

Head of Aphrodite by Praxiteles Discovered

By Sanka Knox

U.S. Scholar Unearths Fragment In Basement of British Museum

NEW YORK, Nov. 8 (NYT).— A battered marble head that had been lying forgotten in the dust and gloom of the basement of the British Museum in London since 1859 has been identified as that of the Aphrodite of Cnidus, the statue carved by Praxiteles in the 4th century BC as the first nude representation of the goddess of love.

The head, minus its nose, mouth and chin and a rear section of the skull and hairdo, was identified by Dr. Iris C. Love, the New York archaeologist, who discovered the goddess's temple among the miles of ancient ruins of Cnidus last year.

The head is the first fragment found to be attributable to the complete statue, which vanished centuries ago.

Dr. Love found the head, which she authenticated on the basis of measurements, artistic quality and known history of the piece, last May. She announced the discovery last week, she said, because the museum is planning to put the head on exhibit.

Expedition to Cnidus

In an expedition to Cnidus, at the southwest tip of a peninsula in Turkey, after her work in the museum, Miss Love found a hand and a forefinger that she has determined are also part of the statue.

Last year, Miss Love found the temple that housed the most renowned Aphrodite of antiquity. This year, close to the temple, a huge block of marble was found wedged between Byzantine walls.

The block had a fragmentary inscription beginning with "PRAX" and including words and partial words for "NUDE" and "APH."

Miss Love conjectured that Cnidus erected the inscription as both homage to the artist and as a signpost to tourists, who came from many parts of the ancient world to see the celebrated nude. It took 36 men to carry the marble block, bundled up and on a litter, to the expedition camp.

In 1859, Sir Charles Newton, a British archaeologist, made the second of two visits to Cnidus for the British Museum. He sent to London 350 crates of marble statues and fragments

of pottery and other relics from the once-thriving Greek colony.

In time, each work and fragment was duly catalogued. Miss Love said that she went to the British Museum late last spring to consult the Newton catalogue and canvass the huge deposit of his booty before embarking on her annual expedition to Cnidus. The museum, she said, "was most hospitable."

Catalogue in hand and accompanied by Margot Love Marshall, her cousin and assistant, and Sheila Gibson, the expedition architect, Dr. Love descended to "the dim and enormous basement. It was dark and dank with electric light bulbs breaking into the gloom at long intervals."

"Spooky" Faces

"Spooky, too, with all those white faces in tiers of shelves, looming," put in Miss Marshall.

Miss Love continued: "I was in a bay of the cellar, on my hands and knees, looking for items marked in the catalogue. There was a head, which I later learned was number 1314, covered with a cloth and the dust of ages. I pulled it out, looked



Iris C. Love

The Aphrodite of Cnidus, by Praxiteles, must have looked very much like this marble copy at the Louvre, Paris.



Matthew Wade

Head found in basement of British Museum in London was identified as the masterpiece. It is one foot high.

measured eight Aphrodite heads, four in the Vatican Museum and four in the Louvre. "Each artist's interpretation differed, but all agreed in measurement and all agree in this respect with the head in the British Museum," she said.

"I used to think that the closest head to Praxiteles's intention was the Kaufman head in the Louvre. But, no longer. It's too soft, in the Hellenistic manner. Our Aphrodite, which is late classical, has the strength and a certain hardness of that time," Miss Love said.

Surface Quality

Miss Love spoke of "the incredible quality" of the surfaces of the Praxiteles fragments. "There is a slight burnishing of the marble that makes the stone look like skin. The planes of the face move one into the other and the eyes are so beautiful; the eyelids were modeled with such precision.

"Lucian [a 2d century AD author] wrote an essay on portraiture, describing the 'ideal' woman of the world. It was a composite portrait, with the head of the Praxiteles Aphrodite and her 'limpid gaze,'" Miss Love recalled.

The slight burnishing that the archaeologist noted is similar, she said, to the surface treatment of the Hermes and the infant Dionysus in the Olympia Museum in Greece, heretofore the only known extant work by Praxiteles.

The original Aphrodite was 6 feet, 3 inches tall. The head in the museum and the hand and finger are of a size commensurate with such stature, Miss Love said. Another finger, found last year and tentatively assigned to an Aphrodite, now has been positively identified with the Praxiteles work.

This may have been the little finger of the left hand, Miss Love said, "perhaps attached to the drapery which, with the hydria, was at the goddess's left." Coins of Cnidus of the time show the goddess with the hydria or water vessel, and drapery held in the left hand, the composition suggesting that the goddess is entering or emerging from her bath.

The last report on the Aphrodite was made in the 4th century AD, by Pseudo-Lucian, writing his "Dialogues on Love."

at it and screamed, 'Margot! Margot! It's here, it's here!'"

Recalling the moment yesterday, Miss Love said: "It was so beautiful, so exquisitely carved, it could only be the work of a great master. It also flashed through my mind that the dimensions were about right. And, of course, I knew that this was from the Newton collection.

"We tried to take photographs, but we had no flash or floodlight. It was so dark, but we found a shaft of daylight and did our best. Miss Gibson carefully made measurements of the head."

The classical figure that Praxiteles carved about 350 BC was the progenitor of all types of the nude Aphrodite. There are 50 or more copies of her and copies of copies in existence, but none are of the classical period. However, aside from the spirit that invested the Praxiteles work and the technique that he employed, the copies of Aphrodite generally followed the original in design and dimensions.

Miss Love said that she

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