

Creating the Past: The Vénus de Milo and the Hellenistic Reception of Classical Greece

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Abstract

This article reexamines the well-known Hellenistic statue of Aphrodite from Melos (the Vénus de Milo), drawing on recently published archaeological evidence and archival sources relating to its excavation to propose a new reconstruction of the sculpture's original appearance, context, and audience. Although scholars have often discussed the statue as a timeless ideal of female beauty, the Aphrodite was in fact carefully adapted to its contemporary setting, the minor Hellenistic polis of Melos. With its conservative yet creative visual effect, the sculpture offers a well-preserved early example of the Hellenistic emulation of classical art, and opens a window onto the rarely examined world of a traditional Greek city during a period of dynamic change. The statue, it is argued, was set up within the civic gymnasium of Melos. Furthermore, Aphrodite likely held out an apple in token of her victory in the Judgment of Paris, as newly accessible sculptural fragments found with the statue demonstrate. The sculpture responds to and transforms both classical visual prototypes and earlier narratives of the Judgment, familiar to Greek audiences from the period of Homer onward. And the Aphrodite not only was appropriate for display within a gymnasium but indeed exemplifies a critical aspect of that institution's role during the Hellenistic period: the creation of a standardized and highly selective vision of the past to serve as a model for the present. Thus the statue, analyzed within its original context, greatly enhances our understanding of the reception of classical sculpture and mythological narrative in Hellenistic Greece.*

INTRODUCTION

The monumental statue of Aphrodite from Melos, dated ca. 150–50 B.C., represents one of the earliest and best-documented examples of the Hellenistic emulation and transformation of classical art (fig. 1).¹ The over-life-sized marble sculp-

ture echoed the visual format of a fourth-century B.C. cult statue of Aphrodite; its altered attributes and style, however, made the Hellenistic work appropriate for its new context, the Melos civic gymnasium.² In addition, sculptural fragments found with the statue and newly accessible for study suggest that the Aphrodite originally held an apple to signal her victory in the Judgment of Paris and to allude to her island home, Melos ("apple" in Greek) (figs. 2, 3).³ In so doing, the sculpture gave compelling visual form and local meaning to a myth canonical from the time of Homer onward, and interpreted in the Hellenistic period as an allegory for humankind's choice of a way of life.⁴ As Aphrodite held out her prize of victory, she encouraged the viewer to reflect upon the decision faced by Paris: what is best—political power, military success, or love? This article's reexamination of the celebrated statue, drawing on newly available archaeological evidence and archival sources relating to its excavation, can thus greatly enhance our understanding of the reception of classical sculpture and mythological narrative in Hellenistic Greece.

In the following discussion, I set the Aphrodite of Melos within its original context: the world of a minor Hellenistic city and in particular its gymnasium. While previous scholars have described the statue as a timeless ideal of female beauty, they have paid insufficient attention to its contemporary appearance and function, and to its calculated response to earlier images and texts. The narrowness of previous research, and the advantages to be derived from a wider inquiry, justify my investigation

*Thanks are due to Evelyn Harrison, Katherine Welch, R.R.R. Smith, Sheila Dillon, and the editors and anonymous readers of *AJA* for their extensive and very helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper; any errors are of course my own.

¹ Musée du Louvre, inv. no. MA 399. Most scholars agree on a date within the period ca. 150–50 B.C., although more precise dates are disputed; for a summary of recent views and general bibliography, see *LIMC* 2 (1984), s.v. "Aphrodite," 73–4.

² On the statue's fourth-century B.C. antecedents, see Kousser 2001, 12–6. The new publication by Marianne Hamiaux (1998, 41–50) of all the sculptures and fragments acquired with

the Aphrodite of Melos makes close analysis of the archaeological evidence possible. In addition, the topography of Melos in the Hellenistic period has been recently studied (Cherry and Sparkes 1982). Many archival sources relating to the discovery of the Aphrodite have recently been collected by de Lorris (1994), although they must still be supplemented with earlier material collected by Vogüé (1874). For a recent popular account of the statue's discovery and early history, see Curtis 2003.

³ Musée du Louvre, inv. no. MA 400–401.

⁴ I thank Tonio Hölscher for first suggesting this to me.



Fig. 1. Aphrodite, Melos, ca. 150–50 B.C. Paris, Musée du Louvre. (© Louvre, Dist RMN/P. Lebaude)

of a statue that is exceedingly well known but less well understood.⁵

The first of three broad sections reexamines written and visual accounts of the excavation of the

Aphrodite of Melos to offer a full restoration and architectural context for the statue. The second section uses the insights gained from this reconstruction to analyze the statue as a well-preserved and attractive, but in many ways conventional, example of the Hellenistic reception of classical culture. The final section opens to a broader consideration of the Hellenistic gymnasium—the initially surprising, but in fact highly appropriate, setting for this retrospective sculpture—and its role in preserving the classical past.

Much more than an athletic facility, the gymnasium of the Hellenistic period became the preeminent educational and cultural institution of the Greek cities.⁶ It furthermore served, in an increasingly cosmopolitan world, to define the essential components of Greek identity. With its conservative architectural forms and classicizing sculptures, the gymnasium provided a fitting site for athletic, military, and intellectual practices inherited from the Classical period. It thus helped create a culture of reception and retrospection that shaped later responses to the Greek past, from Roman times to the present.

In combination, the three sections outlined above bring into focus the importance of the Aphrodite of Melos for an understanding of civic art and culture in Hellenistic Greece. Scholars of Hellenistic sculpture have often stressed the critical role played by new patrons, particularly the ambitious and fabulously wealthy Hellenistic monarchs, in creating styles and genres radically at odds with those of the classical past.⁷ The Aphrodite of Melos—a monumental statue of an Olympian deity, executed in a classicizing style and set up in the gymnasium of a minor polis—exemplifies instead a different and often neglected aspect of Hellenistic art: its self-consciously retrospective quality, visible particularly in the public monuments of long-established Greek cities. When seen within this contemporary cultural and civic setting, the statue opens a window onto the rarely examined world of a traditional Greek city during a period of dynamic change. It demon-

⁵ The bibliography concerning the Aphrodite of Melos is immense. The two major studies of the statue's context are more than 100 years old (Reinach 1890; Furtwängler 1895, 367–401). The problem has been more recently though briefly treated by Corso 1995; Maggidis 1998; Ridgway 2000, 167–71; Beard and Henderson 2001, 120–3. Works drawing particularly upon the archival sources include de Marcellus 1840; Aicard 1874; Vogüé 1874; Doussault 1877; Alaux 1939; de Lorris 1994. More recent works, which primarily discuss questions of style,

include Charbonneaux 1959; Linfert 1976, 116–7; Pasquier 1985; Triante 1998. The best modern discussion of the Aphrodite as a copy occurs in Niemeier (1985, 142–3), again focusing primarily on style.

⁶ For an introduction to the Hellenistic gymnasium, see Delorme 1960; cf. Moretti 1977.

⁷ On Hellenistic monarchs and their role as patrons of art, see, e.g., Pollitt 1986, 19–46; see also Smith 1988; 1991, 19–32, 155–80, 205–37.



Fig. 2. Hand holding an apple, found together with the Aphrodite of Melos. Paris, Musée du Louvre MA 400. (© Louvre, Dist RMN/P. Lebaude)

strates both the conservative tendencies of a Hellenistic polis struggling to maintain its ties to the classical past and—as the statue transformed its classical models in terms of style, iconography, function, and meaning—the gulf between that idealized past and the reality of the city’s narrowly circumscribed present.

MELOS IN 1820: THE DISCOVERY OF THE APHRODITE

At the time of the Aphrodite’s discovery in 1820, the small Cycladic island of Melos was officially still part of the Ottoman empire, but its internal politics—and, significantly, the dispersal of its antiquities—were also subject to the influence of France:⁸ French naval officers stationed on the island encouraged and recorded the excavation of the Aphrodite and its associated sculptures; a French diplomat, backed by his country’s warship in the island’s harbor, purchased the statue; and the French king, Louis XVIII, subsequently acquired the work and donated it to the Louvre, where it remains to this day. The modern history of the

Aphrodite of Melos thus needs to be interpreted with the period’s political background in mind. In addition, the popularity of the statue at the time, and its attribution to a fifth-century B.C. student of Phidias, the great Athenian sculptor, should be understood in relation to the French desire to build a national collection of ancient sculpture to rival that of Britain, after the British Museum’s recent acquisition of the Elgin Marbles.⁹

Given the political circumstances attending the Aphrodite’s discovery, it is not surprising that the written and visual sources for the statue’s excavation are all French. Several have been recently republished, and all are worth examining in greater detail than is often done for the information they offer regarding the sculpture’s context and restoration. The most important include the account published by the French naval officer, Dumont d’Urville (1821); correspondence regarding the find between the French consul on Melos, Louis Brest, the consul general of Smyrna, Pierre David, and the ambassador to Constantinople, the marquis de Rivière (written at the time of the discovery but

⁸ On Melos, France, and the Ottoman empire in the early 19th century, see de Loris 1994; Curtis 2003, 3–36. On the 19th-century reception of the statue, see Hales 2002; see also Haskell and Penny 1981, 328–30; Curtis 2003, 50–163.

⁹ On the attribution to a fifth-century sculptor, see Reinach (1890, 384), with earlier bibliography. On rivalry between the Louvre and the British Museum, see Havelock 1995, 94; Beard and Henderson 2001, 120–3; Hales 2002, 253–4.

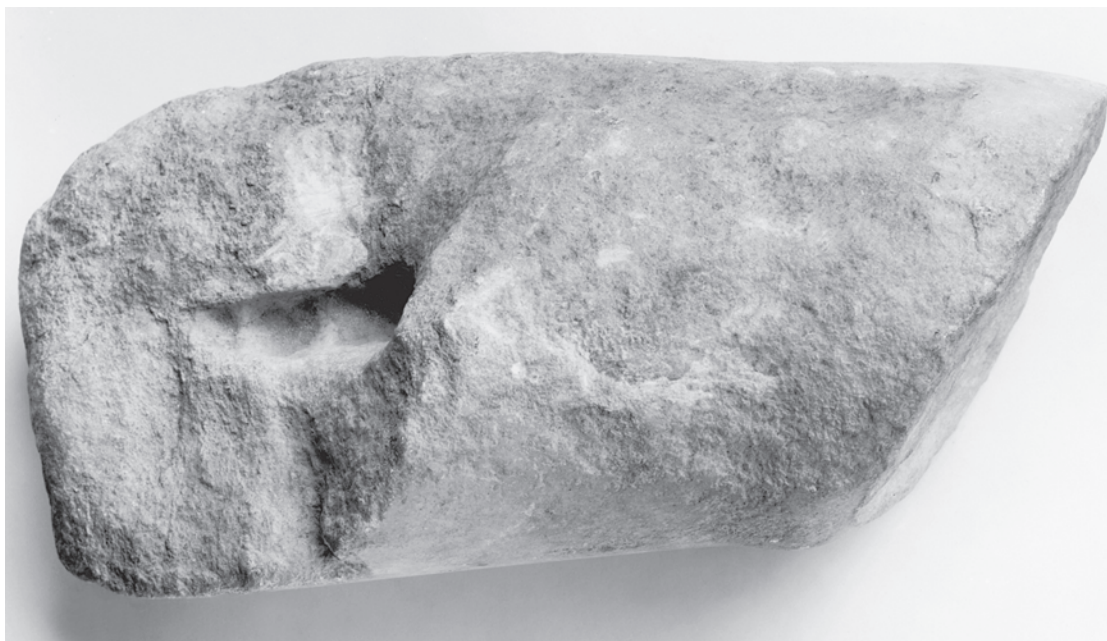


Fig. 3. Left upper arm found together with the Aphrodite of Melos. Paris, Musée du Louvre MA 401. (© Louvre, Dist RMN/Les frères Chuzeville)

not published until 1874); and the autobiography of the comte de Marcellus, de Rivière's secretary (1840).¹⁰ Of these, the letters are unadorned contemporary documents written by people involved with the discovery but giving only a fragmentary picture of events rather than a coherent narrative. De Marcellus' discussion, written later, presents the view of one not directly involved with the excavation. D'Urville's account is near contemporary, though possibly elaborated for publication, and written by one who viewed the results of the excavations but was not present for them. In addition, two drawings exist. The first is by Olivier Voutier, a French sailor and amateur archaeologist who was present when the statue was discovered (fig. 4). It shows the Aphrodite of Melos along with two herms.¹¹ The second drawing, showing the Aphrodite only, was done by A. Debay in 1821, after the statue arrived at the Louvre (fig. 5).¹²

¹⁰ D'Urville's narrative is quoted verbatim in Aicard 1874, while de Marcellus' account is preserved in his autobiography (de Marcellus 1840). The letters, found in the diplomatic archives of Smyrna and Constantinople, are assembled in Vogüé 1874.

