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# The stuff of the gods

The material aspects of religion  
in ancient Greece

Edited by Matthew Haysom,  
Maria Mili & Jenny Wallensten

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## ABSTRACT

The “material turn” in the humanities and social sciences has brought about an expanded understanding of the material dimension of all cultural and social phenomena. In the Classics it has resulted in the breaking down of boundaries within the discipline and a growing interest in materiality within literature. In the study of religion cross-culturally new perspectives are emphasising religion as a material phenomenon and belief as a practice founded in the material world. This volume brings together experts in all aspects of Greek religion to consider its material dimensions. Chapters cover both themes traditionally approached by archaeologists, such as dedications and sacred space, and themes traditionally approached by philologists, such as the role of objects in divine power. They include a wide variety of themes ranging from the imminent material experience of religion for ancient Greek worshippers to the role of material culture in change and continuity over the long term.

*Keywords:* Greek religion, Etruscan religion, Mycenaean religion, materiality, religious change, *temenos*, temples, offerings, cult statues, terracottas, *omphalos*, cauldrons, sacred laws, visuality, purity, pollution, gods’ identities, divine power, inscribed dedications

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### 3. Of things and men in the sanctuary of Aphrodite (Delos)

Does the content of a sanctuary define the personality of the god?

#### Abstract

A major contribution of the anthropological movement known as the “ontological turn” is to make us consider objects not only as the results and testimonies of actions, but also as actors in a society. The use of this theory in the field of archeology leads us to move from a one-time perspective to diachronic analysis, considering the object from its production to its abandonment; in this duration, thinking about the object as an actor requires analyzing its influence on the fluctuating network of social ties in which it is engaged. This paper discusses the case of a Greek sanctuary in this perspective, in order to understand how the offerings that people made to a god contributed to define or strengthen the personality of a divinity. To what extent did the objects which filled a sanctuary direct the way in which a regular or a first-time visitor pictured the god? The case of the Aphrodision of Delos, a cult site which is well documented by archeological sources for almost the entire duration of its use (c. 304–c. 69 BC), brings a qualified answer.\*

**Keywords:** Aphrodision, Aphrodite, Stesileos, Greek sanctuary, worship, Delos, Delian Independence, ontological turn

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#### Introduction

Studying a society by considering the objects it produces and the way humans and non-humans interact in it is one of the trails that follows recent anthropology.<sup>1</sup> The interest that such methods represent for archeologists is obvious, since anthropologists consider live interactions where we only—and partially—possess the material component of this network.

\* I am particularly grateful to Samuel Holzman for converting my broken English into an understandable text. I probably added a lot of mistakes of my own after his kind proofreading.

<sup>1</sup> See in particular the Actor-Network Theory as developed by B. Latour (for instance Latour 2007, 102–118).

Trying to apply the anthropological way of thinking to our material—which means systematically studying objects in terms of complex diachronic social networks instead of typological chronologies—is thus an interesting way to renew our analyses and to advance the ultimate aim of archeology, that is to say the reconstruction of the vanished members of these interactions: people.

This paper is an experimental attempt to read the remains of a Delian sanctuary in this light. Besides the traditional work of dating and reconstructing the missing parts of the buildings and objects that were found in this sanctuary, I will evaluate—as far as possible considering the data—the effect that these objects and their linking could produce on the people who entered the sanctuary, and the way this relationship between people and objects evolved in time.<sup>2</sup> In the field of archeology of religion, it is common to analyze objects as results of an act or as tokens of an intention: an offering testifies to the hope or the recognition of a giver; sometimes it tells us more about who visited the sanctuary and when, what the donor hoped to obtain from a divinity, what the financial means of the worshipper were, and so on. But in making such analyses we only consider the object at the time of dedication. What happens to it then? Where was it stored? Was it prominently displayed or not, maintained, relegated, registered, or left to decay? These questions are more rarely investigated.<sup>3</sup> How people reacted to the material context of the sanctuary is an even more difficult question, but one I aim to address, in the spirit of the other papers in this volume: did this material context impose a specific conception of the god on visitors?<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> See Morin for an analysis of the process of this perpetually renewed retroaction, that he calls “recursive interaction” (Morin 2005, 99–101).

<sup>3</sup> Prêtre 2014 studied the Delian inventories in this perspective.

<sup>4</sup> Several scholars recently studied the emotional reaction of the worshippers: Chaniotis 2006; 2017; Grand-Clément 2017. Chaniotis interestingly experimented with narrating a sacrifice *in medias res*, reconstructing

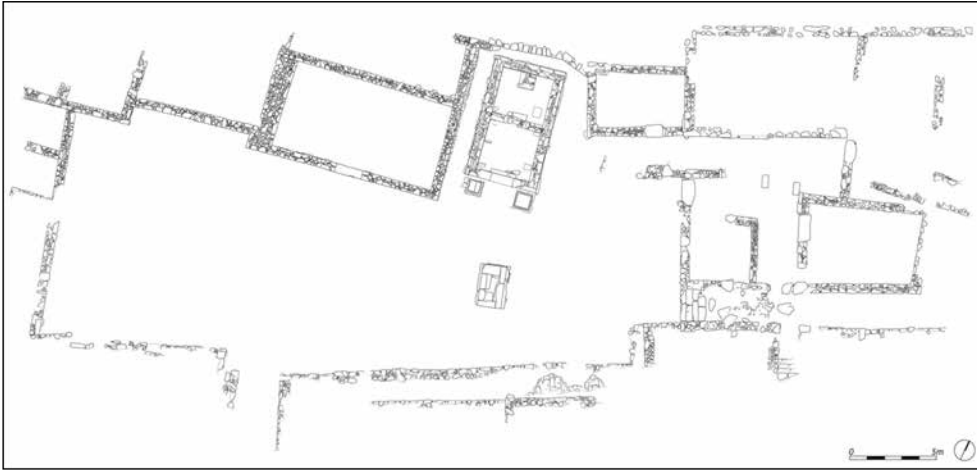


Fig. 1. Plan of the Aphrodision.  
F.-F. Muller, 2004  
(© École française d'Athènes).

