CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE ARCHITECTURAL SETTING
OF THE KNIDIAN APHRODITE

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This chapter considers the architectural setting of the Knidian Aphrodite by Praxiteles. It underlines the difficulties in its discussion, since some now think the Knidian tholos (‘round building’) was not designed to shelter the famous statue. Only texts remain, and I will concentrate on them. Most date from the Roman Imperial period, and I therefore also consider the reception of the Knidian Aphrodite at this time.¹

Knidos is located on the western coast of Asia Minor, on the peninsula of Datça (Turkey), facing the island of Kos. In his Periegesis, Pausanias describes the variation of the cult of Aphrodite at Knidos, where she is worshipped as Doritis (‘The Dorian’), Akraia (‘Of the promontory’), and Euploia (‘She who gives a successful navigation’), in three separate temples.² By the second century AD, Knidian Aphrodite was known as Euploia by the Knidians, as in many other cities on the western coast of Asia Minor, because she protected sailors.³ Pliny the Elder, writing in the first century AD, informs us about the purchase of the famous statue of Knidian Aphrodite:

Praxitelis aetatem inter statuarios diximus, qui marmoris gloria superauit etiam semet. Opera eius sunt Athenis in Ceramico, sed ante omnia est non solum Praxitelis, uerum in toto orbe terrarum Venus, quam ut uiderent, multi nauigauerunt Cnidum. Duas fecerat simulque uendebat, alteram velata specie, quam ob id praetulerunt quorum condicio erat, Coi, cum eodem pretio detulisset, seuerum id ac pudicum arbitrantes. Reiectam Cnidii emerunt, inmensa differentia famae. Voluit eam a Cnidii postea mercari rex

¹ On this statue and its reception in antiquity, see also Havelock, The Aphrodite of Knidos; Stewart, Art, Desire and the Body, pp. 97–107.
² Paus. 1.1.3.

Praxiteles is an artist whose date I have mentioned among those of the makers of bronze statues, but in the fame of his work in marble he surpassed even himself. There are works by him at Athens, in the Cerameicus; and yet superior to anything not merely by Praxiteles, but in the whole world, is the Venus, which many people have sailed to Cnidus to see. He had made two figures, which he put up for sale together. One of them was draped and for this reason was preferred by the people of Cos, who had an option on the sale, although he offered it at the same price as the other. This they considered to be the only decent and dignified course of action. The statue which they refused was purchased by the people of Cnidus and achieved immeasurably greater reputation. Later King Nicomedes was anxious to buy it from them, promising so to discharge all the state’s vast debts. The Cnidians, however, preferred to suffer anything but this, and rightly so; for with this statue Praxiteles made Cnidus a famous city.  

Pliny begins with the context of acquisition and the celebrity of the statue, for example that the Knidians preferred to keep it rather than writing off their debt. The inclusion of this anecdote, however, is a rare source concerning the cost of a marble statue. The statue is usually dated between 364–361 and 340 BC, at the peak of Praxiteles’ career. The original, made in Parian marble, is now lost, but we know its appearance from descriptions in numerous texts, primarily the *Palatine Anthology*, and the later authors, Pliny and Pseudo-Lucian, which I consider below. We can also discern its appearance from labeled images on coins, reliefs, statuettes or figurines, as well as those of large scale (figure 13.1).  

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6 Twelve works of Lucian, among them *Amores* (*Affairs of the Heart*), were relegated to the eighth volume of the Loeb edition because “there are good reasons for doubting the Lucianic authorship of some if not all of these works.” Matthew Donald Macleod, trans. and ed. (London, 1967), p. ix.
7 See, for example, the *Venus Colonna* (figure 14.1, 2.04 m high), a torso in Parian marble (Paris, Louvre Museum, Ma 2184; 1.22 m high), or the Kaufmann head (Paris, Louvre Museum, Ma 3518; 0.35 m high). On the Aphrodite statues made by Praxiteles, see *Praxitèle*, ed. Alain Pasquier and Jean-Luc Martinez (Paris, 2007), pp. 130–201. See also a statuette in Malibu (J. Paul Getty Museum, inv. 72.AA.93); two coins from Knidos showing the Aphrodite by Praxiteles are preserved in the *Bibliothèque nationale de France* in Paris (Pasquier and Martinez, *Praxitèle*, p. 53). Kristen Seaman, “Retrieving the Original Aphrodite of Knidos,” *Atti della Accademia nazionale dei Lincei. Rendiconti Classe di scienze morali storiche e filologiche*, 15 (2004), 531–594.