

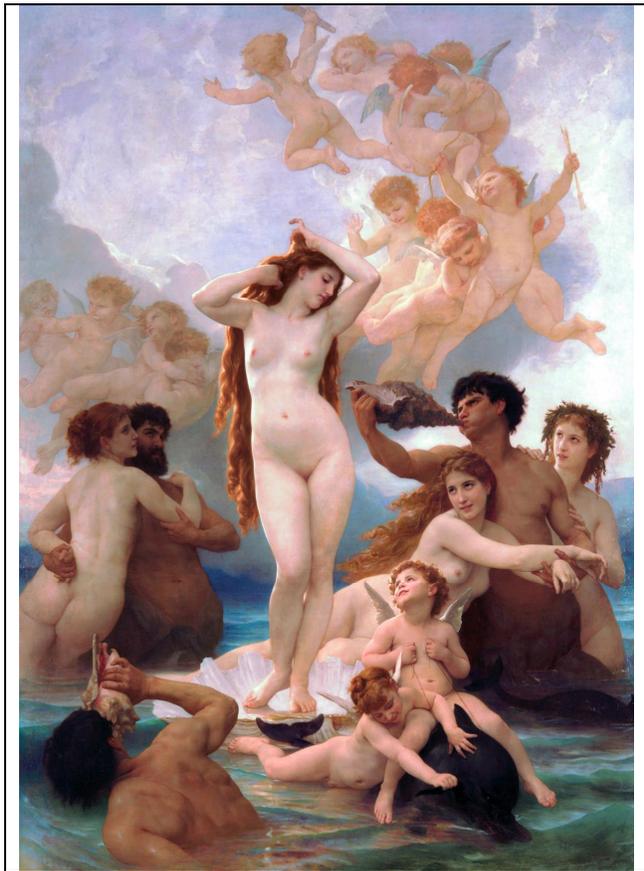
# APHRODITE and ARES: LOVE & WAR

---

## Olympian Lovers

Throughout Greek myth Aphrodite and Ares are consistently paired together as companions, either lovers or close sibling allies. In Roman mythology they are Venus and Mars, the deities who preside over the Empire, as the parents of both founders of Rome, Aeneas and Romulus. Aeneas, the son of Aphrodite, fled the destruction of Troy and fathered a new line of kings who would eventually rule Rome. Romulus the son of Mars later founded Rome on the banks of the Tiber. Hence Venus and Mars are partners in the foundation of the golden city of Rome.

Aphrodite and Ares are deeply attached passionate lovers or siblings. In the *Odyssey* they are caught in a golden web woven by Hephaestus who crafted the fine filament in order to entrap his wife Aphrodite in bed with Ares. Their relationship is erotic. However in Homer's earlier epic, the *Iliad* their relationship is depicted as less magnetic, yet just as close; Aphrodite refers to him in this epic as "dear brother". Yet when we imagine these gods we think of them as eternal lovers, sometimes married, other times not. Aphrodite is also mother to three of Ares's children: Harmonia, Phobos and Deimos. Their union is also credited with creating Eros, a personification of the magnetic power of love, which is born out of their passion.



## APHRODITE

*beautiful Aphrodite  
is who I shall sing,  
she who has  
all the high locations of Cyprus,  
the sea place<sup>1</sup>*

-The Second Homeric Hymn  
to Aphrodite

*painting:*  
The Birth of Venus  
William Adolphe Bouguereau  
1879

Aphrodite is the goddess of love, sexuality and beauty whose cult was universal in the ancient world. Her origins have their roots in the Near East. From the Sumerian tradition she inherits aspects of Innana, the Queen of Heaven; in the Assyrian tradition she was called Ishtar while in Phoenicia she was known as Astarte. The Babylonians referred to her as Mylitta and associated her with the evening and the morning star. From this point forward the goddess was always connected to the bright planet Venus, which hovers near the eastern and western horizons. Venus Hesperus was the evening star in the land of the West, while Venus Phosphorus was the bright, morning star visible before the Sun arose.

Aphrodite's earliest cult of worship in Greece was at Paphos in Cyprus. Her cult image and worship were probably brought to the island by the seafaring Phoenicians. Homer often refers to her as the lady of Kypros throughout the *Iliad*. Hesiod describes the first land to gaze upon the goddess as the island of Kythera, at the foot of the Peloponnese. Here Aphrodite rose out of the sea foam and drifted on the sea to Cyprus. The Phoenicians also brought her to Corinth where 7th Century BCE pottery sherds, with the goddess name of Astarte on them, have been discovered. Hesiod's names for the goddess are all connected to her birth: *Aphrodite* is derived from *aphros*, meaning sea foam, hence she who is born of the foam, *Kyprogene* is the woman of Cyprus referring not only to the initial cult worship of the goddess on the island but the place she relocated to after her ascension out of the sea. Finally *Kythereia* reminds us of her birth out of the Aegean in one of bays of Kythera. Aphrodite may have been amalgamated with other indigenous local deities, however throughout Greek myth she clearly retains her Eastern heritage. While her cult may have been imported, with her first entry point as the island of Cyprus, she certainly was moulded into a uniquely Greek goddess, a goddess who often conflicted with the emerging Greek culture and tradition. Later in Roman times she was known as Venus and the Romans claimed her as their patroness since she was mother to their ancient founder, Aeneas. Vestiges of Aphrodite's archaic traditions continued to influence the Greek goddess.

To put Aphrodite's sexuality and freedom in a contemporary classical context we can reflect on the life of an Athenian woman at the flowering of the classical period in the 5th C. Women did not vote and were physically separated from the men. The domain of the woman remained at the back of the house. She rarely enjoyed the freedom of movement in the agora or outside the house unless accompanied by a man. Athenian etiquette suggested that a woman who travels outside the house must be of such an age that onlookers might ask, not whose wife she is, but whose mother's<sup>3</sup> The exceptions may have been the Hetaera, a woman intellectually skilled and free to choose her own life, a woman protected by Aphrodite.

If we look at the other Greek goddesses who were part of the Olympian pantheon their roles were often well defined, having jurisdiction over specific spheres of influence. These spheres of influence were also defined in terms of a male or the masculine, whereas Aphrodite does not define herself in these terms, except perhaps as a lover of men. Demeter carried the role of the mother, the Goddess of the grain; Hera while Queen of Heaven remained in her role as wife to Zeus; Athena the virgin goddess of city life was the daughter of Zeus, and Artemis another virgin goddess was defined as sister to Apollo. Aphrodite is our image of the goddess of sexual desire, love and beauty who defines herself outside the spheres of the other goddesses, and within her own sphere. In the Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite the poet suggests there are three goddess Aphrodite cannot influence.

But there are three minds that she is  
unable to persuade, unable, that is,  
to seduce: there is the daughter of Zeus  
who carries the aegis, Athena with her  
gleaming eyesí .

The second one  
that Aphrodite, lover of laughter, cannot  
subdue in love is noisy Artemis with her  
golden arrowsί ί .  
And third,  
The things that Aphrodite does are not  
Pleasing to that venerable virgin, Hestia<sup>4</sup>

The poet suggests it is the three virgin goddesses who are not overwhelmed by the power of Aphrodite's passions. However her ability to constellate desire is a force even the other gods cannot control, a passion that is often destructive and life altering. Hence she was often marginalised or manipulated for her magical seductive powers. Athena and Hera convince her to use her power to have Medea fall in love with Jason. And in the *Iliad* Hera asks Aphrodite for the loan of her magic girdle in order to seduce her husband, Zeus. Aphrodite's magic girdle symbolises her erotic power, which is able to seduce gods and heroes into her passionate domain.

Aphrodite's genealogy is not consistent in Homer and Hesiod. According to Homer Aphrodite is the daughter of Zeus and Dione. This is confirmed in the *Odyssey* when Hephaestus threatens to take back the bridal gifts he gave her father Zeus after he has caught his adulterous wife in the net with Ares. In Homeric tradition Zeus was the supreme Olympian and therefore every god was under his jurisdiction. However Hesiod in the *Theogony* portrays a very different and primitive birth myth<sup>5</sup>. When Cronus had severed Ouranos' testicles he threw them into the sea. From this act the sea bore Aphrodite. Therefore the great goddess of sexual love was fathered by the severed genitals of the sky god and brought into creation out of the womb of the sea, ostensibly a goddess without parents. Aphrodite represents a force that is not easily parented. The double tradition of Aphrodite's birth is also consistent with many other dual themes in myths of the goddess. Her duality is also reflected in her names of *Aphrodite Urania*, the celestial goddess, and *Aphrodite Pandemos*, the goddess of all the people.