¹¹ For an account of Voutier's life, his participation in the discovery of the Aphrodite, and excerpts from his memoirs, see Alaux 1939; de Lorris 1994; Curtis 2003, 3–9.

¹² The drawing was done for the painter Jacques-Louis David, then in exile in Belgium (Pasquier 1985, 40).

¹³ The date is given in a letter written three days later by a

Using these sources, a tentative history emerges as follows: On 8 April 1820, a Greek farmer digging in his field began to unearth the Aphrodite.¹³ He was encouraged by Voutier to continue, and excavated the statue and the two herms depicted in Voutier's drawing (figs. 6, 7).¹⁴ The Aphrodite had been sculpted in antiquity in two main parts (upper and lower body) and doweled together. It was uncovered with these two parts separated, and with some smaller pieces of drapery and hair also broken off.¹⁵ It was drawn in this condition by Voutier. At the same time, two fragments, a left hand holding an apple and an upper arm, were also found (figs. 2, 3).¹⁶ These were assumed by contemporaries to be associated with the Aphrodite. Brest, on 12 April, wrote to David describing the discovery of the two herms and "Vénus tenant la pomme de discorde dans sa main."¹⁷

The architectural surrounding in which the statues were found was subsequently destroyed, since

naval captain, Dauriac, who refers to the excavations. The letter is reprinted in Vogüé 1874, 162. For the circumstances of the discovery, see also Reinach 1890; Alaux 1939, 95–6; de Lorris 1994.

¹⁴ Musée du Louvre, inv. no. MA 405 (bearded) and MA 404 (unbearded).

¹⁵ Pasquier 1985, 24.

¹⁶ The fragments are Louvre MA 400 (hand) and MA 401 (arm); on their discovery, see Aicard (1874, 176), drawn from the account of d'Urville.

¹⁷ Vogüé 1874, 163.

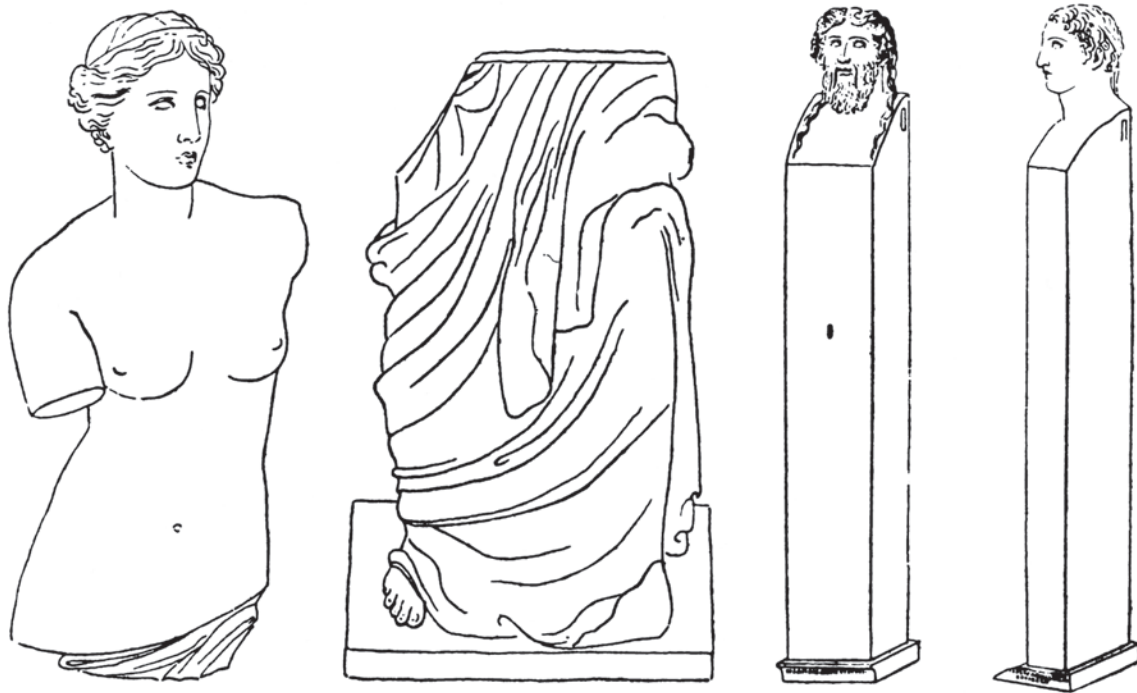


Fig. 4. The Aphrodite of Melos and two herms shortly after excavation. (Drawing by O. Voutier, 1820)

it lay on a Greek farmer's arable land. Some descriptions of its appearance are preserved, however. Brest later described the area to architect Charles Doussault as a hemispherical niche, with the Aphrodite in the center and the herms flanking her. From his testimony, Doussault made a sketch, which Brest agreed fit his recollections (fig. 8).¹⁸

D'Urville, when he viewed the statue three weeks after its excavation, described an "espace de niche," surmounted by an inscription, which he transcribed.¹⁹ According to d'Urville, the inscription read, "Bakchios, son of Satios, assistant gymnasiarch, [dedicated] this exedra and this [?] to Hermes and Herakles."²⁰ The letterforms transcribed by d'Urville suggest that the inscription dates to ca. 150–50 B.C. It has since been lost.²¹ No prosopographical information is available about the dedicator. His name is unusual: although Bakchios is a fairly common Greek name, Satios is otherwise unattested.²² Commenta-

tors have suggested that the name be emended as Sattos (a well-known Greek name of the period) or S. Atios (i.e., Sextus Atius), the name of an old and well-established plebeian Roman family.²³

A second inscription from Melos, likewise lost, was recorded by Debay at the Louvre in 1821 in his drawing of the Aphrodite (fig. 5). In the drawing the fragmentary inscription serves as the statue's plinth and reads "[?]andros son of [M]enides of [Ant]ioch-on-the-Maeander made [it]."²⁴ It too has an approximate date of ca. 150–50 B.C., according to the letterforms.

Several other sculptural fragments were found at approximately the same time and have entered the Louvre collections. A third herm was found in the same area shortly after the original discoveries (fig. 9). A foot wearing a sandal, likely found near the sepulchral caves of Klima, was also added to the collection.²⁵ Two additional arms were presented

¹⁸ The conversation, however, took place in 1847, and Doussault's drawing was published only in 1877, so the information depends on memories recorded long after the event (Doussault 1877).

¹⁹ Aicard 1874, 175.

²⁰ *IGXII.3.1091*: Βάκχιος Σ' Ἀτίου ὑπογυ[μνασιαρχή]σας/ τάν τε ἐξέδραν καὶ τὸ -- / Ἑρμῆα Ἡρακλεῖ.

²¹ Pasquier 1985, 83–4.

²² *RE* 2 (1896), s.v. "Attios/Atius."

²³ Sattos: Collignon in *IGXII.5.1091*; S. Atios: de Clarac 1821.

²⁴ *IG XII.3.1241*: --ανδρος Μηνίδου/[Ἀντ]ιοχεὺς ἀπὸ Μαιάνδρου/ἐποίησεν. D'Urville also described a herm base with an inscription that he considered too weathered to be legible; its present whereabouts are unknown (Aicard 1874, 179).

²⁵ Herm: Musée du Louvre, inv. no. MA 403; foot: MA 4794 (Hamiaux 1998, fig. 56). On the location of the foot, see de Lorris (1994, 61), quoting de Marcellus. The third herm and foot had already been discovered by the time de Marcellus arrived on the island on 23 May 1820 (de Marcellus 1840, 190–1).

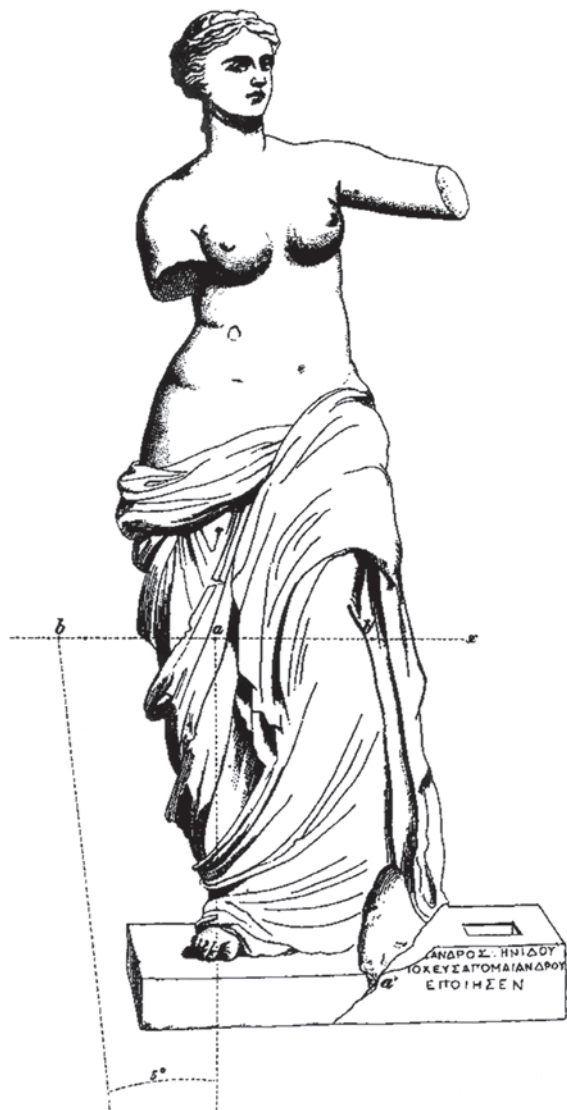


Fig. 5. Aphrodite of Melos, with plinth. (Drawing by A. Debay, 1821) (Salomon 1895, pl. 1) (Courtesy Albert Bonniers Förlag)

to de Rivi re upon his visit and claimed as nearby finds. This presentation, however, took place six months after the excavation of the Aphrodite, and so the association of the finds with the goddess

might be suspect.²⁶ The gymnasiarch's inscription, and perhaps the inscription associated with the Aphrodite, were also presented to the ambassador at this time.²⁷

