

RETRIEVING THE APHRODITE OF HERMOGENES OF CYTHERA*

The aim of this essay is to analyse the form of the statue of Aphrodite set up in the agora (forum) of the Roman colony of Corinth and recorded by Pausanias 2. 2. 8. An understanding of this statue will lead to a likely suggestion about the age of flourishing of its sculptor.

In 2. 2. 8 Pausanias lists the most noteworthy statues of deities located along the western side of the agora of Corinth. First, he saw a statue cast in Parian marble of Tyche in her own temple, probably of the early Augustan period, recognized on Corinthian coins and whose head probably survives;¹ then a bronze Poseidon on a fountain, probably of the first decades of the 1st century AD;² next, a bronze image of Apollo Clarius, probably also Augustan or early Julio-Claudian and recognized on a Corinthian coin type of the age of Julia Domna;³ and finally, he saw ‘a statue of Aphrodite made by Hermogenes of Cythera’ (ἄγαλμα Ἀφροδίτης Ἑρμογένους Κυθηρίου ποιήσαντος).⁴ After this he reports on two bronze statues of Hermes⁵ and three representations of Zeus.⁶

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¹ Regarding this Tyche, see Imhoof-Blumer, Gardner, Oikonomides 1964, 20, pl. E, figs. nos. 83 and 85. Concerning the head, see Johnson 1931, 46–47, no. 54.

² See Dubbini 2011, 152–154 and Aristodimou 2012 [Γ. Α. Αριστοδήμου, *Ο γλυπτός διάκοσμος νυμφαίων και κρηνών στο ανατολικό τμήμα της ρωμαϊκής αυτοκρατορίας*], 291–292, nos. 29–31.

³ See Imhoof-Blumer, Gardner, Oikonomides 1964, 156, no. 25, pl. F, fig. 14; Seltman 1928, 98–99 and Dubbini 2011, 101.

⁴ See Dubbini 2011, 91–99.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 152.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 157.

Hermogenes of Cythera is known only from this passage of Pausanias.⁷

It should be noted that his statue is the only one among the ἀγάλματα listed in 2. 2. 8 whose sculptor is specified. This fact suggests that such a specification was considered important and that this sculptor was also considered valuable.

Pausanias does not clarify the master of this Aphrodite with the words ἔργον or τέχνη + the name of the artist in genitive but with an absolute genitive (Ἑρμογένους Κυθηρίου ποιήσαντος). This detail suggests that Pausanias read the customary signature consisting of the sculptor's name, ethnic and ἐποίησεν on the base supporting the statue.

The exact location of the statue on the western side of the agora of Corinth has been suggested: it is likely that it was erected near or in the Augustan F temple, dedicated to Venus and located in the south section of the west side of the agora (Fig. 1): it was a prostylos tetrastyle Ionic ναός, the finest building on the west side of the agora (Fig. 2),⁸ thus also the appropriate setting for a distinguished statue of the love goddess.

Since the F temple was Augustan, the statue of Hermogenes probably dates to the same era.

Hermogenes' Aphrodite was likely depicted on coins of the Roman colony of Corinth.⁹ Corinthian coins of the neo-sophistic period depict three basic versions of Aphrodite whose styles are plausible candidates for statues, and thus likely inspired by the statues seen by Pausanias:

a) an Aphrodite holding her shield, in keeping with the Capua type of this goddess and to be identified with the ἀγάλμα of Aphrodite ὀπλισμένη in her sanctuary and temple on the Acrocorinth (Paus. 2. 5. 1);¹⁰

b) a draped Aphrodite, holding sceptre and apple,¹¹ perhaps to be identified with Aphrodite Μελαινίς, whose temple was located just east of the urban centre of Corinth (Paus. 2. 2. 4): this sanctuary was associated with the famous courtesan Lais.¹² The attribute of the apple may have referred to the many victories in love guaranteed by the goddess

⁷ See Flemberg 2001, 304–305 and *Der neue Overbeck* 2014, 5. 407–408, sources nos. 4007–4008.

⁸ Regarding the dedication of this temple to Venus, see Kent 1966, 33, no. 56. Regarding the F temple, see Scranton 1951, 57–63 with a wrong identification of the F temple with the temple of Tyche. Historical considerations in Musti, Torelli 1986, 217–220 and Dubbini 2011, 91.

⁹ Regarding the cult of Aphrodite in Corinth, see Soles 1983; Williams 1986, 12–24 and Lanci 2005, 205–220.

