ON THE WINGS OF LOVE

MARINUS A. VAN DER SLUIJS

Abstract

A single passage in Hesiod's *Theogony* describes Aphrodite's abduction of Phaethon. At first glance, this Phaethon appears to have little in common with his namesake, who famously rode the chariot of the sun god for a day. Accordingly, various reputable scholars have treated them as two unrelated characters. This article argues that the underlying theme of apotheosis through catasterism—reinforced through comparison with ancient Near Eastern traditions—forges a link that allows for the ultimate unity of these divergent traditions concerning Phaethon.

Phaethon Abducted

A well-known character in the colourful spectrum of classical mythology is the demigod Phaethon, son of Clymene and the sun god, Helius or Sol, who miserably failed to control the solar chariot of his father and came crashing down to earth, precipitating both his own death and a cosmic conflagration. The most familiar version of the myth is told enticingly in Nonnus' *Dionysiaca* (5th century CE) and Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (8 CE), both of which were arguably dependent on a largely lost play by Euripides, entitled *Phaethon* (±420-416 BCE).[1] That Phaethon may have been a latecomer in the panorama of Greek mythography is suggested by the notable absence of his myth from the works of Homer and Hesiod (8th or 7th century BCE). Puzzlingly, a single passage in Hesiod's *Theogony* does mention a Phaethon, but the information given about this character is so different that one wonders if it actually refers to the same Phaethon:

> And Eos bare to Tithonus brazen-crested Memnon, king of the Ethiopians, and the Lord Emathion. And to Cephalus she bare a splendid son, strong Phaëthon, a man like the gods, whom, when he was a young boy in the

[1] Nonn. *Dion.* 38; Ov. *Met.* 1. 750-2. 366; Eur. *Phaeth.*, ed. Kannicht 2004: 798-826; Collard *et alii* 1997: 195-239; Diggle 1970. A good overview of the textual history of the myth is given in Simon 1999: 23-28.

> tender flower of glorious youth with childish thoughts, laughter-loving Aphrodite seized and caught up and made a keeper of her shrine by night, a divine spirit.[2]

Though he does not mention Phaethon by name, the Latin mythographer, Hyginus († 17 CE), in his book on astronomy, alluded to what is evidently the same story concerning the anonymous *Aurorae et Cephali filium*, "son of Aurora and Cephalus", whose beauty rivalled that of Aphrodite:

> Some have said it [the star of Venus; MAS] represents the son of Aurora and Cephalus, who surpassed many in beauty, so that he even vied with Venus . . .[3]

Grinding a Christian axe, Clement of Alexandria († ±215 CE) and Arnobius of Sicca († ±330 CE) had no qualms in identifying Aphrodite's interest in Phaethon as being of an erotic nature, on a par with her liaisons with Ares, Adonis, Anchises, and others:

> Yet these [the goddesses; MAS] are more passionately given to licentiousness, being fast bound in adultery; as, for instance, Eos with Tithonus, Selene with Endymion, Nereis with Aeacus, Thetis with Peleus, Demeter with Iasion and Persephone with Adonis. Aphrodite, after having been put to shame for her love of Ares, courted Cinyras, married Anchises, entrapped Phaëthon and loved Adonis.[4]

> But now, as you have it, do only the males carry on loves and has the female sex preserved its chastity? Is it not vouched for in your writings that Tithonus was loved by Aurora; that the Moon burned with love for Endymion; the Nereid for Aeacus; Thetis for the father of Achilles; Proserpina for Adonis; her mother Ceres after some rustic Iasion; and after Vulcan,

---

[2] Hes. *Th.* 984-991. ". . . a young boy in the tender flower of glorious youth" translates *néon téren ánthos échont' erikydéos hḗbēs*.

[3] Hyg. *Poet. astr.* 2. 42, tr. Grant 1960: 227f., using *certasse* for "vied". The reason why Hyginus omitted the name of this character is ostensibly that he had already assigned the name 'Phaethon'—along with the story of the crash—to the planet Saturn in the same section, in keeping with the common practice of Hellenistic astronomy. Hyginus' account apparently informed the following scholastic note: "Quartum sidus Veneris, Phosphoros colore albo, maior omnibus sideribus. . . . Est autem pes et caput, <quem> ob amorem ex Attice rapuit et cum eo concubuit. Ex hoc honoratus caelo . . ." *Schol. Basileensia* (9th century CE) on German. *Arat.* 43. 14-17, ed. Dell'Era 1979: 370. The puzzling phrase *pes et caput*, 'foot and head', may have resulted from a misreading of Greek *Ēous*, 'Ēōs', as *Pous*, 'foot', and of *Kephálou*, 'of Cephalus', as *Kephalē*, 'head', 1979: 370 note. Compare: "Veneris uero stellam . . . diCITVR fuisse Hesperum, Aurorae et Cephali filium, et ob pulchritudinem cum Venere certasse IN COITV. . . . Ad hanc enim, se uoluptatem HABERE CREDEBANT." *Schol. Strozziana* on German. *Arat.* 46. 64-67, ed. Dell'Era 1979: 231.

[4] Clem. Al. *Protr.* 2. 29.

> Phaethon, Mars, Venus herself, the mother of the sons of Aeneas and source of Roman domination, for marriage with Anchises?[5]

An anacreontic or short lyrical poem composed as a bridal song by John of Gaza (6th century CE), a Christian monk who was stationed in Palestine, appears to portray Aphrodite, identified with her usual epithets 'the Cytherean' and 'Cypris', as the bride of Phaethon: '. . . that the youthful Phaethon took care of the youthful Cytherean . . .'[6] The goddess' love affair with Phaethon has here clearly evolved into a marriage.

