

Aphrodite and Eros

The Development of Erotic Mythology in
Early Greek Poetry and Cult

Barbara Breitenberger

STUDIES IN
CLASSICS

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Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
270 Madison Avenue
New York, NY 10016

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
2 Park Square
Milton Park, Abingdon
Oxon OX14 4RN

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10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

International Standard Book Number-13: 978-0-415-96823-2 (Hardcover)

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Breitenberger, Barbara M.

Aphrodite & Eros : the development of erotic mythology in early Greek poetry and cult / By Barbara Breitenberger.

p. cm. -- (Studies in classics)

Includes bibliographical references (p.) and index.

ISBN 0-415-96823-2 (alk. paper)

1. Greek poetry--History and criticism. 2. Aphrodite (Greek deity) in literature. 3. Erotic poetry, Greek--History and criticism. 4. Eros (Greek deity) in literature. 5. Aphrodite (Greek deity)--Cult. 6. Eros (Greek deity)--Cult. I. Title: Aphrodite and Eros. II. Title. III. Series: Studies in classics (Routledge (Firm))

PA3015.R5A734 2005

884'.0109--dc22

2005013364

Visit the Taylor & Francis Web site at
<http://www.taylorandfrancis.com>

and the Routledge Web site at
<http://www.routledge.com>

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Preface

This book is a revised version of my doctoral dissertation, written at St Hugh's College, Oxford. Naturally the concept has undergone many changes since its initial stages as a DPhil project. Its development into an interdisciplinary study would not have happened without the expert guidance and encouragement of my supervisor Dirk Obbink, who, during many illuminating discussions, taught me to view literature within its contexts. My first thanks must go to him.

I have been greatly helped by the comments and suggestions of several scholars. The work as a DPhil thesis was examined by Stephanie West and Ian Rutherford, from whose suggestions I greatly benefitted. In addition, I wish to thank Laetitia Edwards, St Hugh's College who read and commented on early drafts, and helped and encouraged me in many ways. I should also like to acknowledge the assistance of Peter Parsons, Robert Parker and Simon Price who read and commented on individual matters, and to the anonymous reader at Routledge for constructive criticism and comments. I am very grateful also to my colleagues in Cincinnati who offered valuable help towards the end of this project. My thanks also go to Hellmut Flashar who has continued to provide support in various ways.

I would not have been able to undertake research without the financial support from the following institutions: the DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service), the British Academy and the Fritz Thyssen Foundation all of whom have granted me a period of study without financial worries. I am also grateful to the Department of Classics (Cincinnati) for a Summer Research Grant and to the University of Cincinnati for a Research Counsel Award.

I have been greatly assisted by the staff of various libraries, especially of the former Ashmolean Library in Oxford, of the Burnam Library in Cincinnati, and of the Institut für Klassische Philologie in Munich.

For granting me permission to use their photographs, I am particularly grateful to the following institutions: the National Archaeological Museum of Athens, the Antikensammlung, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, the British Museum London, the Staatliche Antikensammlungen Munich, the Staatliche Münzsammlung Munich, the Martin von Wagner Museum Würzburg and the Hirmer Verlag Munich. I am especially indebted to Erika Simon who kindly allowed me to reproduce photographs from her book.

My editor at Routledge, Max Novick, has been extremely considerate. My thanks also go to Andreas Müller for his diligence in formatting the manuscript, Catherine Lomax, Linda Sutherland and Christine Jackson-Holzberg for proof-reading the manuscript and improving my style of written English.

A word of special thanks must also go to my parents for making so many things possible in my life, to Inge, my sister, who proof-read several chapters and provided the charts for the Appendix, and to Ken for various reasons, above all, for his patience and understanding.

Finally, the book is dedicated to the memory of my mother who was the first to tell me stories about the ancient Greeks.

B. Breitenberger
Cincinnati, Fall 2003

Abbreviations

Anth. Pal.	<i>Anthologia Palatina</i>
ARV	Beazley, J.D., <i>Attic Red Figure Vasepainters</i> , Oxford ² 1963
CEG	Hansen, P.A., <i>Carmina Epigraphica Graeca Saeculorum VIII-V a.Chr.n.</i> , Berlin 1983
CIG	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Graecarum</i> , Berlin 1828-77
D.-K.	Diels, H., Kranz, W., <i>Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker</i> , 3 vols., Berlin ⁶ 1952
DNP	Cancik, H., Schneider, H. (eds.), <i>Der Neue Pauly. Enzyklopädie der Antike</i> , Stuttgart/Weimar 1996-
ED, EV	Peppas-Delmousou, D., Rizza, M.A., (eds.), <i>M. Segre. Iscrizioni di Cos</i> , 2 vols., Rome 1993
EGF	Davies, M., <i>Epicorum Graecorum Fragmenta</i> , Göttingen 1988
FGrH	Jacoby, F., <i>Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker</i> , Berlin/Leiden 1923-58
G.-P.	Gow, A.S.F., Page, D.L., <i>The Greek Anthology: Hellenistic Epigrams</i> , 2 vols., Cambridge 1965
IE	Engelmann, H., Merkelbach R., <i>Die Inschriften von Erythrai und Klazomenai</i> , Bonn 1972-74
IG	<i>Inscriptiones Graecae</i> , Berlin 1873-
LfgrE	<i>Lexikon des frühgriechischen Epos</i> , Göttingen 1955-
LIMC	<i>Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae</i> , Zurich/Munich 1981-99
L.-P.	Lobel, E., Page, D.L., <i>Poetarum Lesbiorum Fragmenta</i> , Oxford 1955
LSAM	Sokolowski, F., <i>Lois Sacrées de l'Asie Mineure</i> , Paris 1955
LSCG	Sokolowski, F., <i>Lois Sacrées des Cités Grecques</i> , Paris 1969
LSJ	Liddell, H.G., Scott, R., rev. Jones, H.S., <i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i> , Oxford 1996 (9th edn. with a rev. Suppl. 1996)
LSS	Sokolowski, F., <i>Lois Sacrées des Cités Grecques Suppl.</i> , Paris 1962
M.	Maehler, H., <i>Pindarus</i> , ii. <i>Fragmenta, Indices</i> , Leipzig 1989
ML	Roscher, W.H., <i>Ausführliches Lexikon der griechischen und römischen Mythologie</i> , Leipzig 1884-1937 (repr. Hildesheim 1965-)
M.-W.	R. Merkelbach, M.L. West, <i>Hesiodi Fragmenta Selecta</i> , Oxford ³ 1990

