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In memoriam

MICHAEL H. JAMESON
who had kindly agreed to participate in this volume
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There is no specific study of women's religious practices in the domestic context. For recent and comprehensive studies of women's ritual, see Dillon 2002 and Goff 2004, which focus on material from the public sphere yet also touch on evidence for women's ritual actions in the home. Cole 2004 looks at female religious behavior in house and city from a spatial perspective. For women, religion, and social status see Krom 1996. Most useful information comes in the form of articles or collections of articles. Wulff 1999b and Zeitlin 1982 consider the actions of women at festivals of Demeter, Adonis, and Dionysus. Blundell and Williamson 1998, Hawley and Levick 1995, and McAuslan and Wallace 1996 offer a range of articles considering the actions of women at festivals of Demeter, Adonis, and Dionysus. Blundell and Williamson 1998, Hawley and Levick 1995, and McAuslan and Wallace 1996 offer a range of articles considering different aspects of female religious behavior. The essays in Reeder-Williams 1998 offer perspectives from iconography. S. Lewis 2002 offers a refreshing and informative analysis of the problems of using images of women as a source. On women and death rites, see Shapiro 1991 and Stears 1998. For comprehensive studies of the textual and iconographic evidence for weddings, see Oakley and Simos 1993 and Verilhas and Vial 1998. Demand 1994 and Cole 1998 and 2004 offer the best studies of women and childbirth. For women and ritual movement, see Delaunay Roux 1994 and Lonsdale 1993. Information can also be gleaned from wider studies on the history of women. Burkert 1985 remains an invaluable resource, as does Parke's 1977 study of festivals and Simon's 1983 investigation of festivals from a more archaeological perspective. In the sphere of women's studies, Blundell 1995 offers a particularly succinct analysis of the effect of ancient and modern ideologies on our ability to understand the lives of women in Athens.

CHAPTER TWENTY

"Something to do with Aphrodite":
Ta Aphrodisia and the Sacred

Vinciane Pirenne-Delforge

The validity of some concepts and interpretative categories for the study of ancient societies, such as those of "myth," "rite," and "religion," has recently been called into question. "Sexuality," which is defined as the set practices and imagery associated with sex, belongs amongst such concepts. The term had no exact correlate in the vocabulary of the communities studied, and its application to them is accordingly anachronistic (Davidson 1998; Halperin, Winkler, and Zeitlin 1990; Winkler 1990a).

A good part of the discussion of such questions consists of echoes of and reactions, positive and negative, to Michel Foucault's three-volume History of Sexuality (Foucault 1976–84). Without entering into this particular debate, which remains outside our purview, here, two remarks may serve to introduce this chapter.

First, one means of avoiding the danger of over-interpretation and anachronism is to privilege the semantic field of the Greek term ta aphrodisia. Secondly, this phrase, ta aphrodisia, in its very form evokes the figure of Aphrodite. The recognition of this in itself justifies us in investigating the relationship that obtained between sexuality and religious imagery in a Greek context. The goddess is the only one amongst the Olympians whose name generates the common noun that designates her sphere of intervention and prerogatives. The generation of polytheistic deities more naturally flows in the opposite direction, from the manifestation of a specific power to its divine personification (Rudhardt 1999; Stafford 2000). Eros is a very good example: experiencing the powerful effects of "love" and sex-drive, the Greeks deployed the word eros to designate the divine power whose presence and action these feelings seemed to indicate. It is our typographical conventions that lead us to capitalize the name's initial letter. This chapter is therefore devoted to a review of the different facets of Aphrodite and Eros, and the different contexts in which their powers were manifested. Accordingly, it is not a question of investigating the sexual practices of the Greeks, but rather of exploring the religious imagery and practices to which the sphere of sexuality (ta aphrodisia) gave rise in their communities.
First of all, the language of myth will allow us to define some imagery in Greek thought about sexuality. Then, with a look at Aphrodite's cults, we will compare this imagery with ritual practice and with the expectations of her worshippers. At the same time this analysis will tackle the problem of a deity's mode of action and field of action in a polytheistic context (cf. Detienne 1997). Finally, we will pose the question as to whether "sacred prostitution" existed in Greece, and at the same time confront the supposedly "oriental" dimension of the figure of Aphrodite.