The different steps of recursive interaction could be summarized as follows:

- 1) In a first phase, an individual or a group offers to the god a space, a building (altar, temple) and various objects; these offerings make sense in a given social context. Once divine ownership is established, the presence of the god becomes concrete in this space, these buildings or these objects. The physical presence of the deity dwells in the sanctuary, embodied not only in a statue,<sup>5</sup> but as well in the buildings and objects possessed. In this first step, the nature and value of these offerings reflects the personality attributed to the god, the significance and the weight that were given to him in the social configuration of the time when the sanctuary was created.
- 2) In a second phase, successive generations of worshippers follow each other in the sanctuary. They come to meet a god whose identity is illustrated by the configuration of the sanctuary and its content.<sup>6</sup> In this second step, the combination of the spaces, buildings and offerings gives to the god a unique and lasting identity.

the emotions of the participants (Chanotis 2006, 214–216); his text, on the borderline between history and fiction, illustrates perfectly both the profit and the uncertainty of this approach.

<sup>5</sup> The statue remains, however, the main receptacle of the deity (Chanotis 2017) and this representation therefore plays an important role in defining the identity of the deity.

<sup>6</sup> By revealing the expectations of previous donors, the offerings already deposited in the sanctuary guide the devotion of their successors. See, for a contemporary example, churches where the accumulation of marine offerings defines the personality of Mary as protector of sailors (for instance Notre Dame de Bon Port in La Garoupe, on the peninsula of Antibes near Nice)—but this function does not prevent her from being called upon in other fields of action. Similar cases of characterization of a god by offerings are known in antiquity: see for example Cicero (*Nat. D.* 3, 89) mentioning the marine offerings in the sanctuary of the Great Gods in Samothrace—who, however, were not exclusively worshipped by sailors.

- 3) Each generation adding its own offerings, the sedimentation of objects gradually changes its appearance together with the successive social contexts in which it fits, so that the façade which the god presents to the newcomers evolves constantly.

This diachronic reading of interaction in a sanctuary leads us to consider the sanctuary as a combination of hardware changing with time, that, in a sense, constitutes the physical body of the god. The specific character of the god worshipped in a sanctuary should therefore be affirmed to a newcomer by the configuration of this amalgam of objects.

## History of the Aphrodision

Let us now apply this framework to a particular case: the Hellenistic sanctuary of Aphrodite on the island of Delos. Its evolution covers two periods of the Delian history.

In 314 BC, after Antigonos declared the independence of Greek cities, the Athenian magistrates who ruled the Delian sanctuary departed from Delos and local elites recovered the management of the sanctuary of Apollo: they kept it until 167 BC, during the period we usually call the “Delian Independence”. A decade after its beginning, around 304 BC, a member of the Delian elite, a wealthy magistrate named Stesileos, dedicated to Aphrodite a new sanctuary when he left his position as an *archon*.<sup>7</sup> Located at the foot of the Hill of the Theatre, it included a cult statue in a small temple (4.13 × 7.04 m), an altar and an *oikos* (west building) in a court (Fig. 1, western part). This sanctuary was managed by the family of

<sup>7</sup> He was archon in 305 BC (Vial 1984, 75; Durvy 2006a, 100). There was already an Aphrodision on Delos: it was supposed to contain the Cretan *xoanon* of Aphrodite that Theseus dedicated on the island. It has not been identified on the site (Durvy 2006a, 84–91).

the founder during the period of Delian Independence. The goddess was apparently worshipped there as a patroness of magistrates under the supervision of the founder's family.<sup>8</sup> As such, she was strongly involved in the network of the new political elite which grows on Delos after 314 BC.<sup>9</sup>

In 167 BC, after the Roman defeat of Perseus, Delos became a free harbor. The Delian citizens—including the descendants of Stesileos—were expelled and a new population of Athenian colonists and Mediterranean traders settled the island, together with the foreigners who were already well-established residents during the 3rd century BC. At that time, the Aphrodision was enlarged with new buildings (*Fig. 1*, eastern part),<sup>10</sup> and new offerings were dedicated here until the day the sanctuary was abandoned, apparently due to the offensives of Mithridates' troops and allies during the Mithridatic war (88 and 69 BC). During this second phase, offerings suggest that Aphrodite was worshiped particularly for her patronage of marriage and the family.<sup>11</sup>

The history of the worship presents a rather exceptional case, since the audience of the sanctuary substantially changed one century and a half after its establishment. We thus can seek to understand in what measure a new audience, discovering the sanctuary of Aphrodite originally built by Stesileos, perceived the character of the goddess through the materiality of her sanctuary.

## Dating the sanctuary and its furniture

The first step in our attempt is to understand the appearance of the Aphrodision when newcomers arrived. We must therefore establish two categories among the objects displayed in the Aphrodision: before and after 167 BC.