## Aphrodite's Entry into Epic

In Greek myth the face of the feminine becomes more defined; the warrior and strategic sides belong to Athena, the mothering and nurturing side rests with Demeter, while Artemis carries the wild and instinctual sides. While we will look at many stories involving Aphrodite perhaps we should start with her entry into epic to appreciate the difficulty her sexuality and erotic nature may have presented to a rising patriarchal and rationalistic society. In Homeric epic it is evident that Aphrodite's erotic power to seduce the hero away from the battlefield is at great odds with the heroic nature of the warrior. Hence Aphrodite enters epic disempowered. Homer, aligned with the hero, portrays Aphrodite as the goddess who seduces the hero away from his tasks.

Aphrodite's name being linked with *aphros* or the sea-foam is a constant reminder of Hesiod's version of her potent and chaotic birth. Homer, placing her lineage under Zeus, makes an interesting comment on changing social mores, placing Aphrodite's erotic power under the divine order of Zeus. Sexual desire or the lust that leads to disaster, as well as the instincts of love and pleasure, are now placed in the dominion of the sky god Zeus. In the Homeric poem the *Iliad* Aphrodite is ridiculed and denigrated and also favours the Trojans, not the Greeks.

Why is Aphrodite a threat to the Homeric poets? Her sphere is the bedroom, not the battlefield and her power seduces the hero. In the *Iliad* she rescues her son, Aeneas, and her protégé, Paris, from the battlefield. Her ability to magnetise the sexual desire of the hero leads him away from the battlefield (today the sports field, the boardroom or the parliament rather than the battlefield). She is the power

of the feminine who initiates the masculine into the sphere outside mother. Her passions draw out an irrational side in the hero. Unlike mother, she makes no promises of fidelity. She initiates the hero into his erotic and primal desires. Yet in Homer we glimpse the beginning of her sphere being judged profane, as her sexuality is dangerous to the emerging hero culture.

Her dual birth also represents the schism that occurred throughout the development of Greek society splitting the profane (instinctual, primal) off from the sacred (cultured, restrained). Aphrodite was always a dual goddess; her Eastern traditions sometimes portrayed her as bisexual. In Greece she became *Aphrodite Urania*, the ethereal and sublime one, born of heaven and who represented heavenly and spiritual love, the sacred. She was also known as *Pandemos*, Aphrodite of the common people, physical and sensual love or the profane. Heavenly and earthy love became split into polar opposites.

In the *Odyssey* Aphrodite plays no role except for a story that is told of her by a minstrel and poet. Here the story of the triangle of Aphrodite, Ares and Hephaestus is told to the guests' great amusement. In the *Odyssey* Aphrodite is married to Hephaestus the handicapped god who ensnares his wife and Ares together in his marital bed. In the *Voyage of the Argo* Aphrodite helps Athena and Hera by having Medea fall in love with Jason. In the *Aeneid*, Venus is the protectress of her son, Aeneas who she helps guide to Latium. Finally in the *Golden Ass* she is the terrible stepmother to her pregnant daughter-in-law, Psyche. She sets four impossible tasks for Psyche hoping she will fail. But her first entry into epic is in the *Iliad*.

The epiphanies depicted throughout the course of the *Iliad* effectively allow Homer to contrast the divine and human sphere. The pantheon of gods interjects morality, conscience and instinct into the epic. Their divine appearances also affirm that destiny is not always directed or controlled by heroic willpower, but is something god-given and greater than any individual. The presence of the gods in the *Iliad*, alongside the human drama of war, is a powerful juxtaposition of the world of the mortal with the world of the divine. And the realm of war is also uncomfortable for the goddess of love.

The focus for much of the *Iliad* is on battle. The gods are clearly divided as to which camp they favour, either the Trojan or the Achaean (Greek) one. Being a battle epic, Homer decides how the gods who are not aligned with war will be portrayed. Aphrodite is a goddess associated with erotic love, not war, and Homer's depiction of her in the *Iliad* highlights the division between the battlefield and the household or the spheres of the masculine and the feminine, and what is heroic and what is not. Aphrodite's treatment by Homer serves as a commentary on both the morality of the poet and his contemporary time as well as influencing the way Aphrodite will be portrayed in subsequent epic and literature.

Homer's geneogram of the Olympian family places Zeus as the eldest sibling, not the youngest, and rearranges the parentage of Aphrodite. In Homer, Aphrodite is now the daughter of Zeus. Her mother is Dione, a daughter of the Titans, Oceanus and Thetys, whose name is a feminine form of the name Zeus<sup>6</sup>. Homer has placed Aphrodite's domain under Zeus, a domain that is ordered and hierarchical. Hesiod depicts Aphrodite, an older deity born the generation before Zeus, as a much more potent and primal goddess than the one portrayed in the *Iliad*. Did Homer wish to rearrange the myth for the down-playing of carnal extremes<sup>7</sup>? Hesiod allows for Aphrodite's more chaotic, exotic and erotic nature. Homer's Aphrodite and her passionate realm are now under the control of Zeus and order, therefore while she still evokes chaos, she is not outside the realm of Zeus's control. In other myths, Aphrodite is represented as a potent and independent goddess but in Homer she is subjected to ridicule and disrespect. Aphrodite is scolded by Diomedes and Zeus, deceived and ridiculed by Hera, physically wounded by Diomedes, and insulted and assaulted by Athena.

Why Homer chooses to devalue Aphrodite in this way could stem from various reasons. Aphrodite's sexual power and magnetism may have been too threatening to a moral poet in changing times. As a goddess who migrated from the East<sup>8</sup>, introducing her into the western tradition of the time may have meant rearranging her lineage to be subject to a more rational god. Erotic desire, Aphrodite's realm, may be safer if placed in the jurisdiction of the sky god Zeus. Her Eastern heritage may also have included magic and healing, arts, which Homer virtually censors from the *Iliad*. A remnant of these arts is suggested when Aphrodite embalms Hector's corpse with 'rosy immortal oil' and keeps the dogs from ravaging the body. Aphrodite's 'magic' is also referred to in reference to her girdle. The poet also seems to be occupied with a heroic epic of war, and heroes are insular and separate, not caught up in the grips of the love goddess's spell. Aphrodite's more exotic side needs to be quelled.

One of the visible ways that Homer depicts his struggle with Aphrodite is in her relationship to other gods and mortals in the *Iliad*. Aphrodite's character, according to Homer, emerges through her relationships with Paris, Dione, Helen and others.

### *Aphrodite and Paris*

Aphrodite's 'down playing' is interesting given that the mythic roots of the Trojan conflict reach back to the judgement of Paris, a judgment that Aphrodite won with her charm, beguile and promises. The title 'fairest' was awarded to her rather than Athena or Hera, by the judge Paris. Aphrodite was obliged to fulfil her promise to Paris who was to receive the beautiful Helen as his prize. This reward however was not achieved through heroism or *kleos* (glory), but through the manipulation of the goddess, Aphrodite. Homeric heroes achieve their recognition through their skill as warriors, not through judging beauty contests. Paris's alignment with the goddess Aphrodite places his world at odds with the heroic world.

It is Aphrodite who manipulates the abduction of Helen from her Spartan home and her husband, Menelaus, and relocates her to Troy with Paris. This powerful saga is the reason why the Greek armies are assembled below the walls of Troy: to rescue Helen from the grip of the Trojans. The story of the judgement of Paris is however only alluded to in a few lines of the epic poem, described as 'the lust that led to disaster'. Aphrodite's 'lust' that compels Paris has no place in heroic epic. Even Hector, Paris's brother and Trojan hero, judges his brother's desire as anti-heroic. For Homer, shame and lust are often synonymous and are both aspects of possession by Aphrodite.<sup>9</sup> Lust is anti-heroic and therefore shameful to heroic men.

