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# A COMPANION TO GREEK RELIGION

*Edited by*  
**Daniel Ogden**

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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 Kron 1996. Most useful information comes in the form of articles or collections of articles. Winkler 1990b 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 Walcot 1996 offer a range of articles considering different aspects of female religious behavior. The essays in Reeder-Williams 1995 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 Sinos 1993 and Vêrilhac and Vial 1998. Demand 1994 and Cole 1998 and 2004 offer the best studies of women and childbirth. For women and ritual movement see Delavaud-Roux 1994 and Lonsdale 1993. Information can also be gleaned from wider studies of religion or 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 good overview of the lives of women up to the end of the classical period. Katz 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 *erōs* 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 worshipers. 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 slackens 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 entities 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 *kourē*, a "girl," is formed in the white foam produced by Uranus' genitals of as they fall into the sea. The verb *trephein* 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 (Demont 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 (*omartēin*) and forms her retinue, alongside Himeros, "Desire" (201). Henceforth he will be the powerful goddess' agent (Rudhardt 1986). Accordingly, Aphrodite is the first deity to be given a *timē*, 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, deceits (*exapatai*), pleasure (*terpsis*), and loving relationship (*philotēs*), terms which we must qualify 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 (122, 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 (Leclerc 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 abnormal products, emanating from male origins (heavenly "foam" and sea; clay modeled by Hephaestus at Zeus' behest); Aphrodite is the first female divine form, while Pandora is the first female human form (590: "the race of female women" originates from her); they are both "beautiful," with that irresistible beauty conferred by *charis*; Aphrodite presides over the union between sexually differentiated beings, whereas Pandora, the nubile *parthenos*, makes a male out of the man whose partner she becomes (Vernant 1996). Furthermore, the episode of Pandora's creation crystallizes the *timē* 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 to live 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 kakon*), the beautiful Helen is a great bane for humans (*mega pēma*), 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, Athene 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, in epic become the massacre of thousands.

Furthermore, the impulse to war is also a form of *erōs*: 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 (Euripides, *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 *timē* and brings a deadly vengeance down upon himself (Euripides, *Hippolytus* 1–22). The instrument of this vengeance is Phaedra, 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 virginal 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 team of horses, 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 Aegyptiads. The lost 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 [*bios*] of Demeter and the mature fruit [*opōra*] 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

*erōs* 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” (*kallistos*) 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 Poleis: 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 *Nymphia* that the goddess takes on at Troezen makes her the protectress of the *nymphē*, 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 “clitoris”; 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 (Pausanias 2.32.7, 2.37.2, 10.38.12). 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 Procne and Philomela (Pausanias 1.14.7). The central values of marriage are perverted in the horrible story of these two women: the rape of Philomela 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 catalog of horrors rendered the marriage of Procne 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 *thēsauros* from the beginning of the fourth century BC bears an inscription which associates it with the offering of a drachma for the goddess for “the commencement of marriage” (*SEG* 41.182). This object was located not in the Agora, but in the little 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 monolog that Aeschylus (fr. 44 *TrGF*, quoted above) puts into *Aphrodite's* mouth is accordingly rooted both 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 it transformed into a billy-goat, a vision that prefigured his own sexual maturation under *Aphrodite's* auspices. The *Aphrodite* concerned here bore the epithet *Epitragia*, according to Plutarch. Her cult is very well attested in the imperial period (*IG* ii<sup>2</sup> 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* ii<sup>2</sup> 659 = *LSCG* 39), the goddess was worshiped there alongside *Peitho*, and the cult had been founded by *Theseus*. Plutarch (*Theseus* 24.2, 25.1) specifies that he had brought together "all the people" (*pandēmos*) by virtue of his "persuasion" (*peithō*). 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 *mixis*, 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 Obbink 2000; Segre 1993: ED 178). This unique priesthood presides over two cults: *Aphrodite Pandemos* and *Aphrodite Pontia*, worshiped, 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 worshiped by all the demes of Kos on the same day in the month of Panamos (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 Obbink 2000:5-9). 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 impulse, 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 epithet has a validity that goes beyond a strictly civil context: it is hardly appropriate in the case of an *emporion* (Scholtz 2003).