OCD	Hornblower, S., Spawford, A. (eds.), <i>The Oxford Classical Dictionary</i> , Oxford/New York ³ 1996
PCG	Kassel, R., Austin C., <i>Poetae Comici Graeci</i> , 8 vols., Berlin/New York 1983-95
PEG	Bernabé, A., <i>Poetarum Epicorum Graecorum. Testimonia et Fragmenta</i> , vol. 1, Leipzig 1987
Pf.	Pfeiffer, R., <i>Callimachus</i> , 2 vols., Oxford 1949-51
PGM	Preisendanz, K., Henrichs, A., <i>Papyri Graecae Magicae: Die griechischen Zauberpapyri</i> , Stuttgart ² 1973-74
PMG	Page, D.L., <i>Poetae Melici Graeci</i> , Oxford 1962
PMGF	Davies, M., <i>Poetarum Melicorum Graecorum Fragmenta</i> , vol. 1, Oxford 1991
RAC	Klauser T., Dassmann E. (eds.), <i>Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum. Sachwörterbuch zur Auseinandersetzung des Christentums mit der antiken Welt</i> , Stuttgart 1941-
RE	Wissowa, G., Kroll, W., Mistelhaus, K. (eds.), <i>Pauly's Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft (RE)</i> , Stuttgart 1893-1972
SEG	<i>Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum</i> , Leiden 1923-
SH	Lloyd-Jones, H., Parsons, P.J., <i>Supplementum Hellenisticum</i> , Berlin 1983
SIG	Dittenberger, W., <i>Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum</i> , Leipzig ³ 1915-24
TGF	Nauck, A., <i>Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta</i> , Leipzig ² 1889 (Suppl. by B. Snell (1964))
TrGF	Snell, B., Kannicht, R., Radt, S., <i>Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta</i> , 4 vols., Göttingen 1971-85 (vol. 1: Göttingen ² 1986)
V.	Voigt, E.-M., <i>Sappho et Alcaeus</i> , Amsterdam 1971
W.	West, M.L., <i>Iambi et Elegi Graeci ante Alexandrum cantati</i> , Oxford ² 1989-92

Abbreviations for journals are given as they appear in the list of *L' Année Philologique*.

Introduction

FACTORS HELPING TO DEFINE A DEITY: CULTS AND MYTHS

There are several ways to experience deity. Among the most important, one would certainly count the cults and rituals in which gods and goddesses are venerated and receive sacrifices from their worshippers. Since the Greeks were not a homogeneous cultural unit, the range of regional (and temporal) variation has to be borne in mind: different regions have different preferences for different gods. Men would address them on various occasions, depending on which specific aspect of a deity's capacities was required at public festivals and sacrifices, or they would do so privately, as many preserved dedications indicate. In many cases one would also experience deity through a cult image which represented or was even considered to be identical with the actual god in question. Another criterion would have to be the myths which define a divine personality by illustrating genealogy, province, exploits and possibly also relationships with other gods. It is these myths which make deities like Aphrodite the protagonists of their particular stories. Artists seem to have been particularly inspired by such myths when they chose gods as the subject of their art. If we consult modern dictionaries of Greek mythology, first of all we will find a portrait based on an account of these stories and their illustrations in ancient or even modern art. Myth and art exert a particular influence on our conception of the Greek gods, but a deity was always first and foremost an object of cultic veneration. Moreover, there are deities who, unlike Aphrodite or Apollo, are not surrounded by stories as these are, but nonetheless enjoy cultic veneration as, for example, cult personifications such as Peitho and the Charites, which occupy a particular place in the Greek pantheon. Finally there is Eros who is undeniably a god even without cult and specific story. It will be one of the main objectives of this book to explore the role and relationship of some of these personified deities with the Olympian deities against the background of myth and cult.

APHRODITE AND EROS: TWO DISTINCT DIVINE CONCEPTS

It seems to be a unique phenomenon in mythology that, for the Greeks, the province of love is represented not just by one deity, but by two: Aphrodite and Eros. Modern mythological dictionaries refer to them as forming a whole, implying that they have always been related to each other. However, they do not seem to have featured as equally established figures in a myth before the 3rd century BC. The popular image of the mother Aphrodite and her little son Eros, which has inspired artists and poets, particularly in Rome, for centuries, does not occur before the Hellenistic period, being first presented in Apollonius Rhodius' version of Medea's love for Jason in *Argonautica* book 3. That they were not related to each other from the very beginning is all the more surprising because both have their roots in Eastern cult and myth, although here they were never related to each other. Could this be because Aphrodite was perceived as a goddess in cult and also on account of her particular stories, whereas Eros, it seems, had no cult and was not featured in myths like other Olympian deities? Eros can be grasped only if one considers his origins in cosmogonic tradition, his identity as an erotic personification, and his links to a specific phenomenon of Greek society. These components seem to have prepared the ground for Eros' mythologisation by the poets.

This book examines the different features of Aphrodite and her entourage in myth and cult, and analyses the different origins and nature of Aphrodite and her personified companions, Eros in particular. It will explore why and how they finally became related to each other as a pair, as mother and son. The other members in Aphrodite's train—the Charites and Peitho in particular—will also be examined. Their role in myth will be considered as to how it reflects their relationship to Aphrodite as cult-personifications, i.e. personified deities with a cult. This characteristic is common to the Charites and Peitho, and distinguishes them from Eros, whose peculiar character seems to emerge even more sharply by this juxtaposition.

A NEW APPROACH

In classical scholarship no attempts have been made so far to analyse the interactions between Aphrodite and her train, specifically Eros. Normally, scholars have treated each deity separately under a specific aspect or within a certain discipline. Aphrodite's early mythical representations in Hesiod and Homer have been examined against the background of her origins, for example, by D. Boedeker, who in *Aphrodite's Entry into Greek Epic* (1974) infers the goddess's Indo-European origins from the formulaic epic language. P. Friedrich (*The Meaning of Aphrodite*, 1978) analyses Aphrodite's literary representation from Homer to Sappho and, in a structuralistic approach, interprets Aphrodite as a female symbol of love. He identifies her as an Indo-European sky goddess. V. Pirenne-Delforge's monograph

(*L' Aphrodite Grecque*, 1994) consolidates the literary and epigraphical sources related to Aphrodite's cults throughout Greece, but does not give a comprehensive interpretation of cultic, epigraphical and literary evidence. A more universal approach to personified deities with a cult has recently been undertaken by R.G.A. Buxton in *Persuasion in Greek Tragedy* (1982) and B. MacLachlan in *The Age of Grace* (1993). The goddesses Peitho and the Charites are examined in their varying erotic, social and political contexts, but are virtually ignored in their function as goddesses of cult and in their relationship with Aphrodite. In the monograph *Eros. La Figura e il Culto* (1977), S. Fasce combines the examination of Pausanias' references to cultic evidence with Eros' literary representation, whereas other scholars have directed their interest specifically towards Eros' conception in poetry. This is also the case in the first extensive monograph on Eros, F. Lasserre's dissertation *La Figure d' Eros dans la Poésie Grecque* (1946). H.M. Müller's mainly philological study *Erotische Motive in der griechischen Dichtung bis auf Euripides* (1981) examines the implications of the pre-personified Eros, without taking into account mythical and cultic contexts. C. Calame's monograph *L' Eros dans la Grèce Antique* (1996) focuses on the literary features of Eros. Some recent publications, *Eros the Bittersweet* by A. Carson (1986) and *Eros. The Myth of Ancient Greek Sexuality* by B.S. Thornton (1997), are contributions not specifically to the divinity or mythical figure Eros, but rather to Eros as a concept of Greek love in a broader and more general context.