Aphrodite also serves the poet by allowing a contrast to exist between his characters Paris and Diomedes. Paris, who is identified with the goddess and her realm, is antithetical to the hero Diomedes, who by wounding Aphrodite shows no reverence for the goddess. Diomedes as a symbol of 'the masculine sphere'<sup>10</sup> confronts Aphrodite on the battlefield. The poet, through both the mortal and divine voices of Diomedes and Zeus, lets the audience know that this is not where the goddess belongs. After he wounds Aphrodite, Diomedes says:

Give way, daughter of Zeus, from the fighting and the terror. Is it not then enough that you lead astray women without warcraft?  
Yet, if still you must haunt the fighting, I think that now you will shiver even when you hear some other talking of battles.<sup>11</sup>

And Zeus too rebukes her participation in the battle:

'No, my child, not for you are the works of warfare. Rather concern yourself only with the lovely secrets of marriage, while all this shall be left to Athene and sudden Ares.'<sup>12</sup>

The lines are drawn. Through both hero and god, the poet has defined Aphrodite's role away from the battlefield, a sphere where Homer says she does not belong. Earlier in the poem, Aphrodite had rescued Paris from being choked and dragged away by Menelaus. She rescues him from the dangers of battle placing him safely in his "perfumed bedchamber". Aphrodite also commanded Helen to Paris's bed. Against Helen's own wishes, she recanted. However, Helen still managed to express her disgust to Paris: "Oh, how I wish you had died there beaten down by the stronger man". Paris, using the seductive powers of Aphrodite, finally charms Helen into submission.

In this scene, Paris is anti-heroic; passion and desire has led him away from the sphere of battle into Aphrodite's sphere of lovemaking. The poet uses Paris as an example of how the erotic passions of Aphrodite can take the hero away from the task of battle. Homer points to the dangerous side of Aphrodite and Helen, her mortal embodiment. The danger lies in the chaotic realm of lust and desire that lead the warrior away from his heroic labour. Hector, unlike Paris, is a hero who is able to delineate the boundary between the battlefield and the household, not being seduced or enchanted away from battle by Aphrodite. However, Helen enchants Paris and therefore he falls under the spell of Aphrodite.

Subtly, Homer also reminds us of Aphrodite's chaotic side by referring to her in line 5:330 as "the lady of Kypros". This reference links her to her Cyprian cult and earlier heritage, which the poet, as suggested previously, has ignored.<sup>13</sup> Diomedes, as the Homeric hero, and Paris, as Aphrodite's protégé, contrast the realms of war and love, the battlefield and the *polis*, as well as the world of the masculine and the world of the feminine. Homer uses Aphrodite as a device to clarify the boundaries between these worlds.

#### *Aphrodite and Dione*

Dione has virtually no role in the *Iliad* except as Aphrodite's mother, yet her presence in one scene gives the poet another chance to trivialise Aphrodite. Dione is a comforting mother "who gathered her daughter into the arms" and "folded" her after Aphrodite had been wounded. In her mother's presence Aphrodite regresses to a young and whining girl. The poet uses this opportunity to depict Aphrodite as a child who flees back to Olympus and the protection of her mother when things do not go her way.

Dione questions Aphrodite about which Olympian god has injured her. This question is the identical question Zeus poses to Artemis later in the epic. While Artemis has been assaulted by Hera, Aphrodite had been wounded by a mere mortal. Both Artemis and Ares, who also support the Trojan side, seek refuge with Zeus when wounded, whereas Aphrodite seeks the feminine realm of her mother for comfort. The poet has once again contained the realm of Aphrodite in a sphere away from battle. Dione tries to comfort her daughter by reciting the names of other gods who have been wounded by mortals. Ares, Hera and Hades are on the list; both Ares and Hades have been wounded by the greatest hero, Heracles. The scene ends with Zeus reiterating Aphrodite's sphere to be the "lovely secrets of marriage" not war. Athena is the image of the feminine that Zeus supports for the "works of warfare". Athena's strategy and *metis* is valued throughout the epic by the poet unlike her Homeric half-sister, Aphrodite.

#### *Aphrodite and Thetis*

Aphrodite and Thetis have much in common yet are depicted by Homer very differently. Each is a persuasive goddess and a mother of heroes in the war. Thetis is mother to the Achaean hero, Achilles, while Aphrodite is mother to the Trojan hero, Aeneas. Both the fathers of these heroes are mortal and inferior to the goddesses. While they are referred to in the *Iliad*, the fathers play no part in the epic.

Both goddesses have significantly influenced the course of events that shape the *Iliad*. Aphrodite's role in Helen's abduction, the core event that precipitates the war, is not part of the epic. The power Aphrodite has to influence the course of events is not acknowledged. Thetis, on the other hand, plays a visible role in the epic's plot. She secures a promise from Zeus that places the Greeks under Agamemnon, at risk. Without Achilles, Thetis's son, the Greek army is to suffer. Her power is acknowledged. Thetis protects her son and intervenes on his behalf, yet never intercedes while he is on the battlefield. Aphrodite, however, rescues both Paris and Aeneas from danger and even transports Paris back to his own bedroom. Unlike Thetis, Aphrodite crosses the boundary between the battlefield (the sphere of the hero) and the bedroom (the sphere of sexual desire). In saving her son and her protégé from death, Aphrodite also robs them of their heroism. Whether consciously intended or not, Aphrodite's role on the battlefield in contrast to Thetis portrays the realm of Aphrodite as oppositional to the realm of the hero.

Even though Thetis is the lesser goddess<sup>14</sup>, she is more nobly treated than Aphrodite. Both these goddesses have an element of power over Zeus. Thetis had previously rescued Zeus aligning her with Zeus and the preservation of his ordered world. She now uses this leverage to obtain a promise from Zeus to fulfil her son's wishes. Aphrodite's power with which you overwhelm mortal men, and all the immortals<sup>15</sup> is her love charms personified as a girdle, a magical zone. This does not belong in the ordered realm of Zeus. Unlike Thetis, Aphrodite does not use her power to get what she wants, but gives the magic away to Hera. Hera supports the Greeks, and therefore is a rival in the war. Aphrodite is duped into unwittingly aiding Hera in her schemes against the Trojans. Aphrodite, who supports the Trojans, is depicted as naive and subordinate to Hera, who champions the Greeks.

#### *Aphrodite and Ares*

More fun is had at Aphrodite's expense in her relationship with Ares. While Homer in the *Iliad* does not define their relationship, he certainly does in the *Odyssey*. In the *Odyssey* Aphrodite is married to Hephaestus<sup>16</sup>, an unusual partner for the love goddess and certainly no physical match for her lover, Ares. Homer introduces the extra marital affair of Ares and Aphrodite having the bard Demodokos singing the comic tale to Odysseus. The tale is a humorous interlude but when judged moralistically it is a song that so scandalised ancient commentators that, along with some of their modern counterparts, they wanted to atheise it from the text<sup>17</sup>. Perhaps part of the scandal is that epic is dealing with sex, not war.

In the tale, Hephaestus conspires to trap Aphrodite and Ares in his own bed with a webbed net constructed to bind the lovers so neither of them could stir a limb or get up<sup>18</sup>. The woven web that ensnares the lovers is a clever image employed by Homer. While weaving is the domain of Athena, threads that bind are a reminder of the three Fates, the Moirae. The audience may be subtly reminded that cunning Athena, goddess of weaving, would not allow herself to be trapped in such a way. The poet suggests that lust, belonging to Aphrodite, is no match for Athena's wisdom. Or if the web refers to the Fates, then is it destined that this type of lust be exposed? The scene is amusing not only to the audience listening to the poet, but also to other male gods who are summoned to the bed side to view the entrapped pair. In an interesting twist Homer depicts Poseidon as the only god not amused by the shenanigans. Homer is not clear on why, except that in some references Poseidon's name has been suggested as meaning husband of the goddess Dione<sup>19</sup>. Clearly in this scene he respects the sanctity of marriage and is not engrossed by the goddess of love.

The relationship of Ares and Aphrodite is not explicit in the *Iliad*; at one point Aphrodite refers to him as beloved brother. They however are companions and aids to each other. When Aphrodite is wounded by Diomedes, Ares lends her his gold-bridled horses to take her to Olympus and her mother. Ares himself is later wounded. When Ares is flattened by Athena, Aphrodite appears and drags him away from the skirmish. Hera in noticing this insults Aphrodite by referring to her as a

dogfly and encourages Athena to block their escape. Athena punches Aphrodite in the breasts causing both Ares and Aphrodite to fall, lying sprawled on the generous Earth. No other gods are subject to such humiliation in the epic.

