

①

## HYMN TO APHRODITE

↑ Muse, sing to me the deeds of golden Aphrodite  
of Cyprus,<sup>o</sup> who roused sweet longing in the gods  
and overwhelmed the tribes of mortal men  
and the birds of the air and all the beasts,  
as many as the land nourishes and the sea; 5  
for the deeds of fair-wreathed Kytherea<sup>o</sup> are a care to all. ]

But three minds she cannot persuade or deceive:<sup>o</sup>

1 The "deeds of Aphrodite" refer not just to her actions, but also to the goddess' sphere of influence: sexual love. The same Greek word (*ergon*) is used often of a god's domain, e.g. in line 10 where it describes war as the "work of Ares" and again in lines 11 and 15 of Athena's patronage of handicraft.

Unlike the other hymns which open with a focus on the deity, this hymn announces that its subject will be the goddess' domain: sex. Because we know that a hymn celebrates the power of the god or goddess it praises, we expect an account of how Aphrodite influences others to fall in love. What we get, however, is the story of her own helpless submission to the powers of love and passion. See also 7-33n. below.

2 Aphrodite's connection with Cyprus in myth stems from the story of her birth in the sea-foam which carried her to shore on that island; see h. 6.5n. For this reason her most common epithet in early poetry is *Cypris*. Her cult associations with the island are equally strong: a temple to her was built at Paphos, on the western end of Cyprus in the 12th c. BC, and another was added in the archaic period. The origin of the goddess and her cult is not known, although she seems to be associated with the Phoenician goddess, Ishtar-Astarte, whose worship on the island of Cyprus was established at least by the end of the 9th century.

6 *Kytherea* is another common name for Aphrodite. According to Hesiod's account of her birth (*Th.* 188-200), she floated by the island of Kythera (just off the southern coast of the Peloponnese, see Maps 1, 2) before coming ashore on Cyprus. Kythera was also the site of one of her oldest shrines, perhaps founded by Phoenicians.

7-33 In a nice ring composition, the poet singles out the only three deities who are immune to Aphrodite's power: Athena (8-15), Artemis (16-20), and Hestia (21-32). Just as line 7 introduces this section, line 33 will repeat "she cannot persuade the minds of these [three goddesses]." This section on the three virgin goddesses helps to define Aphrodite through her contrast

the daughter of aegis-bearing Zeus, grey-eyed Athena;  
for the deeds of golden Aphrodite do not bring her joy,  
but wars are pleasing to her, and the work of Ares, 10  
and battle songs and preparing glorious deeds.

She first taught earth-dwelling craftsmen  
to make carriages and chariots intricately worked with bronze;  
and the soft-skinned maidens in the halls  
she taught glorious deeds, by placing skill in the minds of each. 15

Nor does laughter-loving<sup>o</sup> Aphrodite ever tame in love  
loud-crying Artemis of the golden bow.  
For bow and arrows are her joy and slaying wild beasts in the mountains,  
and lyres and choruses and piercing cries  
and shady groves and the city of righteous men. 20

Nor do the deeds of Aphrodite bring joy to the reverent maiden,  
Hestia,<sup>o</sup> whom crafty-minded Kronos<sup>o</sup> begot first,  
and also the last born, by the plan of Zeus who bears the aegis,

with them. At the same time it refines a theme introduced in lines 2-3, which stress her power over all creatures, both mortal and immortal. There the poet tells us she "overwhelms" her subjects by "rousing sweet desire" in them. In line 7 we learn that the fulfillment of love's passion comes not through force, but by the gentler arts of persuasion and even deception. Throughout the hymn and elsewhere in Greek poetry, Aphrodite and the love she inspires are consistently described in terms of seduction, sweetness, and joy. Thus when these very charms are turned against the goddess by Zeus in the story of this hymn, there is no sense of outrage at an unwanted conquest. The delights of love are simply so great that not even the goddess who is said to control them can resist their persuasion. And so, after all, it is fitting that the hymnist has chosen the more powerful of the two as his subject.