The French, despite their early interest in the statue, had some difficulty securing it. Brest had alerted David four days after the statue's discovery but could not afford to buy it.²⁸ D'Urville saw the statue on 19 April, and presented a written account of it to de Marcellus shortly thereafter in Constantinople. His description attracted the attention of de Rivi re, who gave de Marcellus permission to visit Melos and acquire the statue while on a diplomatic mission to the Cyclades.²⁹ De Marcellus arrived on Melos on 23 May 1820, a little over a month after the statue's discovery. In the meantime, the Greek farmer who discovered the statue had received another offer from Oikonomos Verghi, an inhabitant of Melos wishing to present the Aphrodite to Nicolas Morusi, interpreter at the Arsenal of Constantinople.³⁰ The statue had actually been loaded on a ship bound for Constantinople and Morusi when the French intervened, and de Marcellus bought the Aphrodite on behalf of de Rivi re for 834 piastres.³¹ At the same time, de Marcellus also acquired the three herms, the hand with the apple, the arm fragment, and the marble foot.³² The statues were then sent to France, bought by Louis XVIII for LL 299, and set up in the Louvre.³³

THE RECONSTRUCTION OF THE APHRODITE

The Aphrodite of Melos, perhaps because of the dramatic circumstances of its excavation and acquisition by the French, or because of its prominent placement in the Louvre, early on attracted scholars' frequent and diverse reconstructions. Salomon Reinach and Adolf Furtw ngler enunciated two opposing viewpoints in the 1890s.³⁴ More recently, the scholarly focus has shifted from an analysis of the statue's context to an examination of its style, with particular emphasis on close dating and connections to regional artistic centers.³⁵ In a 1998 article, for instance, Christofilis Maggidis discusses

²⁶ Only one arm is mentioned in the Louvre catalogue (inv. no. MA 402). On it, see Hamiaux 1998, fig. 55; cf. the account in Furtw ngler 1895, 375.

²⁷ De Lorris 1994, 66 (de Marcellus).

²⁸ The letter from Brest to David is given by Vog   1874, 163; Dauriac, in a letter to David, notes that the Greek farmer wanted 1,000 piastres for the statue and that Brest, though he wished to buy the statue, could not afford to do so (Vog   1874, 162).

²⁹ De Marcellus 1840, 190–1.

³⁰ Pasquier 1985, 25.

³¹ Pasquier 1985, 25; for a rather dramatic account of the affair, see Curtis 2003, 26–33.

³² De Lorris 1994, 59–61 (de Marcellus); de Marcellus 1840, 198.

³³ Hamiaux 1998, 44.

³⁴ Reinach 1890; Furtw ngler 1895, 367–401.

³⁵ For general discussions of the work's style, see Alscher 1957, 81–3; Charbonneaux 1959; Pasquier 1985; Havelock 1995, 93–7; Ridgway 2000, 167–71; on its connections to re-

the Aphrodite's style, carving technique, and reconstruction (largely endorsing Furtwängler's views) but aims primarily to set the work within the context of Melian sculptural production and to connect it with the workshop that produced the Hellenistic Poseidon from the same island.³⁶ A re-evaluation of the sculpture's reconstruction must consequently begin with the theories put forward by Reinach and Furtwängler, which I will evaluate in light of Maggidis' discussion and other recent research.

In an influential article of 1890, "La Vénus de Milo," Reinach discussed the context in which the Aphrodite of Melos was discovered, and the evidence this furnished for possible reconstructions.³⁷ Examining the various contemporary accounts of the sculpture's discovery, he argued that the other sculptures and fragments found along with the Aphrodite were not a coherent group but were, instead, a later assemblage brought together in a post-Antique lime kiln and fortunately preserved.³⁸ Although he admitted that early visitors described an architectural niche surmounted by the gymnasiarch's inscription, he concluded that the niche did not preserve an authentic ancient setting, and that the inscription had nothing to do with the statue.³⁹ Furthermore, because d'Urville did not describe the inscription preserving the artist's signature, Reinach disassociated this signature from the Aphrodite, and argued that Debay's drawing was simply an imaginary reconstruction; if the inscription had in fact fitted the statue so well, he suggested, it would still be preserved.⁴⁰

Reinach's theory that the Aphrodite of Melos was found in a lime kiln, and thus had no necessary connection to the sculptures and inscriptions with which it was found, left the statue without a context, date, or artist. This permitted Reinach to suggest his own dating, based on the style of the piece. He posited a date in the late fifth century B.C. and a sculptor who was a student of Phidias.⁴¹ Reinach also dissociated the hand holding the apple from the statue, admitting that while the marble was the same, and that it fit the scale of the Aphrodite "to a millimeter," the workmanship was far inferior to the rest of the sculpture.⁴² While he provided a history and critique of previous reconstructions, Reinach did not propose one of his own.



Fig. 6. Bearded herm found together with the Aphrodite of Melos, second century B.C. Paris, Musée du Louvre MA 405. (© Louvre, Dist RMN/P. Lebaude)

The flaws in Reinach's argument are well exposed by the more thorough consideration of the evidence in Furtwängler's *Meisterwerke der Griechischen Plastik*

gional centers, see esp. Linfert 1976, 116–7; Maggidis 1998; Triante 1998.

³⁶ Maggidis 1998.

³⁷ Reinach 1890, 376–94.

³⁸ Reinach 1890, 382.

³⁹ Reinach 1890, 380.

⁴⁰ Reinach 1890, 383–4.

⁴¹ Reinach 1890, 384.

⁴² Reinach 1890, 388.



Fig. 7. Beardless herm found together with the Aphrodite of Melos, second century B.C. Paris, Musée du Louvre MA 404. (© Louvre, Dist RMN/P. Lebaude)

of 1893. Furtwängler argued vehemently against Reinach's theory of a lime kiln. He examined the contemporary accounts and separated the material excavated at the same time as the Aphrodite (the herms, the hand and arm fragments, and the inscriptions) from that discovered later or elsewhere (the foot, additional arm fragments). Taken together, these pieces appeared less like the random assortment of a lime kiln than a purposeful sculptural assemblage, since they consisted of three or four near-complete statues and inscriptions that might reasonably be associated with them. Furtwängler suggested that the hand and arm fragments

found with the Aphrodite should in fact belong to the statue, as early viewers had believed.⁴³

My own examination of the fragments revealed that they are made of a pure white, small-grained marble analogous to that of the Aphrodite, and are weathered on the upper surfaces to the same yellowish tinge.⁴⁴ The scale is appropriate for a statue of the Aphrodite's size, and the technique is comparable.⁴⁵ In each case, the flesh is smoothly carved, while other surfaces, such as the apple, are more roughly executed and still show the marks of the claw chisel. Finally, both fragments exhibit the remains of dowel holes, demonstrating that they were attached through a "piecing" process analogous to that of the statue: the hand has a small oval hole visible where the wrist breaks off, and the arm has a larger oval extending parallel to the length of the arm (figs. 10, 11). The size and shape of the dowel hole in the arm suggested to Furtwängler that it



Fig. 8. Aphrodite of Melos in its original setting. (Drawing by the architect Charles Doussault, aided by Louis Brest, from a conversation in 1847, published in 1877)

⁴³ Furtwängler 1895, 367–78.

⁴⁴ The hand fragment has yellowish weathering on the side of the palm, presumably upturned to display the apple. The lower edge of the arm (opposite the dowel end) has a slight crease, perhaps signaling the beginning of the elbow; it is in

the area of this crease that the yellowish weathering is discernible. The bottom surfaces of hand and arm are paler and grayer, perhaps through more limited exposure to the elements.

⁴⁵ E.g., the arm is 13 cm in width, comparable to the preserved portion of Aphrodite's right arm.



Fig. 9. Beardless herm found together with the Aphrodite of Melos, second century B.C. Paris, Musée du Louvre MA 403. (© Louvre, Dist RMN/P. Lebaude)

was part of the same dowel visible on the left shoulder of the Aphrodite, although it did not join. This seems possible, given the oblong shape of both, the fact that they are located in the same part of the arm, and their size (fig. 12).⁴⁶

Furtwängler consequently concluded that the statue should be reconstructed as an Aphrodite holding an apple, the most plausible hypothesis al-

though by no means a certain one. And he connected the apple not only with the Judgment of Paris but also with the name Melos.⁴⁷

Furtwängler suggested, furthermore, that the sculptor's inscription recorded by Debay should indeed be associated with the Aphrodite. He adduced as evidence the arguments preserved in the comte de Clarac and quatemère de Quincy's early publications about whether the signature was original or a later replacement, which suggested that its connection to the statue was beyond dispute.⁴⁸ He also considered that the inscription's disappearance was "only a proof of its genuineness," since it identified the statue as coming from the Hellenistic era and an unknown artist instead of a fifth-century student of Phidias.⁴⁹ Since Debay's drawing showed a square hole in the plinth above the inscription, Furtwängler reconstructed the Aphrodite with her lower arm resting on a waist-high pillar, and her hand holding the apple facing palm up (fig. 13).⁵⁰

Recently Maggidis has reiterated the arguments in support of Furtwängler's hypothesis. He has drawn particular attention to the evidence offered by the statue's fragmentary base (e.g., the roughly carved surface of the diagonal left side and the dowel hole for the left foot, now filled in plaster).⁵¹ He has also examined the flat front portion of the base, which is neither square with the other preserved sides nor as finely worked, and has proposed that here, too, an additional piece was added to complete the plinth.⁵² It is plausible, as Maggidis argues, that the Aphrodite had one or several attachments, which extended the statue forward to support the projecting left foot, and to the left to continue the line of the drapery. A support for the left arm would also be appropriate, since it seems to have extended away from the body, and no struts are preserved.⁵³ However, Maggidis is less convincing in his argument that the base drawn by Debay best fits the statue's requirements.⁵⁴ My own examination of the statue and the drawings of the base has led me to view this part of the reconstruction skeptically: first, because the base directly joins

⁴⁶ Furtwängler 1895, 367; Saloman 1895, 23–4. The dowel hole in the shoulder of the Aphrodite is approximately 6.5 cm long, while that in the arm is at its smallest 4 cm long.

⁴⁷ Furtwängler 1895, 369, 381–2. Coins of Melos from the fourth to first centuries B.C. generally showed an apple on the obverse, so the connection was presumably familiar to contemporary viewers (Wroth 1976, 103–5, nos. 1–31).

⁴⁸ de Clarac 1821; de Quincy 1821.

⁴⁹ Furtwängler 1895, 369.

⁵⁰ As he noted, other copies of the Aphrodite of Capua type use a pillar support, e.g., a Late Antique statuette now in Dresden,

and other Aphrodite types show the goddess holding an apple and resting an arm on a pillar. Late Antique statuette: Dresden, Albertinum 191. For Aphrodite holding an apple, see, e.g., Mollard-Besques 1954–1986, 2:pl. 27b.

⁵¹ Maggidis 1998, 177–80.

⁵² Maggidis 1998, 180–1.

⁵³ Maggidis 1998, 180.

⁵⁴ Maggidis does not in fact provide an illustration of the Debay drawing (here fig. 5) nor of the same base, drawn by Voutier as the plinth for a herm (here fig. 4). He shows only Furtwängler's reconstruction (here fig. 13; his fig. 7).