Ares and Aphrodite serve as an interesting polarity in that the god of war is companion to the goddess of love. Ares is referred to throughout the *Iliad* as violent, man slaughtering, bloodstained, and huge and bellowing. But perhaps the best indication of the Homeric view of Ares comes from Zeus. Ares has come to Zeus to complain of Athena's aiding Diomedes to wound him. Zeus responds by naming him the "most hateful of all gods"<sup>20</sup>

The war god Ares is not well represented in this epic. Athena as more logical and rational is favoured as a patroness of war. She exclaims to Ares, "you did not think even this time how much stronger I can claim I am than you." Athena triumphs over both Ares and Aphrodite, a reminder that *metis* is superior to lust and that rationalism and strategy triumph over chaos. Ares is portrayed as irrational with a lust for battle and therefore is a good mate in Homeric epic for Aphrodite who is also chaotic and lustful.

### *Helen, Briseis & Cassandra*

Helen is the mortal embodiment of Aphrodite and the goddess is her patroness. Two other women are likened to Aphrodite in the *Iliad*: Briseis and Cassandra. Each of these women is linked through their similar roles as captives. While Helen is protected by the Trojans she is still a captive. Briseis is captive throughout the epic and Cassandra, as the audience will know, will be taken as a captive of Agamemnon after the sack of Troy.<sup>21</sup> Homer, through these three women who are all compared to Aphrodite, may be suggesting that the realm of Aphrodite is the spoil of the hero. All three women are captives of heroes, which places them, and perhaps Aphrodite, under the jurisdiction of the hero. Perhaps unconsciously the poet is suggesting this would be best.

Captives are also foreigners. In likening Aphrodite to these women, Homer may be reminding us that she is foreign and therefore dangerous. Aphrodite was a foreign goddess and to the heroic psyche, an enchanting yet dangerous force. Captives do not partake in the war and the audience is reminded that Aphrodite's realm, once again, is excluded from the battlefield.

Aphrodite's entry into epic epitomises the beginning of her devaluation that reaches its height throughout the Christian era. The relationship between the poet and Aphrodite is uneasy:

the epic tradition progressively removed the most carnal aspects of the Olympian gods and goddesses- leaving certain physical activities, sex in particular, conveniently vague in accord with evidently long standing public taste<sup>22</sup>

Sexual desire, lust, and passions that inevitably lead to chaos are dangerous to Homer who is a voice of the shifting times. Rationalism and order are prized over instinct and disorder, the heroic over the householder. Aphrodite represents these denigrated instinctual feelings that lead the hero away from his labours. As regent of this domain, then, she is also denigrated. She is ridiculed, devalued and marginalised. The poet has clearly stated that her feminine sphere must be separate from the heroic sphere and that her influence must be placed under the ordered world of Zeus.

Aphrodite crosses the boundaries between the battlefield and the bedroom and needs to be controlled. Like her Hellenic son, Eros, she gradually loses her power through epic. Homer begins the tradition of trivialising her, as has been shown, in the *Iliad* and continues this in the *Odyssey*. But Homer's influence continues into later epic and literature. Apollonius of Rhodes in *The Voyage of the Argo* and even Apuleius in *The Golden Ass* continue to caricature Aphrodite.

Homer's depiction of Aphrodite in the *Iliad* helps illuminate the potential attitudes of the ancient Greeks towards her domain of love, lust and sexuality. Through Homer, Aphrodite's sphere becomes placed under the ordered worldview of the supreme sky god, Zeus. However not all poets and mythmakers followed Homer's lead. Many praised the transcendent sphere of Aphrodite. Perhaps an archaic voice who best portrayed the sublime influence of the goddess was Sappho in her *Hymn to Aphrodite*. Sappho became a muse for generations of erotic poets who followed.

## The Judgement of Paris

The Trojan conflict described in the *Iliad* was ignited after Helen was seduced by Paris and carried away from her home in Sparta to Troy. With Aphrodite as guide and protectress, Paris was able to charm Helen away from her homeland. As we have read, beautiful Helen is the prize Aphrodite awarded to Paris for choosing her as the fairest over the other goddesses, Athena and Hera. However Aphrodite's schemes ignite a major conflict, which erupted into the Trojan War and the ultimate destruction of Troy.

Paris was one of the many children of the Trojan dynasty of King Priam and Queen Hecabe. On the day he was born he was exposed on Mount Ida behind Troy, as his mother had experienced a frightening vision that her new child would be the ruin of Troy. However Paris survived, maturing into a handsome young man known for his skill of judgement. Hence Zeus chose him to resolve the argument, which had broken out amongst the three goddesses.

The divine conflict arose at the great wedding feast of Peleus and Thetis, the parents-to-be of the great hero, Achilles. This last great wedding celebration when all the gods and goddesses were invited to join with mortals took place on Mount Pelion. All the gods and goddesses except one, Eris, the goddess of strife were there. Furious for not being invited Eris arrived in the midst of the wedding feast. In her hand she held a golden apple that had "to the fairest" engraved on it. She rolled the golden apple down the length of the banquet table and it stopped in the midst of the goddesses, Aphrodite, Hera and Athena. Each goddess claimed the title of the fairest as hers.

To arbitrate the conflict Zeus chooses the Trojan prince, Paris to judge who was the fairest. To convince him to choose her, Hera offered him great wealth and power; Athena offered him heroic status and finally Aphrodite offered him the hand in marriage of the most beautiful woman alive, Helen. Paris chose relationship over wealth, power or fame. However, there would be dire consequences for Helen was already married to Menelaus, the king of Sparta. Menelaus had won the hand of Helen over many other suitors who had sworn allegiance to him should anything happen to Helen. Aphrodite's realm evokes the chaos of passion, abandonment and betrayal.

When Helen is snatched from her home on the Peloponnese and brought to Troy in Asia Minor, Menelaus solicits the help of his brother Agamemnon who gathers together a great Greek army to sail to Troy in order to reclaim Helen. The Greek fleet sails to Troy and engages in a ten-year battle with Troy. Troy is destroyed and the Trojan dynasty ends. Paris is killed and Helen is "rescued" and taken back to her homeland. Under Aphrodite's spell we may be obsessed by the love of beauty, and blinded by the possibility of love and relationship.

The Trojan tale reveals how Aphrodite, the goddess of love and beauty, can often ignite passions and emotions ending in disaster. When Troy is destroyed, only a handful of Trojans are spared. One of these is Aeneas, the son of Aphrodite by Anchises. Aeneas escapes the ruins of Troy carrying sacred relics from his homeland. Eventually after heroic trials and adventures Aeneas arrives in Latium and

finds the seminal site for Rome. Aeneas is one of the dual founders of Rome. And Venus (Aphrodite) as his mother is given a place of honour in Rome, the newly found Troy, another Mecca of culture and beauty.

## Sons and Lovers

Aphrodite's realm continuously intersects with the masculine. Her mythic nature is revealed through many of her relationships with her male counterparts, as follows:

### *Aeneas*

Aphrodite seduced the Trojan Anchises while he was tending his cattle on Mount Ida. "And when she saw him, Aphrodite, lover of laughter, she loved him, and a terrifying desire seized her heart."<sup>23</sup> In order to seduce him, Aphrodite denied she was a goddess.

However after lovemaking Aphrodite revealed she was the great goddess and extracted a promise from Anchises that he would honour their secret. Later when drunk he revealed that he had lain with a goddess. For transgressing his promise, Zeus crippled him with the blow of a thunderbolt. However their union produced the Trojan hero Aeneas, and first founder of Rome. When Troy was destroyed at the end of the Trojan conflict over Helen, Aeneas received the protection of his mother Aphrodite and was able to escape the decimated Troy with his father and his son rescuing the sacred objects from Troy. Virgil describes his mythic journey from Troy to Latium in the epic *The Aeneid*. Aeneas was a favourite of the gods and known for his piety.

### *Eros*

We have already met Eros as one of the primal elements of creation. In Hesiod's *Theogony* he is her attendant after her birth. It is during the archaic period when Eros is first depicted by Simonides as the son of Aphrodite and Ares. From this point on Eros becomes aligned with Aphrodite in epic and poetry, as her son and partner in match making. Myth aligns Eros, the erotic power of love, with Aphrodite and together they conspire to bring lovers together or often unleash monstrous feelings of erotic desire. Later this erotic power is differentiated: Anteros becomes love not returned while Himeros is desire. Plato praises Eros in the *Symposium* whose power he suggests should be honoured by great temples and sacrifices.

