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ABBREVIATIONS

AA Archäologischer Anzeiger
ABV Beazley, John D., Attic Black-Figure Vase-Painters (Oxford, 1956)
AJA American Journal of Archaeology
AM Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts. Athenische Abteilung
ARV Beazley, John D., Attic Red-Figure Vase-Painters, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1963)
BAPD Beazley Archive Pottery Database, Oxford University (www.beazley.ox.ac.uk/databases/pottery.htm)
BCH Bulletin de Correspondence Hellénique
BSA Annual of the British School at Athens
CHD Güterbock, Hans G., Harry A. Hoffner, Jr., and Theo P.J. van den Hout, eds., The Hittite Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago (Chicago, 1980–)
CIG Corpus Inscriptionum Graecarum (1825–1860)
CQ Classical Quarterly
CVA Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum
FHG Müller, C., Fragmenta Historicorum Graecorum (1841–1870)
IG Inscriptiones Graecae (1873–)
IGRom Inscriptiones Graecae ad res Romanas pertinentes (1906–)
JHS Journal of Hellenic Studies
JRA Journal of Roman Archaeology
LIMC Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae (Zurich, 1981–)
RDAC Report of the Department of Antiquities, Cyprus
SEG Supplementum epigraphicum Graecum (Amsterdam, 1923–)
TAPA Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association

Abbreviations of primary sources follow those given in OCD.
Over the last three decades, interest in the goddess Aphrodite has increased considerably. She has become a very popular subject amongst the Greek gods. Since 1978, more than ten monographs have been devoted to her, as have numerous articles. Conferences were not so frequent, however: I only know of two, and the mention of Aphrodite in a title does not necessarily imply that the conference addressed this issue.1

The editors of the present volume, Amy Smith and Sadie Pickup, kindly invited me to deliver a keynote speech at the opening of the conference they organized in May 2008. This was a good occasion to examine the reasons for this scholarly and editorial phenomenon, to which I contributed myself by publishing my PhD thesis on this subject in 1994.2 I would like to present here the results of this bibliographical investigation, and to suggest also, along the way, some methodological issues at stake in this Aphrodite dossier. I want to make it clear that my overview attempts to be neither an exhaustive examination nor a clinical assessment of all that has been written about Aphrodite, more or less recently. For this reason, I have deliberately maintained the personal tone adopted in the original lecture.

I have started with the year 1978. I could have chosen the year 1974 and referred also to Deborah Boedeker, who, in her monograph on

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1 For example, *Engendering Aphrodite*, a conference published by Diane Bolger and Nancy Serwint, American Schools of Oriental Research, Archaeological Reports 7, Cyprus American Archaeological Research Institute Monographs 3 (2002), has the subtitle *Women and Society in Ancient Cyprus*, but that collection of essays is more interested in gendered approaches than Greek gods. A more focused conference was published in 2005, by Göta Johansson, *The Making of a Goddess: Aphrodite in History, Art and Literature* (Lund, 2005). This anthology of texts, some previously published, presents the “influential and versatile goddess” and her development from Inanna/Ishtar through to the twentieth century AD.

pantheon in all its complexity, on the other. Sourvinou-Inwood distin-
guished two levels for the representation of Greek gods: the local, polis
level, and the Panhellenic level. Today, such a distinction is well known
and has been infused into scholarship about Greek religion, as was not
the case thirty years ago, especially with regard to Aphrodite. I believe it
is not mere chance that Sourvinou-Inwood chose a case study of a god-
dess whose figure had been previously studied only from a literary point
of view, and had therefore become disassociated from cultic realities.