16 "Laughter-loving" is one of Aphrodite's most common epithets in early epic (*Il.* 3.424, *Od.* 6.362). Hesiod plays with the similar sound of the roots for "laughter" *meid* and "genitals" *medea* to link this epithet with the story of Aphrodite's birth (*Th.* 200); see introductory note.

22-23 In Hesiod's account (*Th.* 454) Hestia is the eldest daughter of Kronos and Rhea and is immediately swallowed by Kronos, who subjects each of his newborn children to this fate in an effort to avoid being deposed by one of them, as a prophecy has foretold. However, Rhea deceives him at Zeus' birth by substituting for the infant a stone which Kronos swallows in ignorance. Zeus then grows up to overthrow Kronos and force him to disgorge the rest of his offspring in reverse order of their birth, beginning with the stone he had swallowed last (*Th.* 493-497) and ending with his first-born, Hestia. She thus becomes his last-born and youngest child, although begotten first. See genealogical chart.

22 It is likely that Kronos' epithet *ankulometes*, "crafty-minded," originally meant Kronos "of the curved sickle," in reference to his castration of

an august goddess, whom Poseidon and Apollo courted,  
 but she was altogether unwilling and steadfastly refused. 25  
 She touched the head of father Zeus,<sup>o</sup> the aegis-bearer,  
 and swore a great oath which was fulfilled  
 that she would be a virgin all her days, shining among goddesses.  
 And father Zeus granted her a noble prize of honor in place of  
 marriage  
 and so she sat in the middle of the house,<sup>o</sup> having chosen the richest  
 prize. 30  
 In all the temples of the gods she is the holder of honor<sup>o</sup>  
 and among all mortals she is honored as the eldest of the gods.  
 Of these [three goddesses] she cannot persuade their minds nor  
 deceive them.  
 But for the rest there is no escaping Aphrodite,  
 neither for blessed gods nor mortal men. 35  
 She even led astray the mind of Zeus who delights in the  
 thunderbolt,<sup>o</sup>  
 he who is the greatest and has the greatest share of honor.

Ouranos. Hesiod's application of the epithet to Prometheus, however, shows that the sense "of the bent mind" (*mêtis*) was already understood by his time.

- 26 One of Zeus' common epithets as the supreme ruler is "father of gods and men," but the abbreviated version which appears here, "father Zeus," is also common (e.g. h. *Dem.* 321, h. *Ap.* 307, h. *H.* 368). On the aegis see h. *H.* 183n.
- 30 Hestia was the goddess of the hearth, which was placed in the center of each house and was the focal point of daily worship in the home. As the next line implies, each temple also had a hearth on which sacrifices could be made, so Hestia held a share of honor in the sanctuaries of all the gods as well. For the Romans, Hestia became the goddess Vesta, whose temple was cared for by the Vestal Virgins. See h. 29.
- 31 The Greek adjective (*timaochos*) appears only here and at h. *Dem.* 268. Other similar correspondences between the poems suggest the Aphrodite hymn influenced that to Demeter.
- 36 Anyone familiar with Greek mythology and Zeus' long list of extramarital affairs will not think this a great feat but, at least theoretically, the praise of Aphrodite's power is enhanced by her control over the king of all gods and men. A partial catalogue of his affairs is given to Hera by Zeus himself at *Il.* 14.315-328. Lines 40-45 here are given over to praise of Hera, as if to forestall any jealousy on her part. Hera is described as the most beautiful of the goddesses in a physical sense (41), but in spite of her beauty it is Aphrodite who has the more powerful seductive charm. In Homer these attributes are symbolized by an embroidered band of Aphrodite's clothing which Hera borrows at *Il.* 14.214-223 when she wishes to seduce Zeus herself.

And, whenever she wished, deceiving his wise mind,  
 she easily mated him with mortal women,  
 making him completely forget Hera, his sister and wife, 40  
 who is by far the best in form among the immortal goddesses,  
 and the most glorious child born to crafty-minded Kronos  
 and mother Rhea. And Zeus, who knows imperishable plans,  
 made her his revered, devoted wife.

