

Aphrodite's Hairdo—Clue To Identity

By Karl E. Meyer

NEW YORK, Dec. 29 (WP).—A hairstyle—a low bun on the nape of the neck—was cited by archaeologist Iris Love yesterday to buttress her claim that a battered head stored in the basement of the British Museum is the original of the famed statue of Aphrodite by Praxiteles.

Taking her argument before an august audience of professionals, Miss Love came prepared with a profusion of slides to show at the annual meeting of the Archaeological Institute of America, in New York.

In a spirited defense of her controversial identification, she argued that the hairstyle matches not only that shown on images of the love goddess on coins of Cnidus, but also is similar to two small copies of the original she found last summer in the drain of a Roman bath at a Turkish site.

An animated and attractive New Yorker, Miss Love has been director, since 1967, of Long Island University excavation at Cnidus, in southwestern Turkey, on a peninsula overlooking the Aegean Sea.

Some nettled scholars, particularly in Britain, have faulted Miss Love for announcing her identification first in a newspaper interview on Nov. 8. Yesterday Miss Love put the blame for that on the British Museum.

She said that on Sept. 30 she met with Denny Haynes, a keeper of the museum, to discuss her belief that the museum's head No. 1314 might be a fragment of the original Aphrodite. "I asked that this be kept confidential," she said. "This request and permission to publish was graciously granted."

But on Nov. 6, she says, she learned that the museum was preparing the head for exhibition the following week. And she received only "confused and contradictory" answers to her anxious questions about this apparent pre-emptive gesture. The day after her newspaper interview appeared, the head was put on public display, she noted sharply.

The battered head originally came to the British Museum in 1958 in one of 350 crates of objects dug up at Cnidus by the British archaeologist Sir Charles Newton. Though it has been in the museum basement most of the time since, it has been studied by several leading scholars.

Miss Love countered arguments that the head was found nearly a mile from its presumed ancient site in a precinct dedicated to Demeter, among a whole collection of unrelated fragments. This she attributed to the work of a "zealous pagan, who collected the fragments from other areas of the city to give them a respected burial in a rather appropriate sanctuary."

All of this may not be enough to persuade the British Museum that an American has found a prize trophy in its cellar. Speaking to a reporter after her scholarly report, Miss Love had a further suggestion:

"If they don't think it's authentic, why don't they return it to Turkey from whence it came? That's better than sticking it back in the basement," she said.

She has already made the suggestion to the museum, but so far has had no response.

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JALARC0700302