

Homer's Aphrodite: How to Create a Greek Goddess

As a Greek goddess, Aphrodite is a wild-card: the etymology of her name is undetermined, her geographic origin is questionable, and there are even different versions of her parentage. She shares the traits of a plethora of Eastern deities including Ishtar, Astarte, Mithras, and the Vedic goddess Uṣas (Edwards 1990, Budin 2004, Young 2005). In this paper, I discuss the goddess Aphrodite and her role leading up to and within Homer's *Iliad*. I examine prevalent near Eastern traditions which Homer uses in conjunction with Aphrodite as well as Vedic traditions and symbolism particularly within the relationships of Helen, Aphrodite and Paris (Suter 1987).

The ambiguity within Aphrodite's character comes from the fact that the Greeks' Aphrodite evolved in Eastern religions and entered Greek tradition with an amalgam of characteristics and foreign traditions behind her (Boedeker 1974). Because of this, the Aphrodite of Greek mythology is a combination of multiple Eastern deities who became syncretised into a singular Greek being.

In the time of Homer, the deity Aphrodite would have contained haphazard qualities and histories of multiple Eastern deities; however, her connection to marriage and close-knit relationship with war would have placed her in an important role in Greek worship and society. I propose that *Iliad's* character Aphrodite is the poet's method of stabilizing the goddess and formally introducing her into the Greek pantheon in a uniform and standardizing way. In that respect, I propose that Homer actually created the Aphrodite of the *Iliad* and the Aphrodite who became known to Greece as a whole.

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