

# THE JOURNEY OF THE AURA OF THE BLACK STONE OF CYPRUS

(2021-2022)

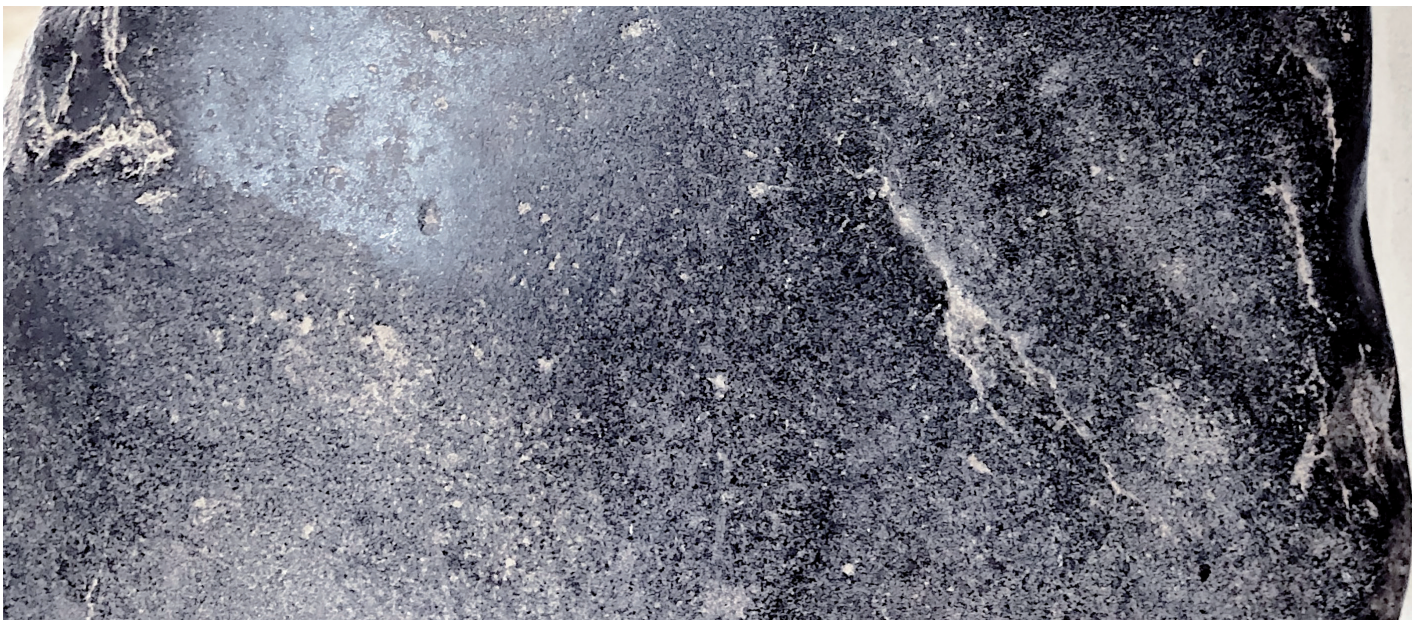
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*I see the origin of the irresistible attraction of metaphor and analogy, the explanation of our strange and permanent need to find similarities in things. I can scarcely refrain from suspecting some ancient, diffused magnetism; a call from the center of things; a dim, almost lost memory, or perhaps a presentiment, pointless in so puny a being, of a syntax." Roger Caillois, The Writing of Stones (L'écriture des pierres, pp. 103–104.1970).*

"The Journey Of The Aura Of The Black Stone Of Cyprus" project is based on research on value and aura. Through an artistic strategy set of mis-en-relation and displacement of objects it will also reconnect the archeological treasures found and exhibited in Cyprus with those guarded by Neues Museum in Berlin.

**Possible partners:** Senatsverwaltung für Kultur und Europa, Embassy of Cyprus in Berlin, Max Hermann Ohnefalsch-Richter collection, Neues Museum Berlin, Cyprus Museum, "POINT" Art Gallery, Palaipafou Museum,



Department of Antiquities of the Republic of Cyprus, Maria Iacovou (Professor Prehistoric and Protohistoric Archaeology, Department of History and Archaeology, Archaeological Research Unit, University of Cyprus), Cyprus Artist Residency.

After one year of research on the Black Stone of Cyprus and a more than inspiring visit to Cyprus in late summer 2020 to collect material and visit the sanctuary of Aphrodite and the archeological museum, we are ready for further steps. A dialogue has already started with archeological experts and the Director Department of Antiquities of Cyprus.

