



**THE INTIMATE RELIGION OF GRECO-ROMAN BRIDES IN DOCUMENTARY PAPYRI:
SOME OBSERVATIONS ABOUT APHRODITE STATUETTES**

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ABSTRACT

Documentary papyri enable us to recreate some intimate religious aspects of daily life, particularly concerning women. The case study presented on this topic is based on papyrological and archaeological documentation of Aphrodite statuettes.

KEYWORDS

Aphrodite; documentary papyri; (intimate) religion; Greek lexicography

It is well known that documentary papyri of the Greco-Roman period give us many details of daily life, in every field, from work management to social aspects, and as far as the most intimate psychological and religious elements.

We know a great deal regarding the religion of this period, especially in Egypt, and many scholars have already highlighted the importance of the syncretism linking the Greek religion to the autochthonous Egyptian one and the role of some deities and religious aspects imported from Rome and from other Near Eastern countries.

There is no doubt as to the importance of these topics; on this occasion, however, I would like to touch on real daily life, in order to point to some aspects of intimate personal religion, particularly relating to women's lives.

Documentary papyri give us a lot of information on particular festivals dedicated to specified deities. During these special days, we can imagine the people attending the religious worship, taking part

in the cult meals, and bringing all kinds of offerings to the god/goddess.¹ But what went on for the rest of the time, during daily life?

Here I would like to illustrate, as a case study, some aspects of the day-to-day and private cult of the goddess Aphrodite, as it appears to be presented in some documentary papyri of Greco-Roman Egypt.²

A. APHRODITE IN DOCUMENTARY PAPYRI

A.I. APHRODITE STATUETTES

Some documentary texts testify to the use of small statues of Aphrodite; these are mainly marriage contracts, lists of (temple or personal—often pawned) items, as well as some other kinds of document.

Below is a list of these documents, to which I have added chronological and geographical data, and, furthermore, the quotation referring to the object under analysis:

