workshops on sculpture becomes more evident. A typical example is the archaic sanctuary at Apostolos Varnavas, close to Salamis, where a series of korai were found bearing features of archaic sculpture and displaying similarities with the korai of the Acropolis of Athens [Fig. 3].29 Additionally, the kore from the Vouni palace30 and one more kore from Salamis31 refer to Cycladic and Attic prototypes, as is the head of akouros, also from Salamis, radiating the influence of Attic sculpture of the end of the Archaic period (490 BC).32 Yet, not all models of the Greek art were accepted by the conservative societies of the Cypriote cities. Hence the naked athletic body of the kouroi, a symbol of the strength of the city and its citizens in the Greek world, is only portrayed in very few works, a fact that implies the differentiation between Cypriotes and other Greeks when dealing with iconography that was opposed to local ideology. Nonetheless, works portraying the naked male body are not unknown, a fact that testifies to the penetration and acceptance of the new mentality by some circles. An example is the naked kouros, apparently a burial statue, on which are imprinted typical features of the Attic sculpture can be traced,33 as well as the kouros from the sanctuary at Mersinaki where typical features of the Attic sculpture are also traced.34

The renewal of Cypriote art seems to discontinue at the beginning of the Classical period. Although important works of sculpture are produced in the early 5th century BC, such as the sarcophagi of Golgoi and Amathous,35 the dynamism that characterized local workshops at the end of the Archaic period, with the adoption of Greek art, is replaced by a phase of recession and production decreases. Of special interest is a sarcophagus from Palaepaphos, probably dated to the beginning of the 5th century BC, which is an indicative example of the tendencies of the end of the Archaic period [Fig. 4]. The sarcophagus features relief decoration referring to the Greek heroic tradition through a style and iconographic options that show the workshop’s inability to follow the evolution taking place in the Greek art at the beginning of the Classical period. This work, however, has a great historical value since
it is an expression of the prevailing political ideology of the Paphians during the critical period of the 5th century BC and reveals the clear links of Paphos with the Greek world.\textsuperscript{36}

However, the interest for renewal is not lost and is supported by important works of classical art of the severe style that continue to reach the island\textsuperscript{37} in spite of the adverse conditions caused by the political situation. It seems that imported works, albeit scanty, motivate local workshops to try small innovative steps towards evolution, using mainly the Attic creations as their prototypes. A marble head of a youth, possibly from Lapethos, resembles the \textit{Blond Boy’s Head} of the Acropolis of Athens or even Apollo from the pediment of the temple of Zeus at Olympia.\textsuperscript{38}

Before the end of the 5th century BC, important processes took place that led to the consolidation of Greek culture and Hellenism on the island. Apart from the imported Attic pottery that confirms trade contacts, there is no other archaeological evidence to indicate the extent of the change. It seems, though, that a spectacular shift from local culture into classical art gradually takes place. Classical art is represented by Athens and in spite of the political problems that the city was facing, it still had a strong cultural influence over the ancient world. This period coincides with the appearance of Evagoras I who came into power at Salamis in 411 BC and it seems that the city went under radical transformations. Isocrates stresses the cultural change in the city, with the participation of Athenian artists and intellectual figures.\textsuperscript{39} Despite the short duration of excavations in the city due to Turkish invasion, archaeological research reveals that the reference of the Athenian orator is not far from the truth [Fig. 5]. The big shift of Cyprus towards classical culture and Hellenism seems to affect not only Salamis but also other urban centres of the island, especially Marion, Soloi, as well as Phoenician Kition and Eteocypriote Amathous. The changes are easier to trace in the 4th century BC, for which archaeological research has produced more evidence that shows the progress towards cultural assimilation.

The era of Evagoras I is certainly a focal point for the relations between Athens and Cyprus and this is proved by the presence of philological texts and inscriptions that mention the Salaminian king and his family.\textsuperscript{40} The oratorical speeches that were written by Isocrates, Lysias, and Andokides testify to the special relation of the two cities. From the beginning of his reign, Evagoras I felt his strong links with Athens as part of his policy against Persian domination. The Athenians honoured Evagoras I with an honorary decree shortly after he ascended the throne, ‘for his numerous and great benefactions’ (διὰ πολλὰς καὶ μεγάλας εὐεργεσίας) to their city, while he and his children were awarded the Athenian citizenship (\textit{IG I2} 113, 411/410 BC).\textsuperscript{41} During his reign the presence and activity of the Athenians on the island is attested. Orator Andokides, a controversial personality in
Athens, flees to Salamis where he was probably protected by Evagoras, and from there he seems to arrange shipments of wheat to Athens. Moreover, Athenian admiral Conon also fled to Salamis together with General Nikophemos, after the Athenian defeat at Aegos Potami. Conon played an important role in convincing Evagoras to put his fleet at Athenian disposal and thus they managed to win the naval battle of Cnidus (394 BC). This victory allowed Conon’s triumphant return to Athens where he was honoured, together with Evagoras I, in 394/3 BC for his contribution to the city of Athens with a second honorary decree (IG II2 20c). Their statues were erected at the agora of Athens in front of the stoa of Zeus Eleutherios and the statue of Zeus Soter, in particular. Finally, after the conclusion of the Peace of Antalcidas in 387/6 BC and in spite of the help offered by Evagoras I to Athens, the king of Salamis got isolated and Cyprus fell again into the hands of the Persians.