The excavation of the sanctuary did not yield many offerings, since the sanctuary was emptied when it was abandoned in the course of the 1st century BC.<sup>12</sup> Several inscribed inventories, however, preserve a list of some of the objects that were kept in the sanctuary in the first half of the 2nd century BC.<sup>13</sup>

All the preserved inventories were written after 167 BC.<sup>14</sup> The most complete of them (*IDélos* 1417, A, II, 1–21) is from the year 156 BC (*Table 1*); it is the basis for the reconstructions proposed in this paper (*Figs. 3, 4*).<sup>15</sup>

By analyzing both the archeological remains and the inventories, we can try dating the buildings and objects to identify those that were offered to the goddess before 167 BC (*Table 2*).<sup>16</sup> Stesileos built the sanctuary at the end of the 4th century BC. Maybe he offered the building plot, which we do not know whether it was a gift of the city or private property.<sup>17</sup> Maybe he also offered the buildings (altar, temple, west building): their cost is not mentioned in the public accounts.<sup>18</sup> It is certain that he offered the cult statue, which appears in the inscriptions in 304 BC.<sup>19</sup> The temple has to be contemporary with the statue which it houses. The stratigraphic context shows that the temple, the altar and the west building are contemporaneous, as well as two statues located in front of the temple.<sup>20</sup> As for the woodwork (doors, grilles, coffered ceiling) and the liturgical furniture (offering table, censer)—both known through the epigraphic inventories—we can assume that it was dedicated at the same time as the buildings and possibly from the same budget.

Most of the offerings whose donor is identified came from Stesileos and his family, which means that they belong to the first period of the sanctuary. The founder dedicated a marble cult statue of Aphrodite, but also two bronze statues, life-size, displayed on marble bases on either side of the outer door of the temple, which depicted the father and the mother of Stesileos. The same Stesileos<sup>21</sup> gave to the goddess a wooden picture stored in the *prodomos*. He also dedicated in 302 BC an endowment of money to be loaned out, the interest on which was used annually to finance both a sacrifice and the offering of one or two metal cups.<sup>22</sup> These cups were

<sup>8</sup> I have tried to demonstrate in other papers that the Aphrodite of Stesileos was probably honored as the protector of magistrates. The main arguments are the identity of the founder and the circumstances of the foundation, the type of offerings made to the goddess (which do not reflect any of her usual characteristics), the identity of the donors (mainly magistrates) and the importance given to the display of their written dedications (Durvy 2009a).

<sup>9</sup> On the social role of the main Delian families during the Delian Independence, see Vial 1984, 280, 287–306.

<sup>10</sup> The eastern terrace was built around 150 BC; the *oikos* on the east of the temple was added in the 1st century BC (Durvy 2006b; 2007; 2011).

<sup>11</sup> Durvy 2009a, 164.

<sup>12</sup> Durvy 2007, 991, 996. On the forsaking of Delian sanctuaries at this time, Bruneau 1970, 339–341, 662–663.

<sup>13</sup> Bruneau 1970, 332; Durvy 2009a.

<sup>14</sup> During the period of Delian Independence the contents of the Aphrodision were apparently not listed, perhaps because the management of the sanctuary was more or less a private enterprise (Durvy 2006a, 98–101).

<sup>15</sup> The sketches were made by the architect François-Frédéric Muller, with whom I am currently preparing the architectural publication of the sanctuary. We tried to locate in the temple the objects mentioned by the inventories. We reconstructed their form according to the vestiges or by using parallels with objects and statues of the same period. A detailed comment is given next to each reconstruction.

<sup>16</sup> I proposed an analysis of this chronological distribution in Durvy 2009a, 152–156, 166–167.

<sup>17</sup> The latter option is conceivable because the sanctuary was built by a private individual at the edge of a residential area.

<sup>18</sup> Likely Stesileos himself assumed the financial burden of this expensive offering. The inscriptions suggest that he at least offered the temple: see Durvy 2022.

<sup>19</sup> *IG* XI 2, 144, B, 5.

<sup>20</sup> Durvy 2011; 2013; typological dating of the altar in Ohnesorg 2005, 93–95.

<sup>21</sup> Bruneau 1970, 337.

<sup>22</sup> On this endowment, see Sosin 2014.

	EN ΤΩΙ ΑΦΡΟΔΙΣΙΩΙ· τὸ ἄγαλμα τῆς θεοῦ λίθινον, νας. ἔχον φιάλην ἐν τεῖ δεξιᾷ ξυλί[νῃ] ἐπίχρυσον· ἐνώϊδια χρυσαῖ ἅ ἐ- χει ἡ θεός, ὥν ὀλκὴ Η·, ἀνάθεμα Δημητρίας· τράπεζα λιθίνη· θυ- μιατήριον χαλκοῦν· ἀφροδίσιον λίθινον ἐπὶ βάσεως λιθίνης, ἀνάθε- μα Ἐχενίκης· ἄλλο ἐπὶ βάσεως λιθίνης, ἀνάθεμα Κτησωνίδου· ἄλλο ἐπὶ 5 κιονίου, ἀνάθεμα Προμαθίωνος· ἄλλο ἐπὶ βάσεως, ἀνάθεμα Πραξιμέ- νου· ἄλλο μικρόν, ἀνάθεμα Στησικράτης· ἄλλα ἐλάττονα τρία, ὧν τὰ δύο κολοβά· πίνακας ἀναθεματικούς δύο· θύραι τοῦ ναοῦ ἔχουσαι ἀσπι- δίσκας δύο χαλκᾶς καὶ ἥλους χαλκοῦς ὧν ἐλλείπουσιν πέντε· 10 κάτοπτρον χαλκοῦν· ἐπίσπαστρον χαλκοῦν ἀσπιδίσκιον ἔχον· κιν- κλίδας ξυλίνας δύο καὶ χελώνιον. EN ΤΩΙ ΠΡΟΔΟΜΩΙ· βάθρα λίθινα δύο· Ἐρωτα χαλκοῦν ἐπὶ βάσεως· ἐξάλειπτρον, τὸ πλινθείον μόνον ἦν, ὑάλινον ἐν πλινθείῳ, ἀνάθεμα Ἐχενίκης· πίνακας εἰκονικούς τρεῖς· ἄλλους ἀναθεματικούς Γ· λευκώματα τρία· ἄλλα 15 ἐλάττονα δύο· πίνακα ξύλινον, ἀνάθεμα Στησίλεω· αἱ ἐκτὸς θύ- ραι τοῦ ναοῦ ῥόπτρον ἐπίσπαστρον ἔχουσαι· χαλκᾶς ἀσπιδί· {ἀσπιδί}σκας δύο· κλεῖν ἀνάπαιστον ὀλοσίδηρον· πίνακας ὀροφικούς έννέα. ΤΑ ΕΚΤΟΣ ΤΟΥ ΝΑΟΥ· ἀνδριάντα ἐπὶ βάσεως, ἀνάθεμα Στη- σίλεω· ἄλλοι γυναικεῖον, ἀνάθεμα Στη<σί>λεω· οἳ ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ τεθυρωμένοι κερα- 20 μωτοὶ κλεῖς οὐκ ἔχοντες, οὐδὲ αἱ ἀπὸ τοῦ ἱεροῦ θύραι κλε<ι>ν οὐκ ἔχο[υσαι]· χιτῶνα ἐρεοῦν λευκόν, ἀνάθεμα ἱερείας Εὐδώρας.
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Table 1. Inventory of the year 156 BC (IDélos 1417, A, II, 1–21; French translation in Durvy 2006a, 103–104).