Eros and Aphrodite: Cosmic and Human Powers

Cosmogony and theogony: Hesiod

After the long preamble that enthrones Hesiod in his role as a poet inspired by the Muses, Hesiod's cosmogonical treatise witnesses the rise of Chaos, Gaia, and Eros (Theogony 115-20). The world is only just coming into existence, but Eros is already present with a divine status and a specific function: "the most beautiful of the immortal gods, Eros slacks the limbs and tames the mind and the wise counsel in the breasts of all gods and all men" (122-3). The power of Eros, his creative force, is accordingly required from the first to activate the birth of the first cosmic entities and to deploy their powers in turn. The birth of the gods that then arise are still intimately associated with the primordial physical universe: Earth, Sky, Sea, River/Ocean. But Uranus pushes back into Earth's womb the formidable children he has sired in coupling with her: the action of Eros closes down upon itself and the genealogical process comes to a halt. The solution to this cosmic problem is radical and bloody: Kronos castrates his father Uranus and throws his severed genitals into the salt sea (173-82). The act of castration separates the Sky and the Earth, whilst at the same time releasing the gods. This unblocking is accompanied by a redefinition of Eros' creative power. Thus a kourot, a "girl," is formed in the white foam produced by Uranus' genitals of as they fall into the sea. The verb tereo is that is applied to this unusual generative process was to be used subsequently in the corpus of medical writing to denote the formation of the fetus within the womb (Demosthenes 1978). This exceptional birth witnesses the appearance of the first anthropomorphic female form in the cosmos. The birth of her "whom the gods and men call Aphrodite" (195-7) accordingly inaugurates a new mode of divine existence for the world: we have passed from cosmogony to theogony. Furthermore, from the beginnings of the world, cosmic Eros is fitted together with her (omartos) and forms her retinue, alongside Hermes, "Desire" (201). Henceforth he will be the powerful goddess' agent (Rudhardt 1986). Accordingly, Aphrodite is the first deity to be given a tereo, a sphere of honor, and this is associated with the long account of her birth and the "portion she was allocated amongst humans and the immortal gods." The moira of the goddess is composed of virgins' whisperings, smiles, deuces (exapatais), pleasure (terpsitai), and loving relationship (philologe), terms which we must quality with "sexual" (204-6; cf. Pironti 2007, contra Calame 1996:55-8). The deep ambivalence of sexuality, expressed as "works of Aphrodite," is completely condensed in the description of her sudden epiphany, a subtle mixture of desire and violence, tension and appeasement (Pirenne-Delforge 2001b; Pironti 2005, 2005b).

The first mentions of humans in the work are associated with cosmic Eros and Aphrodite: they share with the gods a common capacity to unite themselves (222, 204). However, the Theogony does not offer an anthropogony in the strict sense. The poet proceeds to the progressive definition of the human condition, the crisis of which is constituted by the episode of the Promethean crisis (Ledere 1993:157). The final point of this crisis between gods and men, represented by Prometheus, is the creation of the first woman. Now, the narrative of the manufacturing of the woman (anonymous here, but named Pandora in the Works and Days) converges at numerous points with that of the formation of Aphrodite (Pirenne-Delforge 2001a): the goddess is the fruit of the vengeance of Kronos, armed by Gaia, while Pandora is the product of the vengeance of Zeus; they are both abominable products, emanating from male origins (heavenly "foam" and sea; clay modeled by Hephastus at Zeus' behest); Aphrodite is the first female divine form, while Pandora is the first human female form (500: "the race of female women" originates from her); they are both "beautiful," with that irresistible beauty conferred by chaires; Aphrodite presides over the union between sexually differentiated beings, whereas Pandora, the nubile parthenos, makes a man a out of the man whose partner she becomes (Vernant 1996). Furthermore, the episode of Pandora's creation crystallizes the tereo of Aphrodite in the human sphere: human life will be an inextricable mixture of goods and ills, mirroring the ambivalence of the goddess' powers. Sexuality is just one aspect of this human condition, which also includes the requirements to work and to honor the gods, but it constitutes one of the privileged places of this alternation between goods and ills designed by Zeus himself.

Power, victory, or love? Choosing Aphrodite and Helen

Like Pandora, the beautiful evil (kalon kahon), the beautiful Helen is a great bane for humans (megas pene), and she is intimately associated with Aphrodite and her works. The judgment of Paris is the locus classicus for a specific schematic division of roles between the goddesses: Paris does not seem to have hesitated long between Hera with power, Athena with victory, and Aphrodite with the love of Helen. But the choice of Helen's love was a choice subsidiary to that of war, and epic made great play with the two images (Rousseau 1998). The evils that erotic desire inflicts upon the life of an individual man, for Hesiod as he tussles with first woman, is epic become the massacre of thousands. Furthermore, the impulse to war is also a form of eros: sex-drive and war-frenzy share that blinding of the senses that induces the human being to lose control (Euripides, Iphigenia at Aulis 1264; cf. Pironti 2007). When poetry and drunkenness cross paths with Aphrodite, it is notably in the form of the desire that they both arouse in those they possess. This is why melic poetry makes Eros the agent of the powerful Aphrodite when it takes up the theme of his destructive power (Calame 1996:23-52).