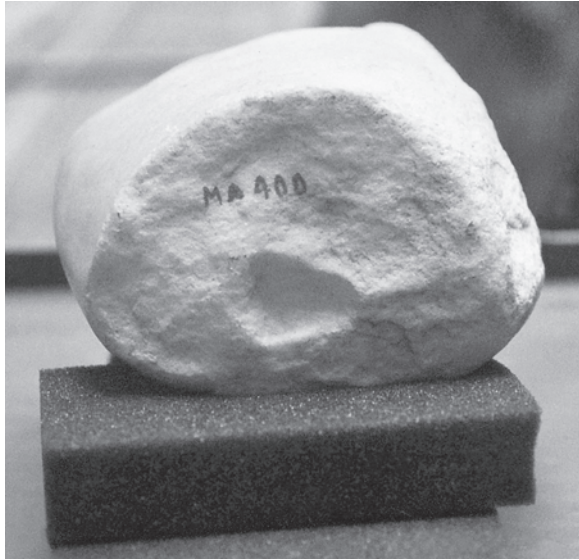


Fig. 10. Hand found with the Aphrodite, showing the dowel hole. (R. Kousser)



Fig. 11. Arm found with the Aphrodite, showing the dowel hole. (R. Kousser)

the Aphrodite but includes no foot or drapery fragments, and second, because it appears in Voutier's drawing as the base for one of the herms, suggesting that it also fit well there. However, in the absence of the fragment, no definitive conclusion is possible, as Marianne Hamiaux has argued in her recent publication of the statues for the Louvre.⁵⁵

Since Furtwängler suggested that the sculpture was found in situ, its location and architectural surroundings took on a new importance. Both Brest and d'Urville describe the place in which the Aphrodite was found as a "niche"; the Greek farmer unearthed stones suitable for building a house, which suggests an architectural structure.⁵⁶ The niche was surmounted by the gymnasiarch's inscription, restored by Furtwängler as a dedication of "the exedra and the [agalma ('sculpture')]" (i.e., the niche and the Aphrodite).⁵⁷

Some scholars, arguing from the inscription and reconstructing the patron's name as S. Atius, have claimed the Aphrodite as a *Roman* work of art.⁵⁸ Their view of the statue fits in with much recent scholarship on late Hellenistic sculpture, which stresses the *romanitas* of such works, and sees the

Romans as the catalyst for the development of major artistic genres, for instance, the female nude, and styles such as neoclassicism.⁵⁹ This is a reasonable interpretation of the available evidence but not an inevitable one. It is not clear, for instance, that the inscription refers to the statue, and indeed one might wonder why the image of a goddess, Aphrodite, would be dedicated to two gods, Hermes and Herakles.⁶⁰ More broadly, scholars' focus on the possible Roman patron of the Aphrodite of Melos has tended to obscure the significance of its context. As Furtwängler argued, exedrae like the one in which the statue was found were often funded by gymnasiarchs, formed part of gymnasia, and were used for teaching or for the display of statues, as here. He consequently suggested that the statue was set up within the civic gymnasium of Melos.⁶¹ The statue's appropriateness for a Hellenistic gymnasium context and for its primary audience, the young Greek students and athletes in attendance, will be the central focus of attention here.

As has been suggested, Furtwängler's argument, based on close reading of the primary sources and

⁵⁵ Hamiaux 1998, 41.

⁵⁶ Aicard 1874, 175; Furtwängler 1895, 375.

⁵⁷ The evidence for the restoration of the word *agalma* comes from a preserved diagonal slash at the beginning of the word, which Furtwängler (1895, 377) suggested was an alpha; the rest of the word is lost.

⁵⁸ Maggidis 1998, 193–4.

⁵⁹ E.g., Zanker 1974; Havelock 1995 (cf. Marvin 1996); Fulleton 2003, 108–12.

⁶⁰ I thank Brunilde Ridgway for bringing my attention to this question.

⁶¹ On gymnasiarchs, see Giovannini 1993; cf. Rostovtzeff 1941, 1059–60; Moretti 1977, 489. On gymnasium exedrae, see Delorme 1960, 325–8; von Hesberg 1995, 18–20.



Fig. 12. Left side of Aphrodite of Melos. (© Louvre, Dist RMN/Les frères Chuzeville)

supported by appropriate archaeological comparisons, makes the best use of the available evidence and is lent additional plausibility by more recent investigations. Further excavation, or the rediscovery of the lost inscriptions, might contradict it, but for now it stands as the most convincing reconstruction of the Melian Aphrodite appearance and context. Reinach's hypothesis of a lime kiln, by contrast, disregards contemporary accounts and unjustifiably brings together a heterogeneous collection of sculpture discovered at different times and in different areas. His attempt to remove the Aphrodite of Melos from its original context allows him to assign the statue to a more prestigious date and sculptor, and it may be suspected that this desire to link the statue



Fig. 13. Reconstruction of the Aphrodite proposed by Adolf Furtwängler. (Furtwängler 1895) (Courtesy Charles Scribner's Sons)

with the illustrious fifth century influenced his interpretation of the archaeological evidence.

I use Furtwängler's reconstruction as the starting point for my own analysis of the Aphrodite of Melos and its transformation of the classical past. To this I will now turn.

THE RECEPTION OF STYLE: RETROSPECTION IN HELLENISTIC SCULPTURE

The Aphrodite of Melos—visually impressive, widely famous, and Greek in origin—has sometimes been claimed by scholars as a Greek “original,” the model for many subsequent Hellenistic and Roman versions (e.g., fig. 14).⁶² Recent discoveries, however, cast doubt on this hypothesis. Most notably, a

⁶² E.g., Havelock 1995, 97.

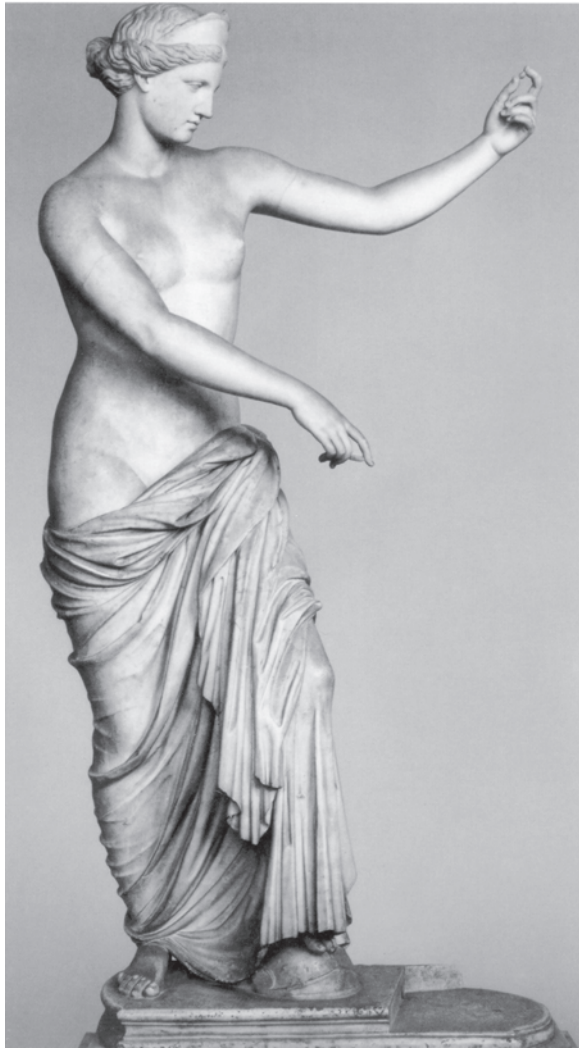


Fig. 14. Venus, Amphitheater, Capua, Hadrianic. Naples, Museo Nazionale 6017. (Shwanke) (Courtesy DAI, neg. 83.2259)

terracotta statuette from Corinth, securely dated to the late fourth to early third centuries B.C., suggests that the visual format was familiar long before the Melian sculpture was created.⁶³ Instead of insisting upon the statue's originality, one might more fruitfully consider it as a creative, but also deliberately retrospective, work of art. As Furtwängler and others have argued, in its pose and drapery the Melian sculpture echoed a classical type known as the Aphrodite of Capua, likely created as a cult

statue in Corinth; indeed, it belonged to a varied and extensive series of Hellenistic adaptations of the type.⁶⁴ Furthermore, in its style, the statue drew selectively on classical precedents to achieve an impressive, elevated air. But these sources of classical inspiration were filtered through a Hellenistic sensibility, seen, for example, in the statue's "baroque" drapery and sensuous flesh. The end result was a visually compelling work that appeared deeply rooted in the past but also vividly contemporary. In this way it was a characteristic product of Hellenistic art.

The Melian statue's relationship to its classical model should first be considered. While the Corinthian statue has not been preserved, the later versions of the type are remarkably consistent in their visual format and allow us to reconstruct this aspect of the original with confidence. In each work the goddess stands with her weight on the right leg, with the left leg bent; the left foot, no longer preserved in the Melian statue, was slightly elevated. Often, as on Melos, Aphrodite's upper body and especially her head turn toward the left side, and her level gaze is also directed out to the left. The overall impression given by the pose is of a dynamic, three-dimensional, and open form. The drapery, like the pose, is consistently replicated: a mantle wrapped about the hips with a thick roll at the waist, one end draped over the left knee and falling between the legs, and a heavy diagonal fold of fabric starting at the right knee. This pose and drapery form the visual signature of the type.

But while the Aphrodite of Melos adopted a familiar visual format—one similar to other half-nude Greek images of the love goddess, such as the Aphrodite of Arles—the Melian statue, like the other later versions of the type, departed from the model in the position of the arms and in its attributes. The classical statue, likely set up in the Temple of Aphrodite on the Acropolis of Corinth, seems to have held out a shield in celebration of military victory. Its model, however, offered only a starting point for later artists' imaginative reworkings of the type.⁶⁵ The more than 300 Hellenistic and Roman versions of the Aphrodite of Capua ranged widely in their appearance, including, for instance, an amorous Venus embracing Mars in the Augustan

⁶³ I thank Gloria Merker for sharing this information with me from her upcoming monograph on the tile works of Corinth. Several other terracotta statuettes from Corinth, likely dating before the sack of the city in 150 B.C. by L. Mummius, also suggest that the model was a Corinthian statue created well before the Melian one; on these terracottas, see Broneer 1930,

fig. 45; Davidson 1952, pl. 18.222.

⁶⁴ Furtwängler 1895, 384–5; on the Hellenistic variants, see Kousser 2001, 48–54.

⁶⁵ Roman versions of the Aphrodite of Capua type from Corinth offer the best clues to the type's initial appearance and function; they include marble statuettes, lamps, coins, and

Forum, and a martial Victoria flanked by trophies on the Column of Trajan.⁶⁶ Too numerous to catalogue here, these many versions merit further investigation, and I discuss them in another forum.⁶⁷ For now, it must suffice to recognize that the Melian Aphrodite was also a creative adaptation of its classical model. Because of the present fragmentary condition of the statue's arms, one cannot reconstruct them with certainty. However, the fragments suggest that this Aphrodite gestures with her right arm toward the left, rests her left elbow on a support, and holds an apple palm up in that hand (fig. 13).⁶⁸ As such, the statue represents Aphrodite as the winner of the Judgment of Paris. The image's iconography is less martial than that of many other Hellenistic and Roman versions, though no less victorious.