	IN THE APHRODISION: the cult statue of the goddess, in marble, holding in the right hand a gilded wooden <i>phiale</i> ; golden earrings that the goddess wears, weight 2 drachmas, offering of Demetria; a marble table; a bronze censer; a marble statue of Aphrodite on a marble base, offering 5 of Echenike; another on a marble base, offering of Ktesonides; another on a column, offering of Promathion; another on a base, offering of Praximenes; another small one, offering of Stesicrate; three others smaller, two of which mutilated; two votive <i>pinakes</i> ; the doors of the <i>naos</i> with two bronze discs and bronze nails of which five are missing; 10 a bronze mirror; a bronze knocker with a small disc; two wooden grilles and a lock. IN THE <i>PRODOMOS</i> : two marble benches; a bronze Eros on a base; a glass perfume vase (the base alone remained) in a base, offering of Echenike; three <i>pinakes</i> with images; 5 others votive <i>pinakes</i> ; three white tablets; 15 two other smaller ones; a wooden <i>pinax</i> , offering of Stesileos; the outer doors of the temple with a doorknob; two bronze discs; a hammered key entirely of iron; nine ceiling <i>pinakes</i> . OUTSIDE THE TEMPLE: a statue of a man on a base, offering of Stesileos; another of a woman, offering of Stesileos; <i>oikoi</i> in the sanctuary, provided with 20 doors, covered with tiles, without key; neither the doors of the sanctuary have a key; a <i>chiton</i> of white wool, offering of the priestess Eudora.
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probably stored in the West building until 257 BC, when the collection—or part of it—was transferred to the sanctuary of Apollo, maybe for storage or safety reasons when the cups became too numerous or too valuable.<sup>23</sup> Stesileos' daughter Echenike gave a miniature marble statue of Aphrodite and an *exaleiptron* that could be used to perfume the statue.<sup>24</sup> Other offerings, in particular several marble statu-

ettes of Aphrodite on marble bases with dedicatory inscriptions, are dated by the name of the donors, who are elsewhere recorded as Delian magistrates who held office in the course of the 3rd century BC.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Tréheux 2023, ch. 6, particularly pp. 207–210; Vial 1984, 206–207.

<sup>24</sup> The term refers to colored molded glass vases that have the form of an *alabastron* (necessitating a plinth), made to contain perfume: Nenna 1999, 15, 23–26, pl. 60. The use of the vase as liturgic furniture is possible: statues were perfumed during their *kosmesis* (Prost 2008; Leka 2014, 63). But the vase could also have been a personal female object offered to

the goddess by its owner, which would give an entirely different meaning to the offering.

<sup>25</sup> Durvy 2009a, 159–160, synthesizing Vial 1984.



Table 2. Typological-chronological classification of the offerings listed in the inventories. The asterisks indicate the objects which are dated from the Delian Independence from logical criteria, but whose dating is not substantiated by onomastic or stratigraphical evidence; the objects that cannot be dated are not mentioned here (See the distribution of the offerings in Durvye 2009a, 166–167).

Offerings made during the Delian Independence	Offerings added after 167 BC
<b>Site and buildings</b>	
the site* the altar the temple the West building ( <i>oikos</i> )	extension of the site 5 tiled <i>oikoi</i> with doors without key
<b>Woodwork</b>	
doors of the <i>naos</i> with two decorative bronze discs and bronze nails + a bronze knocker* two wooden grilles with a lock* outer doors of the temple carrying a hammer-knocker and two bronze discs + forged iron key* nine roof <i>pinakes</i> in the <i>prodomos</i> *	
<b>Liturgical furniture</b>	
the cult statue of the goddess in marble, holding in her right hand a gilded wood <i>phiale</i> (offering) marble table* two marble benches in the <i>prodomos</i> bronze censer* glass <i>exaleiptron</i> on a plinth	the earrings which the goddess wears, gilded silver marble censers
<b>Items</b>	
marble statue of Aphrodite on a marble base, offered by Echenike marble statue of Aphrodite on a marble base, offered by Ktesonides statue of Aphrodite on a small column, offered by Promathion statue of Aphrodite on a base, offered by Praximenes small statue of Aphrodite, offered by Stesicrates wood <i>pinax</i> , offered by Stesileos two statues of the parents of Stesileos outside the temple cups of the Stesileia (probably in the West building)	<i>pinax</i> with the portrait of a priestess three votive <i>pinakes</i> three small wood figures relief with a dove crystal thing white wool <i>chiton</i> , given by the priestess Eudora shortly before 156 BC linen <i>chiton</i> four dedicated <i>chitones</i> wool child's <i>chiton</i> toga six pairs of dedicated sandals small fan <b>From the excavations:</b> isiacal terracotta figurines terracotta figurines of various types

## What was the shape of the sanctuary in 167 BC?

The most interesting moment for our purpose is the turning point of the year 167 BC. Just before, the audience of the sanctuary was composed of the descendants of the founder and other members of the Delian elite; after the eviction of the Delians, it is made of newcomers, mainly Athenians and Italians. This transition is the moment when we can glimpse the effect that the material configuration of the sanctuary had on the interpretation of the divinity by the newcomers.

