

Aphrodite the Phrygian Princess in the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite*

In this paper I propose to explain why the goddess Aphrodite presents herself as a Phrygian princess in the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite*. When Aphrodite first appears to the Trojan prince Anchises, she is hailed by him as a goddess (91-106). She claims, however, that she is no goddess, but rather a human woman: and no ordinary woman, but in fact the daughter of Otreus, the king of Phrygia (107-112). The poet's decision to have Aphrodite identify herself as a Phrygian princess has been greeted with puzzlement in scholarship on the hymn (including the two major recent commentaries, Faulkner 2008 and Olson 2012). Most interpretive efforts have focused on the Phrygian king whom Aphrodite identifies as her father, where scholars have been stymied by the seeming contradiction between his epithet ὀνομάκλυτος, "of famous name" (111) and his extremely limited attestation elsewhere in archaic epic: only at *Il.* 3.186. Attempts to account for Aphrodite's disguise have largely been limited to suggestions that an intertextual reference is being made by the poet to the passage of the *Iliad* where Otreus is mentioned—but scholars have been unable to offer a convincing explanation for what might motivate such an intertext here (Allen, Halliday, and Sikes 1936; van der Ben 1986; Faulkner 2008; Brillet-Dubois 2011; Olson 2012). Aphrodite's choice to identify herself as a Phrygian princess has thus defied explanation.

I elucidate the poet's choice to have Aphrodite present herself as a Phrygian princess by showing that it can be contextualized in mythological traditions of the Archaic Troad. I do so by bringing to bear a precedent that has gone entirely unremarked upon in scholarship on this passage: both Priam and his father Laomedon are said to have married, and had children with, daughters of a Phrygian king (Ps.-Apollod. 3.12.3, *Il.* 16.717-19). I argue that by having Aphrodite represent herself to Anchises as a princess of Phrygia, the poet of the *Hymn* invokes this tradition and makes the Trojan Anchises a participant in this feature of Trojan royalty. By representing the union of Anchises and Aphrodite as a "royal marriage" between Troy and Phrygia, the poet aligns Anchises, a member of the "cadet" branch of the Trojan royal family, with those male members of the family

in the main line of royal inheritance. While Aphrodite's self-representation to Anchises is usually called a "disguise," I propose that we should think of it instead as a technique by which the poet is able to represent the mother of Aeneas as, in the same poem, both the goddess Aphrodite and a princess of Phrygia. We can understand this choice on the part of the poet as a skillful synthesis of traditional elements of local mythology.

I thus propose, in the first place, a solution to the longstanding question of Aphrodite's choice of self-representation to Anchises: Phrygian princesses are traditional brides of Trojan princes. What my argument reveals, furthermore, is that the poet of the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* is engaged in a more complex and original synthesis of Trojan mythological traditions than has previously been recognized.

Works Cited

- Allen, T.W., W.R. Halliday, and E.E. Sikes, eds. 1936. *The Homeric Hymns*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Brillet-Dubois, Pascale. 2011. "An Erotic *Aristeia*: The *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* and its Relation to the Iliadic Tradition." In A. Faulkner, ed. *The Homeric Hymns: Interpretive Essays*, 105-132. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Faulker, A. *The Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite: Introduction, Text, and Commentary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Olson, S.D. 2012. *The "Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite" and Related Texts: Text, Translation and Commentary*. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- van der Ben, Nicolaas. 1986. "Hymn to Aphrodite 36–291: Notes on the *pars epica* of the Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite." *Mnemosyne* 39:1–41.