Before beginning to work on the subject myself, I was conscious that
two principal trends of investigation had been privileged to encapsulate
Aphrodite's profile: first, the study of texts celebrating this so-called
goddess of love, sex, and beauty; second, those looking for her origins
(I will return in due course to the second issue). My own response was
against both of these trends: I wanted to put aside the literary persona
of Aphrodite and the question of her origins. Fortunately a third path
of investigation was at hand, in Lewis Farnell's monumental Cults of the
Greek States, written at the end of the nineteenth century. Farnell's ideas
were reinvigorated, on a stricter methodological basis, in Sourvinou-
Inwood's article. She scrutinized local cults in their own Greek context
without any bias inspired by literature or interpretation through a Near
Eastern or Indo-European frame. My leaning towards this approach was,
in part, rooted first in the consciousness that I was not competent enough
to address the multicultural and multilingual evidence of the many
places in which Aphrodite was thought to have originated. Second, my
education in ancient history was fed by French-speaking scholars, such
as Jean-Pierre Vernant and Jean Rudhardt, who made a strong case for
an interpretation of the Greek religious system in the Greek language.
Walter Burkert's books were, of course, also present on my desk, and very
helpful, particularly his monumental Greek Religion. Despite Burkert's
useful investigations into the oriental background and some cultural
issues, I thought the question of the origins of Greek gods should now
take a backseat. More urgent was the need to understand Aphrodite's
cults in the Greek cities.

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9 For example, Jean-Pierre Vernant, “La société des dieux,” in Mythe et société en Grèce
ancienne (Paris, 1974), pp. 104–105; Jean Rudhardt, Notions fondamentales de la pensée
10 Walter Burkert, Greek Religion: Archaic and Classical, trans. John Raffan (Cam-
bridge, Mass., 1985). On the oriental background, for example: Walter Burkert, The Ori-
Writing such a monograph on a Greek goddess in the late 1980s and early 1990s was not, however, fashionable, despite its subject being Aphrodite. The contemporary trends in scholarship on Greek gods were geared towards regional studies, such as Fritz Graf’s work on northern Ionian cults, Philippe Bruneau’s analysis of the cults on the island of Delos, or Madeleine Jost’s investigation into the religious life of Arcadia. The local level of Greek religion, just as Sourvinou-Inwood had defined it, increasingly necessitated regional investigations, which took into account the nexus of the complex relation among the deities of a local pantheon. Robert Parker has also taken this approach in his second book devoted to Athenian religion.

The study of a single deity does, however, risk being a deity-centered analysis that does not place the god or goddess in a plural context. Returning to this choice with a critical gaze, today, I do not regret having taken this option many years ago. First, regional works and deity-centered monographs are complementary tools that are necessary for the interpretation of Greek polytheism, even though (and here I quote Parker) “Greek polytheism is indescribable.” Second, I realized, while working on this keynote address, that my work had perhaps modestly contributed to the flourishing interest in the cultic dimension of Aphrodite. Even though I had had to limit the scope of my research, the book put at everyone’s disposal, albeit in French, the material necessary to tackle different problems concerning this goddess. Given these sources, one might either agree or disagree with my hypotheses: scientific controversy is the most efficient fuel for scholarship!

Let us now turn to the main trends of this recent scholarship, in which I discern three tendencies: a focalization on regional contexts, a study of

Margaret E. Pinder and Walter Burkert (Cambridge, Mass., 1992); Da Omero ai Magi. La tradizione orientale nella cultura greca (Venice, 1999). Several papers have been gathered recently in Kleine Schriften 2: Orientalia, ed. M. Laura Gemelli Marciano (Göttingen, 2003).


12 The first was Athenian Religion: A History (Oxford, 1996), and the second, Polytheism and Society at Athens (Oxford, 2005).

13 Parker, Polytheism and Society, p. 387.
the presence of Aphrodite inside the political and military arena of many cities, and the continuing question of her origins.

