

ARCHAEOLOGY

'Aphrodite's' Finder Refutes U.K. Critics

By Sanka Knox

NEW YORK, Nov. 10 (NYT). —Iris C. Love, entering a rebuttal yesterday to British critics of her claim to have found the head of the famed Aphrodite of Cnidus in the British Museum basement, said that their attribution of the head to Persephone, the daughter of Demeter, the earth goddess, could not be supported.

"In the absence of any attribute of Persephone, such as her tall-crowned hat, a poppy, a sheaf of grain or a pomegranate, such an identification is not possible," said the New York archaeologist. Miss Love, who has been excavating Cnidus in Turkey for the past four years, last year discovered the temple of Aphrodite.

The controversial head was found in 1859 by Sir Charles Newton in the precincts of the shrine of Demeter. A statue of the earth goddess was found there, nearly intact, as was a figure in good condition of the sorrowing Demeter.

According to Sir Charles's report of his expedition, the head at issue was found along with the hand of a colossal statue, extremities of statues and a large miscellany of other broken material, Miss Love said. Sir Charles saw evidence of great havoc, either by an earthquake or "the hand of man."

A Question

"If there had been an earthquake, why could only two statues—and those nearly intact—be assembled from the tremendous jumble of arms, legs and other portions of statues found there?" inquired Miss Love.

She continued, "From Newton's description, Demeter's sanctuary appears to have been used as a repository for broken gods and goddesses, perhaps for sacred burial after a calamity." A precedent for such burial exists in numerous cases, Miss Love said, citing the interment of the celebrated bronze statue of the charioteer at Delphi.

Persephone has always been represented as a young girl, Miss Love said. The head, found in the earth goddess's precincts, is that of a young, but mature woman, the archaeologist said. Sir Charles Newton described it as being of "fine" quality, an estimate that has not been contradicted since.

If Miss Love's attribution to the most famous goddess of love

and beauty in antiquity is correct, she will have discovered a rare work by Praxiteles, who was noted for the emotion he infused in his marble figures. The only other work extant by him is the Hermes with the infant Dionysus in the Olympia Museum in Greece.

The first nude statue of Aphrodite to appear in the ancient world, the goddess was copied from antiquity many times and copies were made of the copies. There are about 52 examples extant. Sculptors hewed to the original dimensions, and while interpretations varied through the centuries, Aphrodite's height—6 feet, 3 inches—her stance and the slight inclination of her head did not vary, Miss Love said.

In the head stored in the museum basement, Miss Love found the "superior quality" demanded of a Praxiteles work. "The head is inclined slightly to the left and one notices the delicate folds in the neck and the slight burnishing that gives the impression of flesh," she said. "The head's inclination, the folds in the neck, the measurements all agree with copies that I examined in the Louvre and Vatican museum," Miss Love said.

On the Arts Agenda

The Italian opera season opens Nov. 16 in Rome with a production of Verdi's "Nabucco" with Elena Suliotis in the principal soprano part, followed on Nov. 26 by the Teatro Massimo in Palermo with the first modern performance in Italy (reportedly the first stage performance in Italy since 1815) of Rossini's "Elisabetta, Regina d'Inghilterra" with Leyla Gencer in the title part. On Dec. 4 the Teatro La Fenice opens the Venice season with another rarity, Mercadante's "Due Illustri Rivali," followed on Dec. 5 by the Teatro San Carlo in Naples with Boris Christoff in the title role of Verdi's "Attila," and on Dec. 7, Milan's traditional opening date, with Verdi's "I Vespri Siciliani" at La Scala.

Aaron Copland's 70th birthday, which is Nov. 14, will be celebrated Nov. 11 with a concert of his works by the London Symphony Orchestra. Copland will share the podium at Royal Festival Hall with André Previn.

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