The combined motifs of Phaethon's handsomeness and abduction by a goddess are paralleled by a similar tradition transferred to his legendary father Cephalus.[7] The earliest witness to this appears to be Euripides' passage: ". . . Dawn, goddess of lovely light, once abducted Cephalus to heaven for love's sake."[8] With a substitution of *Hēméra*, 'day', for *Ēōs*, 'dawn', Pausanias (2nd century CE) relayed the legend in his description of the images of baked earthenware on the tiling of the Royal Portico in the Athenian suburb of Ceramicus, confirming that Phaethon was installed as *phýlaka . . . tou naou*, 'guardian of the temple' of Aphrodite, but perhaps falsely attributing the tradition to Hesiod's *Catalogue of Women*:

> . . . Day carrying away Cephalus, who they say was very beautiful and was ravished by Day, who was in love with him. His son was Phaëthon, <afterwards ravished by Aphrodite> . . . and made a guardian of her temple. Such is the tale told by Hesiod, among others, in his poem on women.[9]

---

[5] Arn. *Adv. nat.* 4. 27, tr. McCracken 1949: 398. Potter (in 1949: 561 note 202) supposed that "Phaethon, referred to in this connection only by Clement and Arnobius, should possibly read Phaon", but there is no evidence that the church fathers lacked access to Hesiod.

[6] "*hoti tēn néan Kythērēn / Phaéthōn néos komízei*", John of Gaza, *Carmina* or *Epithalamia*, 3: *Bridal Song for Anatolius Faustus*, 5-6, ed. Bergk 1882: 344. Martin West (personal communication, 10th. December 2007) prefers to translate 'new' instead of 'youthful'.

[7] "There is an archaic tradition that features the Dawn Goddess Eos herself abducting young male mortals, and her motive is in part sexual . . . As for the abduction of Phaethon, again by Aphrodite, the precedent is built into the young hero's genealogy: his father Kephalos had been abducted by his mother Eos . . ." Nagy 1979: 197.

[8] Eur. *Hipp.* 454-455. Compare: "Herse had by Hermes a son Cephalus, whom Dawn loved and carried off, and consorting with him in Syria bore a son Tithonus, who had a son Phaethon . . ." Apollod. *Bibl.* 3. 14. 3.

[9] Hes. Fr. 375, ed. Merkelbach & West 1967: 182, apud Paus. 1. 3. 1. The Greek used for "very beautiful" is *kálliston genómenón*. The episode of Phaethon's being "ravished" has the character of an insertion.

Phaethon Hesiodi

In the extant passages cited above, the abducted Phaethon is not directly related to the Phaethon of the tragic incident with the solar chariot. On the surface, moreover, the story of Phaethon's abduction by Aphrodite could hardly be more different from that of the dramatic fall from heaven, concomitant with a partial incineration of the earth. Is there any evidence, direct or circumstantial, that Hesiod was familiar with the 'standard' myth of Phaethon's fall from the chariot of Helius?

While Hyginus in his book on astronomy failed to name the "son of Aurora and Cephalus" and certainly did not associate him with the fall from heaven, two parallel accounts of the myth of Phaethon's fall do occur in his other work, the *Fabulae*.[10] The second of these, generally numbered 154, is curiously entitled *Phaëton Hesiodi* in the 1535 edition produced by the German philologist, Jacob Molsheim, Möltzer alias Micyllus,[11] as if Hesiod had been the source of this tradition.[12] Yet apart from the chapter heading, the only reference to Hesiod in Hyginus' treatment of the myth of Phaethon's fall is the following passage:

> The sisters of Phaethon, too, in grieving for their brother, were changed into poplar trees. Their tears, as Hesiod tells, hardened into amber; [in spite of the change] they are called Heliades [daughters of Helios]. They are, then, Merope, Helie, Aegle, Lampetie, Phoebe, Aetherie, Dioxippe.[13]

As the chapter headings did not originally belong to Hyginus' work, the reference this title contained to Hesiod must have been extrapolated from the above restricted statement, which apparently attributed

---

[10] Knaack (1884: 2179-2181) argued that these two accounts must originally have formed a unity, which some later editor distorted with a forced interpolation of the myth of Deucalion's flood between the two. According to Gruppe (1886: 650), the two accounts merely represented two variations on the same legend, one authored by Hyginus, the other anonymous.

[11] Hyg. *Fab*. 154, ed. Micyllus 1535: 6, 64; cf. ed. Rose 1934: 110; Marshall 1993: 132. In this narration of the myth, Hyginus (tr. Grant 1960: 124) appears to have converted Clymene into a male deity in a contrived attempt to reconcile two conflicting traditions regarding the identity of Phaethon's mother: "Phaethon, son of Clymenus, son of Sol, and the nymph Merope . . ." *Clýmenos* was a euphemistic epithet of Hades, Nagy 1990: 254.

[12] "Hygin bezeichnet also ausdrücklich den Hesiod als seine Quelle für die ganze Fabel, nicht etwa bloss für einen einzelnen Zug derselben . . ." Robert 1883: 436.

[13] Hyg. *Fab*. 154, tr. Grant 1960: 124-125.

to Hesiod only the metamorphosis of the tears of Phaethon's sisters into amber, not the entire myth.[14] A similar fragment in an obscure work ascribed to a late grammarian, Lactantius Placidus (5th century CE), derives the same motif from both Hesiod and Euripides.[15] But even a restricted statement concerning Phaethon's sisters is nowhere found in Hesiod's extant oeuvre, causing modern scholars to view this evidence from Hyginus and Lactantius with scepticism and to argue that it may have derived from Pliny's attribution of the amber episode to Aeschylus († 456 BCE), Euripides, and others.[16] Even so, it is doubtful that the aetiological myth of amber and the Heliads—as relayed in Aeschylus' play the *Heliads*, for instance, and possibly in a lost fragment of Hesiod—ever existed independently from the full myth of Phaethon's crash.