The sculptor of the Aphrodite of Melos responded not only to the visual format of a particular statue type but more broadly to a range of earlier and contemporary artistic styles. Above all, he altered the effect of the statue's classical iconographic format by executing it in a thoroughly Hellenistic manner: an eclectic mixture of neo-classical and "baroque" features.⁶⁹ The drapery, the nude upper body, and the face offer particularly good examples of his method. The drapery, for instance, is carved in a bravura Hellenistic style, with deeply undercut folds of cloth that create a richly varied play of light and shadow. These contrasts, and the fabric's strongly diagonal folds,

adapt the baroque style of works such as the Altar of Zeus at Pergamon to create a sense of energy and excitement in an otherwise rather static figure.⁷⁰ With the upper body of the Aphrodite of Melos, the sculptor looked elsewhere for inspiration. The soft, fleshy contours of the torso, with its slender waist, spreading belly, and broad hips, recall Hellenistic goddesses such as the Medici and Capitoline Aphrodites, and especially the "Crouching Aphrodite" type. Here the artist drew upon the extensive development of the female nude in Hellenistic art to give a convincing representation of a heavyset, almost matronly, image of the mature goddess.⁷¹ And finally, as Maggidis has shown, the sculptor used classical elements for the head—for example, the small, extremely regular eyes and mouth; the strongly delineated brow line, eyelids, and nose bridge; the full lower face and heavy chin—combined with typically Hellenistic ones, such as the "Venus rings" of the neck and the smooth but fleshy rendering of the skin.⁷² The neoclassical style helps to impart an impressive appearance to an over-life-sized statue of a major Olympian goddess.

As these examples suggest, the sculptor of the Aphrodite of Melos did not intend to create an entirely original work of art, but he did not simply copy a model either. Hellenistic sculptors were, of course, eminently capable of precise copying—a version of Polykleitos' *Diadoumenos*, executed ca. 100 B.C. on nearby Delos, furnishes a good ex-

a recently discovered wall painting, which consistently show the goddess holding a shield in her outstretched arms. For the Roman statuettes, see Soles 1976, 43–58; for lamps, see Broneer 1930, 98–9, 192; for coins, see Edwards 1933, nos. 101, 175, 208; for the wall painting, see Gadbery 1993, 61–4. On the type's original context, see Kousser 2001, 12–6.

⁶⁶ On the Forum Augustum statue, see Kleiner 1981; on the Victoria from the Column of Trajan, see, e.g., Wegner 1931, 62–72.

⁶⁷ On the more than 300 Hellenistic and Roman versions of the Aphrodite of Capua type, see Kousser 2001.

⁶⁸ The argument for the restoration of the Aphrodite of Melos is as follows: The right shoulder is lower than the left, and the remains of that arm pressed closely to the goddess' side. The arm seems to have been held in place by a tenon extending from the body at waist level; the hole for the tenon is still visible, though filled in plaster. Generally, in preserved copies of the Aphrodite of Capua type, the right arm crosses the body at waist level, directing the viewer's attention again towards the left side, and this also seems likely here. The position of the right hand is unclear. D'Urville states that it grasped the drapery at the waist, but he gives no evidence for this assertion (Aicard 1874, 176). Furtwängler (1895, 382–3) suggested that it rested on the left knee, as the drapery was drawn up on this side, but although the surface of the knee is weath-

ered, no breaks or remains suggest that a hand was attached to it. On the left shoulder, the oval dowel hole shows that the arm was worked separately and attached, and may be associated with the left arm fragment, as discussed above. Judging from the orientation of the dowel holes, the arm extended outward and slightly down from the shoulder (figs. 11, 12) (Saloman 1895, 23–4). The hand was likewise doweled to the lower arm, although again the fragments do not join. The ring and little fingers wrap closely around the apple, while the others, originally extended, have been broken off (fig. 2). The hand presumably rested on a support, perhaps a pillar, as in other Hellenistic half-draped statues of Aphrodite (e.g., Mollard-Besques 1954–1986, 2: pl. 27b). In the case of the Aphrodite of Melos, a pillar might usefully have shielded the left side of the statue from close viewing; the drapery on this side is executed in a much more summary fashion than that of the right side, with broad flat swathes of fabric interrupted only by a few sketchy folds (fig. 12).

⁶⁹ On the concept of the Hellenistic "baroque," see Pollitt 1986, 111–26.

⁷⁰ Pollitt 1986, figs. 99–107.

⁷¹ Stewart 1990, pls. 503, 719–720. On Aphrodite in the Hellenistic period, see also Neumer-Pfau 1982; von Prittwitz and Gaffron 1988; Havelock 1995; Zanker 1998.

⁷² Maggidis 1998, 184.

ample⁷³—but this practice remains the exception rather than the rule. More frequently, sculptors treated earlier models in a contemporary manner—for instance, in the Hellenistic version of the Athena Parthenos executed for the Library of Pergamon⁷⁴—or combined disparate sculptural precedents into a new synthesis, as in the statue group by Damophon in Lykosoura.⁷⁵ Appropriately, it is in this period as well that we can trace the beginnings of art history as a discipline, as theorists enunciated a master narrative for the evolution of Greek art and selected a set of artists as exemplary and canonical.⁷⁶ Although the sculptor of the Aphrodite may not have followed such dicta consciously, the work is nonetheless a product of this receptive and scholarly environment, combining different styles of past and present to produce a recognizable, authoritative, and attractive image.

THE RECEPTION OF MYTH: THE JUDGMENT OF PARIS IN THE HELLENISTIC PERIOD

Just as the style and visual format of the Aphrodite of Melos responded to earlier works, so too, I would argue, the statue's iconography recalled a canonical myth, the Judgment of Paris. The myth was, furthermore, evoked in such a way as to suggest its relevance for the statue's audience and for its setting, Melos. The apple held by the goddess provides the critical visual cue. As a visitor to the gymnasium observed Aphrodite extending it toward him, he could reflect upon the fruit's local significance, since it had served as the city's emblem on coins from the fourth century onward.⁷⁷ The spectator might then focus on the goddess' connection to the city, appropriately for her setting within the gymnasium, a major civic building.

But in the hands of Aphrodite, the apple was also intimately associated with sexual desire and marriage, as seen, for instance, in the myth of Hippomenes and Atalanta, and above all in the Judgment of Paris. Given the frequently negative interpretations of the Judgment in preserved literature—Homer, for instance, blames Paris for selecting the goddess “who furthered his grievous lust” (*Il.* 24.30)⁷⁸—this allusion might seem surprising for a

statue of Aphrodite, particularly one that was a monumental work in an important public building. Furthermore, in the gymnasium, the statue's primary viewers were young men like Paris. As portrayed in Homeric epic and Greek tragedy, the Trojan adulterer hardly seems an appropriate role model. Thus it is worth considering in what ways the myth might be understood positively by viewers as they faced Aphrodite with the apple in her outstretched hand and were encouraged by the statue's gesture to consider the question posed by the Judgment and their own verdict.⁷⁹

Two aspects of the Judgment of Paris, well documented in the literature of the late Classical and Hellenistic periods, help to explain why the myth might be appropriate for the Aphrodite of Melos. First, in the Hellenistic era especially, the myth served as the prototypical example of the beauty contest, with an emphasis on Aphrodite's praiseworthy and victorious beauty rather than on the destructive aftermath of the contest. Hellenistic epigrams on images of Aphrodite, for instance, often praised the works by alluding to the Judgment, and suggested that the image offered clear visual evidence for why Aphrodite won. An epigram by Antipater of Sidon describes Apelles' painting of Aphrodite rising from the sea and has Athena and Hera comment, “No longer do we enter into the strife of beauty with you.”⁸⁰ A similar treatment of the Judgment as a topos for beauty appears in Herodas' first mime: a young wife whose husband has gone on a long trip to Egypt was warned of the myriad attractions of Alexandria, including women “in form like the goddesses who hurried to Paris to judge their beauty” (1.34–35).⁸¹ Even in Callimachos' hymn in praise of Athena, the poet alludes to Paris' choice not to criticize it but to contrast the types of beauty exhibited by Athena and Aphrodite. Athena has a natural and unadorned beauty, and at the Judgment, forbears to look in a mirror or anoint herself with anything more luxurious than olive oil. In fact, she runs 120 laps around the race track beforehand (5.15–28). Aphrodite, in comparison, exhibits a contrived beauty, primping before a mirror and rearranging her hair again and again (5.21–22).

⁷³ On the Diadoumenos and the evidence it provides for Hellenistic copying in the strict sense of the term, see Ridgway 1989.

⁷⁴ Pollitt 1986, fig. 171.

⁷⁵ Pollitt 1986, figs. 166–168; Hölscher 1987, 62–3.

⁷⁶ On the Hellenistic origins of the discipline of art history, see Hölscher 1987, 62–3.

⁷⁷ See *supra* n. 47.

⁷⁸ ἥ οἱ πόρε μαχλοσύνην ἀλεγεινήν.

⁷⁹ I thank Clemente Marconi for first suggesting this to me.

⁸⁰ Οὐκέτι σοὶ μορφᾶς εἰς ἔριν ἐρχόμεθα (*Anth. Plan.* 178) cf. also *Anth. Plan.* 182 (Leonidas of Tarentum), *Anth. Pal.* 7.709 (Alexander Aetolus).

⁸¹ τὸ δ' εἶδος οἶα πρὸς Πάρι[v] κο <τ'> ὄρμησαν θ(ε)αὶ κρι](θ)ήναι καλλονήν.

A second aspect of the Judgment of Paris is also relevant here: its interpretation as an allegory for man's choice of a way of life. This theme, first enunciated by dramatists of the later fifth century B.C., gave the myth of the Judgment broad philosophical implications.⁸² Paris is forced to choose among three goddesses who appear as representatives of three very different realms of experience: "Cypris delighting in desire, Pallas in the spear, and for Hera, royal marriage with lord Zeus."⁸³ Among the tragedians, Paris' choice is presented as a serious decision among three powerful, radically opposed options, while a more light-hearted view was taken in Sophocles' roughly contemporary satyr play on the subject of the Judgment, the *Krisis*. The play is lost, but a description is preserved in Athenaeus. Aphrodite appears as the goddess Pleasure, perfuming herself with myrrh and looking at herself in a mirror. Athena, in contrast, appears as Wisdom, Mind, and Virtue, anointing herself with oil and acting like an athlete (*Deipnosophistae* 15.687).

Such characterizations of the goddesses were of course connected with the gifts they promised to Paris: martial prowess and victory over Greece, rule of Asia and Europe, marriage with Helen (as enumerated by Helen herself in Euripides' *Troades*, 925–931). The gifts are central to the allegorical interpretation of the Judgment and much emphasized by those who sought to present the verdict in positive terms. So, for instance, the late Classical rhetorician Isokrates, in his defense of Helen, claimed that Paris could not come to a decision on the basis of the goddess' beauty alone—they were all, of course, exceptionally attractive—and based his verdict instead upon the gifts offered (*Helen* 41). Isokrates' choice was motivated not by pleasure, as Homer thought, but by Helen's nobility of birth and beauty, since "How would [Paris] not have been feeble-minded, if, knowing that the gods were engaged in rivalry on account of beauty, he had himself despised beauty, and not rated it as the very greatest of gifts, about which he saw the goddesses themselves were most zealous?"⁸⁴

The context of Isokrates' speech is also relevant here, since it was a declamation meant not for the

law courts or council house but for an educational institution such as the gymnasium, where it served as an example of accomplished oratory. Encomia, like that of Isokrates, were widely popular, as is demonstrated not only by the well-known defense of Helen by Gorgias but also by a recently discovered school text found in a Byzantine codex that paraphrases the story as part of a rhetorical exercise.⁸⁵

The rhetorical debates on the subject of the Judgment seen in Isokrates and other school texts must be understood within a broader historical framework. For students in a traditional Greek polis like Melos, political power and military success were increasingly off-limits, as Greece surrendered its autonomy first to Hellenistic monarchs, and then, by the mid second century, to Rome. Rule by foreign powers left Greek citizens a somewhat circumscribed sphere of action, one in which individual fulfillment through love might take on greater importance than it had previously.⁸⁶ The Aphrodite of Melos embodied the attractions of such a choice for an audience—the young men of the gymnasium, of Paris' age and like him nearing the time of marriage—for whom her message was particularly apropos.