Tragic love

The typical theme of the tragic stage is the excess that drives the community to ask searching questions of itself. Here the power of Eros and Aphrodite is no longer
deployed in the genealogical fashion of the Theogony, but more along the lines of the Fates in epic. Several choral prayers assert the power of these deities who drive humans to lose control if they do not submit themselves to love at the appropriate point of their development (Europides, Hippolytus 443–50, 1268–81; Sophocles fr. 941 TrGF and Antigone 781–800). The profile of the young Hippolytus is particularly significant. He is wholly devoted to the joys of the life of Artemis, and he despises Aphrodite and the female sex; his obsession with purity gives a clear signal of his rejection of sexuality. In so refusing to submit himself to the universal law sponsored by the goddess, he fails to respect her divine timé and brings a deadly vengeance down upon himself (Europides, Hippolytus 1–22). The instrument of this vengeance is Phera, upon whom an irrepressible, violent, and grievous desire descends which can only be appeased by death. Hippolytus thus willfully holds himself back from the social status that his physical maturity imposes on him: a young man of marriageable age, he turns away from marriage by keeping himself in some sort of indeterminate virgin state sponsored by Artemis. The opening remarks of Aphrodite explain that one must respect the delicate balances between the Greek gods: the problem is not Hippolytus’ preference for Artemis, but rather his scorn for Aphrodite herself (20–2). For refusing to be “tamed” by the marriage yoke and submit himself to sexual union, he will be subjugated by his twin lovers, maddened by Poseidon.

Other figures from tragedy, the Danaids, illustrate the same point on the female side. In Aeschylus’ Suppliants we encounter these girls fleeing from marriage with their cousins, the Aegean Giants. The last parts of the trilogy brought this refusal to a fantastical climax with the murder of the young men immediately upon their marriage (Des Bouvrie 1990). As in the case of Hippolytus, the central problem of the plot is the refusal of the girls, now they have reached sexual maturity, to come to terms with their status and become wives and mothers. The conception of marriage in the classical period indissolubly embraced sexual union and reproduction. A famous Aeschylean fragment connected with the Danaid trilogy puts praise of her own power into Aphrodite’s mouth, and this attests the strength of the bond between sexuality and fertility (fr. 44 TrGF, cf. Euripides fr. 898 TrGF): “The sacred Sky feels a desire to penetrate the Earth, and the Earth is possessed by the desire to enjoy marriage. A shower comes to fertilize the Earth falling from her husband Sky. And this is how she brings forth for mortals the pasture of flocks, the living [stai] of Demeter and the mature fruit [ēpōra] of the trees. All that exists is created from moist marriage. And it is I that am the cause of all that.” Herodotus attributes the foundation of the Thesmophoria to the Danaids after their arrival from Egypt (2.171). This tradition intersects the theme of submission to sexuality with that of the production of children to assure the survival of the community.

**Platonic variations**

The imagery that tragedy manipulates is so pregnant that it is found, in another context, in Plato’s remarks on the different varieties of madness. Erotic mania, the madness of love, enables one far more than poetic or Dionysiac mania to recall the appearance of true beauty through sight of beauty in this world. Hence, in the Symposium, Socrates, speaking through the priestess Diotima, defines the purpose of eros as “giving birth in beauty, whether in the form of a body or a soul” (206b). The figure of Eros is accordingly conceived of as a generative force, like the cosmogonic god of Hesiod. The Hesiodic god is “the most beautiful” (kalistos) and Plato explains the companionship of Eros and Aphrodite from the facts that Eros naturally loves the beautiful, and the goddess is beautiful (203c). And so the direct link that the philosopher establishes between generation—albeit completely spiritual generation—and immortality harmonizes with the vision of a form of immortality that humans achieve by means of their children (Halperin in Halperin, Winkler, and Zeitlin 1990:257–308).

**Cults in the Polis: Who, When, and Why?**

This brief survey of classical and archaic texts is more than a mere excursion into literature. The imagery found there gives access to a religious thinking which is found at work in the religious lives of Greek communities. Without making any claim to producing an exhaustive overview of the cults offered to Aphrodite and Eros here (Pirenne-Delforge 1994; 1998), it will be our task to trace out the lines of force that display the echoes between “myth” and “cult” in relation to aphrodisia (cf. Pironti 2005).

