



Kouklia – Palepaphos

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The archaeological finds from the village of Kouklia, 16 kilometers southwest of Paphos, date from various periods and attest to a continuous settlement spanning almost five thousand years, from the Late Chalcolithic period (ca 2800 BC) to the present time.

The area was the location of ancient Palepaphos, site of a very important sanctuary of Aphrodite, which has been added to UNESCO's Cultural Heritage List.

Let us first travel back through the history of Palepaphos, focusing on the main portable finds that have come to light, and then allow our mind's eye to roam through the site.

The city of Paphos was the seat of the ancient Cypriot kingdom until the 4th century BC, when Cyprus came under the Ptolemies of Egypt and the administrative center was relocated to Nea Paphos, situated in the area of the modern city. The kingdom covered a substantial territory in western Cyprus, extending perhaps from the Akamas peninsula to the hills before Pissouri and sharing borders with the kingdoms of Kourion to the east and of Marion to the north. Since the Late Bronze Age Paphos had become the urban and administrative centre of that area.

The alluvial soil was ideal for the cultivation of grains which contributed greatly to the economic development, as did the fact that the sanctuary of goddess Aphrodite had turned Palepaphos into a major religious centre for centuries. In his *Theogony*, Hesiod says that the goddess rose from the foam of the sea, a few kilometers southwest of Palepaphos, the present-day village of Kouklia. The same information is transmitted by the 1st century AD Spain-born Roman geographer Pomponius Mela. Kings of the city inherited the title of the goddess's high priest, a function that carried great influence on the island. This is attested by ancient inscriptions referring to the "King of Paphos and Priest of Anassa", (*Anassa* –meaning *lady* or *queen*– was the traditional cult title of the Paphian Aphrodite).

The systematic archaeological excavations that began at the end of the 19th century have revealed evidence that Paphos has a unique and *uninterrupted*

history which started in the Chalcolithic period (third millennium BC) and continues to date. Indeed the archaeological finds prove that the worship of the goddess at the Sanctuary continued from 1200 BC through the 4th century A.D. There is ample evidence of the worship of an Oriental deity, the “Great Goddess” of fertility, combining different elements, viz. she was initially associated with Astarte and then, subsequent to the arrival of Achaeans from Greece to the island, she was equated with Aphrodite. The fact that the worship of the goddess in the same site dates back to the Chalcolithic period and continues to the end of the 4th century makes the Palepaphos sanctuary the longest-lasting in the religious tradition of Cyprus.

Several sites have yielded numerous Chalcolithic finds, such as tools and pottery shards. Significant votive objects have also been found in the area around the Sanctuary, in the Evreti and Asprogi cemeteries in the eastern section of the ancient city. Among those finds are picrolite amulets, an unusual bone amulet representing a male form, as well as a fragment of a votive figurine with a rounded head and muscular arms, similar to the votive figurines found in Khirokitia, Sotira and Erimi.

The absence of any finds from the Early Bronze Age leads to the conclusion that there was no human habitation in the area during that period. However, there was certainly human presence there in the Middle Bronze Age (1900–1650 BC), as evidenced by sparse vessels found in graves, mainly White-Painted clay pots, such as the bird-like askos now in the UK Ashmolean Museum.

The multitude of finds dating from the Late Bronze Age (1650–1050 BC) attests to the intense human activity in the area: impressive clay prohoi, a plaque from an ivory box, an ivory mirror handle. Golden jewellery bears witness to the fact that Palepaphos was one of the biggest economic and art centres of the island, a city with a thriving craft industry and multifaceted relationships with both the West and the East, as corroborated by the wide spectrum of finds.

Almost no traces of habitation from that period have come to light, perhaps because the area was densely populated during the Archaic and Classical

times. However, wells and pits filled with storage jars attest to the existence of local workshops producing pottery, fine jewellery and ivory carvings, as well as of copper smelting; there were even iron tools, which first appeared towards the end of the 12th century BC. Imported items found in the area constitute evidence of trade relations with the East, especially Greater Syria and Egypt.