APHRODITE IN THE GYMNASIUM

Aphrodite, the goddess of a refined and cultivated beauty, might seem an unusual patroness of the gymnasium. Indeed, the idea that the Melian Aphrodite belonged within one has frequently been questioned (e.g., by Jean Delorme).⁸⁷ Nevertheless, the statue can most plausibly be reconstructed within a gymnasium context, according to the preserved archaeological evidence. And the goddess' role as a protector of young men—above all, as their guide during the transition to adulthood via marriage and sexuality—helps to explain her presence here. The argument concerning Aphrodite's appropriateness in the gymnasium, it is argued, reflects modern perceptions of the goddess' role rather than ancient beliefs and practices. Aphrodite's sphere of influence was broader than most contemporary scholarly accounts indicate.

⁸² Stinton 1990; for a discussion of possible earlier precedents, see Walcot 1977; for the Judgment and its rendering in art, see Hedreen 2001, 182–220.

⁸³ ἃ μὲν ἐπὶ πόθῳ τρυφῶσα Κύπρις, ἃ δὲ δορὶ Παλλὰς, Ἥρα τε Διὸς ἀνακτος εὐναῖσι βασιλίσιν (Eur. *IA* 1304–1307).

⁸⁴ Πῶς δ' οὐκ ἂν ἦν ἀνόητος, εἰ τοὺς θεοὺς εἰδὼς περὶ κάλλους φιλονικοῦντας αὐτὸς κάλλους κατεφρόνησε, καὶ μὴ ταύτην ἐνόμισε μεγίστην εἶναι τῶν δωρεῶν, περὶ ἧς καίκειναι

ἑώρα μάλιστα σπουδαζούσας; (*Helen* 48). Paris' choice not for pleasure (*Helen* 42); for nobility (43–4); for beauty (48).

⁸⁵ Gorgias, Encomion of Helen. Isokrates, Encomion of Helen. *P.I.F.A.O.* 320. The school exercise is discussed in Morgan 1998, 203.

⁸⁶ For the impact of these developments on the art of the Hellenistic period, see Zanker 1998, esp. 548–51.

⁸⁷ Delorme 1960, 164.

The archaeological evidence for the discovery of the statue strongly suggests that the Aphrodite decorated an exedra within the civic gymnasium of Melos. In addition to the gymnasiarch's inscription discussed above, sculptural finds from the area are best explained as fitting within such a setting.

In 1891 a marble statue of a young boxer was discovered in the area of the Aphrodite. Its current whereabouts are unclear, but its appropriateness for a gymnasium is striking.⁸⁸ So too, seven years after the Aphrodite was excavated, a marble statue of Hermes was unearthed nearby by a Dutch merchant (fig. 15).⁸⁹ A preserved inscription gives the name of the sculptor as Antiphanes, son of Thrasides of Paros, and this combined with other epigraphic evidence dates the sculpture to ca. 50 B.C.⁹⁰ Statues of Hermes were particularly appropriate for gymnasia, given the god's traditional depiction as a youthful, athletic young man and his role as patron deity of the gymnasium.⁹¹ This one provides an interesting parallel to the Aphrodite of Melos, since it is a classicizing version of a fourth century B.C. type (the Hermes Richlieu), created by a sculptor who appears to have specialized in such retrospective images.⁹² As with the Aphrodite, the Hermes invokes the classical past to lend dignity and authority to the image of the patron god of the gymnasium.

But it is the herms found with the Aphrodite that most clearly indicate the gymnastic character of the site. According to Cicero, herms were *gymnasiode*, the characteristic and appropriate adornments for his "Academy," patterned after Plato's.⁹³ Such literary evidence is bolstered by inscriptions. For instance, an inventory of 156/5 B.C. from the gymnasium of Delos lists 41 herms in marble, and five have been excavated from an exedra there.⁹⁴ On Melos, one herm, drawn by Voutier and thus clearly discovered with the Aphrodite, shows an Archaistic bearded Hermes (fig. 6). It was appropriate for a gymnasium but not particularly distinctive.

The other two herms found in the exedra with the Aphrodite of Melos especially resemble those found in gymnasia because they have youthful, unbearded faces, rather long wavy hair, and distinctive, almost portraitlike, features (figs. 7, 9). One has an unusually broad forehead and thick neck. The other has deep-set, irregularly placed eyes (the

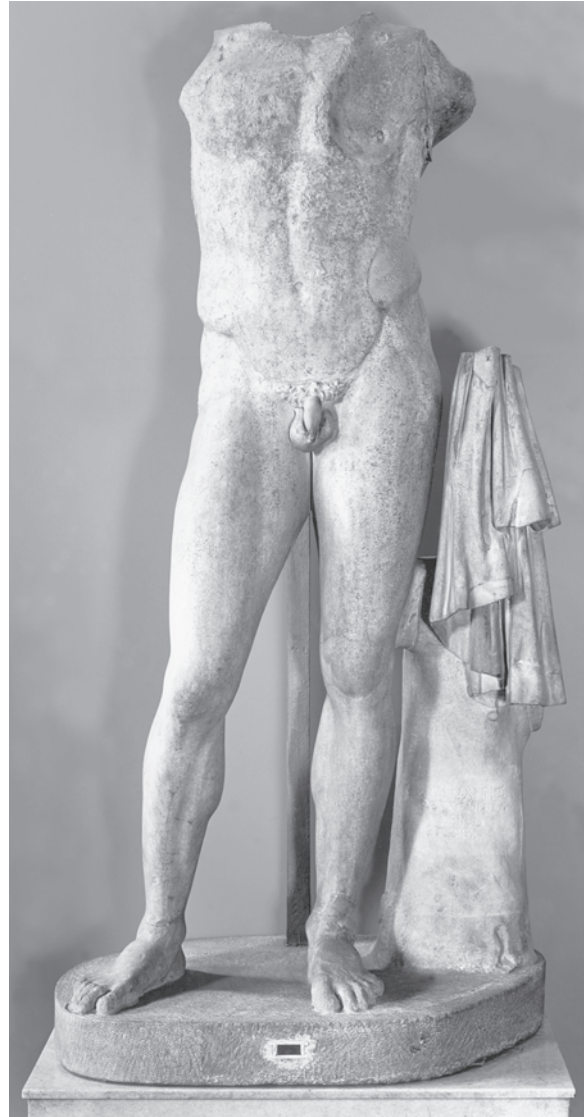


Fig. 15. Hermes, made by Antiphanes son of Thrasides, found on Melos near the Aphrodite, ca. 50 B.C. Berlin, Antikensammlung SK200. (Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz/Art Resource, N.Y.)

right appears lower than the left) and a somewhat battered ear. Both wear bands wrapped around their foreheads and tied in a knot at the back of the head, with the ends hanging down the neck. The herms found in the gymnasium on Delos are similar to those from Melos in their youthful appearance, wavy

⁸⁸ Reinach 1891, 192.

⁸⁹ Berlin Antikensammlung, inv. no. K237 (Blümel 1938, 23–4).

⁹⁰ Rubensohn 1935, 52–3.

⁹¹ On Hermes as patron deity of the gymnasium, see Delorme 1960, 338–9.

⁹² Rubensohn 1935, 58.

⁹³ *Att.* 1.9. For a useful recent review of herms and their connections to gymnasia, see Wrede 1985.

⁹⁴ The inscription is *ID* 1417; for the herms excavated from room G, see Michalowski 1930.

hair, headbands, and portraitlike features. Another youthful herm, found in the Gymnasium of Amphipolis, shows the widespread popularity of such images in gymnasia.⁹⁵ A herm from Rhamnous, similar to these but even younger in appearance, with a slim, boyish torso and soft face, contains a dedicatory inscription by the ephebes of the Erechtheid tribe after their victory in a torch race.⁹⁶ Although the herm presumably represents Hermes, the god is envisioned in the likeness of the youthful athletes, with the fillet of a victor and a portraitlike square face and swollen ear.⁹⁷ Analogous dedications by athletic victors have been found on herm bases in Delos, although the herms themselves are not preserved.⁹⁸ The archaeological and epigraphic evidence, then, suggests that youthful herms were particularly appropriate for a gymnasium setting, and that they were probably dedications of athletic victors, divine but assimilated to their mortal patrons.

Finally, the other civic buildings of the area fit well with a reconstruction of the site as a gymnasium (fig. 16). Near the findspot of the Aphrodite are the undated remains of a stadium, with a polygonal retaining wall and steps or seats for spectators. Also nearby was a theater, probably originally constructed in the Hellenistic era and refurbished in Roman times.⁹⁹ These remains suggest the cultural and athletic character of the area.¹⁰⁰

Since the archaeological evidence for the site best fits a gymnasium setting, it is worth considering in what ways Aphrodite might be appropriate for such a context. It is true that preserved ancient references to Aphrodite's involvement with gymnasia and athletics are rare, but they do occur. For instance, Dionysios of Halikarnassos (1.50.2) preserved a description of an athletic festival, including a race ending in the Temple of Aphrodite, supposedly established on Zakynthos by Aeneas. In Corinth, Pausanias (2.2.4) recorded a Temple of

Aphrodite in the Kraneion, the area of the gymnasium frequented by Diogenes the Cynic.

On Melos the goddess was probably included within the gymnasium because of her role as a protector of young men. This role was alluded to in certain myths, and also appeared in several cults of Aphrodite. At Phaleron, for instance, Aphrodite was worshipped as protector of Theseus during his adventures on Crete, where he defeated the Minotaur with the help of the love-struck Ariadne.¹⁰¹ Here, Aphrodite was explicitly invoked by Theseus and oversaw his transition to adult sexuality, although his "marriage" to Ariadne proved abortive (Plut. *Thes.* 18). In Athens, likewise, Vincianne Pirenne-Delforge has suggested that the goddess Hegemonia, invoked by Athenian ephebes in their oath, was Aphrodite in her role as guide for these mortal young men, as for mythological heroes.¹⁰² Elsewhere, as was likely at Symi Viannou in Crete, Aphrodite was connected to Hermes in initiatory contexts in which both deities cared for youths.¹⁰³ Aphrodite's connection to youths, athletics, and marriage is most cogently expressed in the myth of Hippomenes and Atalanta. When Hippomenes prays to Aphrodite for assistance in his race against the invincible girl athlete Atalanta, she brings him three golden apples, which he throws off the path to distract his rival in the race. Hippomenes wins and therefore marries Atalanta. Both partners have made the transition to adult sexuality through the intervention of Aphrodite.¹⁰⁴

The cults and myths detailed above show that Aphrodite had, in fact, a natural role within the gymnasium. Her presence in that institution on Melos has been disputed, I would argue, because of contemporary scholarly preconceptions rather than an open-minded evaluation of the available evidence. In particular, scholars have based their analyses upon an understanding of Aphrodite's literary persona and not her role in cult. This is prob-

⁹⁵ For the Amphipolis herm, see Mylona 1982.

