

Joyless Mirth: The Timai of Laughter-Loving Aphrodite

Although the goddess Aphrodite is a ubiquitous and well-known figure in ancient literature, there is a long-standing misconception vis-à-vis the goddess and her sphere of influence that still shapes the way in which readers understand her. That is, Aphrodite's *timai* are often seen as limited to the realm of sex and desire. Without a doubt, Aphrodite was closely linked to *eros*. In recent years, however, scholars have begun to reassess this characterization, realizing that Aphrodite's sphere of influence was more complex than originally recognized. Gabriella Pironti and Vinciane Pirenne-Delforge, for instance, have both explored Aphrodite's ties to Ares and martial combat and, in doing so, have started to expand and deepen our understanding of this goddess and her role within the divine hierarchy (Pironti 2007, 2010; Pirenne-Delforge 2010).

This paper contributes to this recent scholarly development by focusing on the epithet φιλομμειδής, or “laughter-loving,” analyzing not only its meaning but also the larger context in which it occurs. Among the various epithets of Aphrodite, φιλομμειδής has perhaps received the most scrutiny. Deborah Boedeker, for instance, devotes much attention to this characterization of the goddess, concluding that φιλομμειδής is directly linked to Aphrodite's appearance in epic and that it often appears within an erotic context, a position maintained by G.S. Kirk (Boedeker 1974; Kirk 1985, 1990).

Boedeker, however, limits her treatment of φιλομμειδής to its erotic aspects and does not explore the possibility of other connotations; likewise, in their exploration of Aphrodite's non-erotic functions, Pironti and Pirenne-Delforge fail to examine and employ the goddess' epithets as evidence for their arguments. Through examining the use of the epithet φιλομμειδής in Homeric epic and the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* (5), I expand our view of the epithet's

significance by demonstrating that the most salient element of the passages in which φιλομμειδής occurs is not *eros* but, rather, power: the appearance of φιλομμειδής highlights crucial moments in the texts that mark a notable shift in Aphrodite's *timai*. Ultimately, the emphasis on Aphrodite's changing sphere of influence signaled by φιλομμειδής reinforces and enhances our understanding of the larger themes of each poem as a whole. Likewise, the use of this epithet also challenges and broadens our previous understanding of the goddess and her *timai*. The epithet φιλομμειδής therefore serves as a tool which these poets employ not simply to satisfy metrical requirements but also to communicate to their audiences ideas indispensable to their overall narratives.

Bibliography

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