**Regional Contexts**

In 1999, Yulia Ustinova published a book on *The Supreme Gods of the Bosporan Kingdom: Celestial Aphrodite and the Most High God*. The author’s command of Russian enabled her to gather the results of excavations and other archaeological research in the Black Sea region. From the available evidence, she produced a balanced evaluation of the rich interactions between Greek colonists, among whom Milesians were the most active, and their indigenous neighbors. She showed the evolution of Aphrodite’s cult, and how the goddess became, during the Hellenistic period, the tutelary goddess of the Bosporan Kingdom. The leading position of the goddess in the Greek cities of this region (well studied in all its implications by Ustinova) has also been shown through the impressive results of the excavations conducted in Miletos, mother city of many colonies on the coast of the Black Sea. On the modern site of Zeytintepe, an extra-urban sanctuary of Aphrodite provides a large amount of Archaic material, which, when published, will probably change our minds about the role and profile of Aphrodite in the Archaic period. This excavation is one of the most promising and exciting in the Archaic “Aphrodisian” domain. Another site where Aphrodite predominates, albeit with a different chronological scope, is at Aphrodisias. Lisa Brody has presented the importance of interpreting the complex and fascinating image of the goddess Aphrodite in such a multicultural place during the Hellenistic and Roman periods. Still in the archaeological domain, results from the old excavations conducted by the French School

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of Athens on the site of the Argive Aphrodision are now at hand.\textsuperscript{18} Regional characteristics are also present in Rachel Rosenzweig’s 2004 monograph, which redispays the Athenian evidence for studying the worship of Aphrodite and emphasizes the available archaeological and visual testimonies.\textsuperscript{19}

\textit{Political and Martial Aphrodite(s)}

The second trend concerns the apparently paradoxical implications of Aphrodite in the context of the political and martial enterprises of the Greek cities. Aphrodite’s role as protectress of Greek magistrates was a surprising discovery in the twentieth century, reflected in an excellent corpus of epigraphic evidence coming from the whole Greek world, produced by Louis Robert, Francis Croissant, François Salviat, and Franciszek Sokolowski.\textsuperscript{20} This corpus still generates interest, as shown by Jenny Wallensten’s recent study of the material.\textsuperscript{21} For the martial dimension of Aphrodite, we rely on some statues of Aphrodite and the implications of some of her epithets. This evidence was not really a new puzzle; ancient authors had already played on the image of Aphrodite using Ares’ warlike equipment, as Gabriella Pironti and Stephanie Budin argue in divergent ways in subsequent pages.\textsuperscript{22} The iconography of the armed Aphrodite was presented in 1991 by Johan Flemberg, who was looking for an explanation of this pictorial type in the royal prerogatives of a Mycenaean proto-Aphrodite.\textsuperscript{23} In a more recent work, published in Spanish, Miriam Valdés has also tried to address the puzzling problem of a god-


\textsuperscript{19} Rachel Rosenzweig, \textit{Worshipping Aphrodite: Art and Cult in Classical Athens} (Ann Arbor, 2004).


\textsuperscript{21} Jenny Wallensten, “\textit{ΑΦΡΟΔΙΤΗ ΑΝΕΘΗΚΕΝ ΑΡΧΑΣ: A Study of Dedications to Aphrodite from Greek Magistrates}” (PhD diss., Lund University, 2003).

\textsuperscript{22} Chapters 5 and 6.

dess involved in fields as different as politics, war, marriage, and initiation. Much space and time would be necessary to examine all aspects of this rich book, which speculatively traces the history of Aphrodite's cults from the arrival of the goddess in Greece until her complete integration into its cities at the end of the Archaic period. One important feature of its approach, however, needs to be underlined, as it leads us to the third trend in Aphrodite studies analyzed here: the problem of Aphrodite's origin. In Miriam Valdés’ book, Greek Aphrodite is a warlike goddess because she comes from the East, where the divine “Queens of Heaven,” from whom Aphrodite derives, are warlike deities. These characteristics would have been well received by the aristocratic warriors, founders of the early Greek cities. Valdés supposes that later on Aphrodite's martial connotations would have lost their significance, only remaining as strange relics in some regions of the Greek world, and in the rhetorical and literary games of the Hellenistic and Roman periods. According to this argument, the figure of Aphrodite would have arrived in Athens between the years 1075 and 1025 BC. This chronological hypothesis does not, however, convince me to give up my earlier opinion regarding the difficulty of reconstructing the origin of a Greek god.