This study takes an approach that is new in comparison with the works of these scholars in two main respects. Firstly, it investigates not only one god, but the Olympian Aphrodite and her train of erotic personifications, with a special focus on the love-goddess herself and Eros, who emerges as her most prominent and individualized companion. Secondly, a more interdisciplinary approach than has so far been used is called for in order to elucidate the different nature and specific character of these deities and the way they interact with each other. This approach takes into account the deities' representation in their literary and mythological features, their functions as cult deities, and also their iconographical representation. It will emerge that for Eros the poetry in which he is represented as well as the social background from which the poetry emerged has been crucial. While Aphrodite's identity as a cult goddess manifests itself in many myths depicted in various literary genres and remains fairly consistent throughout the centuries, Eros is not a cult god, but a myth created by the poets. His nature and image vary according to different genres and contexts, and his complex identity is also reflected in different parentages.

OBJECTIVES

On a more general level this book also examines the relationship between myth and cult and considers how poets combined these in creating their mythological figures. It hopes to contribute to the discussion of whether the representa-

tion of deities in myth and cult practice are related to each other and if so, how. While they have been considered as two separate incompatible units, the discussion of Aphrodite's different appearances will show that mythical representation can never be entirely separated from cultic experience. On the other hand, cult realities usually find their explanation in mythical features.

A further objective of this book is to illuminate the complex structure of what we call Greek mythology today by distinguishing between myth and poetic invention. It will be shown that Greek mythology is not simply a collection of stories of the same kind, but a conglomerate of various elements: of myths in the original sense, i.e. which define the roles and functions of deities (in Burkert's terminology "traditional tales"), of cosmic myths, and also of literary mythical figures and their stories, which subsequent poets created by imitating the structure of deities and their "traditional tales". The emergence of the male love-god will demonstrate that the poets' artistic innovation as well as their social and historical background played an important role in creating Greek mythology.

SCOPE AND SOURCES

Since the evidence relevant to the topic ranges widely, the framework of this book has to be limited. It will therefore focus on the early, i.e. Archaic period. Of course, the absence of a satisfactory account of religion in Athenian tragedy and its implications for the conception of Aphrodite and Eros is particularly regrettable. But a satisfactory treatment would overreach the compass of this book. I will, however, include the choral lyric of the poet who wrote on the threshold to the Classical period and whom most scholars count among the early poets: Pindar (see e.g. H. Fränkel, *Poetry and Philosophy. From Homer to Pindar*). He is the poet considered to have perfected the art of choral lyric and therefore marks the peak of the genre whose main representatives thrived in the Archaic period. Although occasions for the performance of choral lyric did not diminish in the 5th century BC, the genre had certainly lost its former significance as poetry of praise with the downfall of aristocratic or tyrannic structures, at least within this particular environment. Pindar is not discussed here in order to throw light on earlier attitudes, since in some cases he is actually the earliest preserved source for erotic lyric motifs relevant to our topic (the role of Peitho, for instance). For this reason he is part of the subject. Although Pindar sets the final point of the period under discussion, this study cannot dispense altogether with works of Classical and Hellenistic poets. They are cited only where they show earlier Archaic features and help to illuminate them (as, for example, the image of the winged Eros appears in Anacreon and then again in Euripides and Aristophanes—in different contexts which are relevant to our topic).

A homogeneous corpus of contemporary literary, iconographical and epigraphical documents is not available for the Archaic period. Whereas literary and iconographical evidence from the Archaic age is comparatively abundant, epigraphical evidence from this period is not sufficiently dense. Problems particularly arise in defining Aphrodite as a cult goddess—the role that is highly relevant for our argument since it marks a distinctive feature in the demarcation from Eros, who had no cults at that time. It would be impossible to produce an account of Aphrodite's cultic role in Archaic religion based solely on contemporaneous documents. Wherever possible, the earliest inscriptions are adduced. When later sources are cited, they appear for purposes of comparison only, not as a claim for continuity. Such later evidence has to be handled with care. Continuity of practice cannot be projected back into the Archaic age, and there are certainly typical Classical and Hellenistic phenomena which cannot simply be postulated for the preceding periods. In some particular cases, however, it seems helpful to refer to and interpret inscriptions of a later date as parallels, since sometimes they are apt to illuminate earlier stages. This is especially the case when inscriptions are related to a cult which is attested to have been established in the Archaic period. Although new gods were introduced in the 5th century BC and changes in practices occurred, the stability of the cultic and religious system from the Archaic down to the Classical and Hellenistic periods seems to have been the norm in several respects. This has been pointed out recently by modern scholars (see e.g. Price (1999), 7; Mikalson (1998), 4).

The popularity of foundation myths, which is well documented in so many genres in Greek literature, may indicate a conservative Greek attitude in matters of religion. So, for example, the cult of Aphrodite Πάνδημος at Athens, together with its political implications, is already attested by traces of an Archaic sanctuary and also by myths going back to this period (see ch. 2). Therefore Classical and Hellenistic inscriptions indicating those functions are considered here as parallels for earlier cult phenomena. Renewed interest in Aphrodite Πάνδημος is documented by an increasing number of dedicatory inscriptions made by magistrates after Athens' liberation and the restoration of democracy in the 3rd century BC. This, however, does not simply mean that the cult of Aphrodite Πάνδημος at Athens experienced a revival, but corroborates that a particular function which already existed in an earlier period gains importance again at a given moment in Greek history. Thus a few epigraphical documents, even if they represent developments peculiar to a later period, may provide some insight into earlier stages of the original cult even though the nature and the degree of importance among existing cults change over centuries. Later inscriptions from colonies can also sometimes throw light on the earlier stages of the cults in the mother city. Even though they perhaps developed their own idiosyncrasies, it was the cults and religious activities which shaped the basic ties between the new colonies and the cities of mainland Greece. What supports the idea of a certain conservatism is the fact that,

for the colonies, an important means of self-definition and confirmation of origin was to preserve the traditional cults of their homeland. This does not mean that individual practices relating to cults remained static. Thus we cannot take for granted that a phrase such as κατὰ τὰ πάτρια ("in the ancestral way") attests an ancient tradition, but it shows a positive attitude towards religious conservatism: in religion, ancient ways are best. This formula occurs for example in an inscription (dated to 287/86 BC) indicating civic practices (i.e. the bathing of a statue) in the cult of Aphrodite Πάνδημος, which may go back to an earlier period. Although we know that the cult did exist at that time, we cannot conclude that the formula proves the existence of a ceremony of a cultic bath already in the Archaic period.

Our literary sources include not only poetic texts, but also, where appropriate, the geographical writings of Strabo and, in particular, Pausanias' travel guide through Greece. In his *Description of Greece* Pausanias describes the cults and sanctuaries still in existence in his own day, together with their historical background, festivals and local stories about the gods worshipped. Although himself a traveller during the Roman epoch, he depicts the religious culture as central to Greek cultural identity. We cannot take for granted that a cult is as ancient as Pausanias claims it is (see, e.g., ch. 7 for the allegedly Archaic cult of Eros at Thespieae), but in those cases where he adduces a mythological tradition or where he is corroborated by non-literary evidence, his testimony can certainly illuminate phenomena of previous epochs. It was much earlier in the 5th century BC that the investigation and collection of tradition became a literary genre. Our oldest surviving historical source, however, Herodotus' *Historiae*, has to be handled with caution, since the historicity of Herodotus' source citations has been questioned (Fehling (1989)). In his view, they are attached to Herodotus' own free literary creations, a product of Greek thought bearing the spirit of Ionian historiography and geography, and do not represent genuine local tradition. Therefore passages relevant to our topic will be reconsidered in the light of other literary, archaeological and epigraphical evidence, and will be reexamined in view of their possible fictional character role.