Eros and Aphrodite are always linked throughout later antiquity. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century CE, Apuleius tells the story of Psyche and Eros. Psyche is the mortal counterpoint to Aphrodite as she is revered and worshipped for her beauty. Jealous of Psyche, Venus conspires to destroy her by arranging a monstrous marriage. However her own son Eros falls in love with the young beauty and takes her as his lover without the knowledge of his mother. When Venus becomes aware of the liaison and Psyche's love for her son she sets four impossible tasks for the young girl hoping to destroy her spirit. Each of these tasks represents a heroic labour for the unconscious young woman. Her greatest challenge is to descend into the underworld to retrieve the beauty box from Persephone. Psyche succeeds in her labours and Venus becomes her mother-in-law.

### *Hephaestus*

In the *Odyssey* Aphrodite's husband is Hephaestus. His disappointed mother Hera had hurled the smith-god out of Olympus. However when the goddess realised her son was a master jeweller and craftsman she wanted him reinstated to Olympus to create beautiful jewellery and armour for the gods. Hephaestus' condition to return to Olympus was to marry the beautiful goddess. Hephaestus has been crippled from birth, his feet twisted back to front. Walking with a rolling gait he was the brunt of the other gods' jeers and jokes. Hence the two are an unusual pairing, reminiscent of the

pattern of beauty and the beast. Hephaestus is a tormented genius, an artisan and exquisite craftsman cruelly rejected by his mother when he was not born physically perfect. Hence the pair unites outer and inner beauty, suggesting that when feelings of rejection are paramount and self esteem is compromised there may be a tendency to project worth and value onto outer images of beauty in order to reclaim a personal sense of worth and esteem.

Aphrodite is a complete contrast to Hera, the rejecting mother. However in the *Odyssey* Aphrodite is also portrayed as rejecting. Hephaestus, aware of his wife's affair with Ares, conspires to confront her infidelity. Crafting a net of fine mesh he captures the lovers in its web exposing them to all the other gods.

### *Adonis*

The myth of Adonis is a vestige of an Indo-European mythic pattern of the Great Mother and her son/lover who is ritually sacrificed. Astarte in Phoenician myth also had a lover named Adonis. However, by the 5<sup>th</sup> Century BCE Aphrodite, who places a curse upon his mother Smyrna, is influential in shaping the Greek myth of Adonis. Smyrna is the beautiful daughter of a king of the Assyrians and is widely revered for her beauty. Jealous of the attention directed onto her, Aphrodite inflames Smyrna with an incestuous desire for her own father. For twelve consecutive nights she enters his bed and on the thirteenth night the king discovers the shocking truth that he has slept with his own daughter. She prays for pity from the gods not to be destroyed by her father and the gods turn her into a myrrh tree (in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* the young girl is named Myrrha). Another version suggests it is Aphrodite who pities her and transforms her into the tree. However she is pregnant and after ten revolutions of the moon a child named Adonis is born out of the tree.

Aphrodite then conceals the young child in a chest away from view of the other gods and gives it to Persephone. The goddess of the underworld raises the young boy who matures into a charismatic and handsome youth.<sup>24</sup> When Aphrodite discovers the boy's beauty she wants him returned to her but Persephone refuses. Zeus intervenes in the squabble between the goddesses and assigns each goddess one third of the year with Adonis, and the remaining one third of the year is to be spent at his own discretion. However Aphrodite seduces the young boy into staying with her during his allotted portion.

Adonis is killed by a wild boar. Dying young preserves Adonis's beauty and is a pattern associated with the *puer aeternus*, the eternal young man who is destined not to mature. The individual who excites the wild boar to kill Adonis is a mythological mystery, however now it is clear that Persephone will have Adonis eternally as Aphrodite's power does not extend into the realm of death. Beauty is transitional with a use by date. Interestingly the last task Venus sets for Psyche is for her to go into the underworld to retrieve the beauty box of Persephone. On her way out of the underworld Psyche opens the box and falls into a deep sleep. Persephone's beauty secret may be sleep!

Adonis was a resurrection god whose myth also parallels the Phrygian Attis and Cybele and the Sumerian Inanna and Tammuz. The motif of the Great Mother and her son/lover portrayed the fragility of the youthful masculine especially in connection to the dominating feminine through which new life and resurrection can be found. The power, beauty and force of the youthful masculine are no match for the cyclical and seasonal fate of the Great Mother.

### *Priapus*

Priapus is a fertility god whose statues were generally placed in vineyards and gardens in order to promote fertility. He was connected with an increase in fertility in crops, cattle and also women. He was often known as *Ithyphallus* because he was depicted with a huge erect phallus, literally the depiction of a phallic god. However Priapus was also used to ward off evil spirits and thieves as well

as used as a boundary protector, similar to the use of Herms in classical times. As a son of Aphrodite he is an aspect of her primitive, phallic and potent self which reveres masculine potency and the primal male regenerative power. While Aphrodite is mother, Priapusø father could be one of many other gods: most likely Dionysus and Pan however Hermes, Adonis or Zeus are also possibilities.

### *Hippolytus*

Euripides in his play *Hippolytus* has Aphrodite describe herself as:

Powerful among mortals, glorious among the gods,  
I am named in earth and heaven the Cyprian, Aphrodite.  
From east to west, from the Euxine to the Atlantic Gates,  
Over all that sees the light of the sun my rule extends.  
To those who reverence my power I show favour,  
And throw to the earth those I find arrogant and proud.<sup>25</sup>

Hippolytus is a young man devoted to the goddess Artemis, a young man Aphrodite thought too proud to worship her. As a devotee of Artemis he is uninterested in the sphere of Aphrodite and for this he pays the price of his life. His stubborn heart refuses the call of Aphrodite. Since the young man has chosen not to enter the realm of Aphrodite, the goddess draws him into her influence through her surrogate, Phaedra. Hippolytus is the son of Theseus and the Amazon, Antiope. After Antiopeø death Theseus takes Phaedra as his bride. Phaedra is the sister of Ariadne, the daughter of Pasiphaë and granddaughter of Europa and therefore has inherited the fate of the Minoan dynasty.

As revenge for the young manø refusal to honour her Aphrodite lights the flame of desire in Phaedra for her own stepson. When Hippolytus rejects Phaedraø advances she is devastated and in her rejection hangs herself. However, not before leaving a note for her husband that states his son has violated her. In his fury Theseus conspires to have Hippolytus killed. As the young man is driving his chariot along the coastal road a great bull arises out of the sea scaring the horses and ejecting Hippolytus out of his chariot down the steep cliffs to his death.

Hippolytus represents the chaos when Aphrodite is not honoured. He is an image of the devastating consequences of turning against the great goddess. The advice of the chorus is to:

Yield to the universal spell  
Aphrodite you alone  
Reign in power and honour,  
Queen of all creation!<sup>26</sup>

### *Ares*

If Aphrodite were to have a soul mate it would probably be Ares, the god of war and her constant companion. They parent Eros the god of desire as well as three other children: Harmonia, øthe uniterø Phobus øfearø and Deimos øterrorø We will meet her soul mate Ares later.

### Aphroditeø Epithets

Like all deities Aphrodite had many epithets that help characterise her attributes and character. Some of these were:

*Doritis* suggested bountiful and refers to her expansive domain

*Epistrophia* was the depiction of the goddess as øshe who turns men to loveø Aphroditeø main sphere was the sphere of love and of concern to the hero who fell under its spell.

*Pontia* was the goddess of the deep sea, a reference to her birth out of the sea. As a goddess born from this domain, the sea always protected her, as in the following Roman myth. Typhon was a horrible monster whose fury instilled fear, even in the bravest gods. When the fearsome beast confronted Aphrodite and Eros they disguised themselves as fishes throwing themselves into the sea in order to flee the fury of the monster. And in order not to be separated, they tied themselves with a bond that linked them together eternally. Aphrodite was able to seek refuge in the sea as she was born from it. Many of Aphrodite's temples were built near seaports.

*Nymphaea* while nymphs were spirits of the streams, forests, and oceans etc., *nymph* in relation to Aphrodite refers to the young girl in preparation to become a bride. *Nymphomania* is from the Greek combining nymph (bride) with mania (madness) and suggests the madness and passion of being involved in Aphrodite's realm. This is erotic madness.

*Pandemos* is from the Greek Pan meaning all, and Demos meaning people. As Pandemos, Aphrodite is the goddess of all the people. However, generally it is used to refer to a more secular or profane love.

*Urania* means heavenly and is reminiscent of her birth from the severed genitals of her sky-god father, Ouranus. However this epithet generally refers to her as the goddess of heaven or heavenly love, a spiritual and pure love.

