THE CULT OF APHRODITE IN CARIA

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Aphrodite, who according to the Greek legend had sprung at first from the foam on the Cyprus seashore near Old Paphos, was a goddess with a very long pedigree in the world of the Mediterranean and the Near East. She was worshipped particularly in Asia Minor and the Aegean in the Greek period, and proved herself well able to adapt to the Roman sovereignty. She had given her name to twelve cities, so Stephanus of Byzantium tells us, and because of its very substantial remains Carian Aphrodisias has been of particular interest to travellers and scholars. In the early eighteenth century William Sherard, a British botanist, paid three visits there and transcribed the text of numerous inscriptions, with some topographical detail. 1 Although some had appeared in the Antiquitates Asiaticae of Edmund Chishull and in the intervening period various epigraphists and professional men located in Turkey had also made transcriptions, it was not until the late nineteenth century that A. Boeckh used them in the Corpus inscriptionum Graecarum in association with K. O. Müller.

Our knowledge of Aphrodisias has now been put on a new footing by the sustained work of Professor Kenan Erim of New York University since 1963, leading the Anatolian Research Project of the Classics Department. 2 His excavation of the theatre of Aphrodisias in particular has brought to light further inscriptions of great historical importance, so that with the old and the new evidence historians have a corpus available from the city which makes it one of the best attested in Asia. In 1982 Dr. Joyce Reynolds of Cambridge published Aphrodisias and Rome containing documents from the theatre excavations and related texts, together with extended commentaries. 3 This article has a very limited aim, to draw on this information and focus some attention on the city’s Aphrodite cult itself as a good example of the adaptability of Greek religion to the Roman rule of the eastern provinces, and of the personal and political use to which the cult was put both by the Romans and by citizens of Aphrodisias.

Although remains were found of prehistoric occupation of the site and of Aphrodite worship from early Greek times, the actual temple of Aphrodite dated only from the late second or early first century B.C. It appears to

1. Published as BM Add. 10101.
2. Erim’s site reports and more popular accounts have appeared since 1963; summaries of the finds are to be found in Dr. Mellink’s annual reports on ‘Archaeology in Asia Minor’ in the American Journal of Archaeology.
3. Journal of Roman Studies Monographs No.1. Dr Reynolds and Mrs C. Roueché are producing a corpus of the Aphrodisias inscriptions.
have been located in the Plarasa sector of the joint city and was of the Ionic order, consisting of a pronaos and cella without an opisthodomus. Of the original structure of thirteen columns by eight some part is still standing. Erim reported during the first three years of the excavation on the *temenos* of the goddess and the discovery outside the *peribolos* of the temple of three fragments of a huge image of her. The earliest inscription now records the amalgamation or sympolity of the two communities of Plarasa and Aphrodisias which Rome brought about after Caria had been added to the province of Asia in 129 B.C. (Reynolds, *Document 1*).

The oath of alliance between the two and of loyalty to Rome (also taken by Cibyra and Tabae to the south) is dedicated to Zeus Philios, Concord (Homonoia) and Dea Roma. The choice of these deities and the omission of Aphrodite may seem curious, but the whole treaty with these ‘free and federate’ cities was clearly dominated by the Roman interest, and Zeus Philios with Homonoia is an appropriate collocation; the Dea Roma appears also in the text of a treaty with Antioch on the Maeander, the nearest major city, and Samos, and in Aphrodisias in the first century B.C. we know of a citizen who was ‘priest of Rome’ (*Doc. 30.16*). Reynolds suggests that the hospitable Aphrodite may have housed this inscription in her temple, which will have included also some shrines of other deities.