**Aphrodite’s Origins**

*The Origin of Aphrodite* is the title of a book written by Stephanie Budin, who courageously addressed this old issue in 2003, by gathering much evidence from many different cultures and fields of research. This study did not change my mind about the traps in this quest for the origins of a god. “Origin,” as well as the all-embracing and too-feeble concepts of “influence” or “assimilation,” are vague notions that do not do justice to the complexities of historical processes. Even though we are not able to define these processes we use them to explain what we do not understand immediately when we use the canonical vision constructed by two centuries of Classical scholarship. I shall return to this point, but for the moment, one controversial issue, among many others, will clearly show our differences. This also concerns the last book written by

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Jacqueline Karageorghis, in 2005, on Cypriot Aphrodite.\textsuperscript{27} Like Budin, she puts Cyprus at the core of her reconstruction of Aphrodite’s travels, and she addresses the ancient evidence in the same associative manner. There are several aspects of divergence between us.\textsuperscript{28} The Greek Kypris, the “Cypriot” Aphrodite, emerged from a Greek representation of Cyprus, culturally determined by a deep ambiguity: Cyprus was both Greek \textit{and} Eastern, inside \textit{and} outside the Greek world. Literary evidence reflects this ambiguity, which is closely related to the construction of Greekness by means of a series of polarized oppositions of the Greeks themselves. As Cypriot literary evidence is nonexistent, analysis and interpretation rest on a culturally determined representation of Cyprus by others. The oriental origin of Aphrodite, as Herodotos and Pausanias saw it,\textsuperscript{29} is as dependent on the imaginative register as on a hypothetical historical process of cultural borrowing, which is almost impossible to reconstruct with any certainty. Accordingly, we may subscribe to the very general idea that a goddess who was named Aphrodite by the Greeks had crystallized somewhere in the east of the Mediterranean in the early first millennium BC. This process encompassed elements from different places, such as Greece, Cyprus, and the Levantine coast. Although the more precise process will remain forever beyond our scope, I am still convinced, fourteen years after my PhD, that the oriental perspective adopted by the Greek authors speaking of Aphrodite’s arrival in Greece tells us more about their vision of the Greek Aphrodite and her skills and competences than about her origin, whatever it may be.

A brief comparison with the alphabet, the most important borrowing of the Greeks from their eastern neighbors, will provide a useful analogy.\textsuperscript{30} Around the middle of the eighth century BC, writing in a Greek alphabet begins to occur on pottery. Literacy is marked by local variations in letter forms, but it clearly adopts and adapts the forms and names from the scripts used by the Phoenicians. The Greek alphabet therefore functions differently from the Phoenician alphabet, yet Greek communities quickly adapted this wonderful tool to their own particular needs, for which its “origin” did not matter. Greek gods are cultural conglomerates that are more complicated than the alphabet, and, accordingly, caution

\textsuperscript{27} Jacqueline Karageorghis, \textit{The Aphrodite of Cyprus: Ancient Sources and Archaeological Evidence} (Nicosia, 2005).
\textsuperscript{28} Already presented in a review published in collaboration with Corinne Bonnet in \textit{Gnomon} 80 (2008), pp. 664–667.
\textsuperscript{29} Hdt. 1.105; Paus. 1.14.7.
is needed in the assessment that a deity was introduced from the Near East, which does not say anything of such complexity. Such an assessment gives the comfortable yet false impression that the very identity of a god has been established. When Jacqueline Karageorghis writes that “the Ancient Greeks saw Aphrodite as a great and powerful goddess, whose strength derived from her identity as a fertility goddess, and whose strangeness lay in her Oriental roots,”31 for example, we might think that the Greeks associated Aphrodite with an oriental origin to justify her disturbing and potentially violent profile, connected with the violence of the sexual instinct more than with a generic concept of fertility.

