

# CYPRUS SCENES

## Amathus



Pictures: Tony and Mary Benson

Tourism is very important in Cyprus today, and the coast to the east of the second largest city, Limassol, is lined with hotels for miles, broken only by the site of ancient Amathus. The most obvious remains of its long history relate to the time of the Romans, but long before the Romans conquered the island and built their cities, a city was built on the summit of the hill shown in the picture on the right. (The Roman city was on lower ground to the right.) A flight of stone steps leads to a winding path which ascends the hill through rocks and shrubs alive with flocks of twittering finches and the jangling song of corn buntings. At the top, scattered remains (as pictured on the left) witness to past settlements, but in the absence of information panels they mean very little to the untutored eye. Information panels at the entrance to the site reveal that this was one of the main centres for the worship of Aphrodite, the Greek name for the great mother goddess Astarte of the Middle East.

The city is thought to have been founded by native Cypriots about 1000 B.C. (the time of King David). Being close to the shore it traded extensively with Phoenicians from Tyre and Sidon to the east, and Greeks from the west, and the remains of a Phoenician harbour have been discovered. On the hilltop were temples to Aphrodite and Adonis, and here were practised the vile rites of temple prostitution and child sacrifice, imported from Phoenicia. These, of course, were typical of Canaanite worship (the Phoenicians were Canaanites), and before they even entered the Land the Israelites were warned against participating in them. The practising of these rites typically took place on hilltops, hence the command to the Israelites to destroy Canaanite places of worship "upon the high mountains, and upon the hills"

(Deut. 12:2).—*Tony Benson*