Micyllus' bold credits to Hesiod for the entire story of Phaethon's fall may have been partly inspired by medieval traditions that directly and unambiguously made this connection. In his magisterial commentary on the works of Homer, Eustathius († 1198 CE), the archbishop of Thessalonica, offered the following comment on Clymene: 'Yet Hesiod says that she had communed with Helius and gave birth to Phaethon.'[17] Eustathius here attributes knowledge of the 'solar' Phaethon, who is the son of Clymene, to a passage in Hesiod that must—if genuine—by implication be different from the one

---

[14] "It is disquieting to be told at the beginning that Hesiod is the author of the ensuing section and to be told in the middle that Hesiod is the author of a minor detail in that same section. The ascriptions are incompatible . . . The suprascription, it may be assumed, is a later addition prompted by the appearance of Hesiod's name in the body of the narrative." Diggle 1970: 22f., compare 17-19.

[15] "*sorores Phaethontis Phaethusa Lampetie Phoebe casum fratris cum deflent, deorum misericordia in arbores populos mutatae sunt. lacrimae earum, ut Hesiodus et Euripides . . . indicant, in electrum conversae sunt ac fluxisse dicuntur.*" Hes. Fr. 311, ed. Merkelbach & West 1967: 162, apud Lact. Plac. *Narr. Fab.* 2. 2-3, ed. Munckerus 1681: 198. According to Collard *et alii* (1997: 198), this fragment is "an unconfident reconstruction from the narratives in Hyginus and the Aratus-scholia . . ."

[16] "The story how, when Phaethon was struck by the thunderbolt, his sisters through their grief were transformed into poplar trees, and how every year by the banks of the River Eridanus, which we call the Po, they shed tears of amber . . . this story has been told by numerous poets, the first of whom, I believe, were Aeschylus, Philoxenus, Euripides, Nicander and Satyrus." Plin. *HN.* 37. 11. 31. "Hesiodeam esse hanc fabulam non admodum certum est, cum auctor sit Plinius, N. H. XXXVII, 31, primos quos nouerit Aeschylum aliosque quos recenset illo iuniores poetas electrum dixisse e lacrimis Heliadum ortum." Rose 1934: 110 note.

[17] *Hēsíodos dé phēsi promigēnai autẽn Hēlíōi kaì tekein Phaéthonta.*" Hes. Fr. 387, ed. Merkelbach & West 1967: 185, apud Eust. *Od.* 1689. 1, ed. Stallbaum 1825: 421.

identifying Ēōs as his mother. Despite agreement that Eustathius' commentaries were not original, but compiled from earlier texts, however, such a tradition cannot be traced back into classical times. In addition, Micyllus' qualification may have been reinforced by a passage in the so-called *Scholia Strozziana* (14th century CE) on an emulation of Aratus' *Phaenomena* attributed to Germanicus Caesar († 19 CE):

> Saturni NAMQVE sidus, a quo se tarditatem accipere opinabantur, Phaethontem Solis ET CLYMENAE filium esse dixerunt et quia paternos cursus affectans sibi atque mundo concrementionis detrimenta conflIXERIT, ab Ioue fulmine percussus in Eridanum deciderit FLVVIVM (SICVT HESIODVS REFERT) et a Sole patre inter sidera collocatus.[18]

With substitution of Apollo, the sun god of the Imperial era, for Sol, the first part corresponds almost *verbatim* to a passage concerning Phaethon in the work of the African grammarian, Fabius Fulgentius (6th century CE): "Apollo is said, by making love to the nymph Clymene, to have sired Phaethon, who, aspiring to his father's chariot, sparked off destruction by fire for himself and the earth."[19] The authenticity of the ascription to Hesiod in the second half—including the thunderbolt—is ruled out by the fact that this passage was excerpted word for word from the *Scholia Sangermanensia* (8th century CE, ultimately 3rd century CE?), that furnish no reference to Hesiod.[20] The interspersion "*SICVT HESIODVS REFERT*" may then have been based on an earlier passage in the *Scholia Strozziana*, according to which Hesiod, expatiating on the river Eridanus, identified Phaethon as the son of Sol and Clymene, who fell from the sky and drowned in this river, subsequently to be placed in the sky as a constellation along with Eridanus:

> HESIODVS AVTEM DICIT INTER ASTRA COLLOCATVM PROPTER PHAETHONTA, SOLIS ET CLYMENAE FILIVM, QVI CLAM DICITVR CVRRVM PATRIS ASCENDISSE CVMQVE A TERRA ALTIVS

---

[18] *Schol. Strozziana* on German. *Arat.* 46. 47-52, ed. Dell'Era 1979: 231.

[19] Fulg. *Myth.* 1. 16 (49-50; 644-645), ed. Helm 1970: 27, tr. Whitbread 1971: 56.

[20] *Schol. Sangermanensia*, 228. 18-22, ed. Breysig 1867: 174. Diggle's argument (1970: 16-17, 25) that the attribution may have been lifted from the passage on the planet Venus in Hyginus' astronomical treatise, as cited above, is unlikely considering that the scholiast links this statement to the planet Saturn, whilst retaining Hyginus' treatment of 'Hesperus, the son of Aurora and Cephalus' in his discussion of Venus.

LEVARETVR, PRAE TIMORE IN ERIDANVM FLVVIUM, QVI ET PADVS, CECIDISSE, EVMQVE PERCVSSVM FVLMINE A IOVE.[21]

As a reference to Hesiod is absent from Germanicus' text as it is known today,[22] it is clearly an insertion made by the scholiast—presumably during the 3rd century CE, when these scholia are thought to have been originally written. In doing so, one cannot rule out that the scholiast ultimately relied on a genuine fragment of Hesiod.[23] Thus, while two 19th-century classicists, Carl Robert and Georg Knaack, positively deduced on the basis of this flimsy evidence that Hesiod was familiar with the myth of Phaethon's fall,[24] the jury is clearly still out on this matter.

