

Aphrodite's Gaze: Examining the Sacred Landscape of Roman Amathous

The Hellenistic and Roman periods (approximately the end of the 4th c. BCE through the 4th c CE) brought dramatic change to the sociopolitical dynamics of the island of Cyprus due to the abolition of autonomy for the island's city-kingdoms and the accession of the island into trans-Mediterranean imperial networks (Iacovou 2021). Despite this shift, several of the island's cities demonstrated endurance in fundamental aspects of local society and culture, especially in the important sphere of religion. This continuity is especially observable in the ancient city of Amathous on the island's southern coast. The city's sanctuary to Aphrodite was continuously occupied and was a center of worship as early as the 8th century BCE and continued to attract worshippers well throughout the Roman period (Aupert 2000; Aupert et al. 2020). Using a "sacred landscapes" approach to examine the archaeological evidence and conduct geospatial analysis, the proposed paper will explore the functional dynamics of Amathous' religious topography as it was arranged in the Roman period. In doing so, the legacies of Cypriot religious practice with origins in the Iron Age will be demonstrated as having an impact on the community despite its incorporation into the Roman imperial system. The importance of this research is twofold. Firstly, such a study will revisit the island of Cyprus from its conventional relegation as a backwater during the Roman period by employing a framework that prioritizes the agency and experiences of Cypriot society, rather than exclusively privileging the perspective of outsiders (Mitford 1980). Secondly, this paper will serve as a new case study in the potential of applying sacred landscapes approaches to Cyprus, emphasizing diachronic human-environmental interaction and relationships.

Works Cited

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