THE GREAT GODDESS OF CYPRUS BETWEEN THE AEGEANS AND THE "ETEOCYPRIOTS"

The end of the Late Bronze Age is a period of multiple cultural innovations in Cyprus, which have been interpreted in various ways by scholars, and which have occasionally generated lively and controversial discussions. In the view of the writer one of the main reasons for the controversy is the inability to visualize precisely the transformation of Cypriote society, the gradual changes in ideologies and the complexity of the phenomena which led to the radical changes which are tangible in the 11th century B.C., with the introduction of the Greek language to the island, which was destined to be dominant down to the present day.

The cultural changes mentioned above need not be enumerated here since this has been done elsewhere.[1] Rather, the focus will be on one aspect of culture, namely religion, to try to investigate changes, if any, in both religious practices and the religious iconography of the Great Goddess of Cyprus.

A nude female figure holding her breasts appears as early as the Chalcolithic period in Cyprus, and this continues down to the end of the 6th century B.C. The breasts, like the genitalia, form the two important aspects of female symbolism and they are dominant in the iconography of the Great Goddess. Another female symbolism is provided by the *Kourotrophos*, a female figure holding an infant, which has a very long tradition in Cyprus from the Late Bronze Age onwards, and which also appears in the Aegean. In the latter region the type of female figure with arms folded against the chest is well known, both in Crete and on the mainland. Regarding the problem of the origin of the type, the writer would agree with Elizabeth French that an eastern influence, particularly from Cyprus, is possible.[2]

It is true that there are few Mycenaean terracotta figurines in Cyprus unlike the Mycenaean vases which appear in large quantities and which seem to be "status symbols among the local population."[3] Their presence, mainly in funerary contexts, both in Cyprus and the Levant, has been interpreted by French as suggesting that "actual Mycenaean merchants, settlers or consuls must be imagined at the centres which had figurines."[4] Precious vases, especially large craters decorated in the pictorial style, may be considered as status symbols by an élite, but it is highly unlikely that a very small terracotta figurine would attract the attention of a rich Cypriote or Levantine merchant. The figurines may have been significant only for a group of foreign merchants.[5] It is within this context that the influences which such imported figurines may have had on the iconography of the coroplastic art of Cyprus, mainly the female figurines during the late 13th and the early part of the 12th century B.C., may be explained.

In the discussion of the Base-ring ware type of hollow, nude female figurine with arms stretched down beside the body or folded against the chest, the writer pointed out some stylistic innovations, namely the treatment of the hair, the flat-topped head and the long pointed nose, suggesting, in agreement with Lena Åström, that there might be influences from Mycenaean figurines (Pl. XCVIIIa).[6] This influence, however, is even more apparent during the

1 V. KARAGEORGHIS, "Cultural Innovations in Cyprus relating to the 'Sea Peoples'," in *The Sea Peoples and their World: a Reassessment* (2000) 255-279.

2 E. FRENCH, *BSA* 66 (1971) 106, 124; EAD. in C. RENFREW, *The Archaeology of Cult. The Sanctuary at Phylakopi* (1985) 277.

3 FRENCH (*supra* n. 2, 1971) 175; L. STEEL, "The Social Impact of Mycenaean Imported Pottery in Cyprus," *BSA* 93 (1998) 286-296.

4 FRENCH (*supra* n. 2, 1971) 175.

5 Cf. P. BEGG, *Late Cypriote Terracotta Figurines: a Study in Context* (1991) 40-43.

6 V. KARAGEORGHIS, *The Coroplastic Art of Ancient Cyprus II. Late Cypriote II-Cypro-Geometric III* (1993) 22-23.

Late Cypriote IIIA period (12th century B.C.), when numerous other cultural innovations are observed on the island.[7] Various terracotta figurines of male or female figures found in the settlement of Enkomi (not in tombs), in Late Cypriote IIIA levels are distinctly different from the traditional Base-ring ware types. They are wheelmade, an innovation in the coroplastic art of Cyprus (see below), but they are particularly distinct in the treatment of their facial characteristics and their hair (Pl. XCVIIIb). The writer's suggestion of an influence from Mycenaean figurines was opposed by Catling, who argued that a particular figurine of the same type now in the Musée du Louvre, found in Cyprus, was a Mycenaean import not a Cypriote imitation (Pl. XCVIIIc-d).[8] The fabric of the figurine, in addition to the details of its attitude, namely the left arm which was bent forward rather than upward, convinced the writer that this figurine was an imitation of the well-known Mycenaean ψ type but not an import. A clay analysis supported this suggestion.[9] Catling's response to this challenge is of interest, and very much to the point with regard to the suggestion made in this paper that by the beginning of the 12th century B.C. the coroplastic art of the Aegean had had a profound influence on that of Cyprus. Catling kindly remarked in a personal communication: "There are a number of permutations - it is an import from somewhere in the Aegean (which as you say, would make it unique - but that is not, in itself, out of the question). It was made in Cyprus by someone accustomed to making such things in the Aegean. It was made in Cyprus, by a local coroplast, inspired by a piece that had been brought from the Aegean, which the local coroplast wished to follow as closely as possible.

