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Autor: Jackson, Steven

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Callimachus' Pupils and Adonis

By Steven Jackson, Durban

We learn (*FGrH* 334 F 45)¹ that the island of Cyprus took its name from Cyprus the daughter of Cinyras; or from the daughter of Byblus and Aphrodite, as Philostephanus recorded in his work *On islands* and Istrus in his book *On Egyptian Colonies*; or from the cyprus flower:

ἐκλήθη δὲ ἀπὸ Κύπρου τῆς θυγατρὸς Κινύρου· ἢ τῆς
Βύβλου καὶ Ἀφροδίτης, ὡς Φιλοστέφανος ἐν τῷ Περὶ
νήσων καὶ Ἰστρου ἐν Ἀποικίαις Αἰγυπτίων ἱστόρησαν· ἢ
ἀπὸ τοῦ φυομένου ἄνθους κύπρου.

The three possibilities which are quoted here are not, perhaps, as unconnected as they may seem at first sight. Let us look first at the second piece of information, which is supplied by both Philostephanus and Istrus, the pupils of Callimachus. This makes Cyprus a daughter of Byblus and Aphrodite. There can be little doubt that the Byblus referred to was the town in Phoenicia which was sacred to Adonis (Strabo 16.2.18; Lucian, *De dea Syr.* 6) and which, as part of the Assyrian empire, colonised Cyprus. We know that the cult of Adonis came from the Semitic world (*Adon* Semitic for “lord”), and that it became established in Byblus and, subsequently, in Byblus’ colony of Cyprus. The cult bore little resemblance to the form of worship of Adonis which we see later in Greece and in the west². In Hellenistic times both Byblus and Cyprus were very much under Ptolemaic influence (Theoc., *Id.* 17.86–87; *OGIS* 54, line 7), and

1 Müller (*FHG* 3 F 39 p. 423) differs from Jacoby in that he ends the quotation after Αἰγυπτίων ἱστόρησαν, thus omitting the third possibility of the cyprus flower. This omission is unnecessary.

2 For a discussion of the origins of the Adonis cult and its identification with the spread of the Mesopotamian Dumuzi-Tammuz cult see W. Burkert, *Greek Religion* (Cambridge, Mass. 1985) 176–177. The festival of the *Adonia* at Alexandria in the time of Philostephanus and Istrus is described in Theocritus *Id.* 15 (see Gow, *Comment.* esp. pp. 262–265; n. 86. p. 289, n. 114. p. 295) and it resembles a similar celebration at Byblus where, however, a resurrection of Adonis was staged after his death (Lucian, *De dea Syr.* 6; see also Jerome [*Migne P.L.* 25. 86] and Origen [*P.G.* 13. 800]. Interestingly, Cyril [*P.G.* 70. 441] indicates that this was the ritual at Alexandria in his day). Theocritus, though, makes it clear that in Alexandria after the day of mourning nothing will be heard of Adonis for another year (104, 143, 149). Apart from this one apparent difference, the respective rituals were the same at both Alexandria and Byblus, but, significantly, they did not correspond with those held in Greece. It is noticeable that Theocritus uses the term *Adon* in the last line (149) of *Id.* 15. Perhaps, too, one should heed R. L. Hunter’s caveat that “we are dealing with a Theocritean poem and not a documentary account of a ‘historical’ festival” (*Theocritus and the Archaeology of Greek Poetry*, Cambridge 1996, 131).

Byblus would have come within the purview of Istrus in his work *On Egyptian Colonies*, and Cyprus within that of Philostephanus in his *On Islands*.

The Ptolemies valued the authenticity which their court-poets could confer on their institutions by bringing them into the context of traditional local culture and religion³. In the case of Byblus there was a mythological link which had long existed between Egypt and Byblus and which had the authority of a Hesiodic source, so important to the Alexandrian writers. This link involved Phoenix, eponymous founder of the Phoenicians, who, according to ‘Hesiod’ (F 139 M-W), was the father of Adonis:

Ἄδωνις δὲ ἔτι παῖς ὢν, Ἀρτέμιδος χόλωι πληγείς ἐν θήρῃ
ὑπὸ συὸς ἀπέθανεν. Ἡσίοδος δὲ αὐτὸν Φοῖνικος καὶ
Ἀλφεισιβοίας λέγει.

Phoenix’s own father was Agenor, brother of Belus, king of Egypt⁴, again according to ‘Hesiod’ (F 138 M-W):

... ὥς δὲ Ἡσίοδος φησιν, Φοῖνικος τοῦ Ἀγήνορος καὶ
Κασσιεπείας ...

‘Hesiod’ is one of three pre-Alexandrian versions of Adonis’ parentage that we know of before that of the “Callimachean” Philostephanus ([Probus] in Verg., *Ecl.* 10.18, see 3.2, 348.1 Thilo-Hagen = Antimachus F 92a, p. 256 Matthews):

‘Adonis’. <filius, ut> Hesiodus ait, Phoenicis <Agenoris> et
Alphesiboeae {Agenoris}; <ut Panyassis ait T>hoantis, qui
Assyriam Arabiamque tenuit imperio; ut Antimachus ait,
<Cinyrae qui> regnavit in Cypro; ut Philostephanus libro quo
quaestiones poeticas reddidit, ex Iove sine ullius feminae accubitu
procreatus.