One or Two Phaethons?

The question arises whether the kidnapped Phaethon, the son of Ēōs and Cephalus, is entirely different, though coincidentally bearing the same name, from the fateful hero, son of Helius and Clymene, or whether the snippets reviewed so far present a 'forgotten' aspect of the *mythos* of the same hero.

History of the Question

Commentators have been divided over this issue. The dominant sentiment among philologists up until the second half of the 20th century was that Greek mythographers did at some point feel the two different strands of myth belonged to the prosopography of a single character. While Georg Knaack identified the two Phaethons,[25] Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Möllendorff separated them, arguing that

---

[21] *Schol. Strozziana* on German. *Arat.* 40. 1-16, ad 366-378, ed. Dell'Era 1979: 222.

[22] ". . . the River which wept over Phaethon, who, having lost control of his father's horses, had fallen into its waters, Jupiter's flames issuing from his wound. His sisters, forming a new forest, and sorrowing over their arms, unknown to them before, also mourned him. Eridanus flows in the middle of the gleaming stars." German. *Arat.* 363-368, tr. Gain 1976: 62-63. "The allusion to Phaethon's fall into the river is as concise as it can possibly be. . . . He alludes to the two most important events relevant to the catasterism myth, the remnant of the river . . . left by Phaethon's flaming corpse, and the mourning of the Heliades . . ." Possanza 2004: 152.

[23] "We cannot prove that the compiler of the Σ Strozziana did not somewhere find authority for his attribution of the catasterism to Hesiod . . ." Diggle 1970: 25.

[24] Robert 1883: 436; 1878: 214-218; Knaack, in Gruppe 1886: 647f.

[25] Knaack, in Gruppe 1886: 647-649.

Euripides was the first to combine the originally separate myths of Phaethon's abduction, told by Hesiod, and his fateful ride, more widely known.[26] Pierre Grelot knew of only one Phaethon, but regarded the Phaethon of the solar chariot as a late literary development of Hesiod's Phaethon.[27] More recently, Martin West, Neil Forsyth, John Poirier and others have all assumed a relationship of some sort between the two different Phaethons.[28] In the opposite camp, Hyginus was probably the first mythologist to differentiate between the two, associating each with a different planet. A scholium in two 15th-century manuscripts of Hesiod's *Theogony* remarks that the Phaethon who was born of Cephalus and Ēōs must have been another one than the son of Helius, who caused the fire.[29] The Jesuit savant, Franz Kugler, opted for a complete differentiation of Hesiod's Phaethon and the Phaethon known from the poetry of Ovid and Nonnus throughout.[30] And in agreement with this, James Diggle pointed out that Hesiod's Phaethon "is unconnected with our Phaethon, and the attempts which have been made to identify him with the charioteer are misguided . . . It remains doubtful whether Hesiod so much as mentioned the story of Phaethon . . . On the evidence available to us the son of Helios and the son of Eos and Cephalus must be pronounced entirely different persons. There is neither the means nor the necessity of reconciling them."[31]

However, the last word on the subject has not yet been said. In mythology, literary sources are seldom entirely consistent with each other for the simple reason that the actual organic development of the mythological tradition takes place outside the literary domain,

---

[26] ". . . dass Euripides nicht sowohl eine neue Sage erfunden, als Phaethon den Sohn der Eos mit Phaethon dem Sohne des Helios contaminirt hat. . . . Phaethon, der Sohn des Helios, ist mit dem Sohne des Kephalos seiner Natur nach schlechterdings nicht zu identificiren; es liegt hier wirklich einmal eine, bei dem durchsichtigen und wenig bezeichnenden Namen leicht erklärliche Homonymie vor . . ." Von Wilamowitz-Möllendorff 1883: 416, 426, cf. 433.

[27] Grelot 1956: 31f.

[28] Forsyth 1987: 133 note 33; West 1997: 476f.; Poirier 1999: 380f. note 39.

[29] "*Kephálōi: tōi dè Kephálōi éteken hē Ēôs tòn Phaéthonta. héteros dè Phaéthōn estí: prōtos ho tou Hēlíou, aph'ou hē ekpýrōsis egéneto*." schol. Hes. *Th.* 986-989, ed. Di Gregorio 1975: 120f.

[30] ". . . auch scheint mir Phaëthon II (Sohn des Helios und der Klymene) von Phaëthon I (Sohn der Eos und des Kephalos)—gegen Knaack—getrennt werden zu müssen", Kugler 1927: 37.

[31] Diggle 1970: 4, 15; compare: "Hesiod mentions such a person in the *Theogony*, but as a son of Eos and Kephalos snatched away by Aphrodite, and thus presumably a different figure altogether . . ." Gantz 1993: 31.

in the oral realm. The disparate and incoherent character of the snippets of the Phaethon myth encountered in the extant versions does not necessarily testify to 'different Phaethons', but simply to the evolving reception and disintegration of what may once have been or become a single myth. At best, the textual evidence at our disposal amounts to a set of 'fossilised' snapshots of a living and developing tradition. The challenge of the 'historical mythologist' is to try and identify conceptual 'bridges' or points of agreement between the respective versions that could support the idea that some Greek mythographers recognised only one Phaethon in both myths, either at the inception or at a later stage of the literary chain of 'Phaethon' mythology. Two lines of reasoning strongly suggest that the myths of Phaethon's abduction and of his fall from heaven did originally belong to a single myth cycle associated with a single Phaethon, which could perhaps have been known as such to Hesiod.