Just before the Delians were evicted, the *naos* of the temple contained at least the cult statue, five miniature marble statues of Aphrodite, and most probably an offering table and a bronze censer; the room was closed by two wooden doors decorated with bronze elements and two wooden grilles with

a lock.<sup>26</sup> In the *prodomos* were two marble benches,<sup>27</sup> Stesileos' wooden picture and Echenike's *exaleiptron*. The ceiling was decorated with a covering of nine painted *pinakes*; the temple was closed by a wooden door with bronze decorations and

<sup>26</sup> They appear for the first time in the inventory of 156 BC (*IDélos* 1417, A, II, 15–18). The descendants of Stesileos left behind the statues and the wooden painting offered to the goddess; it would be strange if they had taken the woodwork of the temple with them. Therefore, these elements must be contemporary with the construction of the temple.

<sup>27</sup> The dating of the benches can be justified by the following argument. Their feet are embedded in the pavement of long marble working chips whose elements seem to come from the dressing of the wall's blocks. This type of mosaic is known in Delos since the 4th century BC in the northern side of the *cella* of the Samothrakeion (Bruneau 1972, 19–22) and the use of marble from the quarry of the Theater's Hill is typical of the Delian Independence era (Moretti 2015, 89).



*Fig. 2. View of the temple from the South-East. Photograph: C. Durvy, 2006.*

there was a key to lock it. Outside the temple stood the two bronze statues of the founder's parents, the altar and the West building. There were certainly also other items in and around the temple: some of the offerings may have disappeared when the Delians left the island in 167 BC; some of the objects that the Athenian inventories listed without a donor's name may be older than 167 BC; and we must naturally add all sorts of perishable offerings such as flowers, cakes, fruits, wax figures and so on.<sup>28</sup>

## What impression did the sanctuary make on visitors?

We can now tentatively visualize the impact of these buildings and objects on the visitor at the end of the Delian Independence, and try to judge the effect that they had on newcomers after 167 BC. The challenge is to understand the extent to which the buildings and objects that formed and filled the sanctuary shaped the visitor's perception of the deity. Before 167 BC, any Delian visitor would be acutely aware of the local tradition, involving a family and a social context, that gave the sanctuary this specific appearance. However, after 167 BC,

the objects were read for themselves, independently of that tradition.

Seen from the outside, the house of the goddess is a beautiful temple, *petite* but stylish: it has an original polygonal stonework with offset joints (*Fig. 2*); the fine pointed faces of the marble blocks catch the light and soften the building's geometry.<sup>29</sup> The wooden entrance doors, either painted or not, with their bronze decoration, must have contrasted with the whiteness of the marble. So too did the two bronze statues that stood on either side of the door, whether they were maintained in their original golden appearance or left to weather over time and acquired a dark patina.

The temple does not fit with traditional canons of Greek monumental religious architecture because it has no columns:<sup>30</sup> this absence lends added importance to the two statues of the parents of the founder, pictured in a traditional way, the woman wearing a long skirt and the father with his left foot on the center of the base,<sup>31</sup> which are the main deco-

<sup>28</sup> See Salapata in this volume, *Chapter 13*.

<sup>29</sup> Description of this stonework in Vallois 1966, 66–67. See photograph in Durvy 2009b, 203. No traces of coating were found during the excavations. The specificities of this architecture—local marble, irregular stonework, lack of moldings—are analyzed in Durvy 2009b, 202.

<sup>30</sup> Other examples on Delos: Vallois 1944, 121–124.

<sup>31</sup> Both bases are preserved in their original position; the posture and garment of the figures can be inferred from the imprints visible on the upper side of the bases.



rative element in front of this rectangular building. The inscribed bases of these statues present to the visitor the name of their donor, Stesileos, as well as the names of his parents; the dedicatory inscription specifies the family tie, but the dedication to Aphrodite is implied.<sup>32</sup> This presence before the threshold of the temple was probably felt by the descendants and relatives of Stesileos as familiar and as a factor of integration, contributing to inscribe the visitor in a familial and political circle lasting through generations.

For visitors after 167 BC, however, the man and the woman represented by these statues were unknown; nevertheless, their position was that of owners, watchmen or intercessors, since they watched or welcomed the visitor upon entering the temple. Did the newcomers feel this presence as intimidating, marking the oversight of the temple by unknown predecessors? Or did they feel it rather as welcoming, showing the antiquity and continuity of the presence of earlier men and women serving this goddess? Did they consider with respect this legacy of the displaced Delians? Or did they—as we so frequently do in cities with multitudes of visual stimuli—pass by the statues without even looking at them or asking who they represented, so that statues simply receded into the building's overall decoration? Each of these scenarios may have been true at different times, depending on the circumstances, on the individuals and even on their momentary frame of mind.

Seen from the outside (Fig. 3), the Aphrodision should then appear as a secondary sanctuary, modest in its size and layout, embellished by the quality and simplicity of its architectural execution, rendered intimate in its isolation and limited capacity, highly personalized by the ancestral statues.