In this respect, Pironti’s work, published in 2007, addresses the potential violence of Aphrodite and her relationships with the world of the warriors seen from a Greek perspective, setting aside the question of the origins.32 Her paper, published in this companion, is a summary of her thesis, so it would not be useful to repeat the points she herself forcefully defends. I only want to underline that this book is the first comprehensive attempt to understand both the concrete ritual manifestations of Aphrodite in the historical Greek cities and the wealthy literary persona of the goddess, in all their respective complexities. For my part, I had chosen to set aside literature in order to have a fresh look at Aphrodite’s cults. Now Pironti’s study of these cults opens the door for a new reading of literary texts.

Another book published in 2007, by Barbara Breitenberger, has the same aim of confronting cults and myths to grasp the goddess’ complexity, considering that these two types of evidence were not separate, incompatible units.33 The aims and methods of Pironti and Breitenberger, however, diverge. The latter attempts to analyze the interactions between Aphrodite and her train of erotic personifications, particularly Eros, considering “the relationship between myth and cult and how poets combined these in creating their mythological figures,”34 especially in the Archaic period. Searching for the origins and nature of the goddess and

31 Karageorghis, Kypris, p. 7.
34 Breitenberger, Aphrodite and Eros, pp. 2–3. In a more traditional perspective, the literary study of Aphrodite and Eros by Ursula Bittrich has to be mentioned: Aphrodite und Eros in der antiken Tragödie. Mit Ausblicken auf motivgeschichtlich verwandte Dichtungen (Berlin, 2005).
her companions is seen, therefore, as the way of detecting the poetic elaboration of these figures. Accordingly, Aphrodite’s oriental origins are repeatedly called to mind, but her cults and myths are finally disconnected, since “myth … features her adventurous sex-life and cult … is concerned with more serious issues such as marriage and civic harmony.”

The differences between Eros and the other personifications in the circle of Aphrodite (Peitho and the Charites, for example) are allegedly the absence of ancient cults for the former and the cultic contexts of the latter. For this reason, the creation of Eros’ personality is seen as a poetic innovation, closely related to the phenomenon of Greek homosexuality, a male “love god” being the necessary counterpart of a “love goddess.” Aphrodite therefore remains a generic “goddess of love,” and the powerful Eros, already present in Hesiod’s *Theogony*, vanishes.

This study, whatever its qualities, raises a fundamental methodological problem: looking for a god’s origin and nature is conceived as a premise for evaluating the myth and cult interaction without any consciousness that defining this “nature,” if ever possible, should be the purpose of such an investigation, rather than its starting point.

Why Such Success?

Aphrodite is a flourishing topic, and the excavations at Miletos and Aphrodisias indicate that this trend will not decrease. Some hypotheses can be offered to understand this success. A first explanation may be the fact that the evidence for other goddesses—Hera, Demeter, Artemis, and Athena—is far more abundant. The evidence for Aphrodite seems, therefore, to be more easily grasped than that for other goddesses. Some PhD projects on Artemis or Demeter, for example, have been swallowed up by the huge amount of evidence necessary for a monographic perspective. Perhaps the fascination with Aphrodite’s origins is more compelling

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36 Jean Rudhardt, *Le rôle d’Éros et d’Aphrodite dans les cosmogonies grecques* (Paris, 1986), is mentioned in the final bibliography but not used, in fact. The same problem arises with Claude Calame’s study, *L’Éros dans la Grèce antique* (Paris, 1996). Calame does not, actually, address the problem of the “origin” of Eros, but scrutinizes his role within Archaic Greek society, on not only a mythic level but also a cultic level. Stating that “Claude Calame’s monograph focuses on the literary features of Eros” (p. 3) is a reductive summary of such a fine work. The first chapter of Breitenberger’s book addresses the question of the origin of Aphrodite without being conscious that Budin published a whole book on the subject four years before.
than other gods. To some, Aphrodite seems to offer more certainties than do other gods. We were also quite “certain” about Dionysos, before we discovered his name in the Linear B corpus.\textsuperscript{37} Just like Aphrodite, Dionysos was considered by the Greeks themselves as having come from elsewhere.\textsuperscript{38} Traditionally his origin was thought to have been in Thrace or in Anatolia, but there is now general agreement that the representation of Dionysos is closely connected to his divine personality: I am talking about the “epidemic” nature of this god.\textsuperscript{39} Aphrodite has not been found in the Linear B corpus, so scholarship has not changed in her case, although she is equally problematic.