A Shared Solar Aspect

As a first consideration, the two Phaethons are both independently qualified as exponents of solar mythology. The solar connection is most pronounced in the story of Phaethon's catastrophic accident with the chariot of his father, the sun god. That this Phaethon was effectively portrayed as an ephemeral substitute of the sun is underscored by the repeated usage of *phaéthōn*, 'radiant', as an epithet of the sun both by Homer and Hesiod.[32] An implicit association with the rising of the sun is embedded in Hesiod's designation of the abducted Phaethon as a son of Ēōs, the dawn. Significantly, drawing in comparative material from the ancient Near East, *Isaiah* presented the West Semitic god *Hēlēl*—hurled down from the sky as a consequence of *hybris*—as *bęn-šāḥar* or 'son of the dawn'.[33] On the common assumption that the myth of Phaethon's fall was borrowed from a Near Eastern source,[34] the myth of Hēlēl as offered

[32] The title *ēélios phaéthōn* occurs in Hom. *Il.* 11. 735-736; *Od.* 5. 479; 11. 16; 19. 441; 22. 388; *Hymn. Hom. Hel.* 31. 2; Hes. *Th.* 760; Orph. Fr. 238. 8-11 (152), apud Macrob. *Sat.* 1. 18. 22; Nonn. *Dion.* 38. 19, 52, 308; Val. Fl. *Arg.* 3. 236-238 (212-213); Sil. *Pun.* 11. 369-372; Verg. *Aen.* 5. 104-107; cf. Diggle 1970: 4.

[33] *Isaiah* 14. 12-16.

[34] Gunkel (1895: 133f.) was perhaps the first to propose a relationship between Hēlēl and Phaethon, followed by Grelot (1956: 30, 38); cf. Schmidt 1951: 167; Loretz 1976: 133; Forsyth 1987: 126-139; Watson 1995: 747. Astour (1965: 268f., 273; cf. West 1997: 476) was adamant that the name, image, and myth of Phaethon

by *Isaiah* forms a striking bridge between the two aspects of Phaethon considered here, especially if *Šaḥar*'s sex had been conceived as feminine, as McKay has demonstrated.[35] As an additional reflection of Phaethon's association with the sunrise, both Hesiod and the narrators of Phaethon's fall relate Phaethon in some way to Ethiopia as the legendary land of the east. Hesiod's introduction of "brazen-crested Memnon, king of the Ethiopians" as the step-brother of Phaethon arguably implies a general 'family relationship' to Ethiopia. This is matched by pronouncements of Euripides, followed by Ovid, that identify Ethiopia as the place of Phaethon's youth,[36] while the obscure historian, Chares of Mytilene (4th century BCE), apparently located Phaethon's tomb in an Ethiopian temple of Ammon: ". . . Chares states that Phaethon died in Ethiopia on an island the Greek name of which is the Isle of Ammon, and that here is his shrine and oracle, and here the source of amber."[37]

---

all trace back to West Semitic mythology. McKay (1970: 453-456) argued the reverse, that the myth of Hēlēl was based on that of Phaethon. Implausibly, Grelot (1956: 31f.) argued that the motifs of *hybris* and the fall were secondary developments that occurred independently in *Isaiah*'s *Vorlage* and the myth of Phaethon. Etz (1986: 297 note 18) dismissed Phaethon as a weak parallel to Hēlēl, presumably because his agenda was to prove that Isaiah's report of Hēlēl was based on a contemporary observation of the sky. Meanwhile, the argument for a Levantine provenance of the myth of Phaethon does not solely rest on comparative mythological analysis, but is curiously reinforced by the remainder of Apollodorus' (*Bibl.* 3. 14. 3) passage cited above: ". . . Cephalus, whom Dawn loved and carried off, and consorting with him in Syria bore a son Tithonus, who had a son Phaethon, who had a son Astynous, who had a son Sandocus, who passed from Syria to Cilicia and founded a city Celenderis, and having married Pharnace, daughter of Megassares, king of Hyria, begat Cinyras." While 'Cinyras' is the undisputed Greek equivalent of the Ugaritic deity Kinnâr, the 'lyre' (Albright 1968: 144 and note 91), 'Sandocus' resembles Hebrew צדוק *Ṣādōq*, 'righteous one', a priestly title sometimes rendered *Saddouk* with long *d* in Greek; the nasalisation of the consonant cluster through dissimilation is not out of the ordinary in the northwest Semitic language group, being demonstrably systematic and productive in Imperial Aramaic (±600-±200 BCE; Garr 2007) and with possible examples in Punic (K. Jongeling, personal communication 17th. December 2007).

[35] McKay 1970: 453-456.

[36] Euripides' *Phaethon* takes place before the palace of Phaethon's assumed, legal father—Merops, king of Ethiopia, "at the eastern edge of the world bounded by the river Oceanus (109), close to the house and stables from which Helios the sun-god daily drives his chariot across the heaven . . .", Collard *et alii* 1997: 196. Compare: "Phaëthon leaps up in joy at his mother's words, already grasping the heavens in imagination; and after crossing his own Ethiopia and the land of Ind lying close beneath the sun, he quickly comes to his father's rising-place." Ov. *Met.* 1. 776.