Chapter One

Aphrodite: The Historical Background

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Like other deities in the Olympian pantheon, Aphrodite is not of Greek origin, but was introduced from the Near East, probably during a period of intense exchange.¹ Cult-related iconographic manifestations seem to have played a significant role in this process of transmission. By this means the Greeks came to know the Eastern Ishtar-Astarte² as a fully personified goddess who enjoyed cultic worship. Although the Greek Aphrodite inherited many of the characteristics of her predecessors in her mythical representations and also in cult as regards her province and attributes, she was given a typical Greek varnish which distinguishes her from her Eastern forerunners. This chapter will look briefly at the discussion on Aphrodite's possible predecessors in general and then explore how Greek manifestations of the goddess in early cult, iconography, and myth reflect her Eastern origins, but also modify them so that her Greek character becomes clear. Aphrodite will be seen to be a "composite figure whose Greek configurations are different from the originals".³

1.2 THE ORIGINS OF APHRODITE

Over the past hundred years Aphrodite's origins have been discussed intensely.⁴ L.R. Farnell was one of the first to claim that she was originally an "oriental divinity".⁵ Other scholars such as D. Boedeker and P. Friedrich argued in favor of an originally Indoeuropean predecessor,⁶ some in addition emphasize a Hellenic or specifically Minoan-Mycenean character.⁷ These views are not generally accepted, and the more correspondences between Aphrodite and Ishtar-Astarte are discovered, the less convincing they become. However, since our evidence of Indoeuropean mythology is from a stage when it had already been amalgamated with motifs and traditions from the Near East, it cannot be excluded that the Greek Aphrodite may be a complex combination of both origins.⁸

More recent scholarship has limited Aphrodite's provenance to Phoenicia. This view has recently been supported by a possible Semitic etymology in which her name is interpreted as the Greek rendering of a local title of the Semitic goddess Astarte ("she of the villages") and thus related to the phonology and morphology of the Cypriot Phoenician language.⁹ W. Burkert emphasizes many significant parallels on the basis of cult traditions and iconography. Ishtar-Astarte is the Queen of Heaven, and this title is reflected in Aphrodite's frequent cult epithet Οὐρανία in Greece.¹⁰ Aphrodite is the only deity in Greece worshipped with incense, altars and dove sacrifices, which are also offered to Ishtar-Astarte.¹¹ She is a warrior goddess, and Archaic *xoana* of an armed Aphrodite are documented in Sparta and Argos as well.¹² One of Aphrodite's most frequent epithets, χρυσή, together with its compounds (e.g. πολύχρυσος), has been interpreted by W. Burkert as a reflection of artworks made of gold representing the Eastern goddess.¹³ And, of course, both goddesses are associated with sexuality and procreation.

However, during the last few years correspondences in another area have attracted the attention of scholars. Striking similarities in the structure of mythological contexts and in their representation of deities seem to affirm the parallels in cult and iconography. A recent publication by M.L. West gives the impression that most of the significant contexts and characteristics of Aphrodite, not only in Hesiodic and Homeric epic, but also in the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite*, are inspired by oriental models.¹⁴ The parallels of Aphrodite's complaint in Heaven with that of Ishtar in the Akkadian epic of Gilgamesh have been discussed extensively by W. Burkert and more recently by M.L. West.¹⁵ I will argue later that, in spite of clear parallels, there are modifications in the *Iliad* which indicate Aphrodite's separation from her predecessor and confirm her own Greek identity.¹⁶

Support for a Phoenician origin gains ground the more one learns the extent to which many different fields of Greek culture, not only literary structures and motifs, but also trade and art, magic and medicine have been influenced by the Near East.¹⁷

1.3 CULTIC AND LITERARY EVIDENCE FOR THE NEAR-EASTERN ORIGINS OF APHRODITE Οὐρανία

There is in fact good evidence that the key role which Cyprus and Cythera played as mediators between the Near East and Greece in general was vital for Aphrodite's entry into Hellas.¹⁸ The customary use of Κύπρις, Κυπρογενής, and Κυθήρεια in the preserved Archaic epics suggests that at the time of their composition these epithets were so well known that Aphrodite can be identified by them. Furthermore, they are likely to reflect a historical development during which these islands became Aphrodite's earliest cult places in Greece.¹⁹

That it was the Phoenicians who established her cults there is not only suggested by their traditional role as sea-trading intermediaries between the Orient and Greece, but endorsed by archaeological findings.²⁰ The Phoenicians' first settlement *en masse* in Paphos on Cyprus becomes evident at the beginning of the first millennium.²¹ Recent research dates Aphrodite's famous temple there back to Mycenaean times, around 1200 BC.²² However, this does not disprove the assumption that it could have been founded by the Phoenicians. It is quite possible that smaller Phoenician communities were present there already before their actual main settlement. We have evidence from historical times that the adoption of foreign deities does not require a proper settlement of their original worshippers.²³ Furthermore, votive offerings found in another Archaic sanctuary of Aphrodite in Paphos show distinctly Phoenician traits and can thus accord with Aphrodite's Phoenician origin.²⁴ In this context it is important to note that later, in 333 BC, Phoenician merchants received permission to establish a sanctuary of Aphrodite at Athens. They were from Kition on the island of Cyprus which had become a Phoenician city in the mid-9th century BC.²⁵ However, the foundation of the cult at Athens cannot attest a continuous worship of the Phoenicians' ancestral deity in Greece. Early Phoenician traces have been found on Cythera too. According to G.L. Huxley, the most important cult in Cythera was Aphrodite's, and it was for her worship that the island was famous. He deduces from the evidence of purple industry there that the Phoenicians whom he assumes to have founded the cult settled on Cythera by the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age.²⁶

This evidence finds confirmation in historiographical writings. Although Herodotus' testimony, his source citations in particular, have to be considered with care, as D. Fehling has shown, the historian's view concerning Aphrodite's early cult places and her provenance does not seem to be a product of mere speculation.²⁷ The goddess's epithets Κύπρις, Κυπρογενής and Κυθήρεια, which indicate her special relationship with these islands, are attested as early as Hesiod and Homer. Furthermore, Phoenician influence on Cyprus and Cythera is corroborated by sources other than Herodotus, i.e. archaeological evidence.

Herodotus (1,105,2) mentions the pillaging of the sanctuary of Ἀφροδίτη Οὐρανία in Ascalon by the Scythians and says that he learnt (ὥς ἐγὼ πυνθανόμενος εὕρισκω) that this was the oldest of all shrines of the goddess.²⁸ He does not clearly say who his informants were—he probably means the people in Ascalon. Of course, we should not take this statement literally. Certainly, Ascalon in Syria was a Phoenician settlement, and that Phoenician merchants played a role as mediators of the cult of Aphrodite is, as we have seen, otherwise attested. But whether the sanctuary at Ascalon was the oldest ever cannot be proven (cf. Pausanias' statement, see below). It is doubtful whether Herodotus is referring to a real source here; maybe he is just putting a story into the mouth of a Phoenician local whom he need not even have met in Ascalon. One of the numerous Phoenician settlers in Greece could have told him the story as

well—or some locals in Cyprus or Cythera. One can imagine that if he really had gone there and asked the Phoenicians, they would very possibly have claimed their own sanctuary to be the earliest ever, simply out of local patriotism. Considering the maritime expansion and lively exchange with Greece, one can assume that they were aware of their own cult foundations there.