The temple was designed to provide access to visitors, at least in certain circumstances.<sup>33</sup> Entering the *prodomos* (Fig. 4), visitors discovered a small room (about 8 m<sup>2</sup>). The floor was made of a mosaic of marble chips bound by a pink cement and the walls were covered with a pink coating.<sup>34</sup> Painted or treated wood was prominent, as it was used for the coffered ceiling and the outer and inner doors as well as for Stesileos' picture on the wall. Because the magistrates who wrote the inventories after 167 BC knew the name of the donor, we must assume that Stesileos' name was written on the picture, the

frame, or a tag visible near the picture.<sup>35</sup> The benches along both walls are not benches for offerings, but functional seating, which was probably related to the fact that the Aphrodision was, in its first phase, a family foundation and the *prodomos* may have been used as a privileged banqueting room.<sup>36</sup> During the period of the Delian Independence, the benches could signal a sense of hierarchy, since the people authorized to use the inner part of the temple during the festivals were closer to the goddess than the others. After 167 BC, it is unfortunately impossible to know who used these benches, but they certainly gave the room a welcoming aspect which is not usual in Greek temples.<sup>37</sup>

The *prodomos* also contained, before 156 BC,<sup>38</sup> several *pinakes*, whose dating is uncertain: three *pinakes* with images (πίνακας εικονικούς), five votive *pinakes* (ἄλλους ἀναθηματικούς), which probably bore inscriptions, three bleached tablets (λευκώματα) and two smaller (ἄλλα ἐλάττονα δύο). The inventory specifies that Stesileos' *pinax* was made of wood (πίνακα ξύλινον, ἀνάθημα Στησίλεω), which seems to indicate that the others were not:<sup>39</sup> they may have been made of various materials, most likely terracotta.<sup>40</sup> Bleached tablets probably bore inscriptions, prayers or thanks to the goddess, perhaps in a medium that could be reinscribed. As for the impact that the representations and inscriptions adorning the walls necessarily had on visitors, we cannot judge it, since we do not know what image or text they presented to be viewed or read. Few objects are listed in this room; although we must imagine there the many kinds of perishable offerings mentioned above, the room seems to have been a relatively open place, maybe to allow the movement of visitors.

From the *prodomos* (Fig. 4), the visitors could take a look through the grilles to the room of the goddess. The *naos*, approximately 7 m<sup>2</sup>, also had a pink coating and a mosaic floor. But the roof had no coffered ceiling: it seems that the room that welcomed visitors was more elaborately decorated than the one that sheltered the cult statue. It contained, besides the cult statue close to life-size,<sup>41</sup> at least five statuettes of the god-

<sup>32</sup> On the east base, i.e. on the right side entering the temple, [Σ]τησίλεως τὸν πατέρ[α] Διόδοτον (IG XI, 2, 1166); on the west base, Στησίλεως τὴν μητέρα Ἐχενίκην (IG XI, 2, 1167). Commentary in Durvy 2009a, 158–159.

<sup>33</sup> The “wooden grilles with a lock” that separated the *naos* from the *prodomos* permitted indeed the visitor to look into the *naos* without entering it: since the outer door of the *prodomos* did not have such grilles, we can assume that it was possible for some visitors to enter the *prodomos* and admire, from the inner threshold, the content of the *naos*.

<sup>34</sup> Fragments of this coating are still visible on the walls; the mosaic leans against these fragments. If the mosaic is contemporary with the construction of the temple, so is the coating.

<sup>35</sup> Was this picture a portrait of Stesileos himself? It would then form a coherent whole with the statues-portraits of the founder's parents.

<sup>36</sup> Durvy 2009b, 199–201.

<sup>37</sup> It was however not exceptional in Delos: there were benches in the *pronaos* of the Heraion, around the Letoon, in the *prostoon* of the Oikos of the Naxians (which was probably not a temple).

<sup>38</sup> Durvy 2009a, 167.

<sup>39</sup> But it is just as well possible that the magistrate who established the inventory gave more details about this *pinax* just because it was of greater size, or because its donor was identified as the founder of the sanctuary.

<sup>40</sup> Ivory or metal would probably have been mentioned in the inventories, and stone is rather rare for this type of item (Salapata 2002, with large bibliography).

<sup>41</sup> The dimensions of the temple and of the first step of the statue's base show that the statue was probably near life-size; a marble finger of concordant size was discovered in the excavations (Durvy 2006b, 734–735).

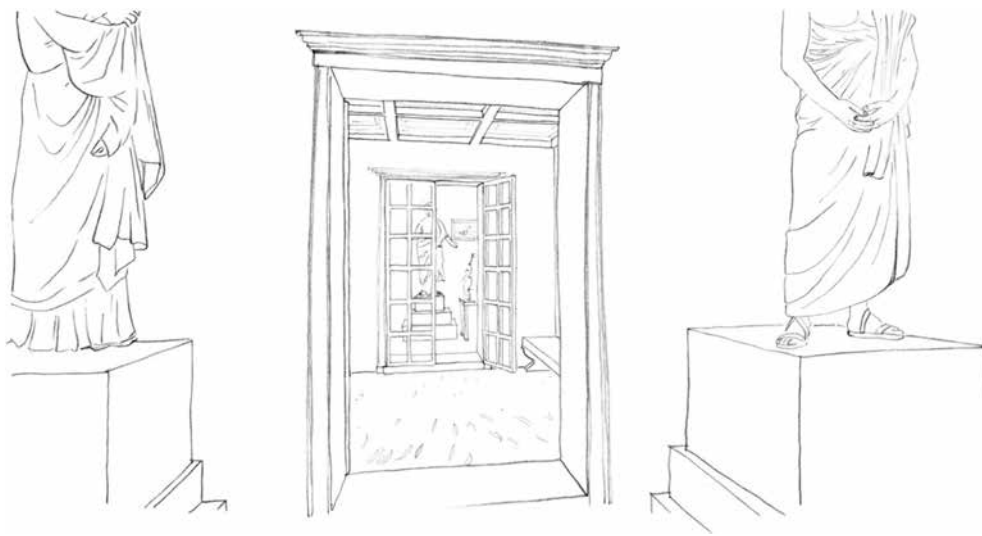


Fig. 3. Attempt to reconstruct the temple and its contents: view from the outer door. Work in progress. F.-F. Muller, 2021. The statues of Stesileos' parents have been reconstructed from contemporary honorific statues (the type of the Little Herculanean is perhaps too late—Biard 2017, 365 and pl. XLVIII; Demosthenes of Polyseuctos—Biard 2017, 379, 388, pl. XXXI). The shape of the Ionic gate is an assumption that the architectural publication will rectify. The shape of the wooden grille is unknown. The base of the cult statue probably had three steps. What the painting in the naos represented is unknown. The offering table must have been placed in front of the cult statue.