[37] Chares of Mytilene, Fr. 3, apud Plin. *HN.* 37. 11. 32-33. "This passage is our only authority for the existence of a shrine of Phaethon anywhere in the

Euripides' Hymenaeus

Secondly, an arguably conclusive proof for a link between Hesiod's Phaethon and the fallen Phaethon is contained in an extant fragment of Euripides' *Phaethon*. In the preceding and largely missing parts of the narrative, Phaethon would have fled to the dwelling of his 'natural' father, Helius, in a bid to escape from the marriage his legal father, Merops, the king of Ethiopia, had arranged for him. As Phaethon's smouldering corpse lies concealed in Merops' treasury, presumably following its retrieval from the Eridanus, the king enters in cheerful anticipation of the wedding and a chorus of girls sing the customary marriage hymn in honour of the goddess Aphrodite:

> Hymen hymen! We sing the heavenly daughter of Zeus, the mistress of passions, her who brings maidens to marriage, Aphrodite. Mistress, for you I sing this wedding song, Cypris fairest of goddesses, and for your newly-yoked child whom you hide in heaven, offspring of your marriage; you who preside over the marriage of the great king of this city, a ruler who is dear to the starry palace of gold, Aphrodite. O blessed man, O king greater than ever in felicity, who will marry a goddess and be hymned the whole world over the only mortal to be kinsman to the immortals.[38]

Ritual hymns sung on occasion of marriages for Aphrodite, the patroness of love and marriage, apparently formed the original *Sitz im Leben* of this passage. The Greek term for these hymns, *hyménaios*, derives from Hymen or Hymenaeus, the deity of marriage, whom disparate and highly fragmentary sources describe as an exquisitely handsome youth,[39] the son of Apollo and one of the Muses,[40] or of Dionysus and Aphrodite,[41] who was "seized by Fate,

---

world. Nor is there any allusion to a cult of Phaethon . . ." Diggle 1970: 45 and note 2. According to Diggle, Chares was not referring to the oasis of Siwa in Libya, but to the 'insula' of Meroe, which also featured a temple of Zeus-Hammon. Yet compare Pliny's report (37. 11. 38) of a pool with amber-shedding trees near Libya: "Theomenes tells us that close to the Greater Syrtes is the Garden of the Hesperides and a pool called Electrum, where there are poplar trees from the tops of which amber falls into the pool, and is gathered by the daughters of Hesperus."

[38] Eur. *Phaeth.*, Fr. 781 (227-244), ed. Kannicht 2004: 817-818; Collard *et alii* 1997: 216-219, tr. Diggle 1970: 149, compare 43, 65f. The Greek for "your newly-yoked child whom you hide in heaven" is *tōi te neózygi sōi / pōlōi tòn en aithéri krýpteis* . . .

[39] Serv. *Aen.* 4. 99; *Buc.* 8. 30; Eust. *Il.* 277; Vat. Myth. 2. 219; 3. 11. 3.

[40] Sauer (1886: 2800) and Jolles (1914: 127) list sources for Hymenaeus' descent from Calliope, Clio, Urania, or Terpsichore respectively.

[41] Serv. *Aen.* 4. 127; Vat. Myth. 3. 11. 2; Sauer 1886: 2800; Jolles 1914: 128.

when first he lay with another in wedlock",[42] or otherwise disappeared on his wedding night.[43] The hymn indicates that this character was the *génna*, "offspring", of Aphrodite's marriage and was transferred by her to the sky: ". . . your newly-yoked child whom you hide in heaven, offspring of your marriage . . ."[44] The wedding song evidently meant to symbolically identify the bridegroom—particularly if he was royal—with the youthful Hymenaeus as the consummator of a celestial and incestuous *hieròs gámos* with Aphrodite. As the "newly-yoked child" mentioned in the hymn would personify Hymenaeus, his bride Aphrodite—perhaps thought to be incarnate in his mortal bride—would symbolically appropriate him to herself with the tying of the knot. Mythologically, Hymenaeus' translation to heaven arguably implied a dalliance with Aphrodite along the lines of the goddess' impressive string of other mortal lovers.

The significance of this hymn in Euripides' play must be that Euripides' chorus sung these lines in order to compare Phaethon's fate to that of Hymenaeus.[45] But how far did the comparison extend? Von Wilamowitz-Möllendorff hesitatingly propounded the idea that Aphrodite would have been Phaethon's intended bride,[46] a possibility rebutted at length by Diggle; she would neither have been Phaethon's mother nor could she ever be thought to marry any of

---

[42] Pind. Fr. 3. 7-8 (139), ed. Maehler 1989: 114.

[43] Serv. *Aen.* 1. 651 (and apud Vat. Myth. 2. 219; 3. 11. 3); 4. 127; *Buc.* 8. 30; Procl. *Chrest.* apud Phot. *Bibl.* 239. 20-22 (321a); Eust. *Il.* 277; Sauer 1886: 2800; Jolles 1914.

[44] Collard *et alii* 1997: 235.

[45] "We must at the same time appreciate that this entire wedding song to Aphrodite and Hymen is being sung in honor of **Phaéthōn**, and that his bride-to-be is in all probability a daughter of the Sun." Nagy 1979: 200. Collard *et alii* (1997: 216-219, 235) proposed that the king addressed in the hymn is Merops, who is blessed to marry out his son Phaethon: "While the bridegroom must be Phaethon, only Merops can be **great king**, whether or not he intends to share power with Phaethon after the wedding . . ." Collard *et alii* 1997: 235 note 236-239. However, the corresponding translation of the final lines (1997: 216-219) seems forced: "You will be marriage-kin to a goddess and be sung throughout the boundless earth as the only mortal father of a groom for immortals." If the hymn was based on ancient Near Eastern prototypes sung on occasion of the *hieròs gámos*, the address is perhaps better seen as a textual relic of the actual king's role in the ritual union with a veritable goddess. Surely Aphrodite only serves as "patroness of the marriage" through a symbolic marriage with the bridegroom, impersonating the bride?