2

But even in the heart of Aphrodite herself Zeus cast sweet longing 45  
 to make love with a mortal man, so that soon  
 not even she would be kept from the bed of a mortal  
 and so that one day, boasting among all the gods, laughing sweetly,  
 she would not tell how laughter-loving Aphrodite  
 had mated gods to mortal women, 50  
 and they had borne mortal sons to the immortals,  
 and how she had mated goddesses to mortal men.

So he cast in her heart sweet longing for Anchises,<sup>o</sup>  
 who, at that time, like the immortals in build, was tending cattle  
 on the lofty peaks of Mt. Ida rich in springs.<sup>o</sup> 55  
 Then indeed, seeing him, laughter-loving Aphrodite  
 was struck with love, and astounding desire seized her heart.

To Cyprus she went and entered her fragrant temple  
 at Paphos where her sacred precinct was and her fragrant altar.  
 There she went inside and shut the gleaming doors.<sup>o</sup> 60

- 53 Anchises was a Trojan prince descended from king Tros (cf. line 208), who gave his name to the city of Troy and its people. Anchises, a cousin of the Trojan king Priam, is important in mythology chiefly as the father of Aeneas, and is best known from this myth and Vergil's *Aeneid*.
- 55 Mt. Ida is located southeast of the city of Troy in Asia Minor (see Map 1). It is also the site of another famous seduction scene, in which Hera deceives and seduces Zeus in order to distract him from the gods' meddling on the battlefield at Troy. That story, told at *Il.* 14.153-360, is similar to this hymn in many respects, and worth reading in its own right.
- 60-63 In early epic a typical prelude to battle is the scene of a warrior arming himself. This scene is of exactly the same type, as Aphrodite literally arms herself for love. Cf. *Il.* 14.169-186, and h. 6.5-13. In this case the remaining description of Aphrodite's appearance is delayed until lines 86-90 when we see her through the eyes of Anchises. See also h. *Aph.* 89n.

And the Graces<sup>o</sup> bathed her and anointed her  
with ambrosial olive oil, such as is poured over the gods who are for-  
ever,

divinely sweet, which was made fragrant for her.<sup>o</sup>  
Having clothed herself well in all her beautiful robes  
adorned with gold, laughter-loving Aphrodite 65  
hastened to Troy, leaving behind sweet-smelling Cyprus,  
swiftly making her way high up among the clouds.

She came to Ida rich in springs, mother of beasts,  
and went straight to the shepherd's hut across the mountain.  
And fawning after her leapt grey wolves and flashing-eyed lions, 70  
bears and swift leopards hungry for deer.  
Seeing them she rejoiced in her heart  
and cast longing in their breasts, and together they all  
lay down in pairs in their shadowy lairs.<sup>o</sup>

But she herself came to the well-built shelters 75  
and found him left alone at the huts by the others,  
Anchises, the hero, who had beauty from the gods.  
All the others followed their cattle along the grassy pastures,  
but he, left alone at the huts by the others,  
was walking here and there playing clearly on the lyre. 80  
Aphrodite, the daughter of Zeus, stood in front of him  
like an unmarried maiden in form and stature,  
so that he would not be afraid when he saw her with his eyes.  
And Anchises looking, saw her and marveled  
at her form and stature and shining clothes.<sup>o</sup> 85

61 The Graces (*Charites*) were the three daughters of Zeus and Eurynome (a daughter of Okeanos): *Aglaia* ("Splendor"), *Euphrosyne* ("Happiness"), and *Thalia* ("Good Cheer"). They, along with the *Horai* ("Seasons"), were frequent attendants of Aphrodite. Cf. h. 6.5.

63 The olive oil mentioned here was made fragrant with aromatics such as rose and sage so that it acted as a perfume. Hera too uses perfumed oil as she prepares to meet Zeus (*Il.* 14.171-174). Oil was not only rubbed on the skin and hair (cf. h. 24.3n), but seems to have been used on clothing as well (cf. 85n. below).

70-74 Aphrodite's power over animals, mentioned in lines 4-5, is illustrated here where the presence of the goddess causes them to mate. Lucretius, in *De Rerum Natura* 1.10-20, describes a similar scene to illustrate the spell cast by the goddess Venus over all creatures and the fertility she brings to the earth. Cf. also Kirke in *Odyssey* 10.