Marriage Documents

1. P.Stras. IV 237, 15–16, 17 (142 CE; Arsinoe): κ[αὶ χαλκᾶ Ἀφροδῖτην, ὀσιπτρον (*lege* ἔκοπτρον) δίπτυχον, κάδο[υς], λ[η]κύθους, [ξύλινα] | [θή]κην³ τῆς Ἀφροδίτης, μυροθήκην [, “and bronze (items): Aphrodite, a double-folded mirror, jars, oil-flasks; wooden (items): a box for the Aphrodite, a perfume-box [.”
 2. BGU III 717, 11 (149 CE; Arsinoites): Ἀφροδείτην cὺν θήκη,⁴ ἐξανάστασις, σκάφιον Αἰγύπτιν | [± 15] α δύο, κάτοπτ[ρ]ον δίπτυχον, λαμπάδα, ληκύθ[ου]ς τέσσαρες, .. | [πάντα χαλκᾶ (?)], “an Aphrodite with its coffret, a base (?), an Egyptian-made water-basin [...], two [...], a double-folded mirror, a lamp, four oil-flasks [all in bronze] (?)” Some observations and new readings of these lines are in Russo 2006, 191–193.
 3. BGU IV 1045, 14–15 (154 CE; Arsinoites): Ἀφ[ρ]οδ[ι]τ[η]ν ± 18] ηχ[υ]τ[] . . . πάντα χαλκᾶ, “an Aphrodite [...], all made of bronze.” It is very difficult to read: for some notes on these and the following line, see again Russo 2006, 193.
 4. P.Oxy. XLIX 3491, 7 (157/158 CE; Oxyrhynchus): κασσιτέρου ἐνεργ(οῦ) ὀλκ(ῆς) μνᾶς ιε, ζώδιον Ἀφροδίτης, στάμνον, κάτοπτρον δίπτυχ(ον) κασιω[± 5],⁵ | διφρ[± 20].[...] μυροθήκ(ην) ξυλίνη[ν ± 10]...μ() δίφρο[v]υς/ γυναικείους, “15 *mnai* of real tin, a statuette of Aphrodite, a jar, a double-folded [...] mirror, (a?) stool [...], a wooden perfume-box [...], female stools.”
 5. SPP XX 7, 7 (= CPR I 22; *post* 158 CE; Arsinoites): καὶ παράφερνα χαλκᾶ μὲν Ἀφροδείτην ± ?] | [± ? καὶ ξύλινα, “and *parapherna*, bronze items: an Aphrodite [...], and wooden items.”
 6. SPP XX 15, 10 (= CPR I 27; 190 CE: see BL X, 269; Arsinoe): καὶ χαλκᾶ | [Ἀφρο]δείτην, ἔκοπτρον δίπτυχον, δίφρον, στάμνον, [σ]κάφιον καὶ ξύλινα [± ? θή]κην⁶ τῆς Ἀφροδείτης [...].ην, σκρήνιον, κάθεδραν cὺν ὑποποδίω, “and (the following) bronze items: an Aphrodite, a double-folded mirror, a stool, an amphora, a water-basin; and wooden items: [...] the Aphrodite coffret [...], a chest, a chair with its footstool.”
 7. SB VI 9372, 20 (2nd century CE;⁷ Oxyrhynchus): ἐν δὲ παραφέρνοισ | [στάμνον?] χαλκοῦν, Ἀφροδ[ι]τ[η]ν[υ]χ[α]λκῆν | [cὺν θήκη] ξυλίνη, κάδιον χα[λκ]οῦν, σκάφιν | [χαλκοῦν, γυναι]κ[εῖ]α κασσιτέ[ρι]να σκεῦη ὀλ[κ]ῆς μνα(ιαίων) X,] δ[ί]φρο[v], κιβωτὸν, [ξύ]λινον, “among *parapherna*, a bronze amphora, a bronze Aphrodite with its wooden box, a bronze jar, a bronze water-basin, some X *mnai* feminine tin objects, a wooden stool, a wooden chest.”⁸ Note that this is the only statuette openly described in the text as made of bronze.
 8. P.Hamb. III 220, 7 (223/224 CE; Arsinoe?): [± 57]ν, ἃ ἐστὶν Ἀφροδίτη, ἔκοπτρον δίπτυχον[ν ± ?], “[...] which are: an Aphrodite, a double-folded mirror [...]” We do not know if this statuette was a phernal (see l. 4) or a paraphernal item, as is more probable: see Burkhalter 1990, 55; nor what material the Aphrodite was made of: it was probably a bronze one, just as the mirror (ἔκοπτρον), that was usually made of bronze (see also nos. 1, 2, 6, 10, 12, and 13).
 9. SPP XX 31 col. II, 19–20 (= CPR I 21; 230 CE; Arsinoites); we do not know if an Ἀφροδίτη was quoted here among the bronze items (χαλκᾶ) because these words are lost in the lacuna: κ[αὶ χαλκᾶ Ἀφροδῖ]την.
- A further papyrological marriage contract—in Latin—can be added here:
10. CHLA IV 249, 9 int., 12 ext. (= P.Ryl. IV 612 + P.Mich. VII 434; 2nd century CE; Philadelphia): as *paralfer]na* (l. 8 int.), the writer quotes a *Venerem* as the first of the *aeramenta*, the others being a *cadium*, *osyptrum*, *arca* [], *lecythoe duae*, and *cadium alter(um)*, “a bucket, a mirror, a chest [], two oil-flasks, an other bucket,” very similarly to the above-quoted Greek texts. For the purpose of this study, it is important to note that some aspects of this Latin document, such as the list of dowry items, are, indeed, typically Greek.⁹
- Temple Lists (nos. 11–12) and Private Items (nos. 13–16)*
11. P.Oxy. XII 1449, 33 (213–217 CE; Oxyrhynchus): among a lot of different cult objects and offering items, an [Ἀφρο?]δείτ(η) χρυσ(ᾶ), “a golden Aphrodite” may be quoted.
 12. PSI VIII 950, 11 (3rd century CE; provenance unknown): it quotes a ναὸς ξύλ(ινος) περικεχρ(υωμένος) Ἀφροδ[ι]της(?), or Ἀφροδ[ι]της(?); here both these readings are possible, so it may have been quoted either a wooden-golden shrine of Aphrodite, or a wooden-golden shrine and a statuette of Aphrodite. The following item,

- indeed, is one or more κατοπτ(); it is possible that both the statuette of Aphrodite and the mirror/mirrors were made of bronze, as was customary (see also no. 8).
13. P.Oslo II 46 *verso*, 6 (3rd century CE; provenance unknown), list of presumably dowry items, among which an Ἀφροδείτ[η] is quoted. No indication of the material is given, but as the following item is a mirror (l. 7: ὄκυπτρον, *lege* εἴκοπτρον), it can be supposed that both of them were in bronze. See the observations of the editor too (P.Oslo II 46, 112–113, note to l. 6) and no. 8.
 14. P.Oxy. VI 921 *verso* (3rd century CE; Oxyrhynchos), list of items, mainly garments and textiles, perhaps part of an inheritance (?); at l. 22 an Ἀφροδίτη is quoted, by itself, with no indication of the material.
 15. O.Bodl. II 1948, 7 (3rd century CE; Thebai), list of items, mainly garments and textiles, that probably have been pawned; also a golden small pot and a small Aphrodite (statuette) are quoted: καὶ κυθρυδιν (*lege* χυτρίδιον) χρυ|κοῦν καὶ Ἀφροδιτάρειν. Note that about the statuette no material is specified.
 16. SB VIII 9834a 7, 15 (3rd? century CE; provenance unknown), list of pawned items, among which an Ἀφροδείτη is quoted twice: it was a statuette—probably from his wife or his mother’s dowry—that Theon had pawned and then redeemed.