[46] "Aphrodite als Braut löst überhaupt die Räthsel des Dramas." Von Wilamowitz-Möllendorff 1883: 413.

her mortal paramours.[47] For Diggle, the "newly-yoked child whom you hide in heaven" was Hymenaeus and Phaethon's only connection to the hymn was the fact that he—as "the great king of this city" *in spe*?—was about to marry someone, perhaps one of the Heliads.[48] Other scholars at least allow for a symbolic marriage of Phaethon to Aphrodite, calling for a closer symmetry between Hymenaeus and Phaethon. The word *pōlos*, 'child', actually means 'colt'. As such, Hymenaeus' role as Aphrodite's 'newly-yoked colt'[49] cannot be separated from Homer's qualification of—a third?—Phaethon as one of the horses of Ēōs,[50] employing the same word for 'horse'. "In the dramatic context, the 'hiding away' of the new-yoked colt makes it impossible not to think of Phaethon, whose corpse is, as we know, hidden away in the treasure chamber. More important, Phaethon has been described, perhaps more than once, as himself a new-yoked colt; and it was precisely Merops' attempt to yoke him in marriage that led to his yoking of the Sun's chariot . . ."[51] If Euripides meant to portray the 'thunderstruck' Phaethon, standing in for Hymenaeus, as Aphrodite's latest acquisition, a striking parallel emerges with Hesiod's intimation that the handsome Phaethon was made "a keeper" of Aphrodite's "shrine". Hesiod placed so much emphasis on the youth of the abducted Phaethon, who was "a young boy in the tender flower of glorious youth with childish thoughts", that the link with the juvenile Hymenaeus can hardly be coincidental. Consequently, at least to Euripides' mind, the Phaethon that fell down from the sky was identical with the Phaethon united in marriage with Aphrodite.[52]

---

[47] Diggle 1970: 156-160; Collard *et alii* 1997: 198

[48] Diggle 1970: 158f., followed uncritically by Kannicht 1972: 9 and more critically, but still in principle, by Lloyd-Jones 1971: 342

[49] Nagy (1979: 200; cf. 1990: 250) translates: "O Kypris, most beautiful of gods! /—and also to your newly yoked / **pôlos** [horse], the one you hide in the aether, / the offspring of your wedding."

[50] Athene "stayed golden-throned Dawn at the streams of Oceanus, and would not let her yoke her swift-footed horses that bring light to men, Lampus and Phaethon, who are the colts that pull Dawn's chariot." Hom. *Od.* 23. 244-246.

[51] Reckford 1972: 424.

[52] Condemning Von Wilamowitz-Möllendorff's allegation that the chorus "shrewdly put two and two together and remembering their Hesiod (pp. 10f.) draw the sensible conclusion that the bride has spirited her husband away to heaven", Diggle (1970: 157) suppressed the similarity of the hymn to Hesiod's passage concerning Phaethon, restricting its relevance to the obscure mythology of Hymen without explaining why the chorus would have compared Hymen to Phaethon if not for

If Phaethon, while marrying Aphrodite, counted as her "offspring", how does Aphrodite's role as 'mother' compare to Ēōs'? In a sense, Hesiod contrasted Ēōs, Phaethon's 'natural' mother, with Aphrodite as his 'adoptive' mother, taking him into her 'sanctuary'. Diggle's objection that Aphrodite could not possibly have been regarded as either Phaethon's bride or his mother[53] is weakened by Nagy's elegant demonstration of the goddess' double, incestuous role in relation to her mortal lover.[54] Coupled with Hesiod's designation of Ēōs as the mother of Phaethon, Nagy's analysis leads to the conclusion that Ēōs and Aphrodite were merely different manifestations of the same goddess. "From the comparative evidence of the *Rig-Veda*, we might have expected Eos to be both the mother and the consort of a solar figure like Phaethon. Instead, the Hesiodic tradition assigns Aphrodite as consort of Phaethon, while Eos is only his mother . . . We may infer that the originally fused functions of mating with the consort and being reborn from the mother were split and divided between Aphrodite and Eos respectively. However, such a split leaves Phaethon as son of Eos simply by birth rather than by rebirth."[55] ". . . the Hesiodic tradition seems to have split the earlier fused roles of mother and consort and divided them between Eos and Aphrodite respectively. This way, the theme of incest could be neatly obviated."[56] "From the standpoint of comparative analysis, then, Aphrodite is a parallel of Eos in epic diction. Furthermore, from the standpoint of internal analysis, Aphrodite is a parallel of Eos in epic theme."[57] This conclusion

---

the very motif of the lad's abduction by Aphrodite. Von Wilamowitz-Möllendorff's (1883: 416, 433) hypothesis that Euripides was the *first* to weave the originally independent characters of the abducted Phaethon and the 'solar' Phaethon together lacks proof.

[53] Diggle 1970: 159.

[54] "On the level of celestial dynamics, these associations imply the theme of a setting sun mating with the goddess of regeneration so that the rising sun may be reborn . . . if the setting sun is the same as the rising sun, then the goddess of regeneration may be viewed as both mate and mother." Nagy 1979: 198; 1990: 246, compare 250. Note also that the hero's twofold role as the goddess' son and lover has parallels in ancient Near Eastern mythology, including Ištar's union with Tammuz and Cybele's union with Atthis.

[55] Nagy 1979: 200f.

[56] Nagy 1990: 248f. However, incest does not need to have been the real motivation for the split, as the Greeks do not seem to have been particularly concerned with incest among the gods.

[57] Nagy 1990: 248.

also throws a sharper light on the parallel scenes of abduction associated with both goddesses.[58]

If Euripides' actors compared the dead Phaethon, come down from the sky, to Hymen as Aphrodite's adoptive son and prospective bridegroom, it seems safe to conclude that Euripides recognised only one Phaethon, but was this a reconciliatory fabrication, as Von Wilamowitz-Möllendorff had argued, or an accurate reflection of earlier versions of the myth? The latter possibility is suggested by the fact that, even though Hesiod may never have elucidated the account of Phaethon's fall, his portrayal of Phaethon as a 'son of Dawn' suggests ultimate dependence on the Canaanite mythology of Hēlēl, son of Šāḥar, who did descend from the highest heaven to hell. Yet the hypothesis of a single Phaethon requires further clarification of the way mythographers would have linked Phaethon's fall with his marriage to Aphrodite. A closer examination of the narrative type detectable in the story of Phaethon's abduction may shed light on this issue.