The common thread that runs through the worship accorded to Aphrodite in the Greek cities is her patronage of the sphere of sexuality, in all the complexity that Hesiod already identified for it. At any rate, the relationships of the worshipers who turn towards her are modulated by their age-group and social status. Thus the matrimonial prerogatives staged in tragedies, mentioned above, are well attested at the level of cult. For example, the epithet Nymphidia that the goddess takes on at Troizen makes her the protectress of the nymphaí, which denotes both the young woman of marriageable age and the young wife prior to the birth of her first child (it is significant that the term also denotes “eunuch”; cf. Winkler 1990a). At Hermione, every woman on the point of making a union with a man, whatever her age, had to offer a sacrifice to the goddess. At Naupactus, in a cave outside the city, the widows prayed to the goddess that they might contract a new marriage (Pausanius 2.32.7, 2.37.2, 10.8.12). At Athens Aphrodite Urania was honored in a similar context. The local etiology told that King Aegeus had founded her sanctuary in the Agora. This is how he had won the goddess’ support for his desire for a child, and how he had attempted to appease the divine anger directed against his sisters Prokne and Philomele (Pausanius 1.14.7). The central values of marriage are perverted in the horrible story of these two women: the rape of Philomele by her brother-in-law Tereus induced the sisters to put the couple’s legitimate child to death and to offer him to his father as a meal. This catalytic of horrors rendered the marriage of Prokne and Tereus a “union without charis” (Ovid, Metamorphoses 6.428–32). The mythical context of the sanctuary’s foundation allows us to specify Aphrodite Urania’s sphere of intervention, and this has been confirmed by a striking piece of evidence. A thiasuroi from the beginning of the fourth century BC bears an inscription which associates it with the offering of a draconh for the goddess for “the commencement of marriage” (SEG 41.182). This object was located not in the Agora, but in the Etalian sanctuary that Aphrodite “of the Gardens” shared with Eros on the north slope of
the Acropolis. The inscription confirms that the goddess bore the epithet Urania there too. The reference of this epithet to the primordial figure of Uranus is obvious. Now, Proclus refers to the obligation at Athens to honor the primordial couple Uranus-Gaia at the beginning of a marriage (Proclus, Commentary on Plato’s Timaeus 40); the monograph that Aeschylus (fr. 44 TGF, quoted above) puts into Aphrodite’s mouth is accordingly rooted in Hesiod’s cosmic vision and at the same time in local cult practice (Pirenne-Delforge 2006).

But Aphrodite does not wait for marriage to assert her power. From the moment that the beauty of a young person becomes a charis, an active grace, Aphrodite is present (by contrast, a boy or girl who is too young is acharis Sappho fr. 49 Voigt). The girls’ choruses, the integrative function of which has been demonstrated by Claude Calame (1977), are one of the places in which Aphrodite and Eros appear, weaving the distinctly homoerotic first threads between young people en route to social integration. Two Athenian traditions suggest that the cults of Aphrodite equally welcomed young men as they emerged from childhood. Thus, the sanctuary of Aphrodite Pandemos (“of all the people”) had been founded by Solon with the money accumulated from brothel-keepers. The tradition may have been simply comic (or polemical). Petre (1992-4) and may just have made the obvious connection between Aphrodite and prostitution. However, the fragment that preserves it specifies that Solon had set up female slaves in the brothels “because of the vigor of the young men” (Nicander FGrH 271 fr. 9-10). It is therefore the sexuality, vigorous and still uncontrolled, of young men as much as it is the activity of female prostitutes that is connected with Aphrodite in this etiology. Along similar lines, Plutarch (Theseus 18) tells how Apollo advised Theseus to make Aphrodite his guide for his expedition to Crete: as he offered her a nanny-goat on the shore, the young man saw its horns transformed into a billy-goat, a vision that prefigured his own sexual maturation under Aphrodite’s auspices. The Aphrodite concerned here bore the epithet Epiphron, according to Plutarch. Her cult is very well attested in the imperial period (IG ii² 5115, 5148) and the account in the Theseus invites us to locate it in the old port of Phalerum. The sanctuary of Pandemos stood on the southwest slope of the Acropolis: according to Pausanias (1.22.3; cf. IG ii² 659 = LSCG 39), the goddess was worshipped there alongside Peithos, and the cult had been founded by Theseus. Plutarch (Theseus 24.2, 25.1) specifies that he had brought together “all the people” (pandemos) by virtue of his “persuasion” (peithos). Even if the image of the money from the brothels is probably derived from a comedy (Philemon fr. 3 K-A), the etiology recorded by Plutarch attests that the vigorous desire of adolescent males fell within the goddess’ sphere of influence. The fact of Pandemos’ worship as a guarantor of the unity of “all the people” does not detract from her core concern with sexuality: it is precisely because she is the deity of misis, of the “mixing” between creatures, that she is called upon to intervene in the cohesion of the “body” politic.

An interesting parallel comes from the island of Kos. Two sequential inscriptions, from the beginning and the end of the second century BC, stipulate the rights and obligations of a priesthood of Aphrodite in the context of its sale (Parker and Obhöök 2008; Segre 1993: ED 178). This unique priesthood presides over two cults: Aphrodite Pandemos and Aphrodite Pontia, worshipped, in all probability, on the sea shore, in a unique enclosure that included two twin temples (Parker 2002 144-5).

Pandemos seems to have been worshipped by all the demes of Kos on the same day in the month of Panemos (Segre 1993:178.26-31; LS 169A 12-13, 172.1-4), perhaps in connection with the synoecism that had taken place on the island in 366/5 BC. Furthermore, all the women of the island, whatever their social status, had to offer a sacrifice to the goddess in the year following their marriage (Segre 1993: ED 178.15-20; cf. Dillon 1999). Finally, the sailors who served on warships sacrificed to Aphrodite Pontia at the end of their expedition (Parker and Obhöök 2000 8-9).