85 The adjective translated here as "shining" is a standard epithet for clothes (also at 164; cf. *Il.* 3.419 for a similar phrase), and has puzzled

For she wore a robe more brilliant than the bright light of fire,  
and she had on spiral bracelets and bright earrings  
and around her soft neck were beautiful necklaces,  
lovely, golden, intricately worked. Like the moon<sup>o</sup>  
a radiance shone around her soft breasts, a wonder to see. 90

Desire seized Anchises and he spoke to her,  
"Hail lady,<sup>o</sup> whoever of the blessed gods you are, who has come to  
this house,  
Artemis or Leto or golden Aphrodite  
or well-born Themis or grey-eyed Athena  
or perhaps one of the Graces come here, who are companions 95  
to all the gods and are called immortal,  
or one of the nymphs who live in the beautiful woods  
or the nymphs who inhabit this beautiful mountain  
and the springs of its rivers and the grassy meadows.  
For you on a mountain peak, in a place visible from all around, 100  
I will make an altar, and I will offer fair sacrifices  
in all seasons. And you, keeping a kindly spirit,  
grant that among the Trojans I may be a distinguished man

many readers of the Homeric poems. The best explanation is that the olive oil used in the manufacture of wool and linen (to soften and perfume the cloth) caused a glossy appearance. Evidence for this idea is contained in several different sources, including Linear B tablets which list allotments of oil to weavers and finishers, (one even designates "oil to Potnia [a goddess] as unguent for cloth"), Homer (*Il.* 18.596-597, of chitons "dripping with oil," *Od.* 7. 105-107, of oil dripping from cloth as it is woven), and even a Middle Bronze Age tablet from Mari (Syria) which talks explicitly of "[sesame] oil to make cloth shine." See further in C. W. Shelmerdine, "Shining and Fragrant Cloth in Homer," in J. Carter and S. Morris eds., *The Ages of Homer* (Austin 1995).

89 A Sumerian hymn describes the goddess Inanna also appearing to her lover "like the light of the moon." The same hymn, which includes an account of Inanna's preparations (bathing, anointing, dressing, putting on jewelry) provides an ancient parallel for the ornaments worn by Aphrodite in her seduction scenes.

92-106 When Odysseus first sees Nausikaä in the *Odyssey* (6.149-154), he too begins his speech by comparing her to a goddess. But the bulk of the address makes clear that he wishes to flatter her and knows full well that she is a mortal. Anchises, on the other hand, seems genuinely awe-struck by the beauty of the young woman before him, and addresses her as a goddess throughout his speech. Not knowing exactly which goddess she is and not wishing to offend, he carefully lists all the likely candidates, then offers to build her an altar, and closes with a prayer that he live to a ripe old age, blessed with successful offspring and

and make my offspring flourish in the future. But for myself let me  
live well for a long time and see the light of the sun 105  
blessed among my people and reach the threshold of old age." ②

Then Aphrodite, the daughter of Zeus, answered him,<sup>o</sup>  
"Anchises, most glorious of men born on the earth,  
I am not a god. Why do you compare me to the immortals?  
I am mortal, and the mother who bore me was a woman. 110  
Otreus is my father, a glorious name, if you have perhaps heard it,  
who is lord of all well-fortified Phrygia. ③  
Your language and my own I know well,  
for a Trojan nurse reared me in my house. She took me  
from my dear mother as a small child and raised me. 115  
So indeed I know your language well too. ]  
But now Argeiphontes of the golden staff snatched me up  
from the dance of loud-crying Artemis of the golden bow.<sup>o</sup>  
There were many of us nymphs and much-courted<sup>o</sup> maidens  
dancing, and a boundless company circled around us. 120

honored among his people. This offer and his final prayer betray  
Anchises' fear that, having seen her, he may have offended the deity and  
put his life at risk.

Aphrodite's divine beauty and sexual appeal shine through her disguise  
here, just as at *Iliad* 3.396-399 where Helen recognizes the goddess despite  
her appearance as an old woman. Cf. h. *Dem.* 188-189 where the disguised  
Demeter nonetheless shows flashes of her divinity.