The first monumental sacred temenos was erected in the area around 1200 BC, along the standards of Near East open-air sanctuaries. This period is marked by the arrival of the first Achaeans from Greece in Palepaphos, at the time of the great migrations. According to Pausanias, the temple of Aphrodite was built by Arcadian King Agapinor of Tegea, who was caught in a storm on his return from Troy and his ship was driven to the shores of Cyprus. Another legend attributes the erection of the sanctuary to Cypriot king Cinyras, father of Adonis, who was renowned for his wealth.

Travelling on through time, we see that during the transition to the Iron Age the city of Palepaphos presents some peculiar features. Whereas other cities in Cyprus are utterly destroyed and relocated, as was the case of Enkomi-Salamis, Palepaphos continues to be uninterruptedly inhabited and retains its privileged position overlooking the coastal plain, as corroborated by funerary finds of the Geometric period through the Classical period (1050–325 BC).

Eteandros was the first historically recorded king of Palepaphos, the biggest urban centre in southwest Cyprus. His name appears with those of other vassal kings in Cyprus on the inscription of the Assyrian King Esarhaddon in 673/2 BC. As evidenced by 5th and 4th century coins, the same name was popular with the Cinyrads dynasty. In addition to political power, Paphian kings also held the religious capacity of Aphrodite's high priests. On inscriptions in the Cypriot syllabary, they are referred to as "King of Paphos and Priest of Anassa".

Paphos and other cities in Cyprus rose against the Persian rule during the Ionian Revolt (499-4 BC), a historical fact substantiated by archaeologists. The uprising failed and the island was conquered by the Persians. Herodotus also makes a succinct reference to the assault, whereas other ancient writers

describe Paphian kings of that era from the perspective of the classical stereotype of Eastern luxury, as indulging in luxurious living and fanfare.

Nikokles, the last king, founded the city and port of Nea Paphos and established it as the new capital ca 320 BC. In the war among the successors, he sided with Ptolemy, however when the rule of the Ptolemies was finally established on the island in 284 BC, all kingdoms were dismantled and Cyprus became a province of the Ptolemaic kingdom of Egypt.

After the founding of Nea Paphos, the old city was renamed Palepaphos. It was no longer the regional centre of southwest Cyprus, but it assumed the character of a sacred city. The sanctuary was rebuilt during the Roman period and many private residences were erected in the area, as attested by the discovery of the "House of Leda". Furthermore, the large number of amphora handles with impressed decoration found scattered all over the ancient city bears witness to the uninterrupted trade relationships with the Greek world.

The renown and magnificence of the Sanctuary of Paphos remained undiminished through time. Even in the 1st century AD, geographer Pomponius Mela includes Palepaphos in the three major cities of Cyprus, together with Salamis and Nea Paphos.

During the Roman period there is intense building activity in the area. The area to the west and south of modern Kouklia is full of Roman ruins which have not yet been systematically studied. To the west of the Sanctuary, a peristyle house has been partly excavated, whilst rescue excavations have brought to light several private Roman residences preserving mosaic floors in their interiors. Among those mosaics is the impressive representation of Leda and the Swan, on display at the Kouklia museum.

It is evident therefore that Palepaphos retained its aura and considerable wealth through the Late Roman period. This was largely due to the Sanctuary of Paphian Aphrodite, a renowned religious centre of the Roman world attracting visitors from the whole empire. During religious festivals, worshippers wreathed with myrtle took part in ritual processions starting from the port of Nea Paphos and terminating at the Palepaphos temple with the

accompaniment of music. Roman emperors, up to and including Septimius Severus, were patrons of the Sanctuary. Titus was very impressed by what he saw when, before being proclaimed emperor he visited Palepaphos in 69 AD, on his way to Syria.