This is a striking illustration of the complexity of divine figures in a polytheistic context. No simple, mechanical explanation can really account for it. However, we may note that Pandemos seems to incorporate at once a “political” dimension (synoecism, as at Athens) and a matrimonial one. The two fields to which the goddess’ powers are applied are not in conflict. The explanation is to be found in a mode of intervention unique to the goddess: her powerful ability to rouse up the vital impulses, to unite beings and to mingle their bodies. The example of Naucratis, where Aphrodite Pandemos is attested from the end of the archaic period, shows that the integrative significance of the epiteth has a validity that goes beyond a strictly civil context: it is hardly appropriate in the case of an emporion (Scholz 2003).

The sexual reference of the misis can accordingly be connected with the imagery of social cohesion: the danger of statis can similarly be associated with the gregarious and passionate excesses the goddess inspires. Thus, an Aphrodite “Guide of the Demos,” associated with the Graces on an Athenian altar dating from the turn of the third and second centuries BC (IG ii² 2798), probably evokes the harmony between the citizens after the recovery of independence in 229 BC. Such a context would equally explain the honor the presiding magistrates give to Aphrodite, sometimes accompanied by Peitho (Pirenne-Delforge 1994:446-50). One example from among many: in the second century BC five Megarian dinomairos made a dedication to the goddess (IG vii 41). Now, according to the evidence of Pausanias, there were at least two sanctuaries of Aphrodite at Megara. One, on the Karia, one of the city’s two acropolises, housed the cult of the goddess Epistrophe, beside the temple of Dionysus Nyktios and an oracular sanctuary of Night (Pausanias 1.40.6). The other, in the agora near the sanctuary of Dionysus Dayllios and Patrokos, housed an ancient ivory statue of Aphrodite Prax. In the fourth century this ancestral object was joined by statues of Peitho, “Persuasion,” and Paregoros, “Consolation,” by Praxileos, and the very coherent group of Eros, Himeros, “Desire,” and Pothos, “Yearning,” by Scopas (Pausanias 1.43.6). Pausanias does not comment on either of the epithets and leaves the reader to make his own interpretation. The goddess of the acropolis is “she who impels,” and the environment in which she is accommodated, with a nocturnal Dionysus and deified Night, leaves us in little doubt about the sexual connotations of this “impulsion.” The epithet of Prax in the agora conveys the action in its actual accomplishment. The goddess thus described sponsors all speech and all action that causes. The figures that make up her retinue orient her field of action in the erotic sphere, but the dedication by magistrates allows this field to be enlarged to embrace a public office in which persuasion is required. The proximity of a Dionysos “of the ancestors” thus suggests an inversion of the cultic configuration on the Karia.

The notion of praxis suggests a more precise interpretation of the term aphrodisiac, which most commonly refers to a male symposium at the conclusion of an enterprise, whether maritime, martial, or civic (Xenophon, Hellaios 5.4.4-7; Plutarch, Moralia)
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301f, 785e, 1097c). The name of the celebration pays homage to Aphrodite, albeit in the privacy of particular houses: the culmination of the enterprise and the releasing of the tension entailed could explain her role here, before the return to normality (Graf 1995).

On Kos, as we have seen, the marine dimension of Aphrodite’s prerogatives is conveyed by the epithet Pontia. She is also Euploia or Limenia in other contexts. Prominent on sea fronts, she responds alongside other gods, such as Poseidon or the Dioscuri, to the anxiety of sailors to reach a good port. This dimension is already present in the Hesiodic account of her birth which makes her a daughter of the foam (aphros) of the castrated sky and of the sea. Furthermore, in crossing from Cythera to Cyprus, Aphrodite immediately embarks upon a Mediterranean voyage. If one accepts, with G. Pironti (2007), that it is the narrative as a whole that establishes the final of the goddess, then these images offer an actual explanation of the powers of the goddess over the waves. It is by virtue of the fact that she is daughter of the sky and the sea that Aphrodite is worshipped by humans as overseeing their maritime enterprises. But the myth also speaks of sexual union: according to Dumézil’s principle, the goddess’ mode of action should remain the stable element within her interventions, whatever the context in which they take place. So, assuming that the polytheistic system is coherent, we may conjecture that the image of the calmness of the sky and the sea derives from the same representational complex that constructs from sea a metaphor for the harmony of the body politic (Pirenne-Delforge 1994:433–7, queried by Parker 2002).

