

TWO “ABERRANT” CULTS IN AMATHOUS – THE WORSHIP OF BAETYLS AND *APHRODITE KYPRIA*

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ABSTRACT: A Cypriot city Amathous is famous for its ancient cults which were introduced already by pre-Greek inhabitants of the island. This paper discusses two special forms of worship, which are claimed by modern scholars to be present there in antiquity – the cult of baetyls and of Aphrodite *Kypria*. The author suggests that our evidence is actually not enough to prove it. The worship of baetyls and the so-called sanctuary of the Seven within the Stelai is a result of a misreading of an inscription, what was already shown by P. AUPERT and A. HERMARY. The cult of Aphrodite *Kypria* does not seem to be an official poliadic form of worship but a mere invention of some foreigners visiting the island and dedicating to the goddess. This epithet can derive from the common knowledge of the origin of Aphrodite, told by myths or from poetry. It is also frequent in Latin Christian polemics with pagans in Late antiquity.

The aim of this paper is to discuss two aspects of the Amathousians’ religious life – the supposed worship of baetyls under the Roman rule and a unique title of Aphrodite, here called *Kypria*, while she was usually styled *Kypris*. Both issues are strongly connected with a couple of inscriptions set up by a Roman governor and both cults seem to be nothing more than a conjecture of modern scholars, misled by the ancient myths about the “aberrant” character of the Amathousian religion. The Cypriot city Amathous was a place of very old rituals, not completely understood even by the ancients¹. They considered the local society as descendants of the native Cypriots, the tribe of Kinyras, inhabiting the island in the period before Greek colonization, as Theopompus stated²: “Ἕλληνες οἱ σὺν Ἀγαμέμνονι τὴν Κύπρον κατέσχον, ἀπελάσαντες τοὺς μετὰ Κινύρου ὧν εἰσὶν ὑπολιπεῖς οἱ Ἀμαθούσιοι³. Stephanus of Byzantium thought that even

¹ MITFORD 1946: 40–42; HERMARY 1988: 101.

² JONES 1937: 366, the selection of sources on p. 487.

³ Theopomp. *FGrH* 115 F 103: “The Greeks commanded by Agamemnon, who captured Cyprus, killed the tribe of Kinyras, whose survivors are the Amathousians” (all translations are mine unless otherwise stated). Cf. KARAGEORGHIS 2005: 75, 77 – the myth can contain a reminiscence of real happenings and it is probable that the Eteocyprians, who escaped from Paphos, found a refuge there. The myth told by Theopompus is not connected to the Trojan war as the other myths on foundation