Other Kinds of Document

17. P.Mil.Vogl. II 102, 4–5 (2nd century CE; Tebtynis), sale contract of a silver (?) statuette: ὁ[μο]||[λ]ογῶ πεπρ[ακέναι] σοι Ἀφροδίτην σὺν [βάσει] καὶ Ἐρωτι | ἀργυροῖς, “I declare to have sold you an Aphrodite with the base and an Eros, both made out of silver.”
18. P.Oxy. I 114, 9 (2nd–3rd century CE; Oxyrhynchos), letter of a woman, mainly a request to redeem many of her previously pledged items; among these an Ἀφροδίτη is quoted. No material is given: Bagnall and Cribiore 2006, 296, note that “the statue is presumably made out of metal rather than terracotta”; it is also possible that it was made out of the same material (tin) as the oil-flask quoted in l. 9–10. After the Ἀφροδίτη, indeed, we find: κῆαφιν, ληκύθιν κας|κιτέρινον μέγα καὶ τῆαμνον, “a water-basin, a large tin oil-flask, and an amphora.” If it is right, κας|κιτέρινον

should be related not only to ληκύθιν, but also to Ἀφροδίτη and κῆαφιν.

19. CPR I 21A has not been completely published, but only quoted in the edition of CPR I 21, 124, as a will of a woman. Carl Wessely, editor of CPR I 21, reported only the sentence where some bronze objects (χαλκᾶ κκεῖη) were described; among these also an Ἀφρ[οδίτην] (?) was quoted.

The majority of these documents are from Arsinoites (nos. 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 16, 17, and possibly 19), while only a few are from Oxyrhynchites (nos. 4, 7, 11, 14, and 18). Chronologically, all of them were written between the beginning of the 2nd and the middle of the 3rd century CE.

The statues of Aphrodite are not listed as dotal goods (φερνή) of the bride, but as part of the paraphernal items (παράφερνα): these are goods that the bride would have used daily, while the φερνή consisted of goods not for use, but to keep, like a “treasure.” This can be said not only for all ten of the quoted marriage contracts, but probably also for nos. 13, 16, 18, and possibly 14 and 19 too, where the statuette of Aphrodite can probably nevertheless be considered a “dotal” item.

As far as the item itself is concerned, this (probably small) statue was not described in specific terms, so we do not have any useful information about it; moreover, only one case, no. 4, specifies that Aphrodite is a statuette (ζῶδιον Ἀφροδίτης).¹⁰

We know, however, that most of them would have been made out of bronze (χαλκοῦν): see the (probably) thirteen cases of nos. [1], [2] (?), 3, 4 (?), 5, 6, 7, 8 (?), 9 (?), 10, 12 (?), 13 (?), and 19, vs. the very few cases in which the statuettes may have been made out of tin, nos. 4 (?; see l. 7 κας|κιτέρου, if the statuette was connected to the tin weight quoted just before it), and 18 (?); the single case of a possibly silver one (no. 17), and those where the statuette was described as made of gold (nos. 11, and 15?).

The only further information these texts offer us is that sometimes the statue was listed with a (wooden) coffret (θήκη),¹¹ where it might have been conserved: see nos. 1, 2, 6, and [7]. It is possible, too, that the coffrets were domestic shrines like the ones housing the statues in the temples (see possibly no. 12).¹²

Exactly thirty years ago, Fabienne Burkhalter¹³ studied these texts, both the marriage contracts and more or less all the other documentary papyri quoted above. It is to be noted that since then

very few papyrological occurrences of Aphrodite statuettes can be added as new ones.

After analyzing the names of the people involved, the chronological and geographical provenance of the documents, and the probable wealth of the bridal dowry, Burkhalter concluded that the infrequent presence of Aphrodite statues in the documentary papyri was due to the limited diffusion of the cult of Aphrodite as the equivalent of the Roman Venus. She thought this was a new (fashionable) cult imported from Rome and welcomed by the Greco-Roman élite living in Egypt, particularly during the 2nd to 3rd centuries CE, because they were much more open to receiving Roman influence than the Egyptian people.