¹⁰ See Imhoof-Blumer, Gardner, Oikonomides 1964, 25–27 and 157.

¹¹ See *Ibid.*, 18.

¹² See Pirenne-Delforge 1994, 97–98.

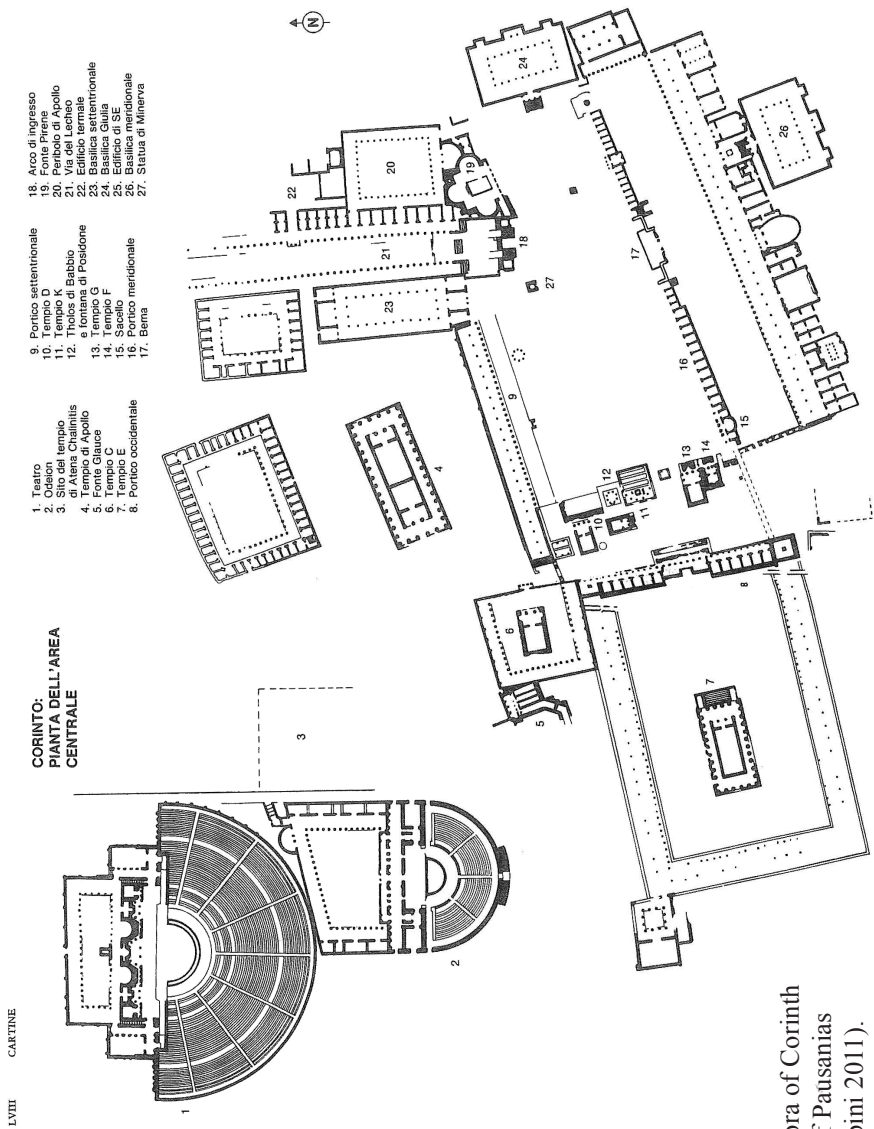


Fig. 1. The agora of Corinth in the age of Pausanias (from Dubbini 2011).