A third consideration is the ambiguity of a deity whose canonical figure of tenderness, beauty, and love does not seem to fit with other aspects of her personality. In this respect Aphrodite is not more complex than other Greek gods; all of them are complex entities, who often defy description and understanding. How should we interpret the appeal of the subject? Could it be that Aphrodite aroused erotic desire and sexual union, which seem to be so constitutive of humanity, in ancient Greece as in modern times? Have we been completely captivated and charmed by the presumed archetypal manifestation of the seductive female? I fear that the answer to both of these questions could be positive. For instance, in A Companion to Greek Religion, published in 2007, a first proposal included a chapter entitled “Religion, sex, and love”; Aphrodite was, of course, the best candidate for this topic.\textsuperscript{40} This section has been amended, but it is significant that the only gods who are explicitly mentioned in the chapter titles of that Companion are Aphrodite, on the one hand, and Dionysos and Demeter (regarding their connection with mystery cults), on the other.

Be that fascination as it may, the profile of Aphrodite is an efficient touchstone for addressing fundamental questions on Greek polytheism and facing its “indescribability.” This point will be the last part of my reflection.

\textsuperscript{38} Euripides, in the Bacchae, describes him as a foreign god dressed in Eastern or Thracian garb. This dramatization of the mythical arrival of the stranger god Dionysos in Thebes was very influential in antiquity as well as in modern scholarship.
\textsuperscript{40} Vinciane Pirenne-Delforge, “‘Something to Do with Aphrodite’: Ta aphrodisia and
Searching for Polytheism: Aphrodite at Work

In my PhD I chose to follow Pausanias. As this tireless traveler did not say anything about possible visits to the islands of the Aegean or to the north of Greece, I had cast aside information on these places, preferring other pieces of evidence in producing a final synthesis. On the island of Kos, a large amount of epigraphic evidence has shed a new light on the religious life of the inhabitants. Aphrodite’s cults are well attested. 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. One of these inscriptions was already known by Mario Segre, and the other has been carefully edited, with commentary by Dirk Obbink and Robert Parker. The latter has also published a paper on this cult in a collection of essays offered to Henk Versnel in 2002. The unique priesthood, to which these inscriptions appear to refer, presides over two cults: Aphrodite Pandamos (‘Of all the people’) and Aphrodite Pontia (‘Of the sea’), both probably worshipped on the seashore, in a unique enclosure that included twin temples and two altars. Aphrodite Pandamos seems to have been worshipped by all the demes of Kos on the same day in the month of Panamos, perhaps in connection with the synoecism (or coming together of the island’s populace) that had taken place on the island in the year 366/365 BC. Furthermore, Aphrodite received post-nuptial sacrifices from wives, regardless of their social status, in the year following their marriage. Finally, sailors who served on warships sacrificed to Aphrodite Pontia at the end of their expedition. This double cult concentrates in one location all the complexities of Aphrodite’s pro-


42 Parker, “The Cult of Aphrodite Pandamos,” pp. 143–144, and note 4 with the references of the archaeological reports.


44 Segre, Iscrizioni di Cos, lines 15–19.

file, which is otherwise generally split elsewhere. In the city of Kos, Zeus seems to have held the role of poliadic deity (or city god). Accordingly, Aphrodite does not play the same role as Athena in Athens, whose multiple functions and prerogatives might be explained by her poliadic status in that city. The probable link of Aphrodite with synoecism might imply such a position, but does not explain the complex network of her cult(s) on the seashore. Here Aphrodite displays all her potentialities.