The Sanctuary of Aphrodite was rebuilt in late 1st or early 2nd century AD. The new Roman complex comprised edifices dating from various periods, without however negating the basic character of the court sanctuary. The large-scale medieval interventions in the area do not allow us to estimate with any accuracy when the Sanctuary was destroyed or to what extent the devastating earthquakes that hit Nea Paphos and Kourion contributed to its decline. The last time the Sanctuary of Paphos was mentioned in a written record was in the 4th century AD. In the middle of that century, the cult of Aphrodite was still the target of criticism by Christian writers such as Julius Firmicus Maternus (ca 345-350 AD). Obviously, the spread of Christianity did not favour the parallel worship of Aphrodite. Consequently, we can reasonably assume that the cult gradually waned until Emperor Theodosius I outlawed all pagan religions in 391 AD. In his "Life of St. Hilarion", St. Hieronymus seems to imply that already in late 4th century AD the temple of Aphrodite lay in ruins.

Still, habitation in the city continued until the 7th century AD.

Oil lamps with the "Chi-Rho" (XP) symbol or the Cross attest to the existence of a Christian population. No evidence of habitation has been found dating from the period beyond that point through the 10th century. It seems therefore that Palepaphos declined into an insignificant community. The setup changes again in the 12th century. Palepaphos, which had been renamed Kouvouklia, flourishes again, mainly thanks to the sugar industry. The Manor House with its outbuildings, on the site of the Sanctuary, and the installations for the production of sugar at the Stavros locality must have been erected by the Lusignan kings of Cyprus in the 13th century. The manor was the local administration centre and the headquarters of the royal official who ran the profitable sugarcane plantations and the sugar refinery in the district of Paphos.

After 1571, the Frankish Kouvouklia fell into Ottomans' hands and was transformed into a storage area for wheat and cotton. Travellers mention the rich crops as well as the silk culture of the area. The village is described as an administrative district of the Paphos province. The Lusignan Manor House was turned into an administration centre of the Kouklia Chiflik and initially belonged to the Sultan, whereas subsequently it was given to grand vizier Kibrisli Mehmed Emin Pasha. Later it came under the ownership of his daughter and since 1951, following negotiations, it belongs to the government. It was restored and now functions as a museum.

Signs of decline appear in the 19th century, when travellers describe Kouklia as a nearly abandoned village, inhabited by very few Greek and Turkish families.

Villagers have kept alive the memories of the old pagan religion. Until just a few years ago, young mothers used to light candles on a pillar nearby in honour of *Panagia Galatariotissa* (the Virgin-Who-Gives-Milk-to-Mothers). The pillar stood out on the Sanctuary site.

Let us now take a virtual tour through the archaeological site and closely observe the monuments.

Through the visitors' gate we enter the site from the north. Passing by the warden's office we see the ruins of Aphrodite's sanctuary. To the right, along the flagstone paved path, we see architectural remains of all the periods. Across the path, in the background, stands the Lusignan Manor House with the museum.

The Sanctuary and its enclosure take up the area from the south side of the village houses to the Manor House. Classic era writers make references to the magnificence of this Sanctuary and to its rituals, which were based on ancient customs from the Aegean and the Orient. It was an aniconic worship, i.e. the image of the goddess was symbolized by a baetyl, a conical andesite rock. The baetyl found on site is now on display at the Kouklia museum. The significance of the sacred rock was corroborated by means of Hellenistic clay seals and Roman coins found in the area bearing an image of the baetyl

between two pillars and under a light canopy (a tripartite shrine). The main altar, where only prayers and “pure fire” offerings were allowed, “was in the open air, but rain never fell upon it”.

The buildings of the Sanctuary have undergone many changes and have suffered the ravages of time. In the Middle Age, the ruins were used as building material, mainly for the construction of the sugar refinery and, perhaps, for the Manor House. The worship lasted more than 1,600 years, in the face of difficulties and destruction.

The surviving remains we see on the site comprise two complexes: a south complex, Sanctuary I of the Late Bronze Age, and a north one, the Roman Sanctuary II erected at the end of the 1st or the beginning of the 2nd century AD.

Starting from the paved area near the Manor House, we see the remains of Sanctuary I: huge limestone blocks as well as the southeast and north parts of the enclosure. These remains show that the Sanctuary was divided into two sections: an open-air court –the *temenos*– and a covered hall. The use of the irregular holes in the temenos walls remains as yet undetermined. A shallow basin has been found in the floor of the open-air court where worshippers perhaps ritually cleansed themselves or deposited their offerings. Between the basin and the hall, there still stands a limestone block which served as the base either of horns of consecration or of a square capital with stepped sides, similar to the ones on display along the path. It is surmised that there were altars as well, but no traces have been found.