I am not sure that all of this is right:¹⁴ as Burkhalter writes, it is certainly true that in comparison to the large number of marriage contracts,¹⁵ the texts attesting an Aphrodite statue are very few (only ten). Furthermore, according to Burkhalter, as far as we know, it is possible that some of the Aphrodite statuettes were (very) expensive, and that some of them were part of a rich dowry; and it is possible too that some of the people involved in the above-quoted documents may have considered Aphrodite as a form of Roman Venus.¹⁶ But it cannot be the *only one* possible conclusion, both because Aphrodite was quite well known all over the Egypt, and, above all, because she was closely connected with some other Egyptian female deities.¹⁷

So, regarding the onomastica and the residence and the places where the contracts were stipulated, I am not so sure that Burkhalter is completely right: it is true that many of the names involved in the marriage contracts are Greek and Roman, but some are Egyptian too, as the scholar herself affirms;¹⁸ furthermore, regarding proper names and their use, it is well known that fashions and the desire to upgrade from the social point of view could have mixed the playing cards and created confusion about the real ethnic origin of the single people.

Geographically speaking, many of the analyzed documents are somehow connected to the metropolis of the nomos or to Alexandria, but the number of documents itself is too limited for us to draw a certain conclusion.

Now it is time to go on to analyze all the other kinds of document attesting the name Ἀφροδίτη, whatever the word's actual meaning is, in order to observe how common this term was (at least) in Egypt.

Papyri.info gives us about 500 hits for the noun Ἀφροδίτη, plus about 80 for the itacistic form Ἀφροδείτη, there being—of course—no difference between them.

A.II. OCCURRENCES OF ἈΦΡΟΔΙΤΗ AS GODDESS NAME
Ça va sans dire, Ἀφροδίτη in any case refers to the Greek goddess born of the sea close to Cyprus. So, in the documentary texts from Greco-Roman Egypt, this name commonly specifies anything connected to her cult, from the temple, through the priests, to her images:¹⁹

- Temples: see, by way of example only, P.Brook. 22, 19, 27 (2nd century CE; provenance unknown); SB VI 9321, 9 (2nd century? CE; Bakchias); SB XIV 11652, 3 (2nd–3rd century CE; Arsinoites). On the temple of Aphrodite called *Aphrodision* see PSI IX 1016, 11–12 (129 BCE; Thebai) and some other texts from the same group (see PSI IX 1014–1025 introd., 16, note 1),²⁰ and more recently P.Bagnall 34 (1st–2nd century CE; Memphis), where an *Aphrodision* (l. 6), and a *dromos* of Aphrodite (ll. 8–9) are quoted.²¹

Her temples and/or related priests are sometimes associated with Hermes: see P.Iand. III 34, 3 (190 CE; Arsinoites); P.Lond. III 1164 g (p. 162), 5 (212 CE; Antinoe); or, more often, with Souchos, as shown by some Ptolemaic (about 100 BCE) papyri from Pathyris quoting priests of Aphrodite and Souchos: see P.Dryton I 3, 43; P.Grenf. I 25 col. II, 11; P.Grenf. II 33, 3; P.Grenf. II 35, 4, 16; P.Köln I 50, 28; P.Lond. III 676 (p. 14), 8; P.Lond. III 678 (p. 18), 5; P.Lond. III 1206 (p. 15), 22; P.Lond. III 1208 (p. 19), 14; P.Stras. II 89, 3. Moreover, we can remember UPZ I 119, 18 (156 BCE as confirmed in BL XII, 286; Memphis), which describes a *pastophorion* of Aphrodite ἐν τῷ Καρπείῳ; and, above all, SB XIV 11656, 36 (186/187 CE; Apollonopolites Heptakomias thanks to BL VIII, 374), which quotes a temple of Aphrodite and Isis; P.Zen.Pestm. 50, 1 (= PSI IV 328; 257 BCE; Aphroditopolis), where Egyptian priests of Aphrodite refer to the Egyptian goddess Hathor both as the Greek Aphrodite and the Egyptian Isis.²² Another interesting identification of Aphrodite with Hathor is in OGIS II 675 (88 CE; Kom Ombo), a dedication from a wealthy woman to Aphrodite: Petronia financed the construction and/or the decoration of a chapel, offering it to Aphrodite despite the