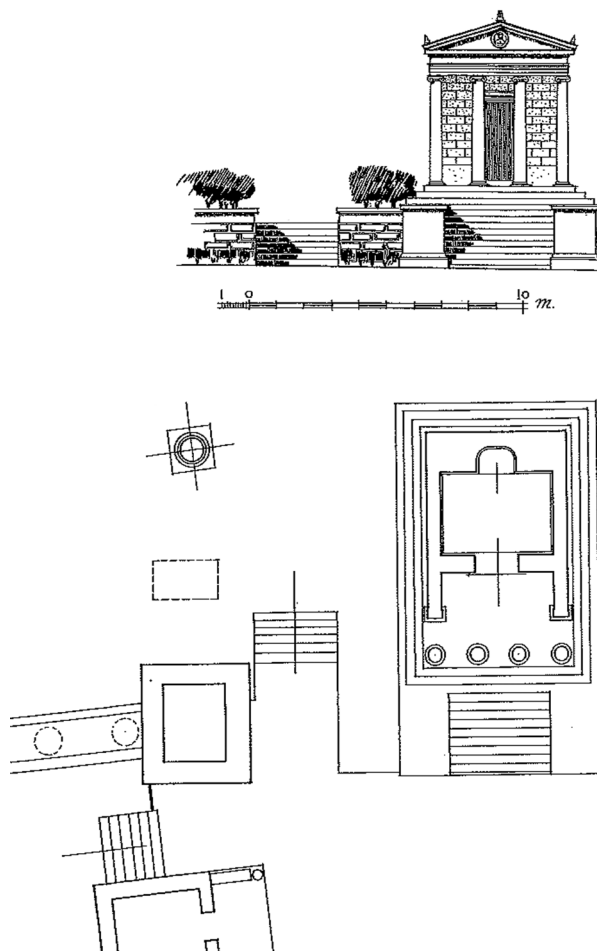


Fig. 2. The temple F in the agora of Corinth (from Scranton 1951).

to her protected courtesan (See Polemon, *frg.* 44 Preller and Athenaeus 13. 588 c);

c) an Aphrodite on coin types dating to the era of Julia Domna (Fig. 3) and Caracalla (Fig. 4):¹³ the goddess is naked; her figure moderately curvaceous. Her left foot stands fully on the ground while her right foot rests on tiptoes with a bent knee. Her left arm is lowered, with its elbow

¹³ See Imhoof-Blumer, Gardner, Oikonomides 1964, 18–19 and Seltman 1928, 98–99.



Fig. 3. *AE* of Corinth struck under Julia Domna, London, The British Museum, Department of Coins.



Fig. 4. *AE* of Corinth struck under Caracalla, reverse, Museum des Stiftes St. Florian.

bent, and her left hand is brought in front of the body, probably in order to hold an attribute, perhaps a mirror. Her right arm is at her side, its elbow bent, the forearm brought to her head, probably in order to wreath it.

The general form of this figure is a plausible candidate for a bronze statue: there is no side support despite the position of the right arm at its side.



Fig. 5. Marble statuette at Corinth, Museum, no. 1181.

As already suggested by Imhoof-Blumer, Gardner, Seltman, Oikonomides and Soles,¹⁴ the statuary type shown on these coins must represent the Aphrodite by Hermogenes of Cythera. In fact in the previously mentioned coin type of the era of Julia Domna, this Aphrodite appears together with an Apollo: a fact in keeping with Pausanias' mention in 2. 2. 8 of a statue of Apollo Clarius and of Hermogenes' Aphrodite standing next to one other.

The same type is reproduced with a Julio-Claudian marble statuette found in ancient Corinth but without a specific provenance (Fig. 5):¹⁵ the head, both arms and most of legs are missing. This statuette is also sinuous in style, the left leg stood on the ground while the right leg was bent. The left arm was lowered, the right, uplifted.

This statuette portrays the same version of Aphrodite which is shown on the above mentioned coins and for this reason was

¹⁴ See the publications cited in notes 1, 2 and 9.

¹⁵ Corinth, Museum, no. 1181: see Johnson 1931, 42–43, no. 44 and Soles 1983, 124–125, no. 22.

probably a miniature copy of Hermogenes' statue. It reveals some information regarding the specific style characteristic of this statue: its fleshy and light-and-shadow depiction of the surfaces is still late Hellenistic and not in keeping with the cold, academic style of the Augustan classicism.

Thus although Hermogenes likely flourished during the Augustan period, he still shows Hellenistic sensibility.¹⁶

On the two previously mentioned coin types, the head is slightly inclined, with an oval face and wavy hair.

The representation of the goddess 'au toilette' catches her as she looks at her mirror, wreathing her head. Since the goddess is naked – and patronized the sacred prostitution in Corinth¹⁷ – it might be suggested that the moment when the courtesan is making up for her client is transferred to the divine realm. Thus perhaps this statue might have advertised that the renowned business of the Corinthian courtesans stood under the protection of their goddess.

Even before the age of Augustus, pre-Roman Corinth was endowed with a bronze Aphrodite bearing the same general style which was later reused by Hermogenes. This work is known thanks to a bronze statuette probably of Corinthian craftsmanship dating to the late 4th c. BC found on Thera (Fig. 6).¹⁸ The general style of the body, legs and left arm is the same as that of the Aphrodite on the previously mentioned coin types of Julia Domna and Caracalla. The statuette also allows an appreciation of the head:



Fig. 6. Bronze statuette at Berlin, Altes Museum, Antikensammlung, no. 7101.