In the same passage Herodotus mentions the tradition, allegedly narrated by his Cypriot informants, in which the Greek sanctuary of Cyprus was also founded from Ascalon, and adds (without indicating a source) that Aphrodite's temple in Cythera was established by the Phoenicians from Syria. We have seen that Aphrodite's links with Cyprus and Cythera are attested as early as Hesiodic and Homeric epic, and thus in this respect Herodotus' statements are certainly correct. We may, however, wonder whether Herodotus really would have had to question these informants to be able to tell us what we read in his work. It is very likely that these things were common knowledge in Greece at the time of Herodotus.²⁹

Six centuries later Aphrodite's early settlement in Cythera is reaffirmed by Pausanias.³⁰ His testimony alone, however, cannot back up Herodotus. Pausanias is much later and may in certain aspects have been influenced by Herodotus. Interestingly he diverges from Herodotus' account on one important point. While the latter says that it was the Phoenicians who established Ἀφροδίτη Οὐρανία's oldest sanctuary ever, Pausanias emphasizes their role as mediators. He says that the Assyrians were the first to venerate Ἀφροδίτη Οὐρανία. Then, he continues, the Paphians from Cyprus and the Phoenicians in Ascalon took over the worship of the goddess, and it was from the latter that the people from Cythera learnt how to venerate Aphrodite.³⁰ Elsewhere he says that the "oldest and most sacred sanctuary" of Ἀφροδίτη Οὐρανία in Greece is the one in Cythera, where she is represented by an armed *xoanon*.³¹ While in Herodotus the cult in Cyprus is said to have been founded from Ascalon, Pausanias claims that it goes back to the Assyrians. This would actually mean that the cult in Cyprus, since founded by its original worshippers, is earlier than the one in Cythera which was established by Phoenicians, who then represent an intermediate stage. Pausanias stresses the function of the Phoenicians as mediators of the cult rather than as the very first worshippers of this kind of goddess. This is certainly correct, since other peoples also venerated a love-goddess or Queen of Heaven (Inanna, the goddess worshipped by the Sumerians in the 3rd millennium, for instance).³² One can imagine that some traits of the Phoenician goddess may go back to features of an even earlier predecessor. Nevertheless, one can still consider it likely that it was the goddess's specific Phoenician idiosyncrasy with which the Greeks became acquainted.

Herodotus and Pausanias usually refer to the goddess's cults as those of Ἀφροδίτη Οὐρανία.³³ The assumed provenance of the cult title certainly suggests that one should relate it with Ishtar-Astarte's title "Queen of Heaven" which is attested for example in the *Old Testament*.³⁴ That Οὐρανία is an inheritance

from Ishtar-Astarte in the sphere of cult is indicated by the fact that Οὐρανία is Aphrodite's most frequently documented cult title in Greece, but never seems to have been used as a literary epithet in mythical accounts about Aphrodite.³⁵ We know that Phoenicians, when expressing themselves in Greek, identify their goddess as Aphrodite Οὐρανία in 4th-century BC inscriptions.³⁶ In addition, a dedication is made to Aphrodite Οὐρανία at Piraeus by a Phoenician woman, Aristoklea.³⁷ The cult epiclesis Οὐρανία is almost uniquely Aphrodite's and is by far her most widespread cult title all over Greece.³⁸ But these later epigraphical testimonies cannot be taken as a proof that Aphrodite Οὐρανία has always been considered as identical with the Phoenician goddess of love. The other frequent cult title of Aphrodite, Πάνδημος, which signals the goddess's civic and political function, seems to be a distinctly Greek phenomenon: it has no Eastern parallel and is instead related to the Athenian city hero Theseus.³⁹

What are the functions and implications of Aphrodite in cult when she is Οὐρανία? Her cult at Athens demonstrates that she is, like her forerunner, associated with procreation, specifically with having children. It emerges there that she is also a goddess to whom women make offerings before they get married. If the monumental altar in the Athenian agora has been correctly identified as part of the sanctuary of Aphrodite Οὐρανία, whose cult is mentioned by Pausanias (1,14,7), public veneration for Aphrodite Οὐρανία would be attested around 500 BC in Athens.⁴⁰ According to the myth attached by Pausanias, the foundation of the sanctuary is (unlike that of Aphrodite Πάνδημος,) not linked with the civic hero Theseus himself, but with his father Aegeus. Also, here we see the tendency to relate a cult to Attic mythological tradition: Aegeus is said to have founded the sanctuary since he feared that he might not have children and that Procne's and Philomela's misery—in particular that Procne killed her son Itys—was caused by the rage of Οὐρανία.⁴¹ That Aphrodite was appealed to in this cult for the purpose of having children is supported by two archaeological and iconographical finds. Near the sanctuary, archaeologists have found a fragmentary relief dating from the end of the 5th century BC. It shows a young woman with a veil, looking at a vessel. Behind her, one recognizes pieces of a ladder. The ladder has been noticed on various scenes related to marriage, and C.M. Edwards has interpreted the ladder as the means by which the young bride receives access to the bedroom in the house of her groom.⁴² If this interpretation is correct, it would be justified to see in this relief a dedication made to Aphrodite Οὐρανία by a young woman on the occasion of her wedding, probably for the sake of having children. That this is the goddess's main function in the cult is also indicated by a more recent discovery in this area: a box with premarital offerings dedicated to Aphrodite Οὐρανία dating from the 4th century BC.⁴³ We do not, however, have any information about forms of worship in this cult.⁴⁴

Considering these two pieces of evidence, together with the Attic myth that Aegeus founded the cult for fear of not having children, it seems justified

to interpret the function and province of Aphrodite Οὐρανία here as similar to that of Ishtar-Astarte: sexuality and procreation. In the case of the Greek goddess this includes marriage, the ἔργα γάμοιο which Zeus attributes to her in the *Iliad* (5,429). Yet this is a role which she, the notorious seductress and adulteress, cannot fulfil in her myths, only in cult. Also, in Sparta the epithet Οὐρανία has a connection with Ishtar-Astarte: it is one of the few cults in Greece in which Aphrodite's worship is linked with warfare.⁴⁵

1.4 THE MYTH OF APHRODITE Οὐρανία

Although Οὐρανία does not seem to be a current epithet in literature, it has certainly provided the basis for a Greek myth.⁴⁶ Hesiod mythologizes Aphrodite's epithet in her birth story in a famous passage of the *Theogony*, where she is born from the genitals of her father, Uranus. It is interesting that Hesiod, unlike what we find in some of the *Homeric Hymns*, does not simply recount the famous cult places and parentage of the deity. He seems to presuppose that his audience is acquainted with what was presumably her most famous cult epithet, around which, without specifically mentioning it, he mythologizes her birth and creation from Uranus' genitals. The myth, as featured in the *Theogony* (190-200), does not seem to have a direct parallel in any Eastern culture, but its Eastern connection has never been denied.⁴⁷ We can expect Hesiod, who probably invented this myth, to have been familiar with the different elements necessary to create the story: Aphrodite's cult epithets and cult places, the folk etymologies of her name and also the relevant succession myths.⁴⁸