These deities clearly had their devotees and officials. There are descriptions of priests of Men Ascaenius (a Phrygian god) and Hermes Agoraius (*Doc. 32.6-7*) of Hecate (*29.6*) and of Pluto and Kore (*42.15-18*). There are dedications to Nike (*31.3*) and one of particular interest in the name of that goddess:

‘I, Victory, am always with Caesar of divine descent . . . To the divine Augusti and the Demos, the Victory and the ? lion.’ The reference is to Julius Caesar and his descent from Venus, here as often equated with Aphrodite. The Demos of the Aphrodisians is linked with Aphrodite in two other inscriptions (*Docs. 36.3, 55.2*) as is the cult of Eleutheria also in a text honouring C. Julius Zoilus, who served as priest of both (*33.2-4*). It is natural to associate this cult with the declaration of the freedom of the city made by the Roman senate during the Second Triumvirate, the *Senatus Consultum de Aphrodisiensiibus* (probably passed in 39 B.C.). Amongst the privileges conferred was the grant of *asylum* over an extended area around Aphrodite’s temple, following the favourable attention of Julius Caesar some years earlier:

4. Also of ‘two terracotta figurines of the seated goddess type and a *protome* of the third quarter of the sixth century B.C.’ (*AJA* 1965, 145).
5. *Doc. 32.1-4*. The translations are by Reynolds.
6. For details of the substantial reconstruction of this inscription and full discussion of the date and contents, see *Aphrodisias and Rome*, *Doc. 8*, pp.54-91. Aphrodisias is listed as *civitas libera* by the Elder Pliny, *NH V.109*.)
‘The temple or precinct of the goddess Aphrodite which is in the city of the Plarasans and Aphrodisians, that temple or precinct is to be an asylum, with the rights and religious sanctity which pertain to the temple or precinct of Ephesian Artemis at Ephesus, for an area of 120 feet surrounding that temple or precinct in all directions . . .’ (ll. 55-8).

The decree itself was to be engraved on bronze tablets and displayed in Rome in the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus, in Aphrodisias in the temple of the goddess and perhaps in the market-place of both cities. The link with Artemis of Ephesus is notable, because this was the most prominent local cult of Asia and it was no small honour for the Carian Aphrodite to be ranked alongside her. But it must be remembered that the area of the asylum at Ephesus was much larger; after first being made a stade square by Alexander it was increased by Mithridates and by Antony, but was then reduced by Augustus after Antony’s grant had included part of the city of Ephesus in the temenos, which became infested with criminals. The Artemisium also illustrates the occasional ignoring of the sanctity of those areas. Mithridates had ordered the arrest of a Greek named Chaeremon who had taken refuge there, because he supported the Romans; and a Roman quaestor of Asia, M. Aurelius Scaurus, pursued an escaping slave thither and was only stopped from recapturing him in the temple itself by a certain Pericles. But in general the inviolability of these goddesses was observed.

The question of asylum privilege for Aphrodite recurs in some events under Tiberius which Tacitus has recorded. The context is the increased administrative activity of the Senate and its dealing with the abuse of asylum in some Greek cities of the east, which were required to produce envoys bearing evidence of lawful grants of the privilege. Aphrodisias was amongst them and relied successfully on the grants bestowed by Caesar. Direct confirmation of this is provided by the Senatus Consultum mentioned above, where ‘the ordinances of Divus Julius on these matters’ are referred to. In addition, the fragmentary text of a boundary stone survives (Doc. 35) marking off part of the asylum area and naming Julius Caesar (in all probability) with Augustus and the Roman Senate and People.

The Senate had confirmed Caesar’s grant in 39 B.C. because this was ‘(in accordance with) the sense of duty to the gods felt by the Roman People’, but in the relations between Roman commanders in Asia and Aphrodisias it is very evident that there was more than religious respect and deference involved. Aphrodite was none other than the Roman Venus, and it was inevi-

8. Ann. 3.60-62. The abuses are vividly described: ‘complebantur templae pessimis serviitorum; eodem subsidio obaerati adversum creditores suspectique capitallum criminum recepetebantur’.
table that both Sulla and Caesar would exploit this in their claims to descent from the goddess. Appian claimed to have seen a document containing the information that the Senate itself conferred on Sulla the title of Epaphroditus, 'favourite of Aphrodite'. He then mentions an oracular response to Sulla at Delphi, on the verge of the war against Mithridates, which assured him that Aphrodite 'Cypris', patroness of the descendants of Aeneas, granted him supreme power and called on him to bring an axe to Carian Aphrodisias to ensure this gift. Sulla sent a golden crown as well as an axe, with a dedicatory inscription calling the goddess the warrior companion of his troops.9