⁹⁶ *IG II²* 3105. On the herm and the inscription, see Palagia and Lewis 1989; for a new, more extensive publication of the inscription, see Petrakos 1999, 84–5, no. 98.

⁹⁷ On the portraitlike qualities of the Rhamnous herms, see Harrison 1965, 126.

⁹⁸ For the Delos herm bases, see Jacquemin 1981.

⁹⁹ Cherry and Sparkes 1982, 56.

¹⁰⁰ Hellenistic gymnasia, esp. those of the second century B.C., are often set up near stadia in the "cultural center" of the town (von Hesberg 1995, 17).

¹⁰¹ Pirenne-Delforge 1994, 35–8.

¹⁰² Pirenne-Delforge 1994, 38–9. In 197 B.C. the Athenians erected an altar in the agora to the Graces and Aphrodite

Hegemone of the Demos (*IG II²* 2798). Here, Aphrodite Hegemone is a goddess of civic government, perhaps a savior in political and military contexts. For this interpretation and a discussion of a monumental Hellenistic statue likely associated with the altar, see Harrison 1990.

¹⁰³ Pirenne-Delforge 1994, 457–8.

¹⁰⁴ As with the "marriages" of Paris and Theseus, Aphrodite's intervention does not result in a long and happy married life. Hippomenes fails to thank the goddess adequately, and he and Atalanta are turned into lions. On the literary and visual sources for the myth of Hippomenes and Atalanta, see Gantz 1993, 1:335–9. As the example of Theseus shows, however, an unfortunate outcome in myth does not necessarily discourage a cult based on the situation.

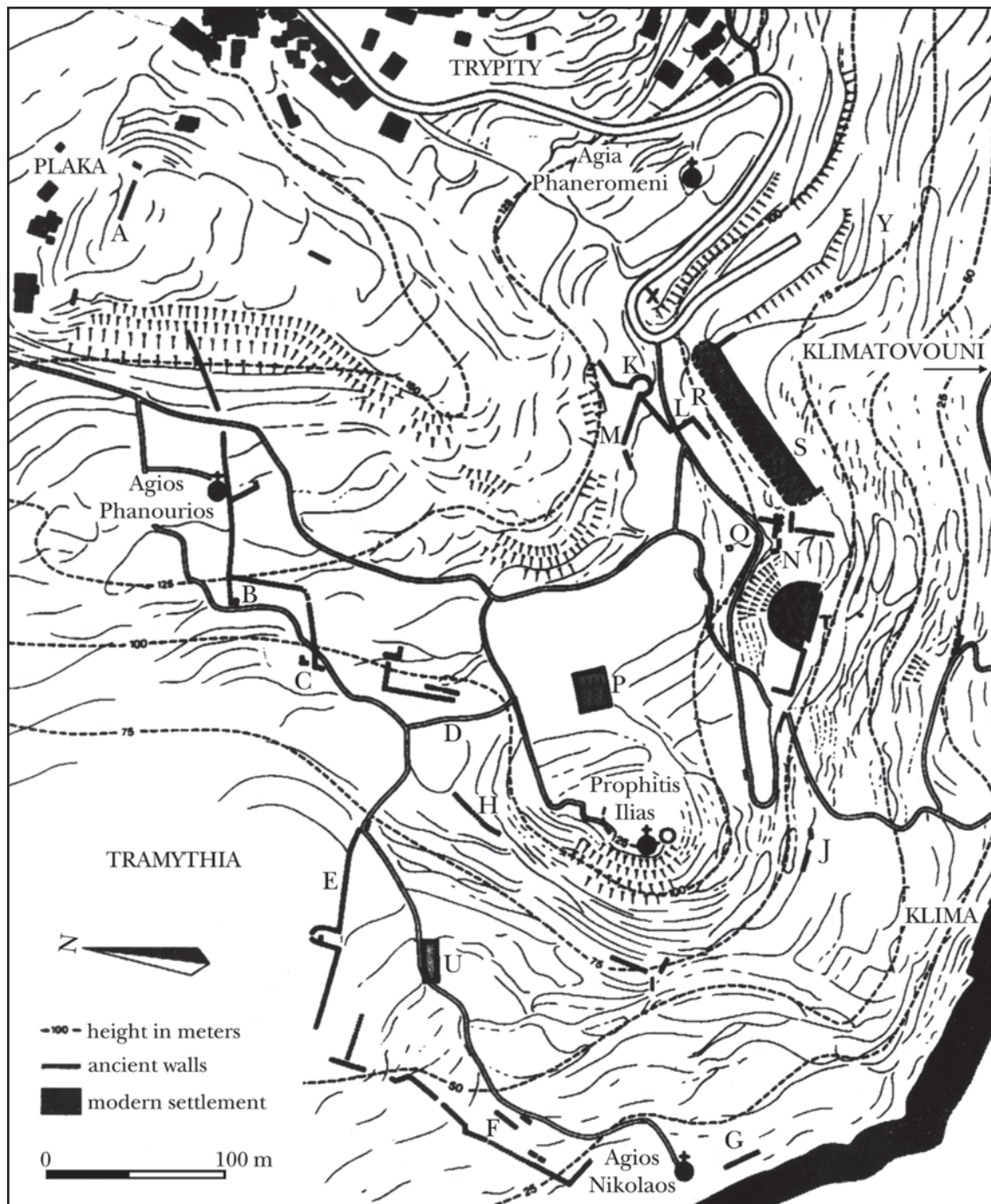


Fig. 16. Plan of ancient city of Melos, showing the location of the Aphrodite of Melos (R), the Stadium (S), and the Theater (T). (After Cherry and Sparkes 1982, fig. 5.3)

lematic because the goddess' character in Homer —irresistibly beautiful, seductive, and promiscuous —became canonical in later literature but never

adequately reflected her many spheres of influence in Greek religion.¹⁰⁵ For example, while her connection to desire and sexuality is universally ac-

¹⁰⁵ Pirenne-Delforge 1994, 11.

knowledge, she also served as a goddess of marriage, of political harmony, of fair sailing, and of the defense of her chosen city in times of war.¹⁰⁶

In the Melos gymnasium, the statue of Aphrodite embodied the delights of love and marriage for an audience of young men particularly attuned to such matters. But the image also spoke to broader concerns. In evaluating the statue's appeal, it is useful to consider in greater detail this audience, the conditions under which they viewed the Aphrodite, and the expectations fostered by the place of viewing.

The final part of this article thus examines the gymnasium, stressing its importance as a site where the Greeks reenacted and reinterpreted the practices and texts of the past to create a timeless vision of Hellenic culture. While scholars have tended to stress the role of the Romans in the reception of the Greek past¹⁰⁷ (e.g., to take the case of sculpture, through art historical texts emphasizing masterpieces and widespread replication of classical works), the contribution of the Hellenistic Greeks and their gymnasia will be further explored here. Examining archaeological and epigraphic evidence for gymnasia, I suggest that the complex interplay between tradition and innovation outlined above for the Aphrodite of Melos can be understood as impressive but by no means unique. Rather, it was characteristic of the retrospective yet creative culture that grew up around the gymnasium and influenced the reception of the Greek past in later periods.

THE HELLENISTIC GYMNASIUM AND THE RECEPTION OF THE PAST

During the Hellenistic period, the audience, function, and appearance of the gymnasium changed radically. Those with the leisure time and financial resources required for participation might begin attending a gymnasium as early as 12 years old, continue their studies through young adulthood, and when mature, form groups of alumni who helped with administration and finance.¹⁰⁸ As with the ages

of those served, so too the range of activities they were offered expanded. Along with traditional athletic and military training, the youths might now receive instruction in newly popular academic subjects such as philology, rhetoric, and philosophy. They did so in buildings that were for the first time monumental civic structures, prominently located in the city center rather than on the outskirts as before.¹⁰⁹ And their endeavors received increased public funding and recognition. The official in charge, known as the gymnasiarch, became in the Hellenistic period one of the most important public magistrates, and the festivals associated with the gymnasia grew to major civic affairs, with processions, sacrifices, contests, and banquets.¹¹⁰ Although the reasons behind these developments are complex, one in particular should be noted here. The gymnasia, with their broadly defined educational mission—athletic, military, and intellectual instruction; religious observance; community service—offered myriad opportunities for civic participation. They thrived at a time when more traditional institutions, such as city councils, had their powers circumscribed under monarchic rule.¹¹¹

The Hellenistic gymnasia thus differed in important ways from their classical predecessors. At the same time, they looked back to, and institutionalized, texts and practices that were explicitly derived from Hellenic tradition. The young men were taught boxing, wrestling, and running, events familiar from time-honored festivals like the Olympic Games and immortalized in Pindar's odes celebrating aristocratic athletes of the early fifth century.¹¹² Military training had a similarly archaic and elite flavor. Youths learned to shoot with bow and arrow, to throw the javelin and the shot put, and to fight wearing the conventional hoplite panoply.¹¹³ Even academic instruction, a novel offering for the gymnasia, looked back to the Classical period and earlier for material to reinforce a conservative, aristocratic ethos.¹¹⁴ Homer was preeminent, and his heroic warriors of the *Iliad* were seen as exemplars

¹⁰⁶ Marriage: Pirenne-Delforge 1994, 421–6; political harmony: Farnell 1971, 618; Pirenne-Delforge 1994, 446–50; sailing: Paus. 2.2.3; Pirenne-Delforge 1994, 433–7; war: Farnell 1971, 635; Pirenne-Delforge 1994, 450–4.

¹⁰⁷ Among recent treatments of the subject, the essays collected in Gazda (2002) offer a particularly useful broad overview.

¹⁰⁸ Moretti 1977, 475; on the alumni groups in particular, see Rostovtzeff 1941, 1058–61. The epigraphical record suggests that, although in some cases primary education might be provided for both girls and boys, the more advanced academic subjects offered in the gymnasium would be largely restricted

to the elite male population. On the subject of girls' education, see Moretti 1977, 482; Criboire 2001, 74–101.

¹⁰⁹ On the development of the Hellenistic gymnasium as an architectural form, see Delorme 1960; von Hesberg 1995.

¹¹⁰ Rostovtzeff 1941, 1059; Delorme 1960, 337–61; Moretti 1977, 478–89; Giovannini 1993, 271; Gauthier 1995, 7–10.

¹¹¹ Gauthier 1995, 10.

¹¹² On the athletic training offered by gymnasia, see esp. Moretti 1977, 481.

¹¹³ Moretti 1977, 477–82; Gauthier 1995, 4.