One of the aims of the project is to widen the current post-colonial discourse about the restitution of cultural artifacts through a productive interaction of the institutions in both countries. Sharing value making and synergies between multinational partners is the strategy the project proposes. The project is centered on the unique story of Black Stone of Cyprus that can be seen as an example of a dynamic fluxus of both meanings and value. Since the stone was just "found" before value and meaning were projected onto it, it shares important characteristics of the surrealist *objet trouvé* (Breton, Man Ray & Cie). The cultural projection into the stone in ancient time has been even so strong that a powerful cult arose around it during the Bronze Age.

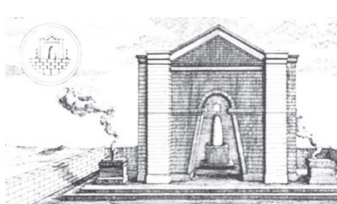
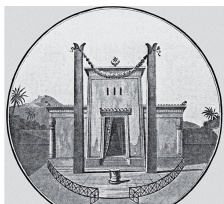
The interaction the Sanctuary "audience" had with the Black Stone shares a lot of common features with Joseph Beuys' social sculpture: it was sculpted by generations of visitors by repeated touch in order to obtain blessing from the Stone as embodiment of the Goddess. The act of touching here is seen both as a creation and a destruction (see the project "When the rising sun" 2018 on Gramsci and John Berger).

Works of art often share a parabola of value like other kinds of objects: ritualistic objects, sacred tools etc. It can happen that an object received an enormous quantity of cultural value for a certain time, but when conditions for this value existence change the object loses its status. The multiplication and reproduction of the image of





The failed cast of the black stone of Cyprus.



Roman and Ellenistic conis and a reconstruction (after coins images) of the sanctuary by Münter et Hetsch (1824) and J. Fisher von Erlach, (1721).

the stone during the Greek and Roman period (with the issue of thousands of coins) got poorly renewed around 50-60 years ago with the realisation of a cast (with the idee to show the reproduction of the stone in the Museum of Paphos). For technical reasons the cast failed and since then has been abandoned/stocked in the courtyard of the manor-house on the grounds of the sanctuary near Palaipafos together with other archeological artifacts. The specificity of the failed cast consists into be a failed copy of an original, since then the cast started to degenerate because of rain and sun and started to produce its own new shapes and its own aura (see picture above).

**What it is the black stone of Cyprus?** The Black Stone of Cyprus is a 122 centimeter high aniconic black gabbro stone found in the Neolithic period. Following the legend, it was found near the beach of Aphrodite in South Cyprus from a lavic deposit. Worshipped as a holy object, the raw stone was transported to a location that became the Sanctuary of Aphrodite in the archaeological site of Palaipafos (Kouklia). For thousands of years it was touched by thousands of hands during rituals, covered with oil and thus smothered. The rituals were first related to the cult of the Queen of Cyprus, the Goddess of Cyprus, the Big Mother, then to Astarte and finally to Aphrodite. The cult of Aphrodite is born indeed around the cult to the black stone. It was presumably the center of the stage of the sanctuary of Palaipafos as documented by Homer, Tacite and depicted on Greek, Roman, and Egyptian coins produced in Cyprus and elsewhere between the first century BC and the beginning of the 3rd century. A hypotheis on the bisexuality of the Paphos Aphrodite is indicated and documented by Antoine Hermar in *"Aniconisme et sexualité"*. The Sanctuary of Aphrodite was one of the most important places of worship in the ancient world and a destination of pilgrimage for centuries until a sudden decay after the Romans forbid non-christian rituals in the Roman colonies in the second century AD.

After almost 1700 years of disappearance the black stone was then rediscovered by archeological researchers: while the exact date of the rediscovery is still controversial, the stone was first mentioned by D.G. Hogarth in 1888. It was found buried/embedded in a late roman mosaic floor but not recognized as the holy stone of Paphos. Its importance was only fully recognized in 1913 during second archaeological excavations by J.F. Myres.

**Production Phase:** Production of a 3D digital copy of the black stone throght 3d scannerisation and a copper printed



replica (3D copper(80%) printing) of the black stone:

1) In collaboration with the Department of Antiquities of Cyprus a 3D digital copy of the black stone will be realized in Paphos and shared with the project partners following the idea of open source.

2) A 3D copper print replica (1:1) will be realized based on the data from the 3D digital copy. This new technique permits to reproduce a 3D digital object in a 80% copper. This new copy of the original represents a further step towards verification of the hypothesis that a copy produces its own aura derived from the original.



The black stone is now exhibited in a small room in Palaipafou Museum (Kouklia). The project wants to be also an opportunity to initiate a re-valorisation of the object that was one of the most important of ancient world.