dess, some on substantial bases,<sup>42</sup> maybe two votive *pinakes*, and probably a marble offering table and a bronze censer: unlike the *prodomos*, it was a rather stuffy place. Here again, our assessment of the impact of the images of the goddess is limited by the fact that all these representations have disappeared.

Thanks to the inventories, we can however get a picture of the cult statue, which was “a marble statue with a wooden gilded *phiale* in the right hand.”<sup>43</sup> This representation of the goddess matches a small statue of Aphrodite (52 cm tall) which was discovered in the House of the Hermes, next to the Aphrodision.<sup>44</sup> It is a draped statue whose forearm is stretched forward in the gesture of libation. Jean Marcadé relates it to the Aphrodite Doria Pamphili: this small Aphrodite would be a more rigid and severe version of the same original type, decorated with a vibrant *polychromy*.<sup>45</sup> The sobriety and clas-

sicizing style of representation would be quite consistent with what one would expect of a patroness of magistrates; it is not impossible that this little statue resumes the type of the Aphrodite who was worshipped in the neighboring sanctuary. If this is the case, the image of the deity was meant to inspire a reverence bare of the sensual dimension that Hellenistic representations of Aphrodite often present.<sup>46</sup>

We can then conjecture that at the end of the Delian Independence the overall impression produced for the visitor by the sanctuary and its furnishings was rather homogeneous: in a small but elegant shrine, under the protection of the two bronze statues, marble offerings surrounded a deity whose dignity was ensured by its representations, by the quality of its furniture and by the prominence of the dedicants. The homogeneity of the objects—if it is not only an effect of our documentation—seems to speak for the theoretical hypothesis we made above: the first setup of the sanctuary, that is to say the offerings of Stesileos, is superimposed with objects of the same type and value. The political form that Stesileos gave to his divine patroness is perpetuated through the objects that fill the sanctuary.

<sup>42</sup> Two marble bases were found in the temple by Roussel (Roussel 1987, 240–242; *IG* XI, 2, 1277–1278); the base of Echenike's Aphrodision is 74,7 cm height × 44,8 width × more than 27,5 depth; the one of Ktesonides' statuette, which is pyramid-shaped, is 49,6 cm × 24/23 × 20/19,3 (photographs in Durvy 2022). These bases carried miniature statues. The name of the donator was there as visible as the image of the deity. One other statuette was on a small column (ἐνὶ κιονίου); others did not have a base.

<sup>43</sup> *IDelos* 1417, A, II, 1–2.

<sup>44</sup> Inv. A 4200 of the Delos Museum (photographs in Durvy 2022); Marcadé first presented the statue (Marcadé 1953, 548–553) and made the connection with the Aphrodite of Stesileos (Marcadé 1969, 228).

<sup>45</sup> Jockey 2014, 359.

<sup>46</sup> The shape of the statue with the *phiale* emphasizes the collaborative dimension of the cult: the goddess sets the example for the worshippers (Durvy 2022, 130).

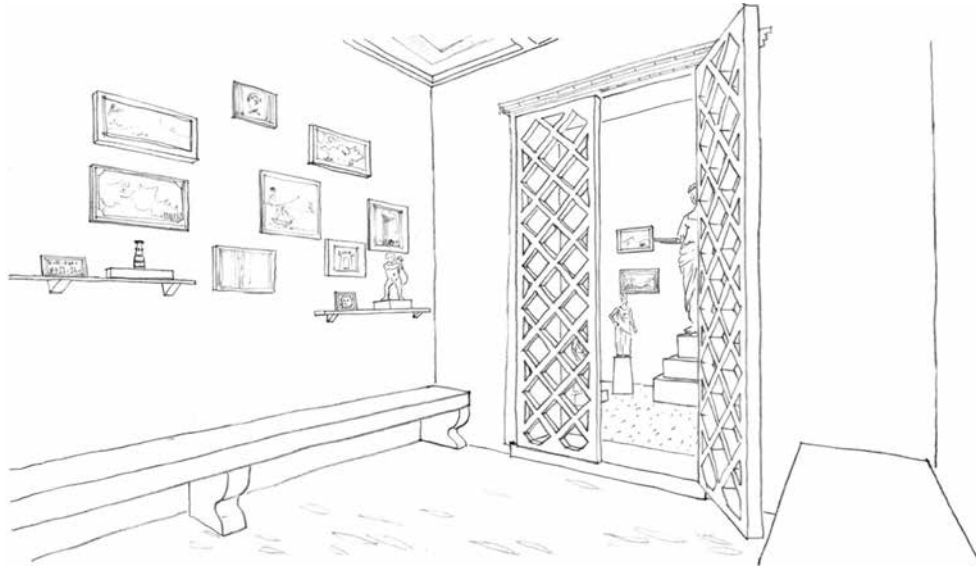


Fig. 4. Tentative reconstruction of the temple with its contents: view from the internal door. Work in progress. F.-F. Muller, 2021. The seat of the benches was not preserved and its height is unknown. The location of the shelves and objects listed in the inventories is fictitious, as are the subjects of the paintings. The Eros with a goose is mentioned in the inventories, but its date is unknown; it has been reconstructed from the *Child with a goose* of the Louvre (Ma 40, MR 168), a Roman copy of an Hellenistic original. The shape of the wooden grilles is not known. The cult statue is freely reconstructed from the *Aphrodite Doria Pamphili*; we assume that her base had three steps. The shape of the statuette in the naos is fictitious; its base is similar to the one of *Ktesonides*, found in the temple. The offering table must have been placed in front of the cult statue.

