

Lucian, Homer, and 'Golden Aphrodite'

The study of the reception of Aphrodite in Greek Imperial prose literature has generally been restricted to the novel (Dowden 2010, 366), where the goddess naturally comes to the fore (although even here she takes a prominent role only in Chariton's *Callirhoe* and in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* (as Venus, in the embedded tale of Cupid and Psyche), and to antiquarian works, such as Pausanias' *Description of Greece* and Athenaeus' *Deipnosophists*, which provide a wealth of detail about the cults, rituals, and other lore concerning the goddess (Pirenne-Delforge 1994). Among the more mainstream authors of the 'Second Sophistic', however, Aphrodite is not especially conspicuous -- even works on love, like Plutarch's *Amatorius*, tend to focus rather on the divinity *Erôs*. The one exception among Imperial Greek writers is the focus of this paper: Lucian, who mentions Aphrodite far more than any other non-novelistic author of his era. He depicts Aphrodite a number of times in his satirical pieces on the gods (cf. Branham 1989, ch. 2; Lanza 2004), notably in his *Dialogues of the Gods* (17, 19-21, 23), *The Judgement of the Goddesses*, and *Zeus Rants* (Iupp. trag.), and Aphrodite is a primary reference point in his encomiastic dialogues *Imagines* and *Pro imaginibus*.

In this paper, I use Lucian to shed light on the attitude toward Aphrodite among the *pepaideumenoï* under the Empire, noting his persistent interest, shared by other authors, in Homer's 'comic' presentation of the goddess (e.g., the marriage with Hephaestus and the adulterous affair with Ares, the wounding by Diomedes, and the 'cyclic' Judgment of Paris). But Lucian's dialogues also include discussions of episodes, such as the encounter with Anchises, the abduction of Ganymede, and the 'immunity' enjoyed by Athena and Artemis, that are treated in the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite*, a poem generally ignored in Imperial prose literature. Finally, in the two dialogues devoted to praising Panthea, the consort of the emperor Lucius Verus,

Lucian invokes both Homer, repeatedly comparing her beauty to that of Homer's 'golden' Aphrodite, and Praxiteles' famous statue of the goddess at Cnidus (Bretzigheimer 1992; Cistaro 2009). I go over Lucian's arguments concerning beauty, artistic representation, and the divine in detail in order to demonstrate the importance of Aphrodite and her literary and sculptural portraits to Lucian's conception of art, and to better understand the spoofing of such pretensions in *Zeus Rants*, where he touches on similar themes. I conclude with a brief look at the *Amores* falsely attributed to Lucian (on which, see recently Haynes 2013) to demonstrate how differently Aphrodite is treated by the author of that text.

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