During the Civil War both Pompey and Caesar laid claims to the support of Venus Victrix; before the battle of Pharsalus Pompey dreamed that he was setting up trophies in her temple, and Caesar made her his army's watch-word.10 Weinstock points out that after his victory Venus Genetrix (or in the East Aphrodite Geneteira) as the ancestress of Caesar's line again became dominant, and that he honoured Ilium for Aeneas' sake and was described on a statue in Ephesus as 'son of Ares and Aphrodite'.11

More information has come to light with the new inscription containing Octavian's Letter to Ephesus (Doc. 12). He states that an envoy from Aphrodisias had reported the depredations of Labienus' troops in the city in 40 B.C., including the looting of a golden Eros which had been dedicated to Aphrodite by Caesar and which was then deposited with Artemis in her shrine at Ephesus. Octavian, observing wryly that 'in any case Eros is not a suitable offering to (the virgin) Artemis', requested the Ephesians to restore it to Aphrodite in Caria. It is noteworthy that he says 'I have given a commission (entolas) to my colleague Antonius that he should restore to them as much as he can find (of other loot').

Octavian again in a subscript to Samos (Doc. 13), written probably in the first half of 38 B.C.,12 states that he had conferred the grant of freedom on the Aphrodisians alone, 'who took my side in the war and were captured by storm because of their devotion to us' (which must be another reference to the war of Labienus). This was offered as a comment to the Samians when he was declining to honour them in the same way and reflects his special attention to Aphrodite and her cult. The same favour for Aphrodisias was retained through the early Empire, to judge by the few extant inscriptions. Trajan instructed the Smyrneans (Doc. 14) that Aphrodisias was not to be

10. Plut. Pomp. 68.2f, Dio Cass. 43.43.3.
11. Stefan Weinstock; Divus Julius p.84; for Caesar's use of the star symbol of both goddesses, pp.375-6.
12. A strange 'Augustus' appears in the address, and must be assumed as a gloss when in the third century A.D. the document was engraved on the 'Archive Wall'.
liable either to the common liturgies of Asia or to others', and Hadrian confirmed the privilege.

Parallel to these public honours paid to the cult of Aphrodite by the Romans in the late Republic and early Empire is its linking with the imperial cult itself. There is now a large volume of epigraphic evidence illustrating the growth of these links in the Asian provinces, a process facilitated by Roman shrewdness on the one hand and by Greek religious complaisance on the other. The case of the Ephesian Artemision is best known, with many dedications jointly to Artemis and the Caesars; here a provincial shrine of the imperial cult had been established within the great temple of Artemis from as early as 29 B.C. From the period of Domitian comes an inscription (Doc. 42) dedicating a statue in this temple 'to the Imperator Divus Caesar Vespasianus (this name substituted for Domitian's after the damnatio memoriae) . . . the people of Aphrodisias, devoted to Caesar, being free and autonomous from time past by the grace of the emperors, dedicated (this) in the provincial temple of the emperors at Ephesus, on account of their loyalty to the emperors and their goodwill to the city of Ephesus which is the temple warden'.

We would expect that a sebasteion was also established at Aphrodisias in the early Empire, and there is a passing reference to one in an inscription. Professor Erim has now reported that a building whose foundations have been discovered near the theatre is likely to have been just this. A natural part of the growth of the imperial cult there is the appearance of some imperial women on statues, going back as far as Augustus' mother Atia, daughter of Julia who was Caesar's sister and the wife of C. Octavius. It would be appropriate for the Aphrodisians to honour the Juliae and their immediate kin; thus the elder Agrippina occurs, daughter of Julia the daughter of Augustus, and more remarkable is a Julia Augusta coupled with Hera and 'daughter of Augustus', whom Reynolds identifies with Livia. To these may now be added the small fragment of a dedication to Antonia Augusta, mother of Claudius, who was honoured by him on his accession. A further step was to equate imperial women with Aphrodite; thus Julia, daughter of Augustus, is described as Aphrodite Geneteira, and Livilla, sister of Gaius, was called 'the goddess Aphrodite in Asia.'