The covered hall was the sanctuary’s adytum (holy-of-holies). It was an oblong raised edifice with solid walls. The other walls of the sanctuary were of fine ashlar masonry. Along the eastern side and at the centre of the edifice there is a double row of bases supporting pillars.

This Sanctuary stands out among the other Cypriot sanctuaries because of its monumental temenos wall and the equally monumental adjacent hypostyle hall. It seems to have been in continuous use until the big earthquake of 76/77 AD.

A ritual storage amphora of the 13th or 12th century BC was found in the same place. It is now on display at the Kouklia museum. The scant Astarte-type votive figurines, i.e. female figures with ample breasts, often supported by the hands, bearing Phoenician influence, hark to the earlier fertility cult deriving from the Chalcolithic cult of the goddess of fertility which was kept alive by the population of the Late Cypriot period until settlers from the Aegean altered its character. This is corroborated by the existence of figurines of the “goddess with raised arms”, most probably imported from Crete in the 11th century BC. The Paphian goddess’s title “Anassa”, maintained through the end of the Classical period, also denotes Achaean influence. From that period onwards, the Paphian goddess was represented in accordance with the common imaging standards adopted for Aphrodite in the Greek mainland. Copper and stone sculpted votive offerings must have been numerous as well, whereas an estimated fifty bronze statues must have adorned the uninscribed pedestals, although only a finger has survived. Most marble sculptures must have ended up in kilns, such as the one found in the southwest corner of the North Hall.

The Roman Sanctuary II is located beyond the first sanctuary, along its NE axis, and covers an area measuring 79 x 67 m. It was designed along the same standards, with an open court, thus maintaining the architectural tradition of the Paphian cult. The scant remains show that it had the shape of a Greek letter Pi (Π), with an opening to the west, and combined the eastern and western architectural traditions. It is difficult to imagine what its east wing looked like, since it was replaced by medieval and modern structures.

The South Stoa was an oblong hall measuring 56 x 10.5 m, with a mosaic floor surrounded by a raised platform. Only a small part of the mosaic with elaborate geometric patterns survives today. Along the central axis there was a row of Doric columns on square bases which supported the roof. On the south side we see the rectangular foundations of a stairway that led to Sanctuary I.

The North Stoa was slightly smaller than the South. A significant section of its eastern side lies under a modern house. A part of the sparsely decorated

mosaic floor also survives. Both wings served as venues for ritual banquets. Worshippers would rest on the platform during the meals. Similar structures have been found in Pergamos and in the temple of Apollo Hylates at Kourion. The massive rectangular pillar standing here was part of the Late Bronze Sanctuary and it was here that, until recently, young mothers from the village used to leave candles in honour of *Panagia Galatariotissa*.

So this was the sanctuary where people worshipped Aphrodite, whom Homer first referred to as "*Kypris Aphrodite*" (= Goddess of Cyprus) in the 8th century BC and Hesiod subsequently called "*Aphrodite Kyprogenea*" (i.e. Cyprus-born). Her other titles included *Potnia* (= lady, mistress) of *Cyprus*, *Akraea* (= of the hills, of peninsulas), *Pontia Enalia* (= lady of the sea), *Ourania* (= heavenly), *Pandemos* (= of all the people), *Enkheios* (=armed), *Aphroditos* (= male Aphrodite – depicted as a bearded man), *Adonaia* (= mourning for Adonis, associated with the nether world), *Eleemon* (= merciful, compassionate), *Chrysostefanos* (= crowned in gold).