*Pasiphaë* was the wife of Minos whose insatiable lust for the great bull became an obsession. She demanded the architect of Knossos to construct scaffolding in which she could disguise herself as a cow in order to mate with the great bull. However when connected to Aphrodite it refers to shining, and reminds us of her role as a heavenly goddess.

*Asteria* is the starry Aphrodite connected again to the heavens and brightness. Many of her epithets remind us of her earlier role as a goddess of heaven.

*Morpho* means shapely and refers to Aphrodite's physical beauty. By the 4th Century BCE Aphrodite was generally depicted nude in statues and art. This broke the convention of the feminine figure being clothed and the male being depicted nude.

*Laughter loving* was a common epithet used by Homer for Aphrodite. The Greek verb *aphrodizien* to make love was a common pun used in relation to Aphrodite as the lover of laughter, since the expression also sounded similar to her as the lover of genitals. In Greek there was a close similarity in the sound of each expression.

*Golden* was often used to describe Aphrodite. She was either the golden one or portrayed with golden hair, referring to her beauty and attractiveness. The goddess was often depicted as shining and bright and open, preferring the light of the Sun to the darkness of night.

*Acraea* referred to Aphrodite of the height and reminds us that Aphrodite was also a goddess often placed on the citadel overseeing her territory. This was definitely the case in Corinth where her temple was placed on the Acrocorinth, overlooking her city. Like Athena at Athens or Artemis of Ephesos, Aphrodite was a goddess of the City of Corinth. And it was Corinth, which was the only centre of mainland Greece that adopted the practice of sacred prostitution, a remnant of the Eastern goddess cult.

## Aphrodite and Corinth

*Young women, hostesses to many, handmaidens  
Of attraction in wealthy Corinth,  
Who burn the golden tears of fresh frankincense,  
Often you soar in your thoughts  
To Aphrodite in the sky,  
The mother of loves.<sup>27</sup>*

-Pindar

Aphrodite's presence as the major deity in Corinth reflects the independence of the Corinthian psyche, for no other major centre in ancient Greece embraced the cult of this goddess in the way the citizens of Corinth did. While the Cypriot centre of Paphos and the Sicilian port of Eryx also aligned themselves with Aphrodite and the cult practice of sacred prostitution, Corinth was unique in the Greek world for her adaptation of these cult rites.<sup>28</sup>

Evidence for Aphrodite's cult in Corinth is dated from the 7th C. By the Classical period, Corinth was widely known for its devotion to the goddess Aphrodite. Her sanctuaries were strategically placed throughout Corinth, the most famous being her sanctuary and temple on the Acrocorinth. Here, as Aphrodite *Urania*, her cult image was dressed in armour, a guardian and protectorate to the Corinthians. Textual evidence for the sanctuary on the Acrocorinth is supplied by Pausanias and Strabo, however very little physical remains have been found to clearly describe the sanctuary that probably existed there in the 7th and 6th C. Other sanctuaries existed within the city walls and at its western harbour. While there is little archaeological evidence, it has been suggested that the harbour temple of Aphrodite was in use at the time of Periander, the tyrant of Corinth. Temples of Aphrodite may have been situated at each of Corinth's ports.

Archaeological evidence of Aphrodite's presence includes many votives to the goddess, however earlier remains also link her to Astarte, her Phoenician counterpart. A 4th Century BCE cup had a dedication to Aphrodite *scratched on the lip of a kantharos* while a small bronze bowl, dedicated to the goddess, is dated to the first quarter of the 5th C. Another deposit contained figurines connected to the goddess: a *handmade dove*, *korè with dove*. A sherd with a Corinthian inscription to Astarte was discovered in a general fill from the 5th C. Other remains have also linked Aphrodite of Corinth to Astarte. A 7th Century figurine of Astarte has been recovered as well as a plaque from Perachora which depicts a *Grecized version of the bisexual Aphrodite of the Orient*, probably dating from the second quarter of the 7th Century.<sup>29</sup> However the clearest picture of the goddess of Corinth does not emerge until the 5th Century.<sup>30</sup>

Given that the Corinthian goddess was connected to Astarte, it is probable that she was imported from the East by the Phoenicians who left their influence on the developing port.<sup>31</sup> During the 8th and 7th C the Greek commercial and colonising traffic also mingled with Phoenician merchants throughout the Mediterranean and Greeks in both Egypt and the Near East would have been exposed to the cult of Astarte, Aphrodite's double. Aphrodite *Urania*'s precinct on the Acrocorinth serving Corinth as an armed protectress of the city was similar to her Eastern counterparts, who had shrines elevated high above their settlements. Her hilltop sanctuary became a focus for the emerging polis by representing a symbol of unification for the villages, a political focus for the security of the community. Corinth chose a Phoenician goddess, not only as a powerful protectress, but perhaps to emulate the successful maritime skills of the Phoenicians.

Textual evidence suggests that Aphrodite's cult practice of sacred prostitution was well established in Corinth by the late 6th Century. Simonides, a poet, was credited with a dedication to Aphrodite's

prostitutes. The temple prostitutes and priestesses were honoured for the potency of their prayers, which the Greeks believed contributed to the defeat of the Persians. It was Aphrodite who empowered the sacred prostitutes' prayers. All of Greece revered the power of the temple prostitutes and gave thanks for the Corinthian custom to offer prayers of supplication to Aphrodite in times of crisis. A wealthy Corinthian, Xenophon, in 464 BCE was victorious at the Olympic Games and he fulfilled his vow to Aphrodite by donating 100 slaves to her temple. Pindar was also employed to compose a song at his victory celebration acknowledging these women who will now serve Aphrodite Urania at Corinth. By the 1st Century BCE, Corinth was reputed to have 1000 female and possibly male prostitutes. Aphrodite is a multi-faceted goddess but what makes her cult so unique in ancient Corinth is the practice of prostitution procured within the sacred precinct of her temples, hence a sacred prostitution.

An old proverb 'Not every man has the luck to sail to Corinth'<sup>32</sup> suggested the desirability to visit Corinth for the pleasurable visits to the temple of Aphrodite. The proverb is also translated as 'Not for every man is the trip to Corinth' a more direct reference to the high price of the Corinthian temple prostitutes. This accepted practice, not only gave Corinth a notable reputation in the ancient world, but also possibly added to its affluence.<sup>33</sup> Revenue collected by the sacred prostitutes was returned to the temple, adding to the wealth which Corinth became noted for. It has been suggested that sacred prostitution 'was used as a mechanism for raising money in coastal sanctuaries, which were considered custodial places for huge quantities of riches; politicians frequently made use of these riches in exceptional circumstances, taking them over by public decree or simply by force.'<sup>34</sup> The cult ritual perhaps served both the political and economic interests of the citizens of Corinth. Even their social concerns may have been served for secular prostitution flourishes in busy trading ports and here in Corinth it was under the jurisdiction of the goddess.

The Corinthians adapted the Eastern practice of temple prostitution in their own way. The Phoenician ritual to Astarte was centred on the dedication of virginity to the goddess and Herodotus suggests that the Babylonian custom conscripted every woman to serve in the temple compound as a prostitute at least once in her life. In Corinth, however, the prostitutes were slaves. The ritual was not practiced by the Corinthian free women or wives, but by slaves assigned to Aphrodite. The ritual was maintained but did not infiltrate into the established Corinthian mores.

Temple prostitution developed in Corinth since the city was dependant on commerce and the prostitutes served the interests of a busy port.<sup>35</sup> Strabo reports that ship captains lavishly spent money on them and foreigners noted Corinth as a special port. And it seems the Corinthians themselves took the practice seriously as it allowed them to live more comfortably. The higher standard of living that the Corinthians enjoyed may have been related in a minor way to the revenue generated by the temples of Aphrodite. Other historians disbelieve that a Greek state would permit such practices, yet prostitution was known to exist in the other major centres throughout Greece. In Corinth however it was under the jurisdiction of Aphrodite. In one way this was a socially progressive way of legalising and containing what was inevitable especially in a seaport where sailors and migrants congregated.

The visitors, mainly foreigners and seamen, would visit the temple to choose their partner. Payment was exchanged and the act took place outside the temple precinct, perhaps in the sacred prostitutes' own quarters, although there is no evidence to suggest this. While the Corinthian cult of Aphrodite is a fascinating glimpse into how unique and individualised the state of Corinth was there is little physical evidence to draw a conclusive portrait of the rituals and practices. Most of the physical evidence is found in smaller figurines, possibly votives or souvenirs. From the textual evidence we do know the practice was infamous throughout the ancient world. Perhaps it was this notoriety that brought affluence and trade to her shores. At least it reflected Corinth's progressive social attitudes and unique character amidst the other Greek *poleis* and perhaps even this notoriety brought affluence

and trade to her shores. Aphrodite, as the sensual goddess of pleasure, found her home amidst the Corinthians who embraced a wealthy, perhaps even luxurious lifestyle. At least, the cult of Aphrodite reflected Corinth's progressive social attitudes and unique character amidst the other Greek states, allowing an ancient expression of the goddess.

