

The cult of Astarte and Melqart in Kition are of special importance, because temples were linked with the royal court, i.e. an inscription on a gypsum plaque, dated to the 5th cent. B.C. mentions wages for those in service of the “temples and king’s court”, and two deities names are Astarte and Melqart. Other reason is that those two divine entities are being strongly recognized with the ‘Phoenician’ community in Cyprus. Although, they both are being often identified with Cypriot or Greek-Cypriot gods, Astarte with Aphrodite (or the so-called “Great Goddess of Cyprus”) and Melqart with Heracles (or the local, so-called “Master of Lion”). In many places Cypriot Phoenicians adapted local deities, renaming them according to their religion, i.e. Athena and Apollo worshipped as Anat and Reshef in Idalion, or probably Zeus as Keravnios-Reshepkhetz. Many temples in the island might have been frequented as much by the Cypriot Greeks and Cypriot Phoenicians worshipping gods from both pantheons, who had different names, but similar prerogatives. Those gods had also a very Greek face, as statues manufactured in Cyprus, were mostly inspired by the Greek art, with just elements of Phoenician origin. In Kition temples early sculptures bear many Egyptian influences, due to the period of Egyptian rule over the island (569-545 B.C), but later statues were modeled according to Cypriot style influenced mostly by the Greek Archaic art. More Levantine influence can be found in small mould-made terracottas, depicting naked women with arms alongside the body or holding their breasts, sometimes pregnant (fig. 6). During the Ptolemaic period rulers cult used to be popularized, an example of that can be Arsinoëion within the temenos of Apollo-Reshef in Idalion. The longevity of ‘Phoenician’ cults can be proofed by not only 3rd cent. B.C. Heracles-Melqart sculptures from Kition (fig. 3), but also a 3rd cent. B.C. dedication from the Aphrodite sanctuary, made to the ‘Astarte from Pafos’ (another late example of ‘Phoenician’ presence in the area is a grafitto from a tomb in Nea Paphos, dated to the 300 B.C.).

Although the Cypriot Phoenician kingdom of Kition vanished from the map in 312 B.C ‘Phoenicians’ of Cyprus did not vanish themselves, and for many years they probably continued their lives in a similar manner they’ve used to, gradually becoming a part of a unified Hellenistic culture, in a specific process of acculturation without migration. Papantoniou argues that there were no visible demographic changes connected with the annexation of Cyprus by the Ptolemys (with an exception of the Marion area), later on population movement might be associated with urbanization, arrival of (military) settlers or maybe taxation. As it was stated above, conflicts within the island, or with outside forces were of political and military and not ethnic or cultural nature. Maier states that “the basic concept of sharp division and racial enmity between the two ethnic groups in the population of Cyprus can hardly be proved by the evidence available. A number of testimonies point to a considerable degree of peaceful co-existence, mutual cultural exchange and even intermarriage.”