¹⁶ In the Augustan Peloponnese, there is a current that continues from the late Hellenistic styles: see Themelis 2012 [Π. Θέμελης, “Έργα επωνύμων γλυπτών και εργαστήριο γλυπτικής πρώιμων ρωμαϊκών χρόνων στη Μεσσήνη”, in: Θ. Στεφανίδου-Τιβερίου (ed.), *Κλασική παράδοση και νεωτερικά στοιχεία στην πλαστική της Ρωμαϊκής Ελλάδος*], 177–191.

¹⁷ See the bibliography in note 9.

¹⁸ This statuette is kept at Berlin, Altes Museum, Antikensammlung, no. 7101: see Corso 2013, 129–130.

the face is typically Praxitelean (oval shape, triangular forehead, narrow and elongated eyes, long nose, short mouth and slightly protruding chin). The hair is divided in the middle and brought back to the nape with the usual wavy locks. The skin of this body appears to have a velvety texture; the bones and muscles are not expressed.

The face is very similar to those of the Arles type of Aphrodite (Fig. 7), which is probably the copyist type of Praxiteles' Thespian Aphrodite, and of the Aspremont-Lynden / Arles type of head (Fig. 8): the latter likely portrayed the Thespian image of Phryne, which had also been made by Praxiteles.¹⁹ The same face is found again on the Aphrodite Pseliumene (Fig. 9),²⁰ on the Townley Aphrodite (Fig. 10) probably derived from Praxiteles' statue of Phryne at Delphi,²¹ as well as on the Leconfield Aphrodite (Fig. 11).²²

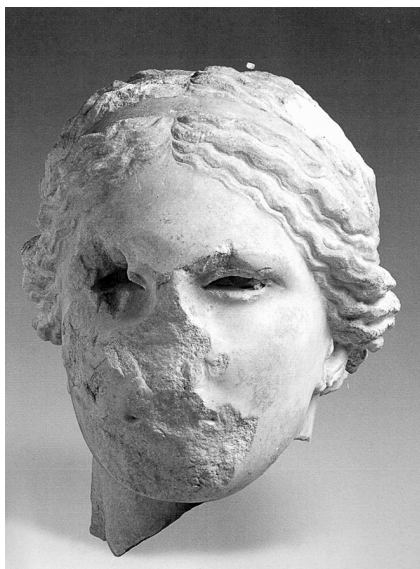


Fig. 7. Marble head in the type of the Arles Aphrodite, Athens, Acropolis Museum, no. NMA 200.

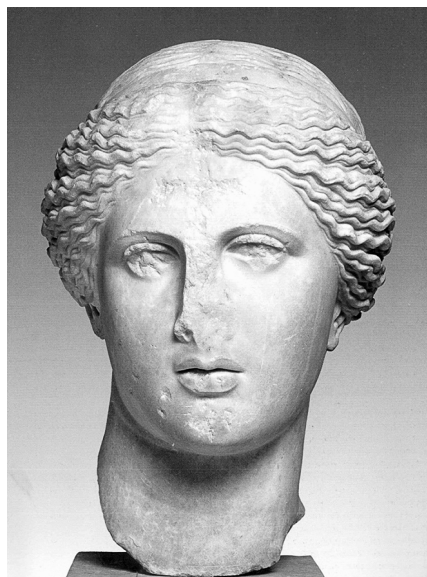


Fig. 8. Marble head at Athens, National Archaeological Museum, no. 1762.

¹⁹ See Corso 2004, 257–281, work no. 17; Pasquier 2007, 130–201 and Kaltsas, Despinis 2007 [N. Καλτσάς, Γ. Δεσπίνης, *Πραξιτέλης*], 114–117, nos. 22–26.

²⁰ See Corso 2013, 172–185, work no. 53.

²¹ See Corso 2014, work no. 62.

²² See Corso 2014, work no. 65.



Fig. 9. Bronze statuette at London, The British Museum, Department of Greek and Roman Antiquities, no. Br 1084.