### In Praise of Aphrodite

*'On your throne, a marvel of art, immortal  
Aphrodite, daughter of Zeus, amused to  
lead us on through folly and pain*

- Sappho

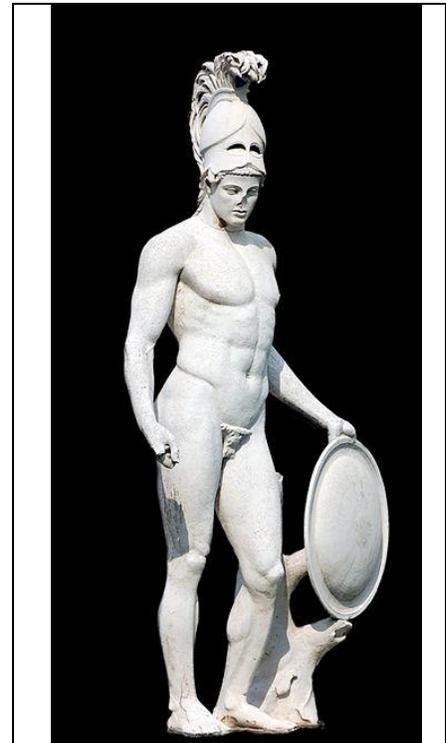
While Aphrodite may have entered epic in a compromised way she survived to be regarded as a great and powerful goddess worshipped in a multitude of ways throughout regions of Greece. However it was on the island of Lesbos where she inspired Sappho to write her poetic visions of love, which still influences poets to this day. Aphrodite's passion and intensity not only inspired a generation of erotic poets but also shaped the disciplined art forms, which emerged in the archaic period. Underpinning the later stories of Aphrodite's scheming and jealousy lie the respect and reverence for the great goddess of love and beauty and the -Queen of all creation!

## ARES

*Hear me, helper of mankind  
You, happy god,  
give me courage,  
let me linger  
in the safe laws of peace,  
and thus escape  
from battles with enemies  
and the fate of a violent death<sup>36</sup>*

*The Homeric Hymn  
To Ares*

Roman statue of Ares (Mars) at the Villa of Hadrian



The Homeric Hymn to Ares was probably the last hymn, written as late as the 4<sup>th</sup> C nearly three or four centuries after the first of the hymns had been composed. To the ancient Greeks Ares was not a deity to praise and it took until the Hellenistic period to offer a hymn to the god, a dedication that the other gods had received much earlier.

*Ares* is derived from the root, *to destroy or to be carried away*, and has always been associated with war or in psychological terms, the aggressive and sexual instincts that are associated with the

masculine. The Babylonians called him Nergal, an angry fire god who was also a god of the netherworld as well as their war god. The Romans embraced him as Mars, amalgamating the Greek god of war with an indigenous agricultural god; hence he was often associated with spring or the rising of the sap, fertility and new growth. Our month March (march or marching, beating the drum etc.) is named after the Roman god Mars as is the constellation of Aries, also associated with the Northern Vernal Equinox. Sacrifices were made to Mars to help avoid natural calamities (inclement weather, the destruction of grain etc.) and to promote a bountiful harvest and encourage prosperity amongst their herds. The Romans saw him as protective, bestowing a much more elevated position than he had in ancient Greek myth. As the father of Romulus, the founder of Rome, he was revered as both their founder and champion. He was a patron of the Roman army whose conquests spread throughout most of the known world. Augustus proclaimed him as Mars *Ultor*, the avenger, for avenging the assassination of Julius Caesar through his victory at Philippi in 42 BCE as well as avenging the disaster suffered by the Romans at the hands of the Parthians. Along with Venus the mythic couple served in the transformation of the Roman Empire. However in Greek myth Ares was portrayed not as a victorious war god, but a coward and an oaf.

As suggested The Homeric Hymn to Ares was a relatively late composition, which also links the war god with his fiery red sphere, the red planet he had been associated with since the Babylonians. In the hymn his attributes are listed as:

★ Superior in force	★ Chariot-rider, Golden-helmeted	★ Shield-bearer	★ Sceptred king of manhood
★ Stalwart in battle	★ Saviour of cities	★ Bronze-armoured	★ Tyrant against the rebellious
★ Strong-fisted	★ Unwearyingly relentless	★ Mighty with the spear	★ Champion for the righteous

We could compare these traits to the description of Ares in the *Iliad*. Ares is referred to in the epic as violent, man slaughtering, bloodstained, and huge and bellowing. Ares was the battle god, the god of dreadful war and the overseer of the storms in human affairs. He is one of the most unpopular gods in Greek myth, reflected in Homer's view of him in the *Iliad*. Wounded and ridiculed by Athena, rejected by his mother Hera his father Zeus also scorns him. He is a rejected son of the sky father, as these lines from the epic suggest:<sup>37</sup>

Do not sit beside me and whine, you double-faced liar,  
To me you are the most hateful of all gods who hold Olympus.  
Forever quarrelling is dear to your heart, wars and battles.

Zeus commanded that Ares be healed since he was his son. However later in the battle Ares comes face-to-face with Athena and vows to avenge his earlier defeat at the hands of Diomedes which Athena had supported. As he lunges at Athena she lifts a huge boulder and brings him down, standing over him and exclaiming: you did not think even this time how much stronger I can claim I am than you. The war god Ares is not well represented in this war epic. The Greeks favour Athena, a goddess who is more logical and rational, as the patroness of war. Athena's strategy and logic triumph over Ares' irrationalism and lust for battle; rationalism overpowers chaos. To the Greeks, violence was not sanctioned. While the war against the Trojans became idealised by the Greeks it was not their war god who was heroic. In fact he was on the opposite side to the Greeks supporting the Trojans.

Other mythic vignettes also suggest that he is often bound and injured. The giant sons of Poseidon, the Aloidae, declared war on the gods by trying to attack Mount Olympus. However before they did

they captured Ares and interred him in a bronze vessel where he remained for nearly thirteen months until Hermes intervened and released him. Heracles was also responsible for injuring Ares more than once. The second time Ares sided with his son, Cycnus, against Heracles only to be injured by the hero. It was Athena who had to bring him to Olympus to be healed. Early Greek writers seemed to prefer Heracles as a heroic image to Ares. The war god was also unsuccessful at attempting to bring his brother Hephaestus back to Olympus. His brute strength could not persuade Hephaestus to relinquish his place; it took Dionysus to loosen Hephaestus' attachment to his internal hideaway.

Ares is the son of Zeus and Hera and as we have already noted both parents reject him, as they do his brother Hephaestus. Both being rejected by mother, it is interesting to note the two brothers, Ares and Hephaestus, are aligned with Aphrodite in a love triangle exposed in the *Odyssey*. Ares and Aphrodite's passion often exploded in jealous rages. It is often claimed that Ares was the one responsible for killing Aphrodite's lover, Adonis, by enraging a wild boar to attack and kill him. However Aphrodite was also enraged when Ares and Eos, "rosy fingered dawn" became lovers. Blaming Eos for seducing her lover Ares, Aphrodite cursed her to yearn for the beauty of mortal youth. Hence Eos had relationships with many mortal lovers including Orion. But when Eos fell in love with the youthful beauty of the Trojan Tithonus, she pleaded with Zeus to make him immortal and the god granted her wish. However she forgot to also request that his youthfulness remain immortal so Tithonus grew older and decayed.

Ares and Aphrodite had three children. Their daughter Harmonia was married to Cadmus who founded the great dynasty of Thebes, the birthplace of the god Dionysus. Thebes was a special cult place for Ares where a dragon guarded a spring sacred to Ares. Cadmus following the Delphic oracle's advice founded the city of Thebes near this spring, killing the sacred dragon. For this sacrilege he served Ares for eight years and at the end of his slavery married his daughter Harmonia. Their sons Deimos and Phobos (Dread and Alarm or Fear and Terror) were his attendants during the Trojan War as mentioned in the *Iliad*.