Aphrodite came into being in the foam which was formed around her father's genitals after Cronus had cut them off and thrown them into the sea (188-192). When Hesiod calls her κούρη here (191), a significant characteristic of the Greek Aphrodite is already implied. After the amorphic primeval entities (such as Chaos, Earth and Tourtarus), and the hardly imaginable gods such as Cronus, she emerges as the first deity to be given clearly anthropomorphic characteristics or, what is more, a detailed female identity. Her description resembles that of a hymnic epiphany: Aphrodite is a young and "beautiful goddess" (καλή θεός 194), with "tender feet" (ποσσὶν . . . ῥαδινοῖσιν 195), but her character is rather like that of a "shy girl" (αἰδοίη 194). As one would expect in a hymn, the goddess's favourite cult places are also integrated into the birth story.⁴⁹ After her birth she swims directly to the "very sacred Cythera" (Κυθήροισι ζαθέοισιν 192), and from there she approaches "sea-encircled Cyprus" (περίρρυτον Κύπρον 193), where she goes on land. Cyprus and Cythera were certainly already at the time of Hesiod famous for their Aphrodite cults, and the epithets derived from them (Κυθέρειαν 198 and Κυπρογενέα 199) were probably already traditional.

Hesiod also integrates another central hymnic element: the deity's sphere of influence. When the grass starts growing immediately after she has put her tender feet on the earth (194-95), we are reminded that Aphrodite, as the orien-

tal Queen of Heaven, is linked to reproduction and fertility. In the subsequent context of the *Theogony*, however, her responsibility in this sphere seems limited to the sexuality of the anthropomorphic gods, as the formulaic expressions with which her name is connected seem to indicate.⁵⁰ It is a plausible assumption that the first “historical condition” that inspired the birth myth is her actual cult epithet Οὐρανία, which was already common in Greece at the time of Hesiod. It could have been easily linked to the Hittite version of the succession myth which underlies the section preceding Aphrodite’s birth myth in the *Theogony*. There, Uranus’ equivalent, the King of Heaven, is deprived of his genitals.⁵¹ As Aphrodite is Οὐρανία by cult reality, Uranus could easily become her father and thus link her to the old generation of gods. An additional factor which may have inspired this birth story is the folk etymological interpretation which links her name to ἀφρός, “foam”, alluding to her emergence from the foam around the cut-off genitals.⁵²

Aphrodite’s earliest attested epithets in literature also seem to confirm that Cyprus and Cythera represent the first stages of Aphrodite’s entry into Greece. Not only does Hesiod refer to her as Κυθήρεια and Κυπρογενέα, but Homeric epic and the *Homeric Hymns* frequently also simply call her Κύπρις⁵³ and Κυθήρεια.⁵⁴ This suggests that they belong to an established mythological and epic tradition which an Archaic audience apparently could be expected to know: they would thus identify Aphrodite on the basis of her epithets Κύπρις and Κυθήρεια.⁵⁵ Hesiod explains the epithets by describing how the goddess immediately after her birth arrives first in Cythera, then in Cyprus (*Theog.* 192f.).⁵⁶ In the *Odyssey* (8,362f.) Paphos in Cyprus is her home, the place to which she flees, awaited by the Charites, after her affair with Ares had been discovered.⁵⁷ In the *Homeric Hymn* she is addressed as “Cypriot Aphrodite” (*Hymn. Hom.* V,2) and the temple which she enters to receive her beauty treatment for the seduction of Anchises is located in Paphos in Cyprus.⁵⁸

We have already seen that these mythical features, together with Aphrodite’s traditional literary epithets, may be taken as a proof that the origins of those cults of Aphrodite, which were also the most important ones in Greece, were on these islands. Archaeological finds corroborate these assumptions; moreover, Herodotus and Pausanias also indicate that the cults were associated with the Phoenicians.⁵⁹ These testimonies confirm firstly that Aphrodite Οὐρανία is directly related to the Eastern love-goddess; secondly that her earliest and probably most important cult places were the islands of Cyprus and Cythera;⁶⁰ thirdly that it was the Phoenicians who brought her to Greece. There is epigraphical evidence that, in 333 BC, it was Phoenician merchants from Kition on Cyprus who gained permission to found at Athens a shrine of Aphrodite, whom they presumably looked upon as their ancestral deity Astarte.⁶¹

1.5 ISHTAR-ASTARTE AND APHRODITE IN ICONOGRAPHY

None of our historical sources records that the Phoenicians brought a cult statue or any other images of the goddess to Cyprus or Cythera. Pausanias (3,23,1), however, mentions an ancient armed *xoanon* of Aphrodite which was set up in her most ancient sanctuary at Cythera.⁶² It is not surprising that she, armed like her predecessor, is Οὐρπασία.⁶³ One would expect iconography in general, not only cult images, to be one of the most important media by which the Greeks came to learn of Ishtar-Astarte. Maybe also Aphrodite's epithet "the golden" was inspired by early Eastern artworks. It has become more and more evident how much the East influenced not only archaeology and arts, to which the term the "orientalizing epoch" was originally applied, but also all sorts of crafts, as well as religion, literature and science.⁶⁴

The beginnings of trade and interchange between the Near East and Greece can be dated back to the 10th/9th century BC, but the contacts must have increased immensely in the mid-8th/mid-7th century BC, as one can infer from the number of imported objects which were found not only on the Eastern islands Cyprus, Crete and Rhodes, but also on the Greek mainland.⁶⁵ This interchange was not limited to the trading of goods and products of all kinds, but included also the artistic skills and techniques which Eastern craftsmen brought to Greece, and the Greeks' imitation of certain oriental motifs, including religious iconography. Such reproductions are preserved from the 8th century BC onwards.

One of the frequent motifs which the Greeks were acquainted with through different media was that of a naked, upright standing goddess, sometimes holding her breasts in a significant pose: Ishtar-Astarte.⁶⁶ This type was conveyed for example by clay plaques, such as those which have been preserved from North Syria, where they had been produced since the 14th/13th century BC.⁶⁷ This image of the goddess had a crucial influence on Greek art and was imported, and imitated from the 9th/8th century BC onwards in various ways and places, sometimes just by using the same moulds (See Plate 1).⁶⁸ Other media could be bronze plates and all kinds of minor arts and objects, such as jewellery and golden pendants which, among other reasons, may lie behind Aphrodite's being called χρυσή in epic.⁶⁹

Eastern influence also becomes palpable in the ivory figures which imitate the Ishtar-Astarte type.⁷⁰ They were found in a tomb at Athens and date from the third quarter of the 8th century BC. Their material points to Phoenicia which was at the forefront of the production of ivory and bronze statuettes.⁷¹ They are, however, not just imported objects, as their style reveals new features in comparison with originally Eastern models.⁷² Whereas the latter show the typical nutritive maternity in their full waist, the Athenian model is more refined in detail and has a significantly slimmer waist. Also, Ishtar-Astarte's most prominent characteristic, the position of the hand on the breast, is miss-

ing. Perhaps we see here already the beginning of a development during which the Greek Aphrodite diverges in distinctive points from her predecessor and establishes her own Greek idiosyncrasy. The Greek Aphrodite is never a full and maternal type. These features tend to be displayed instead by goddesses like Demeter. In the case of Aphrodite it is always more the aesthetic aspect, her rather pre-maternal beauty and attraction, as admired by later Greeks, which is emphasized not only in iconography and art, but also in myth, as we will see later.⁷³