The Cypriot Tourism Organization, in cooperation with the Department of Antiquities, has created the "Aphrodite Cultural Route", hence the two large boards in this archaeological site providing information regarding this important goddess. Similar boards have been put up in Amathus (in Limassol) and Kition (in Larnaca), where we have found ruins of sanctuaries devoted to the goddess. Other sites forming part of the Route include Nea Paphos, the Lempa Chalcolithic Settlement, Yeroskipou (formerly the goddess's Sacred Garden) and Tamassos (in the village of Politiko). A part of the trail south of Larnaca Salt Lake is also included in the Aphrodite Cultural Route since many plants and sea shells are associated with this exceptional goddess. Some of the plants are the wild rose (*rosa canina*), the pomegranate (*punica granatum*), the oregano (*origanum dictamnus*), the narcissus (*narcissus poeticus*), the myrtle (*myrtus communis*), and the anemone (*anemone coronaria*). Some of the sea shells associated with Aphrodite belong to the families of *astartidae*, *cardiidae*, *cypraeidae*, and *veneridae*.

Leaving Sanctuary II behind us and crossing over to the other side of the paved path, we see ruins of Roman edifices which must have impressed

visitors approaching the island from the sea. The mosaic floor in the patio of a large peristyle house stands out. It is a copy of a representation of Leda and the Swan. We also see the remains of the small 16th century Byzantine chapel of St. Nicholas which was destroyed two centuries later.

We now walk towards the Manor House. In the 13th century, the Lusignans chose this strategic spot to build the centre of regional administration and control of the sugar industry and of the royal sugarcane plantations. After 1571, the manor was turned into the konak of the Turkish Kouklia Chiflik. At the beginning of the 20th century, however, it started falling into disrepair. When it was acquired by the Department of Antiquities, the west, east and north wings were reconstructed and they now house the archaeological museum and its storage rooms.

The Manor is a massive structure of sandstone blocks, with exterior buttresses for better support and a large interior courtyard. The west and south wings serve as storage and ancillary rooms, whereas the east wing is open to the public. The Gothic hall in the basement of the east wing is one of the finest surviving monuments of the Frankish secular architecture on the island. The hall, measuring 27.3 x 6.8 m, is 5.7 m high and has four consecutive arches with cross vaults which are reminiscent of the 13th century gothic style of Burgundy and Southern France. It is lighted by four small square windows. The east wing masonry is also impressive, consisting of finely cut stone blocks. The remaining walls are made with local sandstone.

On the ground floor there are two spacious halls with flat roofs supported by large beams. The two halls communicate via an exterior stone-paved ramp. The floor of the lower hall is adorned with the mosaic from a Roman house which was found in the Alonia locality. Other items on display include finds from the Sanctuary of Aphrodite, such as the cone-shaped baetyl, a small collection of figurines, a clay tub for the transport of water, and the huge storage amphora with one of the handles decorated in relief. The upper hall houses a chronological display (starting from the left) of various items from Palepaphos spanning the period from the Chalcolithic era to the Ottoman occupation. Particularly noteworthy are the following: the clay lustral basin in

the centre of the hall, the conical clay vessels and the small pithoi, in the far right, which were used in the sugar refinery, and next to the entrance, the authentic mosaic of Leda and the Swan from the Roman house.

The large 6th century BC sarcophagus on the left side of the upper hall is a new and impressive find. It came to light in 2006 in the Kato Alonia locality. It is made of limestone, stands on lion's-paw legs and bears decoration in relief, with natural colours. The main face represents a battle scene with Hercules at the centre. It is probably a scene from the first siege of Troy by the Greeks with the participation of Hercules, Telamon, the King of Salamis in Greece, and the Arcadians. On the other side there is a scene drawing inspiration from Odyssey Rhapsody "ix".¹ It is the scene where Ulysses and his companions escape from the cave of Cyclops Polyphemus tied to the underbellies of the sheep. The one narrow side portrays a warrior approaching a cypress and carrying a dead or wounded comrade on his shoulder. Perhaps it is Aias carrying Achilles's body. The other narrow side is a representation of a fight between a lioness and a wild boar.

In the same hall we see the Annunciation in relief, a sample of Cypriot religious art coming from the Panagia Katholiki church, located to the east of the Sanctuary.