The inscription from Kos specifies that it is the crew of worshippers who worship Aphrodite Pontia at the conclusion of their expeditions. The marine dimension is accordingly coupled with a martial dimension which constitutes one of the prerogatives of a goddess a priori with little concern for such matters. Now the battle is not unfamiliar with the power of Aphrodite, and her relationship with Ares is well attested in myth and cult alike. As in the case of maritime enterprises, martial enterprises pose the problem of the coherence of the figure of the deity engaged in improbable spheres of intervention, if one cleaves to the soothing image of the goddess of beauty and love. On the other hand, the scheme retains a certain coherence from the fact that one exploits martial imagery to describe the sexual union itself, and the tremendous impulse that it brings about in the human being. The complementarity of opposites (elabos, war, female/male, ebros/death) is insufficient to account for the relationship between Aphrodite and Ares (for which see Pirenne-Delforge 1994:450–3): the associations between Aphrodite and the world of the warrior lie at the heart of her own prerogatives and they are not hers merely by the virtue of her union with Ares (Pironti 2005): this is particularly clear in the case of the cults that she received at Sparta (Pausanias 3.15.10–11, 3.17.5).

Finally, the goddess whom the poets describe as “golden” is also “black” in some of her cults (Pausanias 2.2.4, 8.6.5, 9.27.5). The vague concept of the “fertility goddess” presiding over “black earth” does not do justice to the complexity of the data bearing upon this Aphrodite, any more than the concepts of a “marine goddess” or a “warrior goddess” are useful in describing Aphrodite’s place in the Greek pantheon. Thus, when Pausanias tries to explain the epithet, he associates it with the nocturnal nature of sexual relations (8.6.5). Even if the explanation may seem a little superficial to us, we must note that a Greek was instinctively looking for the sexual dimension of the goddess’ prerogatives in her various cults. Such a concern on the part of an “insider” must form part of our own “external” investigation. Once again, the web of mythical imagery comes to support and enhance our investigation: fertilizing moisture, conceived on the model of the sexual union between the sky and the earth, may come distinctively under the competence of Aphrodite (cf. Aeschylus, above). The image of her nimble feet which cause the first plants of the world to shoot up (Hesiod, Thogny 194–5) is not merely poetic: it is truly “theocratic.” The birth of the goddess gives rise to a paradigmatic vital impulse that brings with it the fecundity of creatures and the fertility of the earth. Epic plays with the same theme in associating the sexual goddess between Zeus and Hera on Ida with the growth of vegetation (Iliad 14.346–51; Calame 1996:173–85; Motte 1973).

Therefore, even without sufficient evidence to reconstruct actual cult practice in connection with “black” Aphrodite, the mythical background allows us to assert the importance of her patronage of vital humor in this particular context.

The desiring impulse is the very image of life and of its drive, creative and potentially destructive. This impulse and its fulfillment in sexual union constitute the frame on which images and actions are woven, the imagery of the cults concerned with aphrodisia (on the various cults of Eros, cf. Pirenne-Delforge 1998).

Sacred Prostitution and Oriental Influence: Some Historiographical Myths

Aphrodite presides over all forms of sexual union, matrimonial and extra-marital, heterosexual and homosexual, with concubines, courtesans, or prostitutes. The respective statuses of courtesans and prostitutes, male and female, were subject to a wide range of variation, from the free and educated courtesan to the slave whose room for maneuver was non-existent. Deductions by courtesans and prostitutes to Aphrodite are well attested, particularly in the Palatine Anthology; there is no doubt that the goddess was the official patron of this professional guild.

Sacred prostitution?

On the subject of sex for sale, no study of aphrodisia and the sacred in Greece can avoid mentioning the “sacred prostitution” associated with the city of Corinth (MacLachlan 1992). I embarked upon the study of this a decade ago, building on the work of C. Calame (1989) and H.D. Saffrey (1985), and arrived at negative conclusions (Pirenne-Delforge 1994:100–26). Since this question continues to hinder contemporary analyses of “the religion of women” (Dillon 2002:199–202), even though the argument against sacred prostitution is never confronted, I shall allow myself to present the basics of this case afresh.

The data bearing upon this question falls into three groups, to which one must add the argument for oriental influence upon the cult, which we will tackle in conclusion.

1 Three texts mentioning the supplication that Corinthian women, married women, and prostitutes addressed to Aphrodite of the Acercorinth on the eve of the battle of Salamis in 480 BC and that Simonides immortalized in an epigram (Plutarch, Moralia 871a; Athenaeus 13.573c–d; scholarist Pindar, Olympian 13.32b).
2 A fragment of Pindar (fr. 122 Snell-Maehler) – cited by Athenaeus following his mention of the 480 BC supplication – concerning the vow that Xenophon of Corinth made to the Aphrodite of his city, to bring her a hundred girls if she won the victory at Olympia.

3 The famous passage of Strabo (C278-9) on the thousand sacred slave women controlled by the sanctuary of Aphrodite at Corinth, who helped to ruin the shipowners.