Ares' origins are in Thrace, a northern part of Greece considered in antiquity to be wild and uncivilised. Its climate was considered to be severe and fierce and its people warlike, similar to the war-god. However due to the harshness of the climate it was also considered to be the home of Boreas, the North Wind. This was also the home of the Amazons, the race of warrior women Ares was credited with fathering. During the Trojan War Ares took the side of the Trojans at Aphrodite's request, placing him against his mother Hera who supported the Greeks. His daughters the Amazons also fought on the side of the Trojans. Other children fathered by Ares included Eros, Diomedes of Thrace, the keeper of the man-eating mares, Tereus of Thrace, and two of the Argonauts, Ascalaphus and Ialmenus.

The Areopagus or the hill of Ares is on the Athenian Acropolis. It came to be named after Ares, as he was tried by a tribunal of gods there. On this hill was also the famous court known by the same name. The god of war had killed a son of Poseidon (Halirrothius) after he had raped Ares' daughter (Alcippe). Poseidon accused Ares of murder and the tribunal met on the hill, which commemorated this trial. Ares was acquitted of the murder, as the jury found he was saving his own daughter from being violated. Because of this Ares was often referred to as a protector of his own children. Later the famous trial of Orestes takes place there and Orestes was also acquitted of murder.

The *Iliad* also mentions Eris, meaning "strife" as Ares' marching companion and his sister. Eris was also credited with instigating the clash of the three goddesses, Hera, Athena and Aphrodite, when she introduced the golden ball inscribed "to the fairest" at the wedding feast of Peleus and Thetis. Like her brother, Eris was seen as a bringer of conflict and discord. Priapus was sometimes mentioned as a tutor to Ares, linking the ithyphallic fertility god with the war god, connecting the masculine instincts of aggression and sexuality with fertility as the Romans did with their god Mars. It was Hera who

made Priapus tutor the young child Ares in the art of dance before the art of warfare. From Priapus Ares learned to dance first and war later.<sup>38</sup>

Sacred to Ares were the vulture, the boar and the dog. The Spartans sacrificed dogs to Ares, under the epithet of *Enyalios*. The Spartans were one of the few cities to honour Ares. Unlike the other Olympians, Ares had few cults or sanctuaries of worship. The battlefield may have represented his sanctuary. These battlefields were often cultivated land. Hence in Roman myth Ares became aligned with the indigenous agriculture god.

## ENDNOTES

---

<sup>1</sup> *The Second Hymn to Aphrodite*, *The Homeric Hymns*, translated by Charles Boer, Spring Publications (Dallas, TX: 1970), 3-7. Corinth, also a sea place located Aphrodite's precinct high on the Acrocorinth.

<sup>3</sup> From a speech of Hyperides (fr. 205 Jensen) quoted in Mark Golden, *Children and Childhood in Athens*, Johns Hopkins University Press (Baltimore, MD: 1990).

<sup>4</sup> The Hymn to Aphrodite from *The Homeric Hymns*

<sup>5</sup> Hesiod portrays this birth in *Theogony*, translated by Dorothea Wender (Harmondsworth: 1984), 189-199.

<sup>6</sup> Morford and Lenardon, *Classical Mythology 5th Edition*, 128.

<sup>7</sup> G.S. Kirk, *The Iliad: A Commentary Volume II: books 5-8*, Cambridge University Press (Cambridge, 1990), 99.

<sup>8</sup> G. S. Kirk in the introduction to *The Iliad: A Commentary, Volume II*, 6 states: "Aphrodite is pure Sumerian/Akkadian in type and origin; she is Innana and Ishtar, Canaanite Anath, the love-goddess, down graded by the Greeks from her aspect of "queen of heaven"

<sup>9</sup> Boedeker, Deborah Dickmann, *Aphrodite's Entry Into Greek Epic* (The Netherlands: 1974), 34 states: "...the motif of shame which in epic poetry is frequently attributed to characters under the influence of sexual desire."

<sup>10</sup> Arthur, M., "The Divided World of Iliad VI" *Reflections of Women in Antiquity*, edited by Helene Foley (New York, 1981), 24.

<sup>11</sup> Homer, *The Iliad of Homer*, translated by Richmond Lattimore, University of Chicago (Chicago, 1961), 5.348-351. While there are many translations of the *Iliad*, Lattimore's is most frequently cited. In most cases the translation quoted in the text will be this one.

<sup>12</sup> *Iliad*, 5.428-430.

<sup>13</sup> Cyprus was where Aphrodite floated to after her birth from the sea according to Hesiod. Homer also refers to the island in the *Odyssey* as the place Aphrodite takes refuge after being humiliated (*Odyssey*, 8:362-4). For further elaboration on the use of Aphrodite as "Kyprosö see discussion on page 94-96 of *The Iliad: A Commentary, Volume II*.

<sup>14</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, 20.106. Apollo is enthusing Aeneas into battle against Achilles, stating his birth is from the Olympian daughter of Zeus, Aphrodite, but Achilles is born from "a lesser goddess."

<sup>15</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, 14.199. Hera lies to Aphrodite about her purpose in obtaining the magic girdle.

<sup>16</sup> In the *Iliad* Hephaestus is married to Charis, one of the Graces. *Iliad* 18.382-3.

- 
- <sup>17</sup> Zeitlin, Froma, "Figuring Fidelity in Homer's *Odyssey*", from *The Distaff Side: Representing the Female in Homer's Odyssey* (Oxford, 1995), 128.
- <sup>18</sup> Homer, *The Odyssey of Homer*, translated by Richmond Lattimore, Harper Collins (New York, NY: 1967), 8.298.
- <sup>19</sup> C. Kerényi, *The Gods of the Greeks*, Thames and Hudson (London: 1951), 181.
- <sup>20</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, 5.889-891.
- <sup>21</sup> The shade of Agamemnon tells Odysseus of Cassandra's murder in *Odyssey* 11:419-23.
- <sup>22</sup> G.S. Kirk, *The Nature of Greek Myths*, Penguin Books (London: 1990), 13.
- <sup>23</sup> The Hymn to Aphrodite from *The Homeric Hymns*.
- <sup>24</sup> Adonis is often suggested as the prototype for classical male beauty.
- <sup>25</sup> Euripides, *Hippolytus*, translated by Philip Vellacott, Penguin Books (London: 1987), lines 1-6.
- <sup>26</sup> Euripides, *Hippolytus*, 1281-1284.
- <sup>27</sup> Fragment of an ode composed by Pindar for Xenophon of Corinth for his contribution of 100 slaves to the temple of Aphrodite. See J.B. Salmon, *Wealthy Corinth*, Clarendon Press (Oxford: 1984), 398.
- <sup>28</sup> Sacred prostitution may have also been practiced on the island of Cythera, the Aegean birthplace suggested by Hesiod.
- <sup>29</sup> References to archaeological finds from C. K. Williams II, "Corinth and the Cult of Aphrodite", *Pre-Roman Cults in the Area of the Forum of Ancient Corinth*, Corinth, 1974: Forum Southwest; Agnes N. Stillwell, *Corinth, Volume XV, Part I The Potter's Quarters*.
- <sup>30</sup> Mary Ellen Carr Soles, *Aphrodite at Corinth: A Study of the Sculptural Types*. 3: "The earliest representations which are identified as possible Aphrodite are in fact more likely to be Astarte or her Near Eastern counterparts."
- <sup>31</sup> Sabatino Moscati, *The Phoenicians*, Bompiani (Milan: 1988), 136 states "there had been a Phoenician trading station in Corinth for many years and the Corinthians may well have taken their inspiration from the Phoenician ships. Aphrodite was a guardian for the Phoenician sailors and she may have well arrived in Corinth via the Phoenician trade routes."
- <sup>32</sup> Eva C. Keuls, *The Reign of the Phallus*, University of California Press (Berkeley, CA: 1985), 155.
- <sup>33</sup> Bonnie MacLachlan, "Sacred Prostitution and Aphrodite", *Studies in Greek Religion*, 21/2:1992. 158. MacLachlan suggests this reputation "allowed them to live so comfortably."
- <sup>34</sup> Sabatino Moscati, *The Phoenicians*, 118.
- <sup>35</sup> J. G. O'Neill. *Ancient Corinth* (Baltimore: 1930), 101.
- <sup>36</sup> Homeric Hymn to Ares from *The Homeric Hymns*.
- <sup>37</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, 5.889-891.
- <sup>38</sup> C. Kerényi, *The Gods of the Greeks*, 176.