107-142 Although Anchises has already been captivated by her beauty,  
Aphrodite uses both persuasion and deception (cf. line 7) in this speech to  
seduce him. According to her story, not only is she a virgin born to noble  
parents who will pay a fine dowry, but even the gods have decreed that  
Anchises take her as his wife. Her lying tale contains just enough detail  
(e.g. her father's name, the reason she can speak Anchises' language —  
see below) to be convincing, and is typical of other such tales in early epic.  
Cf. the lying tales of Odysseus in the *Odyssey*. For lies by other deities, see  
the hymns to Demeter and to Hermes

112-116 Phrygia was an area of Asia Minor to the west and north of Troy (see  
Map 1), and their king Otreus fought with Priam, king of Troy, against the  
Amazons (*Il.* 3.184-189). We know from *Iliad* 4. 437-438 that those fighting  
at Troy did not share a common language, and Aphrodite embellishes her  
outright lie here with the believable detail that she learned the Trojan  
tongue from her nurse.

117-118 On Argeiphontes (= Hermes see h. *H.* 73n. For the theme of girls  
abducted while dancing see h. *Dem.* 5n.

119 The epithet's literal meaning, "earning oxen," refers to the bride price a  
suitor would pay to the parents of his chosen wife. This phrase establishes  
her as a maiden ready for marriage (like Nausikaä in the *Odyssey*) and  
looks ahead to her (supposed) concern for the proper performance of the  
marriage rites (131-141).

Then Argeiphontes of the golden staff snatched me,  
and led me over many fields of mortal men,  
many poor and untilled, through which wild beasts,  
eaters of raw flesh, roam along their shadowy haunts,  
and I did not think I would touch the life-giving earth  
with my feet. 125

He kept saying that in the bed of Anchises I would be called  
your wedded wife, and that I would bear you glorious children.  
But when indeed he had explained and told me this, again  
the strong Argeiphontes went away among the tribes of  
the immortals.

So I have come to you, and a strong compulsion is upon me. 130  
I beg you, by Zeus and by your parents,  
noble people, (for base ones would not have borne such a son),  
take me untouched and inexperienced in love  
and show me to your father and devoted mother  
and to your brothers who were born from the same womb. 135  
I will not be an unfitting daughter- or sister-in-law for them, but a  
seemly one.

Send a messenger quickly to the Phrygians with their swift horses  
to tell my father and my worried mother.  
And if you do, they will send abundant gold and woven clothing,  
and you accept their many splendid dowry gifts! 140  
And after you have done these things, arrange a lovely wedding feast  
held in honor by men and immortal gods."

Speaking thus the goddess cast sweet longing in his heart.  
And desire took hold of Anchises and he said,  
"If you are mortal and a mortal woman was your mother,<sup>o</sup> 145  
and Otreus is your father, a glorious name, as you say,  
and if you have come here by the grace of the immortal guide,  
Hermes, and you are to be called my wife forever after,  
then no one of the gods or of mortal men  
will restrain me until I have made love with you here 150  
now at once; not even if the far-shooter himself, Apollo,

145-154 Like Hermes who insists (*Od.* 8.339-342) he would gladly endure the  
public ridicule of all the gods watching if only he could share  
Aphrodite's bed, Anchises too is willing to pay any price for a moment  
of love with the woman before him. Not realizing that it is he who is  
being seduced, an eager Anchises now seeks to persuade the  
"innocent" Aphrodite to sleep with him right away, since they are to  
be married anyhow! And Aphrodite continues her deception by  
"allowing" him to lead her to his bed and disrobe her.