fact that the decorated scenes involved the Egyptian goddess Hathor.²³

- The name of the goddess can be found in some of the *agathe tyche* invocations: see, for example, BGU XX 2876 col. II, 3, 15 (160/161? CE; Arsinoites), and the recent contribution of Sippel 2020.
- Aphrodite is invoked in some letters too: see, for example, P.Bad. IV 51, 5 (2nd century CE; Herakleopolites), in which a woman writes: ἐνευχόμεν κοί τήν Ἀφροδίτην, “I pray to the goddess Aphrodite for you”; P.Giss.Apoll. 5, 17 (= P.Giss. I 23; 113–120 CE; Hermopolis), where the writer Eudaimonis writes to another woman, her daughter Aline, and quotes Ἀφροδῖτης Τὰ [ζβή] [τοσ, the same divinity as in P.Bremen 23, 52–53;²⁴ the late P.Wash.Univ. II 108, 6 (6th century CE; Oxyrhynchos), a love (or magic?) letter which quotes λαμπράειν ἡ Ἀφροδίτη, perhaps “Aphrodite [burns me] with torches.”
- An image of Aphrodite appears on the *sphragis* of a sigillo ring: see P.Köln II 100, 28 (133 CE; Oxyrhynchites): ἡ σφραγὶς Ἀφροδείτης; P.Stras. VI 546, 11 (155 CE; provenance unknown, but perhaps from Soknopaiou Nesos): [γλύματι Ἀφροδείτης, both of which relate to testamentary documents.
- Aphrodite could also be the name of a ship: see P.Bingen 77, 24 (2nd century CE; Alexandria?): Νίνου τοῦ Τουνεου(ς) ἄκατο(ς) Ζεὺς Ἀφροδείτη Σελήνη, “the ship of Ninos, son of Tounes, ‘Zeus, Aphrodite (and) Selene’” and the editor’s note at 343–344; and P.Worp 40, 5–6 (104 CE; Elephantine), where Κυθέρης could be the name of a ship. It could be a form for Κυθέρια = Κυθέρεια, an adjective used as another way of referring to Aphrodite. In P.Oxy. XXIV 2415, 49 (now dated to the 4th century CE thanks to BL XIII, 158; Oxyrhynchos), a ship is specified by its ensign: παρ(ά)κρημον Ἀφροδίτη καὶ Ἀπόλλων. It is interesting to note that the concept of Aphrodite as a sea-goddess is well known in Greek literature.²⁵ However, a further very significant point of connection can be found in Egypt, because in the Ptolemaic Period the famous Queen Arsinoe II Philadelphos—sister and wife of Ptolemaeus II—was associated and identified with Aphrodite (as well as with Hathor and Isis), and worshipped as “Lady of the Sea.” It is also important to note that the

same situation happened much later, in the 2nd century CE, to Emperess Faustina II, wife of Marcus Aurelius, who was represented as Isis Pharia “protectrice de la flotte frumentaire d’Alexandrie.”²⁶ It is a common opinion that the representation of Isis as “Lady of the Sea” is not from the pharaonic but the Ptolemaic Period. Nevertheless, it can be interesting to note that already in ancient pharaonic times we find Hathor worshipped as “Lady of Pnetw” (the ancient name of the port of Byblos),²⁷ and, as we have noted above, Isis and Hathor and later Aphrodite too were often connected with each other.

A.III. OCCURRENCES OF ἈΦΡΟΔΙΤΗ AS PERSONAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL NAME

Coming to the human field of investigation, we may observe the following data:

- Ἀφροδίτη is a personal (female, of course) name: TM Nam 1741 gives us 118 occurrences of 71 individuals. It is attested mainly from the 3rd century BCE to the 6th century CE. See, particularly, SPP XXII 157, 6 (4th century CE thanks to BL III, 239; Arsinoites), a λόγος χειρικμοῦ²⁸ θεᾶς Νεφρέμμιδος (l. 1) where a woman named Aphrodite is quoted; and SB IV 7399, 2 (144 CE; Elephantine) where Aphrodite is a *hetaira*.
- Ἀφροδίτη is well attested as a geographical name too; it can indicate different cities, villages, and minor places: TM Places lists more than 20 places, most of which are located in Egypt.

I think all this documentation, although not complete and exhaustive, enables us to understand that the situation was much more complex than it appears in Burkhalter’s research.

The cult of Aphrodite was not so restricted, and, above all, we know that the goddess was frequently closely connected with some Egyptian deities, such as—as already affirmed—Isis and Hathor.²⁹

B. ARCHAEOLOGICAL FINDS

The cult of Aphrodite is well documented not only by some of the above-quoted texts but also by many kinds of archaeological finds from Egypt.