This is a striking illustration of the complexity of divine figures in a polytheistic context. No simple, mechanical explanation can account for it, but we cannot escape the question of what unifies the activities attributed to major gods by their worshippers. As far as Aphrodite's cult is concerned, we may note that Pandamos seems to amalgamate at once a political dimension (synoecism, as at Athens) and a matrimonial one. These spheres are not conflicting. An explanation can be found in a mode of intervention unique to the goddess: her powerful ability to arouse the vital impulse, unite beings, and join their bodies, as Pironti explains. At Naukratis, where Aphrodite Pandemos is attested from the end of the Archaic period, for example, we see that the integrative significance of the epithet Pandemos has a validity that goes beyond a strictly civil context. In the case of an emporion, or trading center, this power to integrate is larger than the coalescence of people in one civic body.

On the island of Kos, the marine dimension of Aphrodite is conveyed by the epithet Pontia. She is also Euploia ('Of fair sailing') or Limenia ('Of the harbor') elsewhere or in other contexts. Prominent on seafronts, she responds, with 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 Aphrodite's birth, which makes her a daughter of the foam (aphros) of the castrated sky god and of the sea. Furthermore, in crossing from Kythera to Cyprus, the new-born Aphrodite immediately embarks upon a Mediterranean voyage. These images offer an “emic” explanation of the powers of the goddess over the waves, that is, an explanation provided by the Greeks themselves. Aphrodite is daughter of the

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46 A brief look at the inscription no. 151 published in Sokolowski, Lois sacrées, supports such an assessment.
49 See Pirenne-Delforge, L’Aphrodite grecque, pp. 433–439.
50 In the well-known passage of Hesiod’s Theogony (188–206).
sky and the sea, and therefore she is worshipped by humans as overseer of their maritime enterprises. But the myth also speaks of sexual union. Assuming that the polytheist system is coherent, therefore, we may conjecture that the image of the calmness of the sky and the sea derives from the same representational complex that constructs, from sexual union, a metaphor for the harmony of the body politic. As we saw earlier, one of the inscriptions from Kos specifies that it is the crews of warships that worship Aphrodite *Pontia* at the conclusion of their expeditions. The marine dimension is accordingly coupled with a martial dimension, which echoes what I have presented above.

All these recent advances towards a better understanding of polytheism in general, and of Aphrodite’s works in particular, allow us to hope that the study of the goddess’ cults in regions as yet little investigated, such as Thessaly, will produce new material with which to evaluate the efficacy of these interpretative tools. In the city of Metropolis, for example, Aphrodite seems to have assumed a poliadic function. The city had already experienced a synoecism process, to which Aphrodite’s principal position must be connected. A deeper investigation into this issue is likely to be fruitful.

Aphrodite was not honored in a Panhellenic sanctuary of her own, but Greek poets have sung masterpieces in her honor, Greek craftsmen and sculptors have celebrated her beauty and potency in their works, and, for decades, she has been scrutinized, as reflected in this huge bibliography. I am conscious that my own interests in “gods at work,” to quote Parker once more, give this introduction a peculiar flavor, as I prioritize cults and myths in context above art, literature, or symbolic issues. The following collection of essays will go some way to supplement my overview of scholarship, with other perspectives on the fascinating figure of Aphrodite.

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52 Strabo 9.5.17 (C437); *IG* 92 1.271 (a dedication to Aphrodite, dated to the early fifth century BC and found in one of the settlements involved in the synoecism); *IG* 92 1.231 (a proxeny decree between Phalanna and Metropolis, dated to the second century BC: a copy must be displayed in the sanctuary of Aphrodite in Metropolis). See also the coins of Metropolis with the head of the goddess: Aliki Moustaka, *Kult und Mythen auf thessalischen Münzen* (Würzburg, 1983), pp. 39–40, and plate 6 on p. 115.


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