The 480 supplication

On the eve of the battle of Salamis the Greeks were in a desperate situation. In the hour of danger, the women of Corinth naturally fled for refuge to the sanctuary of Aphrodite on the Acrocorinth. Plutarch simply mentions the women (gynaikeis) praying to the goddess to inspire their husbands with the desire (erotes) for combat. Athenaeus includes the supplication in a wider study of the ancient Corinthian custom (nomonomachia) of appealing to as great a number of hetairai as possible to supplicate Aphrodite when the city was in danger; he accordingly mentions their intervention in 480 BC without breathing a word about gynaikeis, and he cites the treatise On Pindar by Chameleon of Heralce. However, the scholar to Pindar speaks only of gynaikeis, in terms close to those used by Plutarch, whilst deriving his information from Theopompos. All three texts cite the epigram composed on this occasion, but only the scholar attributes it to Simonides, specifying that “the elegiac lines can still be seen today inscribed on the lintel that is part of the temple.” Plutarch and the scholar construct a tight parallel between the warriors and their wives, while passing over the courtesans in silence. Athenaeus makes no mention of the Corinthian wives because the parallel he constructs is of another sort: the 480 supplication constitutes the counterpart at public level to the vow made by Xenophon of Corinth at private level, to which we will come. A fragment of Alexis, also preserved by Athenaeus (fr. 255 K-A = Athenaeus 13.574b-c) stipulates that the free women and the courtesans each celebrated their own aphrodisia. One may, accordingly, suppose that the 480 supplication was undertaken by two groups of worshippers. Whatever the case, at no point is there mention of “sacred” prostitutes or courtesans.

The “filles” of Xenophon of Corinth

In Athenaeus the narrative of the 480 supplication constitutes the first panel of a diphyryt, the second part of which is devoted to the private equivalent of this sort of ritual. Thus Xenophon of Corinth, before battling in the reenactment of the symposium in the temple of Aphrodite. The song is addressed first to the goddess to whom “Xenophon led a herd of hundred fillies, for joy in having seen the realization of his prayers.” Then the poet addresses the young women: “Girls of numerous guests, of the Peitho in wealthy Corinth, you who burn the golden-yellow drops of pale incense and whose thoughts often fly towards Aphrodite, the heavenly mother of Loves, it is to you in your blamelessness that she grants the right, my children, to garnish the fruit of sweet youth on pleasant couches…” Athenaeus then cites another extract in which

Pindar asks himself about the masters of the Isthmus’ possible disapproval of his “familiarity with common women.” These words, like the 480 supplication, are frequently held to demonstrate the existence of a ritual prostitution in honor of Aphrodite (with the notable exception of Saffrey 1985 and Calame 1989). Xenophon had “consecrated” the young girls to the goddess after buying them at market. Now the text talks at no point of a “consecration” or a “dedication,” but of an act of thanks that takes the form of a sacrifice. The skholai was sung at the subsequent feast. Xenophon’s vow concerned both a sacrifice and thanks and an aristocratic feast under the aegis of Aphrodite, perhaps in a room in the sanctuary devoted to this function (cf. Plutarch, Moralia 146d, on the hetaira at the citizen feast, cf. Calame 1989).

Strabo’s hierodouloi

The geographer looks over the history of Corinth and the conditions that led to its prosperity. He proceeds:

The sanctuary of Aphrodite was so rich that it possessed more than a thousand sacred slaves (hierodouloi) in the form of courtesans that men and women alike had dedicated (nomonomachia) to the goddess. It was accordingly by virtue of these that the city became crowded and rich; indeed, it was easy for shipowners to ruin themselves there, and this is the reason for the proverb that states “It is not given to every man to cross to Corinth.”

Only the proverb cited is in the present tense: the remainder of the text is in the aorist, referring to an indeterminate time in the past. Passing on to the description of the sanctuary, Strabo refers simply to the naidian of Aphrodite, which cuts a sorry figure by contrast with its former glory. Neither he nor Passas’s two centuries later (2.5.1) affirms the practice of sacred prostitution. But Strabo returns to the subject when, in book 12 (3.36 = C559), he describes Comana in Pontus and the local veneration for the goddess Ma:

Many women prostitute theirs bodies, the majority of whom are consecrated to the goddess. In some respects, in fact, this city is a mini-Corinth, since the large number of courtesans at Corinth, consecrated to Aphrodite, produced a considerable increase in the population and gave rise to multiple festivals.

By way of conclusion he cites ares and the same proverb on crossing to Corinth. In contrast to the two other texts in this group, Strabo speaks explicitly of hierai, “sacred,” courtesans. However, his remarks on Corinth are on each occasion confined to the past, whilst the circumstances in Cambria in Pontus – Strabo’s home territory – belong to the present. Hence, in the face of this second-hand testimony which otherwise goes unsupported, we may consider that Strabo has projected an institutional reality that he knew well – the dedication of slaves to the service of the great sanctuaries of Asia Minor – onto the ancient custom of involving courtesans in public supplications or in private vows addressed to Corinthian Aphrodite. Pindar’s skholai leaves few doubts about the significance of this custom: to secure massive honor from a privileged category of worshipers with, perhaps, a financial advantage for the sanctuary thrown in – but no information is available on this. Corinth certainly had a reputation for beauty and for the luxurious life of its courtesans, and
there is an indication too of brothels (Hesychius s.v. katacleisai). A port on each side of the Isthmus would in itself be sufficient to account for the colorful image of Corinthian prostitution. This practice becomes "sacred" when it is organically attached to a sanctuary and its deity: the fact that Xenophon must bring "the young women into the sanctuary is sufficient to show that their participation in the sacrifice is associated with the imperative of the victim's ceremonial act of thanks, and not with the sacred nature of their office. Strabo's evidence therefore looks like a distortion of local facts—the prostitution of a two-port city and the exceptional protective status of Aphrodite of the Acrocorinth, which privileges the devotion of courtesans—reinterpreted in the light of "exotic" traditions.