¹¹⁴ For an introduction to the subject of academic instruction in gymnasia, see Delorme 1960, 317–35; Moretti 1977.

of physical prowess and courageous leadership. Statues of ephebes in the guise of the youthful, athletic Achilles were also popular in gymnasia.¹¹⁵ Among the tragedians, Euripides took first place. A catalogue of the gymnasium library at Rhodes also mentions classical orators, perhaps in connection with the city's fame as a center for rhetoric.¹¹⁶ Such authors, already ancient, were studied in ways that reinforced both their distance from the present and their power as models for emulation. In the case of Homer, endowed professors were on hand to explain the author's complex grammar and out-of-date vocabulary to those who spoke the period's very different koine Greek.¹¹⁷ As students read these authors aloud, scanned them for meter, analyzed them for grammatical peculiarities, and memorized and recited passages, they fixed such works in their minds as canonical examples of Greek culture, while others, for instance Aristophanes, fell out of favor.¹¹⁸ And at competitions sponsored by gymnasia and popular on a local level throughout the Hellenistic world, the young men raced like Pindar's athletes, fought like classical hoplites, and recited Homeric passages.¹¹⁹ Thus the texts and practices considered exemplary might be transmitted to a wider audience.

These activities took place at a site whose architectural form evoked the grand civic spaces of the classical city. The entrance was a monumental gateway, often set off with steps, columns, and a pediment in the manner of a conventional Greek temple (fig. 17).¹²⁰ Within was a large open-air courtyard enclosed on all four sides by roofed colonnades, in form resembling the agora, the economic and political center of the classical polis, although with a more regularized plan and restricted access (fig. 18).¹²¹ Architectural details, such as the columns and entablature, and the use of marble for high-profile areas like the entrance, also gave the new

building form an impressive effect, derived from its resemblance to earlier monumental complexes.¹²² Although the appearance of individual gymnasia varied in detail, from at least the second century onward, they had a canonical form and may be easily recognized in cities throughout the Hellenistic world, from Afghanistan to Sicily.¹²³

The sculptural decoration of the gymnasia had a similarly standardized and retrospective quality.¹²⁴ The finds from Melos are typical in their range of subjects—gods (Aphrodite, Hermes), athletes (the boxer), herms—in their somewhat repetitive character (seen particularly in the herms), and in their eclectic combination of styles. For instance, the Aphrodite and Hermes adopt the visual format of classical statues and are executed with classicizing details (figs. 1, 15). The herms, by contrast, replicate a format familiar from the Archaic period onward: sculpted heads set on flat pillars, truncated arms, and erect phalloi. On Melos, the bearded herm, whose classicizing features suggested reverence due to his antique cult, was juxtaposed with sculptures bearing up-to-date portraitlike images that probably resembled the athletes who dedicated them (figs. 6, 7, 9). In other gymnasia, statues of benefactors round out the picture. These might be local worthies whose pose, costume, and expression stressed their ties to the past, or Hellenistic monarchs depicted in a novel and heroic manner.¹²⁵

To sum up, the audience, function, and visual form of the Hellenistic gymnasium made viewers there particularly receptive to the Aphrodite of Melos, in terms of both its appearance and of its message. The statue represented the delights of love for an audience of youthful male viewers nearing the age of marriage. Examining the statue and its mythological referent, these young men could recall the varying interpretations of Paris' choice put forth in the texts they studied, from Homer

¹¹⁵ On the use of Homer in education, see Delorme 1960, 318; Walbank 1981, 182; Morgan 1998, 219–20; Cribiore 2001, 194–7, 204–5. Isocrates disdainfully mentions instructors teaching Homer and Hesiod in the lyceum gymnasium in Athens (*Panath.* 33). Pliny mentions the statues of ephebes as Achilles (*HN* 34.5.10).

¹¹⁶ Lists of books donated by the ephebes attending the Ptolemaion gymnasium in Athens probably include both Homer's *Iliad*, and works by Euripides (Delorme 1960, 332; *IG II²* 1041.2). On the library catalogue at Rhodes, see Delorme 1960, 331; for another library catalogue of historical authors, at Tauromenion, see Yegül 1992, 427 n. 54.

¹¹⁷ A second- to first-century B.C. inscription from Eretria commemorates the endowment by the gymnasiarchs of chairs in, among other things, Homeric philology (*IG XII.9.235*, lines 10–12). On the difficulties Homer's language presented to later

readers, see Cribiore 2001, 142, 204–5.

¹¹⁸ On general methods of studying in the Hellenistic period, see Cribiore 2001; Morgan 1998, with earlier bibliography. On the neglect of Aristophanes see, e.g., Cribiore 2001, 201.

¹¹⁹ On the competitions, see, e.g., Moretti 1977, 480–2; Gauthier 1995, 4–6.

¹²⁰ von Hesberg 1995, 18–9.

¹²¹ On the gymnasium as a “second agora” for the city, see Gauthier 1995, 10.

¹²² von Hesberg 1995, 18–20. See, e.g., the gymnasium at Delos, as discussed in Delorme 1960, 150–2; Gauthier 1995, 3.

¹²³ von Hesberg 1995, 17–21.

¹²⁴ For an introduction to sculptural decoration in gymnasia, see Delorme 1960, 362–73.

¹²⁵ On honors accorded to benefactors, see Delorme 1960, 341–6.

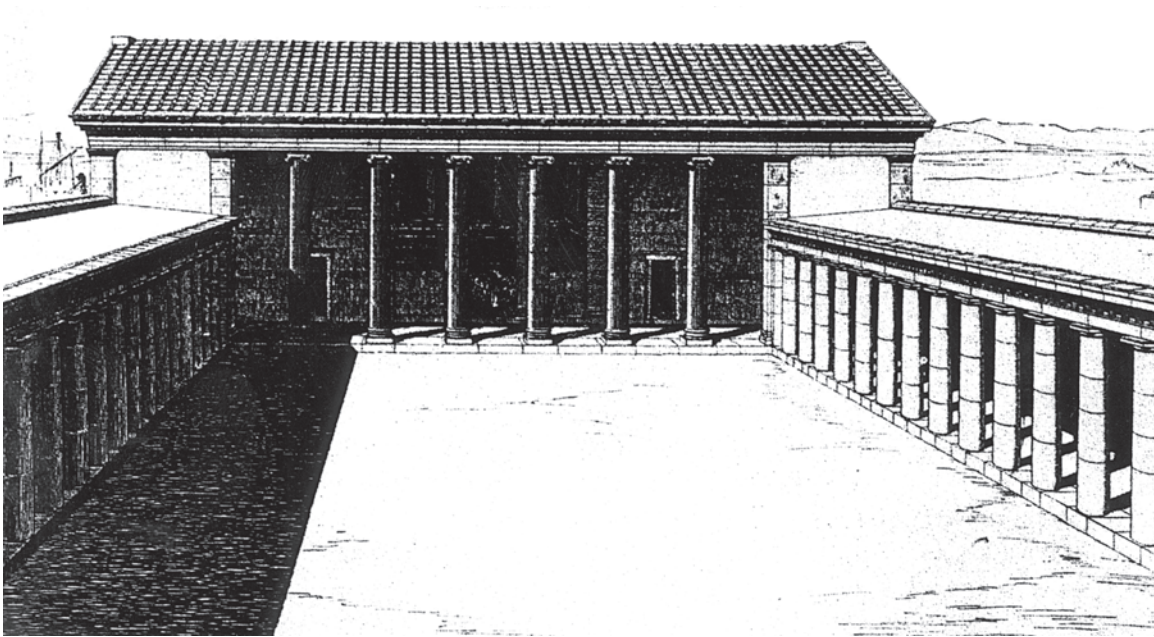


Fig. 17. Restored perspective of Hellenistic gymnasium, Miletus. View west. (After Yegül 1992, fig. 10) (Courtesy The MIT Press)

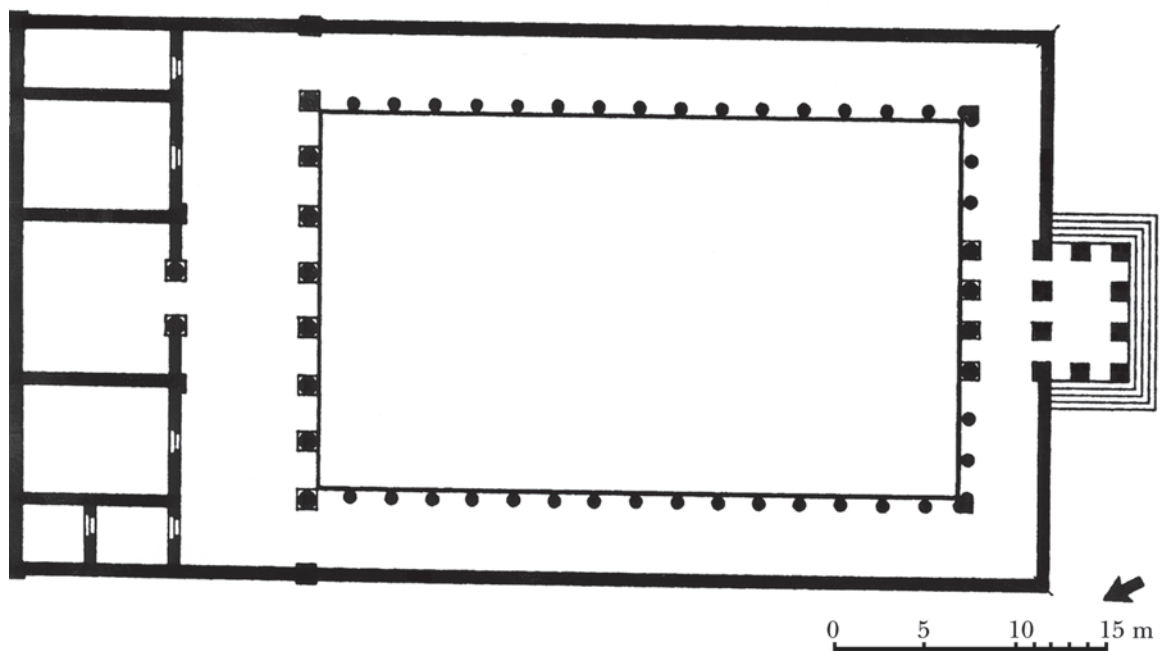


Fig. 18. Plan of gymnasium, Miletus. (After Yegül 1992, fig. 9) (Courtesy The MIT Press)

and the tragedians to Isokrates, and perhaps also their own rhetorical exercises on the subject. And observing the statue's monumental, classicizing appearance, together with its placement in the imposing public space of the gymnasium, they could conclude that its valorization of individual fulfillment through love was compatible with the duties of a responsible public citizen.

Scholars and the general public have often appreciated the Aphrodite of Melos as a timeless work of art, but as this article has demonstrated, our understanding of the statue is enhanced by a consideration of its particular architectural, cultural, and historical context. Furthermore, close analysis of the sculpture suggests that it is best examined not in isolation but rather as exemplary of a much broader tendency in Hellenistic culture: the creation of a standardized and highly selective vision of the past to serve as a model for the present. While this "creation of the past" can be detected throughout the Hellenistic world—the kingdom of Pergamon, with its selective invocation of classical Athens, is a good case in point¹²⁶—the gymnasia of traditional Greek cities had a particularly important role to play. Offering athletic, military, and academic training to the youthful male elite, these institutions not only helped standardize an evolving series of texts and practices but also aided in promulgating these activities to successive generations. In so doing, the gymnasia stressed the contemporary relevance of traditions inherited from earlier periods despite the passage of time and the radically altered political and cultural situation of the present. The Aphrodite of Melos offers a useful demonstration of the authoritative and attractive qualities of this vision of the past, for modern as well as ancient viewers.

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¹²⁶ On Pergamon and Athens see, e.g., Pollitt 1986, 166–7; Rhodes 1995, 156–60; on its subsequent influence on Rome, see Kuttner 1995.

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