## Did the appearance of the sanctuary condition the interpretation of the goddess by the newcomers?

The stamp of politics and kinship that characterized the sanctuary in its first phase necessarily lost its meaning with the eviction of the Delians, since both the founder's family and the magistrates involved in worship left the island. The names of the founder's family were perpetuated into the sanctuary by the objects on which they were inscribed, but their referent was lost. Outside of the social context of the Delian Independence, did the character of the sanctuary impose on the newcomers a specific idea of Aphrodite's personality and areas of action?

The answer can be read in the list of the offerings that were added in the sanctuary after 167 BC (*Table 2*).<sup>47</sup> The erection of four new *oikoi* shows that the exclusive spirit of the worship disappeared, and that the audience increased. The portrait of a priestess (πίνακα εἰκονικὸν ἱερείας) dedicated around 146 BC<sup>48</sup> leads to the conclusion that representations of the priesthood superseded the familial display. *Pinakes*

with inscriptions and other small things were very humble offerings. Clothes, sandals or small personal objects like a fan show clearly that a close personal relationship was established between the goddess and individuals of different origins and sexes who left in the sanctuary, as an offering, something that they used.<sup>49</sup> In their offerings, we recognize the type of objects mentioned in literature in connection with the worship of Aphrodite as the goddess of love, the patroness of the couple and of the family. The Egyptianizing figurines and various types of terracotta statuettes found during the excavations<sup>50</sup> prove that this broader function of the goddess, linked to in-

<sup>47</sup> See Durvy 2009a, 155–156, 166–167 for a list and a detailed analyze of these offerings through several inventories.

<sup>48</sup> *IDelos* 1443, B, II, 101.

<sup>49</sup> In addition to the garment that the goddess was maybe wearing (*IDelos* 1442, B, 30, year 146–145 BC: the restitution of ἐσθῆτα is accepted by Prêtre 2018, 556), four *chitones* are explicitly designated as votive, i.e. probably woven with the aim of being offered to the goddess. The others are not. Is this due to inconsistency in the recording or rather to the fact that most of the clothes offered to the goddess were previously worn clothes? We see many examples of this practice in the *Palatine Anthology* (VI 21, 133, 199–202, etc.). This modest offering of a used object is a way of leaving a part of oneself close to the deity. The display of these objects is unknown. The inventories do not mention a chest; they could have been hung on the walls, such as on the relief of Echinus depicting sandals and clothes hanging on a wall (Brons 2015, 72).

<sup>50</sup> Durvy 2009c, 600–601.

dividuals and no longer to social groups, attracted a more diverse population to the sanctuary.<sup>51</sup>

At first sight, the specific personality of the austere, political and exclusive Aphrodite of Stesileos has here been supplanted by a very different facet of the divinity. During the second stage of use of the sanctuary, the personality of Aphrodite seems to have widely diverged from its primary function of protecting magistrates.<sup>52</sup>

We can thus conclude that the buildings and objects that filled the sanctuary in 167 BC were not sufficient to maintain the specific personality of the Aphrodite of Stesileos in front of a new population of worshippers. The substrate formed by the buildings and objects that were given during the Delian Independence remained in the sanctuary, but new layers of buildings and offerings overlaid the original nucleus and transformed the first meaning of the cult. The example of the Aphrodision seems therefore to show that objects only play a minor role in defining the character of worship. The specific value that Stesileos, his descendants or the Delian political elite frequenting the sanctuary—who saw in Aphrodite a protector of a prominent family and a political community—could give to these objects was probably not understandable and certainly not usable as such for another audience. These objects first made sense in a specific relationship with their background of Delian donors; but the newcomers could easily use them as support for a different conception of the goddess. The gathering of offerings thus defines the god for an audience aware of the original meaning of these offerings: who gave them, under what circumstances, and to which aspect of the goddess they refer. When a new audience comes, the objects lose this background. They remain as witnesses of piety; they are regarded in consideration of their decorative, financial or age-old value; but they do not seem to impose a specific definition of the deity, which is reshaped by new contributions. However, the example of the Aphrodision is made particular by the significant change of its attendance. If we consider the two phases of its story separately, we see that objects can perpetuate a homogeneous characterization: the donation of one statue brings the donation of more statues, and the offering of one *chiton* brings the offering of more clothes. So, the logical theory according to which the offerings gradually build the divine personality shall be effective for a reasonably constant audience; it is sufficient if we consider the transition from one

generation to another. But in the case of a radical upheaval of the audience, the flexibility of the cult makes it possible to reinvest the objects with new values, and the equipment of the Aphrodite of the Delian magistrates easily adapts to a cosmopolitan Aphrodite protecting couples and families. The stuff of a god reflects the identity allotted to him at a given time, but does not define his personality in a stable way, nor impose a fixed conception of its contours.

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<sup>51</sup> On the donors after 167 BC, see Durvy 2009a, 160–162.

<sup>52</sup> Durvy 2009a, 155–156, 160–165. The contrast in the nature and value of the offerings seems striking, but part of it could be the result of our lecture of the inventories. The gap is however not so complete: Aphrodite continues to be effective as a patroness of social ties, no more in the restricted circle of a political elite, but in an open way for a cosmopolitan population whose needs concern the family circle more than the political sphere.



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