Despite their importance for the future of the island, these political and military incidents do not seem to relate with the progress of classic culture and Hellenic education or to the dynamics towards the final cultural assimilation. The dedication of Cypriote kings and dignitaries to the Greek culture is obvious since the most important works of art are addressed to the upper social class. A series of statues that are thought to represent dignitaries of Cypriote kingdoms show the dedication of the upper class to the Greek way of portraying that attests the influence of the Greek culture. The prevailing tendency of the 5th century BC to depict subjects from classical Greek iconography is best shown on the issuing of coins by the kings, especially of Salamis, Marion and Lapethos. Evagoras I was the first king of Salamis to issue coins on which the Panhellenic hero Herakles is portrayed. The same king also introduced the Greek alphabet to the coinage of his city, which marks a considerable change towards the integration of Cyprus into the classical culture and the acknowledgement of the importance of the alphabet for the progress of literacy.

It is archaeologically attested that in the second half of the 5th and in the early 4th century BC there was an increase in imported goods on the island, mostly luxury items, such as Attic pottery, that was found throughout the island and particularly at the main urban centres in larger quantities. Attic vases were preferred for their high quality and aesthetics and were used in palaces, as is attested by the finds from the palace of Vouni and Amathous. They were also preferred as votive offerings in some sanctuaries, such as at Kition, Salamis, whereas at Marion most of the Attic pottery was found in graves. The increase of Attic pottery on the island was possibly due to the further growth of trade that was never really suspended during the century despite the tough political situation. Athens was in need of
raw materials, such as copper and wheat, commodities that were in abundance in Cyprus. We saw that wheat shipments by Evagoras were the main reason for the honorary tribute to the Salaminian king.\(^{50}\) Copper trade between Athens and Cyprus is attested epigraphically, as in the case of an inscription from Eleusis on which the use of copper from Marion is designated. \(^{51}\)

The kingdom of Marion at northwestern Cyprus was one of the most important centres of classical culture on the island, apparently due to the tight commercial links with Athens and other Greek cities. \(^{52}\) Archaeological research reveals that Attic pottery was imported to the city from the late 6th century BC but imports reached their heyday in the late 5th and early 4th centuries BC. Although imported goods may have not been the price of direct exchanges between the two cities and possibly derived from different sources of trade, they reveal a refined society with luxurious living habits that sought to acquire works of classical art to use in every significant moment of life, and this was certainly due to the contacts and acquaintance with the Greek way of life. \(^{53}\)

At the time, Marion was a city that assimilated classical influences in a unique way and transformed them into works of art reflecting the local style [Fig. 6]. The workshops of the city were the most dynamic in Cyprus with regard to the integration of ideas from the Greek territory that were portrayed in pottery, terracottas and sculpture. The most typical scheme of local pottery, the elongated oinochoai with a female terracotta figurine on the shoulder, perhaps a representation of the Great Goddess, evolved under the influence of Attic art and these works are perhaps the most interesting creations of Cypriote pottery of the Classical period in its entirety. However, under no circumstances was the iconographic tradition of Greek and particularly Attic pottery adopted, while the integration of certain elements is limited to decorative features, such as palmettes, spirals, meanders, and so on. However, a change in the figurines adorning the shoulder of the vases that now follow Greek prototypes is attested. \(^{54}\)

The cemeteries of the cities of the island were at the time areas where prestige and power of the rich and of the ruling class in general were displayed. Even though burial architecture does not change considerably in comparison to previous centuries, grave monuments are some of the best representatives of classical art in Cyprus. The statues are either imported from the islands or from Attica, or are manufactured in situ by artists that had migrated to the island or by Cypriotes who are familiar with the Greek sculpture. Marion has produced an interesting series of grave stelae imported from Attica and from island workshops, as well as local ones manufactured in the classical spirit that dominated artistic creation in the city. \(^{55}\) Furthermore, a special category of large terracotta figurines appears in Marion that
are inspired by the Attic grave reliefs and are exclusively intended for burials. These are original local creations that put into sculpture figures known from representations of grave stelae, mostly of Attica, that depict scenes reflecting local ideology. All finds from Marion highlight a city where classical art has penetrated every artistic expression and outlines a society with a special sensitivity and sophistication. The well-known stele of Salaminian Aristila from Marion is a top specimen of assimilation of the classical spirit into Cypriote art; it does not only signify the big change in art and ideology of Cyprus but also connects the two pioneer cities of classical art in Cyprus.

