CHAPTER THREE

THE GREAT GODDESS OF THE BOSPORUS IN THE LATE FIRST CENTURY BC–THE FOURTH CENTURY AD

1.3.1 Epigraphic Evidence

1.3.1.1 Aphrodite Ourania Apatourou Medeousa

Aphrodite Ourania was honored in the overwhelming majority of the Bosporan dedications from the Imperial period. A stele (CIRB 31, 9/8 BC–AD 7/8), with a dedication ‘Αφροδίτη Οὐρανία Ἀπατοῦρος μεδεούση, erected by a private person and his wife ὑπὲρ βασιλίσσης Δυνάμεως φιλορωμαίου, and a statue base (CIRB 35, AD 243), erected by a son of a πρίνκιψι θείᾳ Ἀφροδίτει Οὐρανίᾳ Ἀπατοῦρῳ με[δε]σούση, were found in Panticapaeum.

However, it was the Asiatic Bosporus that continued to play a leading role in Aphrodite’s cult. Since in the first centuries AD Panticapaeum gradually lost its importance and the center of the Bosporan Kingdom moved to Phanagoria, there were additional reasons for the increasing popularity of the tutelary goddess of this city.

During the turbulent first century BC–first century AD the great sanctuaries of the goddess on the Taman peninsula must have suffered considerable damage. In fact, the famous Apaturum itself in Pliny’s time was deserted (Hist. Nat. 6.6.18: paene desertum Apaturos). Therefore in AD 105 the king of the Bosporus, Tiberios Iulius Sauromates, restored the porticos (περιναύοις στοάις τῶν—[χρόνωι καὶ] θηρημέναις) of the Hermonassa temple. The practical supervision was entrusted to an official who was titled ὁ ἐπὶ τῶν ἱερῶν (CIRB 1045). Rostovtzev (1913: 29; 1990a: 181) observes that ὁ ἐπὶ τῶν ἱερῶν, the minister of religion, corresponds to the office of the supreme priest of the main sanctuary, subordinate only to the king, in the Iranian monarchies of the Pontus and Cappadocia.2

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1 The responsibilities of a πρίνκιψι in the Bosporan kingdom remain unclear.
2 This office occurs also in CIRB 976 and 1129.
The royal court, or at least people serving there, continued to honor Aphrodite in Hermonassa during the second century AD. A synod of Aphrodite (θεᾶς Ἀφροδείτης), headed by ὁ ἐπὶ τῆς αὐλῆς, the chancellor of the royal palace (Minns 1913: 613; Gaydukevich 1949: 341; Gajdukevič 1971: 360), set up there a dedication to the goddess (CIRB 1055).

In another inscription set up by a Hermonassa synod, apparently under Cotys II (CIRB 1054; AD 123/4–132/3), the name of the deity is not preserved. The synod was headed by a νακόρος, followed by ἵρευς (sic), ἵερωμάστωρ, γραμματεὺς, φιλάγαθος, and a list of λοιποί θιασείται.

Νακόρος is a Doric form of νεωκόρος, which penetrated the koine and was used elsewhere in the Greek-speaking world (comm. to CIRB 1054). The word initially designated a temple servant (Eurip. Ion 82) or official (Xen. Anab. 5.3.6–7). As to the responsibilities of the neokoroi, in Panamara (Caria), for instance, the nekoros was one of the most important temple officials, usually an ex-priest, who was in charge of the archives and the finances of the sanctuary (Laumonier 1958: 231), but this evidence certainly cannot be applied directly to the Bosporus. The functions of the nakoros in Hermonassa remain therefore unclear.

The word ἱερωμάστωρ, which appears only on the Bosporus, according to Latyshev (comm. to IPE IV 421) designates “a searcher” or “a seeker” of sacred things, in other words, ἱεροποιός. However, the exact responsibilities of the hieromastor remain obscure (comm. to CIRB 1054; Minns 1913: 624; Gaydukevich 1949: 435; Gajdukevič 1971: 454). As to other officials, they are usually mentioned in the inscriptions of Bosporan cult associations (below, 2.1.2). This document may be compared with CIRB 1005 from Phanagoria, containing the word νεωκορείον (lines 4, 26), which designates a room or a building where sacred ceremonies were to be performed. Since there can be almost no doubt that CIRB 1005 describes ceremonies in honor of Aphrodite Ourania, and another synod known in Hermonassa

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3 A female nekoros enjoyed the privilege of entering the temple of Aphrodite at Sicyon (Paus. 2.10.4); a collegium of nekori served Aphrodite in her temple at Aphrodisias (Laumonier 1958: 485). In the Roman period most prominent people sought the title of νεωκόρος (νακόρος), cities housing important sanctuaries could also be thus named, and in a Bosporan third-century AD inscription the city of Heraclea Pontica is called νεωκόρος (CIRB 59).