Exempla of images of Aphrodite can be found in many museums, although they have been variously interpreted.³⁰ By way of example, I can quote the

bronze Aphrodite statuettes grouped by E. R. Williams because of their link to the Johns Hopkins University statuette.³¹ Two examples from the Ann Arbor Kelsey Museum of Archaeology can also be added to these,³² all of which are from 2nd- or 3rd-century CE Egypt (or the Mediterranean area). Some later examples are the female naked figurines, now stored at the Louvre, which can be considered ornaments on special items rather than independent objects. Unfortunately, neither their provenance, nor their actual dating is completely known.³³

There are more frequent attestations of terracotta statuettes of Aphrodite. I shall quote just some of them: for example, those in the Budapest Museum of Fine Arts,³⁴ and those now stored in the Louvre;³⁵ again, some cases of Aphrodite statuettes were collected by Françoise Dunand among “les terres cuites isiaques du Musée du Caire.” They might not be so many, compared to the complete number of terracotta statuettes she analyzed (368), but I think they may well illustrate the actual “problem” of this topic. As I have already said, at the beginning of the Ptolemaic era Aphrodite had been associated with Isis, the most important Egyptian goddess, as well as with Hathor. As a result, we may observe syncretistic representations of Isis-Hathor-Aphrodite in many museums all over the world. Dunand herself highlighted the different attributes and aspects that were part of the terracotta statuettes of Isis. In the Egypt of the Roman Period, this goddess “est devenue la principale divinité féminine, celle qui absorbe les fonctions et les attributions de toutes ses pareilles”; she is “la déesse égyptienne qui a été le mieux reçue et assimilée par les Grecs.”³⁶ So, if we observe at least the Cairo Museum terracotta statuettes depicting Isis (who is represented in various ways and with different attributes), the number of statuettes grows, as Isis can be associated with different Greco-Egyptian goddesses, and her cult can be represented under many different aspects.³⁷

I would like to add here the (small and of little worth) fragmentary Isis-Aphrodite from Arsinoe, now stored at the Istituto Papirologico «G. Vitelli» where I work.³⁸ The plaster statuettes of Aphrodite cannot be omitted either.³⁹ In any case the representation is often in a Greek style (as a naked or semi-naked woman, particularly underlining the sexual aspects), but the depicted character traits are by no means only Greek.

C. CONCLUSION

As other scholars have already noted,⁴⁰ I do also think that it is unlikely that the cult of Aphrodite was limited as Burkhalter’s research seems to indicate: it is much more probable that the papyrological occurrences we know illustrate a Greek name for a goddess (and particularly for her human representation) that was no longer actually Greek but the result of lengthy syncretistic activity. In this case, many different aspects belonging to Egyptian, Greek, Roman, and Near Eastern female deities could be blended together under the same goddess.

If this is true, we could say that the cult of Aphrodite was (well) known not only to the Greco-Roman élite who named and worshipped this goddess to highlight their own connection with their (presumed, but in effect no longer) mother country, but also to the Greco-Egyptian people, as the cheaper terracotta statuettes of Aphrodite appear to explain.

Aphrodite’s name, which was widely used for people and places in Egypt, confirms that the local (Greco-)Egyptian milieu also worshipped (or at least knew) this very beautiful goddess, who above all helped and protected the bride’s conjugal and maternal life,⁴¹ just like the Egyptian Isis and Hathor. If these aspects were typical of Venus too, I think Venus could also be added to the syncretism. However, her traits should not be thought of as the sole ones characterizing the statuettes of Aphrodite attested in the papyrological sources.

ABBREVIATIONS

For the sigla of the (Greek) papyrological series and *instrumenta*, see the *Checklist of Editions of Greek, Latin, Demotic, and Coptic Papyri, Ostraca, and Tablets*, online at Papyri.info, <https://papyri.info/docs/checklist>.