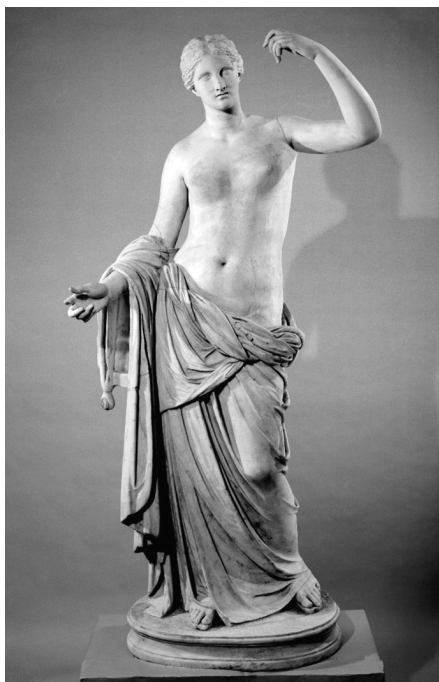


Fig. 10. Venus Townley, London, The British Museum, Department of Greek and Roman Antiquities, Townley collection, no. 1574.

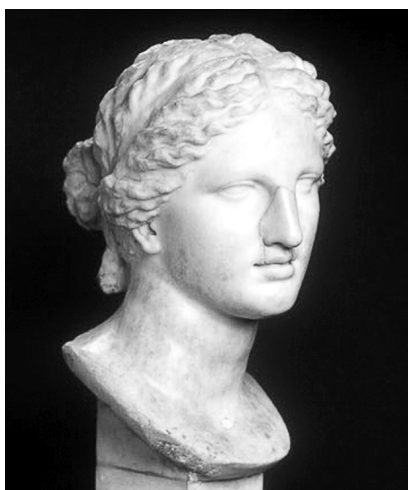


Fig. 11. Leconfield head, Petworth House.

The obvious conclusion is that Phryne, the lover of Praxiteles, had been the model of the bronze Aphrodite, later echoed in the Thera statuette. The clear Praxitelean features of this work suggest that this bronze Aphrodite was the one made by Praxiteles, brought to Rome and set up there in front of the temple of Happiness where it perished in a fire during the reign of Claudius (Pliny 34. 69). This statue was part of the bounty of works of art brought from Corinth by Mummius, as it is argued both by Strabo 8. 6. 23. 381 and Dio Cassius 22. 76. 2. The original location of the statue was not a sanctuary but a public area, as it is argued by Cicero, *In Verrem* 2. 4. 4 who specified that Mummius never looted sanctuaries. Thus it is likely that Praxiteles' bronze Aphrodite stood in the agora of Corinth, perhaps in the same place where at a later time Hermogenes' Aphrodite was erected.

As soon as the Roman colony of Corinth was established, the authorities of the sanctuary may have commissioned a new statue of Aphrodite from Hermogenes of Cythera: this statue of the love goddess was meant to be, if not a copy, at least a variation of Praxiteles' bronze Aphrodite removed to Rome and at the time standing in the capital of the empire in front of the temple of Felicitas.

Since Cythera was famous for its cult of Aphrodite (Paus. 3. 23. 1), Hermogenes may have specialized in the imagery of this goddess and this may be the reason that he was commissioned to make this important statue.

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In this article, the statue of Aphrodite by Hermogenes of Cythera is discussed. This statue is recorded by Pausanias, and was located in the temple of the love goddess in the forum of the Roman colony of Corinth. The temple is Augustan, thus probably the statue and its artist are also of this period. It is likely that this Aphrodite was represented on Roman imperial coins: a naked standing female wreathing herself with her right hand and looking at a mirror held in her left hand. A statuette from Corinth may also be a copy of this work. A bronze Aphrodite of the same style had been set up in Corinth already in the 4th century BC (as it is known thanks to a statuette of Corinthian production from Thera), but this bronze statue had been brought to Rome by Mummius. The new work by Hermogenes was meant to replace it.

Статья посвящена статуе Афродиты работы Гермогена Киферского. Согласно Павсанию, она стояла в храме богини любви на форуме римской колонии Коринф. Храм датируется эпохой Августа, поэтому к ней же, очевидно, можно отнести саму статую и ее автора. Вероятно, что эта Афродита изображена на монетах императорской эпохи: стоящая обнаженная женская фигура, которая возлагает на себя венок правой рукой и держит зеркало в левой. Произведение Гермогена, видимо, копирует и найденная в Коринфе статуэтка. Уже в IV в. до н. э. в Коринфе была бронзовая статуя Афродиты, выдержанная в таком же стиле (о ней позволяет судить статуэтка коринфского производства с Феры), но Муммий увез ее в Рим. Новое произведение Гермогена предназначалось для того, чтобы заменить ее.

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