It may be pointed out in conclusion that devotion to the cult of the god-

13. Doc. 15 (an embassy seeking relief from a tax on the import of iron for the nailsmiths).
14. CIG 2839.
18. IGR iv.9, ILS 8787.
dess was the mark of prominent Aphrodisian families, who also through the offices they held linked it strongly with the cult of the emperors. In regard to the former, we find individuals bearing official titles. C. Julius Zoilus is an outstanding example; he is ‘priest of the goddess Aphrodite, saviour and benefactor of his country, who (? built) the sanctuary of Aphrodite’ (Doc. 37). He is further described on the memorial frieze now reconstructed by Erim as ‘C. Julius Zoilus, freedman of the divine Julius’ son Caesar, (who) after being stephanephoros for the tenth time in succession (gave) the stage and the proscenium with all the applied ornaments on it to Aphrodite and the Demos’ (Doc. 36).

Here is a prime case of imperial patronage, fully exploited by its beneficiary. Octavian probably freed Zoilus following the publication of Caesar’s will, and stated in his letter to a certain Stephanus (Doc. 10): ‘you know my affection for Zoilus. I have freed his native city and recommended it to Antonius’ (dated late 39 or early 38 B.C.). Zoilus is further described as ‘priest of Aphrodite and Eleutheria for life’ (Doc. 33) and his ten years in the local magistracy will have been unequalled at this period. He was responsible for the setting up of the new boundary stones of Aphrodite’s temple following the extension of the asylum area. The frieze is further remarkable for the series of figures set in relief, representing Polis and Demos, Andreia, Arete, Time, Mneme, Aeon and probably Roma, with Zoilus himself being crowned.

With the evidence recently discovered about the family of one Diogenes, his son Tiberius Claudius Diogenes and his brother and sister-in-law Attalus and Attalis, we have an example of the accumulation of priesthoods of Aphrodite and the Caesars, including the high priesthood of Asia. The inscriptions (mostly fragmentary) have been set out and discussed in the second of the articles by Dr. Reynolds already cited, and we may translate the major one in full; ‘The Council and People honoured Tiberius Claudius Diogenes, high priest of Asia and priest of the Augusti (sebastophant: cf. flamen Augusti in the west) and giver of games . . . benefactor, philanthropist, lover of the citizen body (philopolites) . . . twice lawgiver, gymnasiarch, who held all the remaining magistracies in succession’.19 The lettering dates the inscription to the Julio-Claudian period, so that we have an early example of an Aphrodisian citizen attaining to the highest provincial post of the imperial cult.

Another text contains a dedication by this Diogenes: ‘To Aphrodite . . . , Tiberius Claudius Caesar and the Demos, Tiberius Claudius Diogenes Philopolites (has fulfilled) what he promised’. On an adjacent block in the same portico was found a further dedication by his father Diogenes and Attalus and on behalf of his uncle Attalus. This other Diogenes and Attalus

were brothers, with Attalis probably the wife of the latter, and what we have is a cluster of prominent Aphrodisians. The older Diogenes is identified by Reynolds with 'the son of Menander' who gave the city a portico and dedicated it 'to Aphrodite, divus Augustus (who is) Zeus Patroos, Tiberius, Livia (Julia Augusta) and the Demos' and who is himself described as '(priest) of Aphrodite'. His brother Attalus and sister-in-law Attalis Aphion were also 'priests of Aphrodite' and together made the gift of a column in her temple.\textsuperscript{20} Attalis is described posthumously as \textit{herois} in the inscriptions, and is notable for her prominence as priestess and benefactress at this period.

From this brief survey it is evident that Aphrodite in her Carian sanctuary proved as accommodating as did Artemis in Ephesus. In her own city she was dominant; she 'presides' over it (Doc. 18.4) as its 'first mother' (55.1), she 'gave it her name' (25.8, 49.2) and was its 'leader' (49.2), and although we lack the direct evidence we possess for some other Asian cities, we may be sure her cult evoked strong popular support. She had another dimension which was of great benefit to the community, namely her identification with the Venus Genetrix to whom the Julian gens looked back as its founder. This made Aphrodisias a likely ally for Caesar and Octavian and ensured an easy transition to its association with the imperial cult. For individuals with the advantages of birth and wealth, this association could be used profitably in their priesthoods and benefactions. Imperial Rome could have wished for no firmer nexus of relationships to fortify her dominance in Asia.