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NOTES

- ¹ For this subject, see, for example, Perpillou-Thomas 1993; Jördens 2020; and Arzt-Grabner 2016, particularly on the *klinai*, banquets in honor of a god.
- ² For representations of a female deity, particularly Hathor and some female figurines already used in pharaonic times in private and housing cults, see also Weiss 2015, 117–177, and particularly 131–132, 138–146; Nifosi 2019, 92–98, 112–114.
- ³ The editor’s reading ἐπι[θή]κην has been rightly corrected as [θή]κην: see BL IX, 326. Note that the Papyri.info version is slightly different, offering the transcription [χαλκήν] instead of [χαλκῶ] and [ξύλινην] instead of [ξύλινᾱ].
- ⁴ See Russo 2006, 192.
- ⁵ Both the reading and the possible meaning of κασιω[] are uncertain: see BL XIII, 162.
- ⁶ See BL IX, 344.
- ⁷ Bogaert 2000, 212, note 251, proposes a more exact datation: “Le texte a été daté du II^e siècle, mais, comme il mentionne la banque affermée d’Oxyrhynchos, on peut proposer une date plus précise, après 154.”
- ⁸ The text of the first edition has been corrected in Russo 2006, 198–199.
- ⁹ See also Rowlandson 1998, 181–182, no. 136.
- ¹⁰ The term ζώδιον is attested in epigraphic sources too: see LSJ, 758, s.vv. ζωδάριον II., and ζώδιον; more recently Bianchi 2007, 477. For the ζώδια quotation of P.Giss.Apoll. 6, 24 (= P.Giss. I 47), see note 12 herein.
- ¹¹ Some supposed composed forms (see the first edition of no. 2, συνθήκη, and that of nos. 1 and 6, ἐπιθήκη) are wrong, as rightly observed by Burkhalter 1990, 52, note 7. No. 3 also quotes a θήκη (l. 16, ζα.θηκην []), but, vs. Burkhalter 1990, 55, I am not sure it was a “coffret de l’Aphrodite,” mainly because of this possible but not certain reading.
- ¹² θήκη is the usual name for a box. It is attested about fifteen times in the papyrological documents where it means a box, or, more generally speaking, a container for different kinds of items: see, for example, BGU VI 1300, 17 (3rd–2nd century BCE; Arsinoites?), which quotes a box for a mirror (ὀξύπτρου θήκην, on which see BL II.2, 32 and more recently Bonati 2016, 339); P.Oxy. XLII 3080, 6 (2nd century CE; Oxyrhynchos): λαγύνιον ὑελούν cὺν θήκῃ, “glass flagon with case”; P.Giss.Apoll. 6, 24

- (= P.Giss. I 47; 116? CE thanks to BL XIII, 101; Hermopolis), where a θήκη is qualified as ξυλίνη (“wooden”). This case is interesting not only because it is the only one attesting directly the material of manufacture, but also because of its special description: the expression in l. 24, ὑπὸ τὰ ζώδια ξυλίνης θήκης, has been translated by the second editor, Michael Kortus (1999), as “Holztruhe für die Bildwerke” (100). Furthermore, he observes (101, note to l. 24) that the first editor’s opinion, “eine hölzerne Truhe, auf der Silberarbeiten in Form von Tierbildern angebracht sind,” is to be changed, thanks to Preisigke, *Wörterbuch*, II, 653–654, into “die hölzerne Truhe zur Unterbringung von Bildwerken.” Similarly, Schubart 1923, 74, no. 53, translated it as “Holzbehälter für die Tierfiguren,” while Johnson 1959, 445, no. 277, understood “the wooden box with animal reliefs.” I am not sure Kortus’s solution is the right one: ὑπό could mean “with,” following LSJ, 1875, s.v. C. IV.2; see also P.Basel II 44, 13 (235–269 CE; Theadelphia), a private letter in which the writer affirms, “I sent the camels laden with wine” (ἔπεμψα τὰ καμήλ(ια) ὑπὸ οἶνον); moreover, as for the article, it could be used here simply as a form of “possessive” (see LSJ, 1195, s.v. B.I); so the expression could be used to specify a (wooden) box on which some (possibly silver) figures of a very particular object were represented.
- ¹³ Burkhalter 1990.
 - ¹⁴ See also Russo 2005, 234–236.
 - ¹⁵ They counted about 150 at the time of the complete research of Yiftach-Firanko 2003.
 - ¹⁶ In the case of the Latin contract (no. 10), for example, the female deity may have been an “actual” Venus, or her name might just have been the Latin translation of Aphrodite.
 - ¹⁷ It is well known that she was connected particularly with Isis and Hathor; I will not go into this topic, nor the theological and religious matters, nor the extensive bibliography on it. I shall quote some observations of some scholars on this topic in the text and/or the notes. For example, for the connection between these goddesses in the field of magic, see also Suárez de la Torre 2020, particularly 64–66; Nifosi 2019, 123–124.
 - ¹⁸ See Burkhalter 1990, 54, note 19.