Clay analysis suggests manufacture in Cyprus is quite likely. Form and manner of decoration - to my mind - allow one to call it Mycenaean, particularly with LH IIIC material in mind. Its interest is great, whether it was brought to Cyprus by an Aegean visitor, or made there either by an Aegean incomer, or a Cypriot with a taste for Aegean things - perhaps even a belief in whatever the figure may have symbolised."

A second figurine of obvious Cypriote manufacture, but imitating a Mycenaean type, was found at Hala Sultan Tekke.[10] To these may be added two examples of probably female figurines, detached from vases, with their arms raised to touch their heads, recalling the Mycenaean "pleureuses" (Pl. XCVIIIe).[11] The imitation by a potter/vase-painter of Mycenaean ceramics is not the same as that of a coroplast. A vase, especially a non-cultic vase, has quite a different significance from a terracotta figurine found in a settlement, most probably in a sanctuary. It suggests the presence of people who were accustomed to such figurines. It is not unreasonable to suggest that the innovations which can be observed in coroplastic art were due to the presence of Aegeans in Cyprus at the beginning of the 12th century B.C. Apart from the new elements in the facial characteristics and attitudes of anthropomorphic figures mentioned above, it should be added that several of these anthropomorphic figurines have hollow, wheelmade bodies, a feature well known in the coroplastic art of the Aegean; this is true not only of the anthropomorphic figurines, but also of the zoomorphic (e.g. bull figurines, Pl. XCVIIIf), which appear in Cyprus at the same time, whereas prior to the Late Cypriote IIIA period handmade, hollow rhyta were predominant.[12] Catling refers to the phenomenon as "a widespread religious innovation which began at the end of LC II and evolved throughout LC III, continuing unchecked into CG."[13] The relations of these new categories of Cypriote terracottas with comparable Aegean terracottas, again according to Catling, are suggestive,

7 Cf. V. KARAGEORGHIS, "The Prehistory of an Ethnogenesis," in *Cyprus in the 11th Century B.C.* (1994) 1-10.

8 H.W. CATLING, Review of V. Karageorghis, *The Coroplastic Art of Ancient Cyprus* Vol. II, *CR* 44 (1994) 148-151.

9 V. KARAGEORGHIS and A. CAUBET, "Mycenaean or "Mycenaean"," *RDAC* (1996) 83-86.

10 P. ÅSTRÖM *et al.*, *Hala Sultan Tekke 8. Excavations 1971-79* (1983) 69, no. N.2000, fig. 285-286; KARAGEORGHIS (*supra* n. 6) 29 no. K(ii)3.

11 Cf. KARAGEORGHIS (*supra* n. 6) 29 nos. K(ii)1 and 2.

12 V. KARAGEORGHIS, "Notes on the Origin of Cypriote Wheelmade Terracotta Figurines," forthcoming in *Festschrift for Jörg Schäfer*.

13 CATLING (*supra* n. 8) 150.

but not yet precise. The author elaborated on this theme in an article written in 1991 and published in 1996,[14] stressing the fact that these religious innovations should be taken as part of a much larger phenomenon which included innovations in other arts and crafts such as ceramics, metalwork, jewellery, ivory carving and glyptic, as well as in architecture (e.g. the appearance of central hearths and bathrooms).[15]

The religious innovations with regard to the female figurines, which started in the 12th century B.C., continued uninterruptedly into the Cypro-Geometric I period. Anthropomorphic and zoomorphic terracottas are found more and more in sanctuaries (which is very significant from the point of view of cult) although they did not disappear altogether from funerary contexts. Among the female terracotta figurines, a predominant position is now held by the type of the goddess with uplifted arms (Pl. XCVIIIg-h).

Although the type originated on the Mycenaean mainland and was transferred to Crete, the Cypriote examples bear a much closer resemblance to the Cretan examples and were introduced to Cyprus together with a number of other cultural features.[16] Although this Cretan influence had already started in the Late Cypriote IIIA period, as seen on the two 'masks' from Enkomi, probably detached from the top of the necks of vases,[17] it has been argued that the female figurines with uplifted arms found in the sanctuary of the Ingot God at Enkomi, together with the two 'bicephalic centaurs,' may also date to the very end of the Late Cypriote IIIB period and not to the Cypro-Geometric I as originally thought by the writer.[18] The high tiara worn by these figurines, the spots on the cheeks and the almond-shaped or round eyes with tasselled eyelashes around the eyes betray the Cretan influence.[19] Mention should also be made of three bottle-shaped figurines (perfume bottles) of the 11th century B.C. which typologically derive from a Cretan inspiration; each has a cylindrical body, an anthropomorphic female head at the top of the neck and a funnel spout (Pl. XCVIIIi-j). They resemble the bottle-shaped Astarte figurines,[20] but without human arms; instead there is an ordinary handle from the back of the neck to the shoulder. Two wear a necklace with a pendant.