Herodotus’ kinsman Panyassis (Apollod. 3.14.4 = *EGF* Panyassis F 22A Davies = *PEG* Panyassis F 27 Bernabé) says that Adonis was the son of Thias (corrected to *Thoas* by Matthews after a codex of Apollodorus) king of the Assyrians who had a daughter called Smyrna. She, encouraged by Aphrodite whom she had failed to honour, desired her father, and she, with the aid of her nurse, slept with her father for twelve nights without his realising the truth. When Thias discovered what he had done he drew his sword and pursued Smyrna. Finally caught she prayed to the gods to make her invisible, whereupon the gods pitied her and turned her into a tree called “smyrna” the myrrh-tree.

3 See pp. 60–61 of my “Apollonius of Rhodes: Author of the *Lesbou Ktisis*?”, *QUCC* n.s. 49 (1995) 57–66.

4 For Agenor as Belus’ brother, see Hyg., *Fab.* 157.1, 168.1, and Apollod. 2.10–11. But it is almost certain that the original genealogy, with Agenor and Belus as sons of Libya and Poseidon, appeared in ‘Hesiod’: see (taken in conjunction) FF 137–139 M-W; *FGrH* 3 F 21; and M. L. West, *The Hesiodic Catalogue of Women* (Oxford 1985) 77–78, 151, 154, 177.

Ten months later the tree split open to reveal Adonis, a very beautiful child whom Aphrodite secretly from the rest of the gods put in a chest which she then gave to Persephone who on seeing the child did not return him. Zeus was called in to arbitrate. Dividing the year into three parts, he ordered Adonis to spend one part on his own, another with Persephone, and the third with Aphrodite. But Adonis gave over his own third to Aphrodite⁵. He was later killed by a boar while hunting⁶.

That Panyassis said that Adonis was the son of Thias king of the Assyrians who had a daughter called Smyrna is certain, but it is unlikely that the myrrh-tree action is genuine Panyassis⁷. It is more likely to be a piece of Hellenistic romanticism⁸. If this is so, we may, I think, reasonably assume that the Alexandrian poets excised the reference to Thias, which, no doubt, originally had been created to associate more closely the conquering Assyrian with the native Phoenician in Byblus⁹, and that they replaced it with the Phoenix genealogy as recorded by 'Hesiod'. They then created the myrrh-tree action¹⁰.

The myrrh-tree action helps to explain the words of Philostephanus (*FHG* 3.31 F 14 Müller = Antimach. F 92a, p. 256 Matthews) who tells us that Zeus begot Adonis without having intercourse with any woman. He also records, after 'Hesiod' (above F 139 M-W), that Adonis was killed by a boar while hunting:

'Adonis' ... ut Philostephanus libro quo quaestiones poeticas reddidit¹¹, ex Iove sine ullius feminae accubitu procreatus. Hunc venandi studiosum fuisse et ab apro interiisse, atque ita plurimis cognitum.

We know that in his chapter *On Cyprus*, in his work *On Islands*, Philostephanus told the story of Cyprian Pygmalion's lust for a naked ivory statue of Aphrodite and of his making love to it (*FHG* 3.31 F 13 Müller = Clem. Al., *Protr.* 4.51):

5 Cp. Hyg., *Astron.* 2.6; *Sch.Theocr.* 3.48, p. 131 Wendel.

6 Cp. Bion, *Id.* 1; Cornutus, *Th.Gr.Comp.* 28; Plut., *Quaest. Conviv.* 4.5.3; Athen. 2.80; Tzetzes, Σ ad Lycophr. 831; Propert. 3.4.53f.; Ovid, *Met.* 10.710ff.; Hyg., *Fab.* 248; Macrobi., *Sat.* 1.21.4; Lactant., *Div. Inst.* 1.17.

7 Cp. G. L. Huxley, *GEP* pp. 186–187. This, of course, precluded Wyss' theory (Antimach. F 102, p. 51) that in his *Lyde* Antimachus had followed Panyassis in the story of Smyrna's incest. But the text of [Probus] printed by Wyss was corrupt, and the corrections of West (followed by Gentili-Prato) should now be adopted, see Antimachus F 92 Comment., p. 256ff. Matthews.

8 For an alternative view see Astour, *Hellenosemitica* 137–138.

9 Interestingly, Tzetzes (Σ ad Lycophr. 829, 831) rejects the idea that Myrrha, the mother of Adonis, was a daughter of Thias.

10 Cp. Lycophron (*Alex.* 828–833) who refers to Byblus as "the strong city of unhappy Myrrha".

11 A reference, it seems, to Philostephanus' *Aetia*, but Müller (p. 31) ascribes, probably correctly, this fragment to Philostephanus' *On Islands* (i.e. ch. *On Cyprus*) rather than to his *Aetia*.