The sexual reference of the *mixis* can accordingly be connected with the imagery of social cohesion: the danger of *stasis* can similarly be associated with the grievous 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* ii<sup>2</sup> 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 *damiourgoi* 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 acropoleis, housed the cult of the goddess *Epistrophia*, beside the temple of *Dionysus Nyktelios* and an oracular sanctuary of *Night* (Pausanias 1.40.6). The other, in the agora near the sanctuary of *Dionysus Dasyllios* and *Patrōos*, housed an ancient ivory statue of *Aphrodite Praxis*. In the fourth century this ancestral object was joined by statues of *Peitho*, "Persuasion," and *Paregoros*, "Consolation," by *Praxiteles*, 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 *Praxis* in the agora conveys the action in its actual accomplishment. The goddess thus described sponsors all speech and all action that ensues. 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 *Dionysus* "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 *aphrodisia*, which most commonly refers to a male symposium at the conclusion of an enterprise, whether maritime, martial, or civic (Xenophon, *Hellenica* 5.4.4-7; Plutarch, *Moralia*



301f, 785e, 1097e). 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 *timē* 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 worshiped by humans as overseeing their maritime enterprises. But the myth also speaks of sexual union: according to Dumézilian 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 polytheist 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 sex 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 crews of warships 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 field of 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 (*oikos*/war, female/male, *erōs*/death) is insufficient to account for the relationship between Aphrodite and Ares (for which see Pirenne-Delforge 1994:450–4): 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, *Theogony* 194–5) is not merely poetic: it is truly “theogonic.” 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 union 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 humors 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. Dedications 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 Acrocorinth 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; scholiast Pindar, *Olympians* 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 he won the victory at Olympia.
- 3 The famous passage of Strabo (C378–9) 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 (*gunaikes*) praying to the goddess to inspire their husbands with the desire (*erōs*) for combat. Athenaeus includes the supplication in a wider study of the ancient Corinthian custom (*nomimon archaion*) 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 *gunaikes*, and he cites the treatise *On Pindar* by Chameleon of Heraclea. However, the scholiast to Pindar speaks only of *gunaikes*, in terms close to those used by Plutarch, whilst deriving his information from Theopompus. All three texts cite the epigram composed on this occasion, but only the scholiast attributes it to Simonides, specifying that “the elegiac lines can still be seen today inscribed on the left-hand side as one enters the temple.” Plutarch and the scholiast construct a tight parallel between the warriors and their wives, whilst 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 “fillies” of Xenophon of Corinth*

In Athenaeus the narrative of the 480 supplication constitutes the first panel of a diptych, the second part of which is devoted to the private equivalent of this sort of ritual. Thus Xenophon of Corinth, before competing at Olympia, made the vow “to bring *hetairai* to the goddess should he be victorious.” The *skolion* that Pindar composed to celebrate the victor was sung at the time of the symposium in the company of *hetairai*. 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, servants of 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 garner 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 *skolion* was sung at the subsequent feast. Xenophon’s vow concerned both a sacrifice in 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 [*anatithēmi*] 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 *naïdion* of Aphrodite, which cuts a sorry figure by contrast with its former glory. Neither he nor Pausanias two centuries later (2.5.1) affirm 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 their 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 afresh 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 Comana 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 *skolion* leaves few doubts about the significance of this custom: to secure massive honor from a privileged category of worshippers 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. *katakleistoi*). 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 imperatives of the victor'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 (5.92), 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 Aphrodisias in Caria, where a decree protected doves, Louis Robert (1971) emphatically asserted 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 no more permitted in Aphrodite's Corinthian sanctuary than they were in Greece's other sacred places: *aphrodisia* belonged amongst 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 Tralles in Asia Minor. But Stephanie Budin has recently (2003b) demonstrated that the inscriptions mentioning *pallakes* in this city had nothing to do with any such practice. Beyond Greece the evidence for, for example, Gravisca (Torelli 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 1957:51–2): 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 Innana, Ishtar, 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 *Kupris*, "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 coasts 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 figurines 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 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 resurgence of the theme in a divine context (Stewart 1997). In the fourth century, in a pantheon that was now well structured, fashioned at 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 *aphrodisia*.

### GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

For modern discussions of "sexuality" in an ancient context, amongst many other references, see Davidson 1998, Foucault 1976–84, Halperin, Winkler, and Zeitlin 1990, and Winkler 1990a. See also, for an iconographical and archaeological point of view, Koloski-Ostrow and Lyons 1997 and Stewart 1997. For the cults of Aphrodite and Eros in the Greek world, see Calame 1996, Graf 1995, Pirenne-Delforge 1994 and 1998, and Rosenzweig 2004. For a literary study of these gods, see Bittrich 2005 (with previous bibliography). For cosmogonic Eros, see Rudhardt 1986 and Pirenne 2001. For Aphrodite's associations with Ares, see Pironti 2005 and 2007. For sacred prostitution in Corinth see Calame 1989, MacLachlan 1992, Pirenne-Delforge 1994:100–26, and Saffrey 1985. The problem of the "origin" of Aphrodite is a vexing one, probably insoluble: see, nevertheless, the attempts of Budin 2003a and Friedrich 1978. Another way to consider this problem is presented in Pirenne-Delforge 2001b.

**Postscript (2009).** On sacred prostitution see additionally now S.L. Budin *The Myth of Sacred Prostitution in Antiquity* (Cambridge, 2008), with my review in *BMCR* (28 April 2009), and T. Scheer and M.A. Lindner (eds.) *Tempelprostitution im Altertum – Fakten und Fiktionen* (Oikumene 6, Berlin, 2009).