should shoot his painful arrows from his silver bow.  
 Then I would be willing, lady like the gods,  
 after I have entered your bed, to go into the house of Hades."  
 So speaking he took her hand, and laughter-loving Aphrodite 155  
 turned, her beautiful eyes cast down, and went  
 to the well-covered bed, which was already spread  
 with soft coverings for its lord. And upon it  
 lay the hides of bears and loud-roaring lions  
 which he himself had killed on the high mountains. 160  
 Then when they had climbed onto the well-made bed,  
 Anchises first took from her skin the gleaming jewelry,  
 the pins and spiral bracelets and earrings and necklaces.  
 And he loosened her belt and took off her shining robes  
 and placed them on a silver-studded chair. 165  
 Then by the will of the gods and by destiny,  
 he lay beside the immortal goddess, a mortal, not knowing clearly  
 what he did.  
 But at the time when shepherds turn their cattle and well-grown  
 sheep  
 back to the fold from the flowering pastures,  
 then she poured on Anchises sweet, refreshing 170  
 sleep, but she herself put on her beautiful clothes.  
 And when she was fully clothed the shining goddess  
 stood in the hut and her head touched  
 the well-made roof-beam,<sup>o</sup> and from her cheeks shone  
 an immortal beauty, the sort which belongs to fair-wreathed  
 Kytherea 175  
 And she woke him from his sleep and said,  
 "Up, son of Dardanos.<sup>o</sup> Why do you sleep so soundly?  
 And consider if I seem to be the same  
 as when you first saw me with your eyes."  
 So she spoke and he, from his sleep, reacted quickly. 180  
 But when he saw the neck and beautiful eyes of Aphrodite  
 he was afraid and turned his eyes aside in another direction.  
 Then he covered his noble face with his cloak

173-174 For this characteristic description of the goddess' epiphany cf. h. Dem. 189n.

177 The phrase "son of" here is used loosely to mean "descendant of," since Anchises was actually the great-great-grandson of Dardanos. Dardanos, a son of Zeus by a mortal woman, was the founder of the Trojan line which took its name from Dardanos' son, Tros (cf. 53n.).

and spoke winged words<sup>o</sup> begging her,  
 "The first minute I saw you with my eyes, goddess, 185  
 I knew you were a god. But you did not tell the truth.  
 By Zeus who bears the aegis I beg you, (4)  
 do not let me live without strength among men  
 but have pity, since the man is not strong  
 who sleeps with immortal goddesses."<sup>o</sup> 190  
 Then Aphrodite, daughter of Zeus, answered him,  
 "Anchises, most noble of mortal men,  
 have courage and do not fear too much in your heart.  
 For you should have no fear that you will suffer harm from me  
 or from the other blessed ones, since you are dear to the gods. 195  
 You will have a dear son who will be a lord among the Trojans  
 and children will continue to be born to children.  
 And his name will be Aeneas, since dreadful  
 grief held me because I fell into the bed of a mortal man.<sup>o</sup>  
 But among mortal men those of your race 200  
 have always been especially close to the gods in form and stature.

#### Indeed Zeus the deviser snatched up golden-haired Ganymede

184 The meaning of this common Homeric formula, "s/he spoke winged/feathered words" (appearing 55 times in the *Iliad* and 60 times in the *Odyssey*), has been the subject of much debate. The image probably comes from that of an arrow which flies straight because of its feathers. Thus, words once spoken move through the air from speaker to hearer like an arrow. Some scholars see instead the metaphor of a bird flying rapidly through the air.

187-190 Anchises has (at least) two reasons to fear the consequences of his passion. The language here suggests that he fears Aphrodite will make him impotent. In addition, recalling his challenge to fight any god who stood in his way (149-154), Anchises may also fear retribution for *hubris* (cf. h. Ap. 67n, 541n). Greek mythology is full of examples of mortal lovers of an immortal who are punished, either for their *hubris* (e.g. Tityos, Ixion), or through the jealousy of another god (e.g. Semele). Since Aphrodite was, in fact, the seducer in this case, Anchises has no need to fear. Cf. also Odysseus' caution when Kirke invites him into her bed (*Od.* 10.333-344).

198-199 The poet puns on the name "Aeneas" here by connecting it to the Greek word meaning "dread" (*ainos*). In a conventional ring-composition, the hymnist returns to the theme of Aphrodite's grief (247) after giving the examples of Ganymede and Tithonos which follow. On Aphrodite's grief over this affair, see the introduction to this hymn.

202-217 According to the *Iliad* (5.265-66; 20.230-235) Ganymede, the son of