Ὁ Κύπριος ὁ Πυγμαλίων ἐκεῖνος ἐλεφαντίνου ἡράσθη
ἀγάλματος ... Τὸ ἄγαλμα Ἀφροδίτης ἦν καὶ γυμνὴ ἦν ...
Νικᾶται ὁ Κύπριος Πυγμαλίων τῷ σχήματι καὶ συνέρχεται
τῷ ἀγάλματι, καὶ τοῦτο Φιλοστέφανος ἱστορεῖ ... ἐν τῷ Περὶ
Κύπρω.

This is significant as we know from Ovid (*Met.* 10.298ff.) that the tale of Cinyras followed on the Pygmalion story. We may reasonably assume, therefore, that Philostephanus went on to narrate the tale of Cinyras too, since he was after all (unlike Ovid later) specifically recording the history and legends of Cyprus. If he did, then he would almost certainly have had Antimachus of Colophon before him who had recorded that Cinyras' offspring was Adonis¹².

Now, we are told that a certain Cinyras of Syrian descent reached Cyprus with some people and founded Paphus there (*Bibl.* 3.14.3)¹³. This, probably, symbolised the colonisation of Cyprus by the Assyrians who, setting out from Byblus, no doubt took their Adonis cult with them. In this sense Adonis was received as Cinyras' progeny on the island¹⁴.

The Alexandrian poets may well have sought to strengthen the Hesiodic link between Egypt and Byblus and at the same time to extend it to Cyprus after Cinyras' colonisation. This they seem to have done through a clever piece of semantics. They made the connection between *cyprus*, which is an Egyptian dye known as *henna*, and *Cyprus*, the name of the island. The intervening link was the *Smyrna* story from Assyria into which they introduced the myrrh-tree

12 Interestingly, Antimachus, like Panyassis, and Epimenides, recorded Aphrodite's unashamed lust for Adonis, but this is not to say that he followed them in other respects (Antimachus F 92b, pp. 256–257 Matthews):

[εἶ]
τά τε [Ἀφροδίτην
ἀν]αῖς[χύντως ἐρᾶν]
ἀνθρώπων? Ἀδῶ]
νιδό[ς? Ἀντίμα]
χος καὶ Π[ανύασαις]
καὶ Ἐπι[ενίδης (F novum) καὶ]
πλείους. ἄλλοι καὶ Ἀγχε[ῖσο]ν.

The reference to Hesiod (F 139 M-W) is false.

13 According to Hyginus (*Fab.* 142) Cinyras was a son of Paphus.

14 Bion of Phlossa (fl. c. 100 B.C.) states that Adonis was "Aphrodite's Assyrian lord" (1.24) and speaks of "pouring out upon him perfumes of Syria": *Syrioisin ... Myrroisin.* (1.77). But he also refers to Adonis as the son of Cinyras (1.91). Interestingly, we learn from Theopompus (*FGrH* 115 F 103) that, eventually, Cinyras and his people were driven out of Cyprus by Agamemnon and those with him. This, in turn, probably symbolised the first arrival of Aeolian Greeks on the island and their subsequent initial clashes there with these Assyrian colonists. For the story of Cinyras, cp. *Sch.Theocr.* 1.109a, p. 66 Wendel; Plut., *Parall.* 22; Ovid, *Met.* 10.298ff.; Hyg., *Fab.* 58, 164; Fulgent., *Myth.* 3.8; Lactant., *Narr. Fab.* 10.9; Servius ad Virg., *Ecl.* 10.18, *Aen.* 5.72. Cp., too, Ant. Lib. (*Transform.* 34) who, however, differs as to the name of Myrrha's father whom he calls Belus. Also, Cat. 95 rf. Cinna's *Zmyrna*.

action¹⁵. They bound together the links of this chain through the etymology of *cyprinon myron*, a perfume made from the flower of the *cyprus* on the island.

In a manner of speaking, therefore, *Myrrha* is the element common to all three parts of our original fragment. She is the daughter of Cinyras; she is also a daughter of Byblus (Phoenicia) and Aphrodite; and she is related to the cyprus flower. And the name of the island of Cyprus is closely connected to her name.

In this way Alexandrian writers like Istrus and Philostephanus imposed their own element of myth on the already long established elements of traditional local legend. The important thing was that Egypt, and not the traditional site(s) of the legend, in this case Byblus and Cyprus, should appear as the instigator of the relevant cult, thus giving credence to Ptolemaic authority and influence and conferring the authenticity on their institutions which the Ptolemies valued so much.

15 We know of a Myrrha/Cinyras story which was around before the Alexandrian scholars (*TrGF* II, Adespota F 5d Kannicht-Snell). In this (performed in the theatre as a tragedy when Philip of Macedon was murdered) Cinyras and his daughter Myrrha were killed. Clearly, though, this has little to do with the Alexandrian romance.