As mentioned before, the new cultural ideology is displayed in cemeteries, and thus creations of classical art attract kings and dignitaries who integrate them in their last residence. Luxurious sarcophagi, like those of Kition, are indications of the new tendency to bury the members of the upper class even within Phoenician environment. Kition also produced a series of grave stelae that express the interest of Phoenician dignitaries to denote the prestige of their social status through works of classical art. The same tendency also dominates Greek-speaking kingdoms. Soloi is a centre that has yielded significant grave monuments either imported from Attica or of local manufacture yet fully incorporated in the classical spirit. From the same city comes a marble sarcophagus that portrays relief scenes of battles between Athenians and the Amazons. It is a subject with clear references to the heroic battles of Athenians that may be denoting the victory of the people of Soloi against their enemies, probably the Persians, as well as the connection of the two cities through their battles. The models of classical art are disseminated fast throughout island, even in remote areas, as shown by finds that are often impressive. Such an example is a burial stele from Mosphiloti, carved on limestone, matching the best marble creations of a big artistic centre.

The new ideas about urban planning portrayed on the finds from Kition, including the construction of a sewage system, as well as the creation of ship sheds that copy those of Piraeus, are not inspired by the plans of eastern cities. In Salamis major infrastructure works were possibly undertaken, although what Isocrates said about the city has not been archaeologically verified yet.

The changes are major and within a few decades the island steadily diverges from the East. Hence for the first time the local and Phoenician deities are identified with deities of the Greek pantheon. The sanctuaries are swarmed with figurines that were either imported from Greece and copy Attic models or were produced on the island based on imported models. Athena, the goddess of the city that represents the Greek ideals, dominated the coins of cities, such as Soloi and Salamis. The Great Goddess is now identified with Greek
Aphrodite and adopts her iconographic features. 66

The most important and decisive change pertains to education. The most illustrious example of the final attachment of the island to Hellenism is the case of Zeno, a Phoenician from Kiton, who renewed Greek philosophy with his teachings; he taught philosophy in Athens, where he was honoured like very few philosophers had. He was the second Cypriote, non-Greek, that had his statue erected in the hub of Hellenism. 67

We have seen in what ways the feeling of Hellenism developed and was established in Cyprus. The sense of community with other Greeks arose in the 6th century BC, when the contacts with Ionia and Athens were intensified and the Cypriotes developed a Greek consciousness, further strengthened by traditions, poetry and common features such as common language and habits. Despite the tough political situation and the failure of Athens to establish itself militarily in the East Mediterranean, the 5th century BC was a period during which Hellenism was reinforced since Persian domination created stability for economic growth and did not provide any cultural models to the conquered people. This sense of community along with the progress of Greek culture and education reached their heyday in the 4th century BC, when Athens declined as a political power and remained a major artistic and educational centre. As it has been proved, the diffusion of classical culture and its prevalence on the island was not due to some cultural policy of Athens but was a choice of the Cypriotes themselves. Cyprus was a crossroads of cultures yet did not passively adopt their influences; it reacted dynamically and played a decisive role in the relations of Greeks with the East, while its choices contributed to its cultural incorporation with the Greeks.
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/Ak

Fig. 1: Cyprus Museum, Nicosia: Limestone head of the statue of goddess Athena. Vouni Palace. Hall II. Height.: 10.15 cm. 5th cent. BC. Inv. No.: V.P. 210. © Cyprus Museum Archive.

Fig. 2: Archaeological Museum, Famagusta: Crater. Geometric Period. Necropolis of Salamis. Height: 48 cm. 8th cent. BC. Inv. no.: Tomb 1/22. © Cyprus Museum Archive.

Fig. 3: Archaeological Museum, Famagusta: Limestone Kore from Salamis, sanctuary near Apostolos Varnavas. Height: 26 cm. Inv. No.: A. Var. A 5. © Cyprus Museum Archive.

Fig. 4: Local Museum of Palaipaphos, Kouklia (Paphos): Limestone sarcophagus from Palaepaphos – Kato-Alonia with mythological scenes. Length: 1.99 m., Width: 0.67 m., Height: 61 m. Late archaci period (beginning of the 5th cent. BC). Inv. No. RRKM 485, T. 167/1. © Cyprus Museum Archive.

Fig. 5: Cyprus Museum, Nicosia. Marble female head from Salamis. Height: 31.5 cm. 4th cent. BC. Inv. no.: 2.245. © Cyprus Museum Archive.

Fig. 6: Local Museum of Marion-Arsinoe, Polis Xrysochous (Paphos). Oenochoe with plastic decoration on the shoulder. Late classical period (4th cent. BC). Height: 40 cm. Inv. No.: C 418. © Cyprus Museum Archive.
Endnotes

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