Arguments from silence must be handled with care. Nonetheless, Herodotus' silence may be added to the dossier: although discussing occasional sacred prostitution in Babylon on the one hand (1.199) and the Corinthian dynasties on the other (3.592), he breathes no word about any such practice at Corinth. He had no reason to speak of it, because it never consisted of anything other than the showy but genuinely Greek devotion of the goddess' privileged worshipers. Similarly, in discussing the case of Aphrodiasis in Caria, where a decree protected doves, Louis Robert (1971) emphasized that the city did not have some doves that were sacred and others that were not. All doves were held to belong to the goddess. So it was at Corinth: there were no prostitutes more sacred than others. They were all protected by the goddess, who delighted in the massive honors they paid her in exceptional circumstances. But sexual relations were more permitted in Aphrodite's Corinthian sanctuary than they were in Greece's other sacred places: aphrodiasia belonged among those conditions of the human body that required precautions and purifications before approaching the sphere of the divine and the sacred (Parker 1983: 74-103).

Sacred prostitution in Greece is a historiographical myth. The other case generally invoked to support this thesis is that of Triakos in Asia Minor. But Stephane Budin has recently (2003b) demonstrated that the inscriptions mentioning pauleke in this city had nothing to do with any such practice. Beyond Greece the evidence for, for example, Graecia (Morelli 1977) and likewise Eryx, for which Strabo is once again our sole source (6.2.6 = C272) ought to be re-evaluated with greater prudence.

A certain image of the Orient

An argument that was long advanced to explain the supposedly attested existence of sacred prostitution was that of the oriental influence, and more specifically Phoenician, influence to which Corinth had been subject. Even when Corinth was recognized as "completely Greek," sacred prostitution was the sole element conceded to this oriental impact (Dunbabin 1987:51-2): a good example of a viciously circular argument.

The question cannot be dissociated from the nagging question of the goddess' origins. The Greeks themselves derived Aphrodite Urania from the Near East via Cyprus, with the Phoenicians as intermediaries (Herodotus 1.105; Pausanias 1.14.7). The functional profile of Oriental goddesses such as Ishtar, Inanna, or Astarte has induced many moderns to fall in behind the ancient notion: these various "sky queens" (= Urania), connected with sexuality, birds, and war, offered so many plausible models for the Greeks' Aphrodite. Indeed, Aphrodite did not appear in the Linear B documents and, from Homer, she was Kapris, "the Cyprian": it was at Paphos that the most important of her sanctuaries was to be found, the origin of which went back to the twelfth century BC. Despite recent attempts to determine the career of a "proto" Aphrodite (Budin 2003b), it is difficult to get beyond vague notions such as "borrowing," "assimilation," or "syncretism," since the problem of the genesis of gods is a complex one, and probably insoluble when posed in these terms.

A compromise method with which to address the question as to how a divine figure whose functions were oriented towards sexuality came to be formed in Greece at the dawn of the first millennium is to analyze the impact of the iconography of the "nude goddess" (Böhm 1990; Bonnet and Pirenne-Delforge forthcoming). These images are well attested in the sanctuaries on the Aegean coast in the geometric and archaic periods, i.e. at a time when the Greek local pantheons were being developed. Images of a nude woman in frontal position, inherited directly from oriental models, must have answered the particular needs of the communities that adopted them. That these needs were connected with sexuality is hardly to be doubted. However, it is not a matter of making these figures into so many Aphrodites; it is rather a matter of thinking about the context of the construction of types in this period and the religious imagination to which they bear witness. After flourishing for some two centuries, this iconography disappeared: women and goddesses recovered their clothes as the city formalized it to an ever greater extent the respective roles of man and woman, especially that of the legitimate wife. We have to wait until the Aphrodite of Praxiteles to see the re-emergence of the theme in a divine context (Stewart 1997).

In the fourth century, in a pantheon that was now well structured, fashioned at a panhellenic level by the secular recitation of Homeric epic, such a direct evocation of female seductiveness and sexuality in all its maturity could only induce Praxiteles to christen his statue with a single divine name: the Aphrodite of aphrodiasia.

GUIDE TO FURTHER READING
