

Statue of Aphrodite and Eros from Cyrene

The [marble statue that greets visitors to the Ure Museum](#) is of the goddess **Aphrodite** and her son, **Eros**. This Roman statue was discovered at Cyrene (now in Libya, North Africa) during excavations of a building thought to have been the Temple of Aphrodite. The statue was probably 'given' to Aphrodite as a **votive** (gift offered as a prayer). The statue now belongs to the British Museum, which has generously lent her to the Ure Museum.

The statue dates from the Roman period, but Aphrodite – one of the twelve Olympian deities and goddess of love, fertility, and beauty – had been worshipped at Cyrene by Greeks since they founded the city in 631 bc. Cyrene was **colonised** (settled) by Greeks from Thera (an Aegean island now called Santorini). It was taken over by the Romans in 96 bc and became a great city, capital of the province of Cyrenaica, but was destroyed by an earthquake in ad 356.



Roman statue of Aphrodite, copied after Praxiteles' Aphrodite of Knidos, ca. 350 bc.

The goddess is shown almost naked, as her **himation** (robe) has slipped off her body and gathered around her legs. Like most statues of Aphrodite (or **Venus**, her Roman counterpart), this statue was probably influenced by the famous **Aphrodite of Knidos** carved by the sculptor **Praxiteles** in the 4th century bc.

As our Aphrodite has, unfortunately, lost her head, we cannot see the facial expression that her unnamed creator gave her. According to Greek and Latin authors who wrote about the famous statue at Knidos, Praxiteles gave Aphrodite 'false modesty': while she didn't appear to be embarrassed at her lack of clothing, Aphrodite held her hand in front of her private parts in a gesture of modesty. This image of a complex Aphrodite who is modest and shy, yet coy and confident at the same time suits the things she represents: love, sexuality and reproduction.

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