DEMONASSA – THE TRUE STORY OF AN ILL-FATED QUEEN OF CYPRUS

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ABSTRACT: This article examines the probable roots and origins of the legend about Demonassa, the unknown queen of Cyprus. The story is told solely in the discourse Peri Tyches by Favorinus of Arelete and seems to be a rhetorical exemplum invented by the author. The detailed analysis of the individual parts of the story presents its complexity and eclectic character.

The recent decades brought without any doubt a great revival of interest in ancient rhetoric, as it is attested by a larger number of publications, conferences and projects concerning different aspects of the Greek and Roman art of oral expression. Among others also the so-called rhetorical topics or exempla deserve some attention from scholars as they tell much about both composition of the orations and the sublime ways of persuasion.

A rhetorical exemplum which deserves detailed investigation is the story of Demonassa. As the queen of Cyprus of this name is mentioned only once in extant ancient literature and there is no counterpart of the heroine in history, the legend has not provoked much modern scholarly interest. The purpose of this paper is to present the probable roots for this story. The analysis of the individual parts of it may shed some light on both the historicity of Demonassa and the origins of the legend.

The story about the Cypriot queen Demonassa was told solely in the discourse Peri Tyches, one of the two Orations of Dio Chrysostomos, recently assigned to Favorinus of Arelate.