It is significant that one of these figurines from Salamis wears a tiara and has a spot on her cheeks, thus demonstrating a relationship to the Cretan type of the goddess with uplifted arms referred to above.[21]

The female figurines of the type of the goddess with uplifted arms, standing or seated, persisted into the Cypro-Geometric I period.[22]

The writer has argued elsewhere that there was a strong Cretan element among the immigrants to Cyprus at the beginning of the 12th century B.C., as seen mainly in the defensive settlement at Pyla-Kokkinokremos.[23] More Cretans may have come to the island in the 11th century B.C. and they may have been responsible for the introduction of the type of the goddess with uplifted arms, who was adopted by the local population, who identified her with their own goddess of fertility. It is not surprising that during the early decades of the first millennium B.C. this same goddess was even assimilated iconographically with the local type of the nude Astarte.[24]

14 V. KARAGEORGHIS, "Aegean Influences on the Coroplastic Art of Late Bronze Age Cyprus," in *Atti e memorie del secondo congresso internazionale di micenologia* (1996) 1051-1061.
15 Cf. V. KARAGEORGHIS, "Hearths and Bathtubs in Cyprus: a 'Sea peoples'" Innovation?," in *Mediterranean Peoples in Transition. Thirteenth to Early Tenth Centuries BCE* (1998) 276-282; KARAGEORGHIS (*supra* n. 1).
16 KARAGEORGHIS (*supra* n. 6) 58-61.
17 KARAGEORGHIS (*supra* n. 6) 33-35.
18 Cf. CATLING (*supra* n. 8) 150.
19 A. KANTA, "Introduction. 16th-11th cent. B.C.," in *Cyprus-Dodecanese-Crete* 51-52.
20 KARAGEORGHIS (*supra* n. 6) 15-16.
21 Cf. KARAGEORGHIS (*supra* n. 6) 62-64.
22 KARAGEORGHIS (*supra* n. 6) 58-61; KARAGEORGHIS (*supra* n. 12).
23 V. KARAGEORGHIS, *The End of the Late Bronze Age in Cyprus* (1990) 9-10; see also V. KARAGEORGHIS, forthcoming in the Proceedings of the Conference "Defensive Settlements of the Aegean and the Eastern Mediterranean after c. 1200 B.C." held in Dublin, 7-10 May 1999.
24 KARAGEORGHIS (*supra* n. 6) 84, no. LGA(iv)16 and 90-91.

It would be of interest to examine how the religious innovations referred to above were introduced to Cyprus, how they were diffused within Cyprus and by which portion of the population they were shared. Religious ideas and symbols, unlike artistic styles, do not travel as a result of trade or cultural exchanges. They have a meaning which must be understood by those who adopt and use them. Thus, the 'horns of consecration' which appear in the main sanctuaries in Cyprus at the beginning of the 12th century B.C. were probably not copied from vases or other artistic media by a Cypriote élite, but they must have been introduced to the island by people who understood their meaning.[25] They are known at urban centres such as Kition and Palaepaphos, where the cult of the Great Goddess was predominant, but also in the rural sanctuary of Myrtou-Pigadhes. The 'horns of consecration' which appear in relief on a cultic limestone trough at Pyla-Kokkinokremos could not, in any manner, be used specifically by an élite. They were used by immigrants who understood their meaning and a portion of the population at this defensive outpost must have been Cretans.[26] Gradually they may have been adopted by the Cypriots and they were used as long as the cultural impact of the first generation of Aegean immigrants on local society was strong. Whether these symbols were used only by the élite society is questionable. The sanctuary at Myrtou-Pigadhes was rural and modestly built, an indication that this symbol was adopted by the rural population as well.

It is significant that by the 11th century B.C., when the political scene on the island changed, the 'horns of consecration' were forgotten, at least as far as the present archaeological evidence indicates, in favour of another religious symbol, the goddess with uplifted arms. Her diffusion in the island was easier and more lasting because she was assimilated from the very beginning with the local Great Goddess of fertility, whose cult was deeply rooted among the local population. It must have been rather strange, however, for the average Cypriot to get used to the idea that the new Great Goddess was fully draped. Thus, very shortly, as mentioned above, she was adapted to the old ancestral nude goddess of fertility, keeping at the same time all the other characteristics of the Cretan goddess, namely her attitude (uplifted arms), the tiara, necklace, bracelets and other features (Pl. XCVIIIk). It is, therefore, not surprising that this new Great Goddess survived in the island for more than 500 years down to the Classical period, side by side with the Astarte type goddess whose iconography had already started in the Chalcolithic period as a nude female figure with arms folded against the chest.

This, then, was the fate of the Great Goddess, at the time of the confrontation of the two cultures in Cyprus, the Aegean and the local, in the 11th century and the early part of the 1st millennium B.C. There was a happy compromise because she was understood by both. But as often happens with immigrants, she had to make some concessions, namely she had to strip occasionally in order to survive.

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25 For a general discussion see BEGG (*supra* n. 5) 40-43.
26 H.W. CATLING and V. KARAGEORGHIS, *BSA* 55 (1960) 127.

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