However, the small gold-leaf figures which were sewn as ornaments on shrouds found in the third shaft grave in Mycena may give an early impression of the image the Greeks became acquainted with. They date from around 1600 BC and display a female figure accompanied by birds, probably doves. As this type of female figure, especially its nudity, is very rare in Mycenaean-Minoan culture, one assumes that this figure is the unique imitation of an image of the Eastern love-goddess.⁷⁴ These figures have been connected with Aphrodite, although it is agreed that she was added to the Greek pantheon not before the post-Mycenaean period. Her name does not appear in Linear B documents, but in Greek epic, she becomes the “golden” one.⁷⁵ The doves, as the birds with which she is depicted are usually interpreted, are attributes and sacrificial animals of both Ishtar-Astarte and Aphrodite.⁷⁶

1.6 APHRODITE AND DOVES

In Ascalon doves were sacred to the love-goddess as well as in Aphrodisias, where for this reason it was forbidden to hunt them.⁷⁷ Doves are attested on the coins of those places in Greece which have important cults of Aphrodite, for instance Sicyon, Corinth, Cythera, Cassiope, Eryx and Paphos.⁷⁸ This shows how closely related doves are with the veneration of Aphrodite.

There is also archaeological and epigraphical evidence to attest Aphrodite's relationship with these birds. In Aphrodite's sanctuary in Argos vessels of the 2nd century BC have been found which bear a dedication to the goddess.⁷⁹ In the same place, female votive figurines from the 6th/5th century BC have been discovered. As well as different kinds of fruits and flowers, they carry animals, most frequently birds, which have been interpreted as doves.⁸⁰ Furthermore, the birds depicted on Attic reliefs, together with birds made of marble found in the sanctuary of Aphrodite at Daphni, look like doves.⁸¹ It is hard to judge whether the dove is a direct inheritance from the Eastern cults or whether it had developed its own meaning, because our extant evidence for the dove as Aphrodite's animal does not go beyond the 6th/5th century BC. Besides, it is amusing that Apollodorus of Athens makes the doves' notorious propensity for mating the reason why they are Aphrodite's birds, and thus he relates them directly to the province Aphrodite has in myth. He corroborates this with an etymology which relates the Greek word *περιστερά* to *περισσῶς ἐρᾶν*.⁸²

We do not know with certainty what the meaning of the dove was in cults of Aphrodite before the Hellenistic period, but we know from a Hellenistic *probouleuma* at Athens that the *astynomoi* had to provide a dove for the purification of the sanctuary of Aphrodite Πάνδημος there.⁸³ Presumably the dove, originally being the sacrificial animal of Aphrodite Οὐρανία, was transferred to the cult of Aphrodite Πάνδημος at Athens around which votive doves and decorative ornaments have also been found.⁸⁴

To sum up so far: iconography in its various forms had a key function in the transmission of the goddess's cult and image and also of her sacred animals. It will have been these concrete visualizations with which the Greeks first of all became acquainted. Therefore it seems that Aphrodite-iconography shares at least some common features with her predecessor.⁸⁵ The three cult statues of Aphrodite at Cythera, Sparta and Corinth, which Pausanias describes as carrying weapons, are influenced by Eastern models. Also, the doves occur in the cult and iconography of both. Therefore it seems that the Greeks, when they came to know Ishtar-Astarte, received immediately a relatively clear idea about her personality and appearance. Since aniconic portraits of Aphrodite in Greece seem to have been an exception, it is clear that, in cultic contexts, worshippers conceived of her as a clearly defined anthropomorphic goddess.⁸⁶

However, whereas common characteristics between Ishtar-Astarte and Aphrodite are documented in early iconography,⁸⁷ the more recent portraits which are familiar to us show that Aphrodite developed a distinctively Greek character. While the aesthetic element of the oriental love-goddess does not seem to have prevailed in Greece, pre-maternal beauty and femininity become peculiar to Aphrodite in Greek art and literature.⁸⁸ This development towards a Greek conception of the love-goddess finds expression in subsequent iconography. Generally speaking, naked goddesses disappear from art in the late 7th century BC,⁸⁹ and from then on Aphrodite is presented in significantly lavish robes and adornment, which are also paralleled in Hesiod's and Homer's descriptions in epic. When the type of the naked Aphrodite re-emerges in the Hellenistic period, it becomes evident that she is being more associated with the Greek concept of pre-maternal feminine beauty than the fertility or nutritive maternity characteristic of her predecessor.

1.7 APHRODITE AND DIONE

Although iconographical parallels and the ancient historical tradition suggest that Aphrodite is of Phoenician origin, Ishtar-Astarte, when she came to Greece, did not enter a "religious vacuum." Aphrodite also has early connections with the Charites which are reflected not only in iconography, but also in myth and cult. This will be discussed later. The other Greek deity with whom Aphrodite has early connections is Dione. The depiction of Aphrodite's relationship with this Indo-European goddess in Homer's *Iliad* (5,370ff.) is unique.⁹⁰ I suggest

that Dione's role as Aphrodite's mother in this episode is not only based on a possible mythical model—Ishtar's complaint in Heaven as featured in the epic *Gilgamesh*—but may also be motivated by cultic similarities between the two goddesses.

It has been argued by W. Burkert in particular that Homer's version of Aphrodite's complaint about Diomedes, who had hit her hand in battle, is modelled on an episode of the Akkadian epic of *Gilgamesh*.⁹¹ Ishtar, not physically hurt by *Gilgamesh*, but rejected, retreats to Heaven and complains about the mortal to her parents Anu, the God of Heaven, and Antu, the Goddess of Heaven. Then she seeks revenge. Apart from similarities in the narrative structure, another parallel between the Akkadian and Homeric version has been seen in the fact that in this episode Aphrodite has a mother, Dione, and a father, Zeus.⁹² In the same way as Antu is the feminine form of Anu, Dione is the feminine form of Zeus; however, she is not called his wife.⁹³ This role is taken by Hera. Considering the Homeric tendency to give gods individual names, this is certainly a unique case in Homeric mythologizing.⁹⁴

The question now is whether the Akkadian epic, as a possible narrative model, was the only inspiration and motivation for the poet of the *Iliad* to make Dione the mother of Aphrodite. How should one interpret the fact that Aphrodite, who is herself Goddess of Heaven, Οὐρανία, and traditionally motherless, becomes the daughter of Dione? It must be considered whether this mythical relationship could reflect a cultic phenomenon.

The only cult place where Dione was worshipped conjointly with Zeus as his consort in Greece was at Dodona, at the same time one of Zeus' most important and ancient cult places. There he had a famous oracle.⁹⁵ That this cult place was already familiar to Homer emerges from Achilles' invocation of the "Zeus of Dodona, where the Selloi live, the prophets who never wash their feet and lie on the ground".⁹⁶ There is no direct epigraphical evidence to define Dione's role and her relationship with Zeus and Aphrodite there.⁹⁷

Homer's early mythical connection suggests that Zeus, Dione and Aphrodite were linked in a cult at an early stage as well. Since the mythical model for the episode in the *Iliad* required a mother for Aphrodite, Homer may have referred to the cult association of Zeus and Dione in which the name of the female deity is a derivative of the god. Moreover, Hera would not have been the right goddess to sympathize with Aphrodite, by whom she was beaten in the beauty contest.