The courtyard of the Manor House serves as a venue for art performances. The main event is dedicated to Aphrodite, during the annual "Aphrodite" festival organized by the Yeroskipou Municipality and the Community Council of Kouklia. Usually, the performance is a combination of opera, poetry, choral song and ballet.

Other important monuments in the area: the *Panagia Katholiki* church, the fortifications on the Marcello hill with the Northwest Gate of Palepaphos, the Late Classical royal tomb, the peristyle house at Evreti-Arkalou, the Kouklia oil press in the Styllarca locality, and the Lusignan sugar refinery on the coastal plain.

¹ The Rhapsodies of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are numbered by upper-case and lower-case roman numerals, respectively.

The *Panagia Katholiki* church is located outside the Sanctuary enclosure, to the east. It is an important medieval monument, partially enclosed by a wall with pointed arches. The church was built in the 12th or 13th century and originally it was of the cruciform type with a raised cylindrical dome. The western nave was added in the 16th century. The 15th century murals inside the church are in a very poor state of preservation and are covered by layers of soot. A scene that stands out on the western wall represents the Tigris and Euphrates rivers depicted as two heads disgorging water cascades, thus forming a part of the Garden of Eden on Judgement Day. The church was initially named *Panagia Aphroditissa*. Then it was renamed *Panagia Chrysopolitissa*, as confirmed by Sir Henry Luke, and finally became *Panagia Katholiki*.

A pair of perforated monoliths was found at the Styllarca locality, between the Xeros and Dhiazos rivers, a few kilometers southwest of the Aphrodite Sanctuary. The monoliths were of limestone and thus unique among the fifty fenestrated monoliths found thus far in Cyprus. Italian diplomat Luigi Palma di Cesnola, who lived in Cyprus at the end of the 19th century, was the first to wonder about the use of these monoliths. Traveller, writer and naturalist F.H.H. Guillemard was the first to put forth the view that the monoliths were part of the equipment of an oil press. They were used as fulcrums to raise and lower the mill-stones tied to one end of timber passed through the slits. The mill-stones would crush the olives to pulp and the oil would run into a groove and end up in the five reservoirs a little further down the slope. Fragments of black-glaze Attic pottery found in the same site date back to the late 4th or early 3rd century BC.

The Lusignan sugar refinery in the coastal plain is quite remarkable. Sugar production was a profitable industry in the Eastern Mediterranean from the 13th to the 16th centuries. It was spread throughout the Mediterranean as a result of the Arab conquests and the Crusades. Thanks to the scientific research of the Swiss-German Mission to Kouvouklia, we have extensive information regarding the operation of the refineries. On the Sanctuary grounds there must have been refinery installations which were destroyed. Only traces of the water supply network survived in the courtyard, as well as

numerous reservoirs cut in the rock. However, at the Kouklia-Stavros locality (ten minutes to the east) there is one of the few sugar refineries in the Mediterranean and the Near East which preserves its basic elements and was in operation from the end of the 13th century through the 16th. The finds show that the mill was powered by the water from the Oreites forest springs, which was channelled via the medieval aqueduct. The water entered the mill and turned a horizontal waterwheel which, through a system of gear shafts and gear wheels, powered the vertical crushing wheel. The cane pulp was decocted and then boiled and purified. The boiled juice was poured into small funnel-shaped pithoi (moulds), where small cones of sugar were formed as the juice evaporated and small drops of juice fell into other vessels on top of which the moulds were placed, forming molasses. Italian engineer Juanelo Turriano (1560) makes reference to this very process in his drawings.

The architectural model of these industrial complexes was applied by the Order of the Knights of St. John, who built a sugar factory next to the Kolossi castle, and by the Cornaro family in Episkopi. The thousands of moulds and vessels found here evidence the huge sugar production and the serious revenues from its export to the West. Written records state that the Cypriot sugar, in powder form, was the best in the market. F. B. Pegolotti, in his manual *La pratica della mercatura*, says that Cypriot sugar bore the highest price tag.

This therefore is the impressive monument of Kouklia which denotes the uninterrupted worship of Aphrodite, goddess of beauty and love, but also the prosperity of the city-kingdom through the ages.