- ¹⁹ For some attestations, see, for example, Ronchi 1974, 182–190.
- ²⁰ See also Ronchi 1974, 180–181.
- ²¹ See P.Bagnall 34, 151, introduction. For other possible meanings of *Aphrodision* see P.Petrie Kleon 9, 40, note to l. 2. Relating to the *dromos* of Aphrodite, see also P.Mich. XXI 862 col. I, 9 (2nd century CE; from Karanis, but probably written in the Memphite nome) and the editors' notes.
- ²² See also Rowlandson 1998, 49, no. 23.
- ²³ See again Rowlandson 1998, 67, no. 43. In this case, following Burkhalter 1990, a Roman milieu is to be noted: here Petronia is probably the wife (apparently a widow?) of a Roman official or military man; furthermore, similarly the preceding Rowlandson 1998, 66, no. 42 is the (posthumous) dedication of a statue to Aphrodite from a woman with Roman citizenship.
- ²⁴ Some further notes in Bagnall and Cribiore 2006, 156–157.
- ²⁵ See, for example, P.Mil.Vogl. VIII 309 col. VI, 31, and the notes at 155, relating to the famous Posidippus's *Epigrams*; Barbantani 2005; Perale 2012.
- ²⁶ See Bricault 2000, particularly 147; the review by Françoise Dunand 2008 (*Chronique d'Égypte* 83, 165–166, 368–370) on Bricault, Laurent 2006. *Isis, Dame des flots*. Aegyptiaca Leodiensia 7. Liège: Centre Informatique de Philosophie et Lettres. On the connection between the Ptolemaic queens and Isis and Hathor, see also Malaise 2000, particularly 10; Malaise and Veymiers 2018, 471–478; and Minas-Nerpel 2019.
- ²⁷ This information is taken from Stephen Quirke's contribution "Substance Beyond Visible, Tangible, Audible: Assessing Cultural Exchanges in Middle Kingdom Lahun within a Longer Term History of Egypt." It was part of a two-day International Conference on Zoom: "Cultural Exchanges in Ancient Egypt. University of Kent, 10–11 June 2020," organized by Csaba La'da, with Ada Nifosi and Matthijs Wibier, during the beginning sad times of the Covid-19 pandemic.
- ²⁸ On this topic, see Battaglia 1984, particularly 98–99.
- ²⁹ This subject has been approached by many scholars, from different points of view: see, for example, Dunand 1979, 31–38; Malaise 2000, 6–13, particularly 8–9; and Ballet 2000, particularly 96–98. See also Ballet 1998, 237–239.
- ³⁰ Relating to Isis's identification with Aphrodite see also Ballet and Galliano 2010, 199–202; in the same volume Kaper 2010, particularly 177–180, highlights the importance of the Isis cult even in the area of the Oases, but he explains that her specific roles varied in Egypt from location to location. With regard to the more or less large quantity of Greek, Roman, and Middle Eastern deities documented by the Egyptian finds, the scholars are not unanimous: some say they were rarely limited to the Greek and Roman milieu, others affirm that statuettes (particularly those of Aphrodite), reflecting the daily-life cult, were found throughout Egypt. See, for example, Fjeldhagen 1995, 19, 69, no. 47; Török 1995, 28–29, no. 4. Relating to Pompei's representation of Aphrodite, see the marble statuette illustrated in Cappelli 1992, 153–154, no. 7; the bronze Aphrodite shown in Sirano 2018, 25; moreover, see the fresco representations where Aphrodite is sitting on a chair and is being approached by her lover Ares: see Bragantini and Sampaolo 2009, 256 (no. 105), 290 (no. 123), 292 (no. 125), 354–355 (no. 163). This kind of scene is interesting because it was often used to represent the house owners, as if to "upgrade" them to the gods' lifestyle. This explains how widespread these stories were among the (perhaps exclusively wealthy?) people and, above all, how it was important for these people, socially and religiously speaking, to be "close" to the deities. On the other hand, it can be interesting also to note some of the conclusions on pharaonic bronze statuettes in Hill 2019, particularly 44.
- ³¹ See Williams 1979.
- ³² See their representation in Burkhalter 1990, 56–57.
- ³³ See Bénazeth 1992, 217–220. Their provenance can be only supposed because they were bought. Relating to the dating, Bénazeth proposed "Époque: romaine tardive" and "Époque: copte (début)," which we can probably deem to be from the very end of the 3rd to the 5th/6th century CE.
- ³⁴ See Török 1995, 28–30 (nos. 4–5).
- ³⁵ See Dunand 1990, 29–32 (nos. 2–8).
- ³⁶ See Dunand 1979, particularly 31–38, quoted words on 38.

- ³⁷ See again Dunand 1979, 29–38, 171–210 (nos. 19–132).
- ³⁸ See Menci and Pesi 2012, 14, 56 (no. 8) (Tav. III.8).
- ³⁹ See, for example, Kassab Tezgör 1998, particularly 355–358.
- ⁴⁰ See also, for example, the notes of Török 1995, particularly 28–29 (no. 4), but also 29–30, for the Aphrodite Anadyomene statuette (no. 5).
- ⁴¹ For this aspect see also Rowlandson 1998, 258, pl. 28, particularly relating to no. 191 (= P.Oxy. I 114, here above no. 18).