Zeus' epithet at Dodona is Naïos, which has usually been interpreted as referring to Zeus as the god of "flowing water", since the environment of Dodona has always been famous for its abundance of springs and fountains.⁹⁸ Pausanias (10.12.10) mentions a hymn in which Zeus is related to the Earth who "makes the fruits grow" at Dodona.⁹⁹ Thus Dione's function and association with Zeus will have to be seen in this context of fertility and reproduction—and this province belongs to Aphrodite as well. And there is another interesting feature in

this cult at Dodona which one may relate to Aphrodite. Doves, an important attribute and sacrificial animal in the worship of Ishtar-Astarte and Aphrodite, as has been shown above, appear in this cult too: a bronze figure representing a dove was found at Dodona and dated to the 7th century BC. This date suggests that the animal could have been associated with the cult already in Homeric times, but its meaning is certainly different from that in cults of Ishtar-Astarte and Aphrodite, since the dove has an oracular function at Dodona.

Together with the oak the doves are traditionally associated with stories of the foundation of Dodona. This tradition went back at least to Pindar. In one of his *paean*s he mentions oracles in Libya and Dodona which were founded from the same origin in Egyptian Thebes, as well as Egyptian doves or priestesses as their founders.¹⁰⁰

This myth is strikingly similar to the two mythical variants Herodotus was told by his informants in Egypt and Greece (2,54-7). According to the priests of Ammon at Thebes, Phoenicians had carried off two of the Theban priestesses and sold one of them to Libya, the other one to Greece. The former had founded the oracle of Ammon at the oasis of Siwa, the latter the oracle of Zeus at Dodona (2,54). His Greek informants, the priestesses of Zeus at Dodona, however, told him that it was not abducted priestesses, but two black doves (πελειάδες) who founded the oracles. They had both flown from Thebes, one coming to the oasis of Siwa in Libya, the other to Dodona, where she sat on an oak tree and announced that an oracle of Zeus was to be set up at there (2,55).¹⁰¹

Herodotus, in a γνῶμη, harmonizes the two diverging accounts by rationalizing the Dodonean version through the Egyptian variant: if the latter is correct, the woman was sold to Thesprotia (near Dodona). Enslaved, she established a sanctuary of Zeus under an oak, remembering her god in the foreign country. Of course, the inhabitants were unable to understand her language, which they perceived as the cooing of a dove. As soon as the Egyptian priestess had learnt the new language, she installed the oracle of Zeus there (2,56-7). That Herodotus distinguishes between the foundation of the sanctuary and that of the oracle can probably be explained by his assumption that the priestess had to learn the language first. We may have expected Herodotus to refer to his informants as Πελειάδες so that the story they had to tell could be expected to explain their strange cult-title. Instead, he tells us their individual names (2,55: Promeneia, Timarete, Nikandra), and adds that their account was confirmed by other people who were affiliated with the sanctuary. Perhaps the priestesses only adopted the cult-title later.

The two variants of the myth are reflected in Sophocles (*Trach.* 171f.) where the two πελειάδες on the oak are the source of the oracle.¹⁰² The ambiguity of the phrasing there leaves it open as to whether the oracle is meant to be announced by birds or priestesses who were called Πελειάδες as well.¹⁰³ Perhaps Sophocles' phrasing is deliberately vague. The priestesses' name may suggest that they were to interpret the animals' voices.¹⁰⁴

The idea of links between Thebes, Libya and Dodona, of oracles of the same origin, of Egyptian priestesses or doves as their founders already existed at the time of Pindar.¹⁰⁵ However, if these motifs were common knowledge, Herodotus' information did not necessarily depend on the priests at Thebes and the priestesses at Dodona, and Herodotus may well have been acquainted with these motifs through literary sources.¹⁰⁶

As it turns out, the presence of doves in the oracle of Zeus at Dodona, which is of interest to us, is well attested by several Greek versions. Independently from any foundation myth, the doves can be assumed to have a long-standing tradition going back to the Archaic period, since literary evidence is corroborated by a 7th-century BC bronze figure of a dove found there.¹⁰⁷ The ambiguity of whether doves or priestesses established the cult could have its roots in two different Greek mythical versions. The double version, together with the two locations implied in them, may have inspired Herodotus to attribute one to a source in Egypt, the other to a source in Greece, the origin and target of the doves or priestesses. Whereas an archaeological find proves the presence of doves in the cult, the excavations at Dodona have not uncovered any evidence to indicate a connection between the oracle and Egyptian Thebes.¹⁰⁸

The appearance of doves in this cult does not seem to be directly related to its deities, but rather to the fact that there was an oracle. It has been suggested that the doves here may be considered mediators between the divine and human world.¹⁰⁹ It may be coincidental that doves, Aphrodite's animals, are also connected with Dione's only cult place in Greece. Perhaps it helped to suggest to the Homeric poet this special relationship between Dione and Aphrodite, i.e. as mother and daughter.¹¹⁰

The reasons why Aphrodite is shown with a mother in *Iliad* 5 (and only here in epic) have been debated. G. Kirk argues on aesthetic grounds that Homer tends to avoid "carnal extremes" and therefore "wished to gloss over the savage old tale of her birth in the sea".¹¹¹ Of course, he may have known the story. Some scholars see in the parentage of Zeus and Dione an indication of Aphrodite's Indo-European origins.¹¹² It can be argued, however, that the tendency in Homeric epic to subordinate deities supposed not to be originally Greek to Zeus as his children corroborates Aphrodite's Near-Eastern origins.¹¹³ Thus Aphrodite's unconventional individual birth story (which makes her one of the oldest deities in the *Theogony*) would not have suited her less outstanding role in the *Iliad*.¹¹⁴ Given that the Homeric poet was acquainted with the epic featuring Anu and Antu, it can be expected to have influenced his choice of Zeus' and Dione's parentship. That he could relate the Akkadian mythical couple to a cult reality in Greece where the God of Heaven and his female equivalent of the same name were venerated together, may have facilitated the borrowing, as well as the choice of Dione rather than, say, Hera. The cultic link need not have been the primary motivation.¹¹⁵

1.8 CONCLUSION

It was the aim of this chapter to map out the main directions in the discussion of Aphrodite's origins. In defending the idea that the predecessor of Aphrodite Οὐρανία is to be sought in the Eastern goddess Ishtar-Astarte, the most important similarities in mythical, iconographic and cultic features have been considered against the background of ancient historical sources, which include (apart from the testimonies of Herodotus and Pausanias) epigraphical evidence. The Phoenicians played a crucial role in transferring the cult of Aphrodite Οὐρανία to Greece, and the islands Cyprus and Cythera were Aphrodite's first and later most traditional cult places. Her literary epithets seem to reflect a historical development. The Greek Aphrodite diverges from her predecessor in certain respects (the aspect of feminine, pre-maternal beauty seems to be more important for Aphrodite). In the two following chapters, the evidence of myth and cult will show how Aphrodite's typical character and functions are modulated in different contexts.