Phaethon's Apotheosis in the Light of Comparable Traditions from the Ancient Near East

Adopting a Jungian approach, Reckford understood the union of Phaethon and Aphrodite implied by Euripides as representative of the youth's 'loss of innocence' both if he would have married according to plan and through his death, in his attempt to avoid the marriage.[59] Perhaps closer to the tragedian's conscious intentions is Nagy's masterful and irrefragable demonstration that Aprodite's seizure of Phaethon belongs to the wider mythological genre of the apotheosis of a hero. Although Hesiod does not say it with so many words, what is being described is essentially Phaethon's premature death and the status of immortality conferred upon him by the goddess.[60] The epithet *daímōn* in particular, bestowed here on

[58] Analogous to Aphrodite's numerous affairs, Ēōs is on record abducting Orion (Hom. *Od.* 5. 121), Clitus (15. 250), Cephalus (Hes. *Th.* 986), and Tithonus (*Hymn. Hom. Aphr.* 5. 218-227), and Attic vases show winged Dawn carrying off a young man, Brown 1995: 111f.

[59] Reckford 1972: 425.

[60] ". . . the story about Aphrodite and Phaethon (Hesiod *Theogony* 986-991) presents yet another pattern, that of *abduction/death followed by preservation*." Nagy 1990: 252. "From the standpoint of myth, he is explicitly dead, but from the standpoint of cult, *he is implicitly reborn and thus alive*." 1990: 253.

Phaethon, implied divine preservation: "The designation of Phaethon as **daímōn** also conveys the immortal aspect of the hero in his afterlife, since it puts him in the same category as the Golden Generation, who are themselves explicitly **daímones** . . ."[61] Through abduction, Aphrodite killed but simultaneously resuscitated Phaethon.[62] On a ritual level, this 'heroisation' at the hands of the goddess will have been expressed through "the practice of burying the priest-king in the temple of his god", whom he represented and "where he received worship as a hero. . . . In Euripides' play, this took place on the day of Phaethon's marriage to a goddess (we do not know who . . .). This must have been the reason for his consecration to Aphrodite. . . . Aphrodite may have appeared at the end of the play and instructed that Phaethon's remains should be laid in her temple."[63]

Both ancient Greek and Near Eastern mythology are replete with other Phaethon-like tragedies in which some winsome mortal youth is adored, adopted, immortalised and not infrequently also employed by a voluptuous goddess.[64] Erechtheus and Cinyras were commemorated as priestly servants of respectively Athena and Aphrodite,[65] while Demeter attempted to immortalise the young Demophon by means of a fiery ritual *en megárois* or in her own "mansion".[66] Another possible parallel is furnished by the mythology of the so-called 'Tyrian Heracles', a segment of Heracles traditions that was in all likelihood based on the cult of the Tyrian god Melqart, the consort of Astarte. In his capacity as one of the dwarf-like Dactyls, Heracles is reported to have served as 'doorkeeper' in the sanctuary of Demeter, near a town on Boeotia.[67] Though present knowledge does not permit a connection with these temple duties, Heracles—in the tragic culmination of his career—was also granted apotheosis, through his self-immolation on a funeral pyre on the

---

[61] Nagy 1979: 191. Rohde (in Nagy 1979: 191 note 3) mistakenly assumed that Phaethon's abduction did not involve death.

[62] "As with the myth of Aphrodite and Phaethon, the myths of Eos too are marked by the design of making the hero immortal." Nagy 1979: 197.

[63] West 1966: 428. "Phaethon becomes a daimon himself, but is subordinate to Aphrodite as her temple-keeper."

[64] Astour 1965: 258f.

[65] Erechtheus: Hom. *Il.* 2. 546-551; cf. Nagy 1979: 192. Cinyras: Pind. *Pyth.* 2. 15-17.

[66] *Hymn. Hom. Dem.* 236-241. While Aphrodite appears to have succeeded with Phaethon, however, Demeter's efforts failed.

[67] Paus. 9. 19. 5; compare 9. 27. 8; 8. 31. 1, 3; Cic. *Nat. D.* 3. 42 (16).

summit of Mount Oeta, a type of death reminiscent of the cremation of Homer's heroes.[68] As archaeologists have discovered, this myth corresponded to a ritual festival during which cult figurines representing Heracles were subjected to a fire atop Oeta.[69] This aspect of Heracles' cult—both the myth and the rite of the bonfire—was probably directly inspired by the Phoenician worship of Melqart,[70] who experienced a ritual *égersis* or 'awakening' during an annual festival in Spring.[71] The analogy of Heracles' fiery way to attain bliss with Hesiod's abducted Phaethon especially springs to light in a tradition that, following Heracles' death atop Oeta, Hera adopted him as her son, thus also in a sense 'rejuvenating' him.[72]. Despite vivid scholarly debate, it would seem straightforward to conclude that Heracles' name, which almost certainly means 'glorious through Hera', had originated as an epithet, earned by Hera's efforts in securing Heracles a place of fame among the immortals on Olympus.[73] This inference is strengthened by vestigial indications that a form of Heracles not only served as Hera's adopted son, but also as her servile partner in matrimony,[74] as seen in a sacred marriage rite that was apparently celebrated on the island of Cos and perhaps

---

[68] Sil. *Pun.* 3. 43-44; Soph. *Phil.* 726-728; Arn. *Adv. nat.* 1. 36. 5; Herod. 7. 198; Serv. *Aen.* 8. 300; *Buc.*, 8. 30. "Herakles is the only Greek hero who, at the end of his mortal life, was elevated to the company of immortals on Mount Olympus . . ." Shapiro 1983: 9; compare Burkert 1985: 210.

[69] Shapiro 1983: 15; Croon 1956: 212; Nilsson 1932: 205.

[70] Lucian *D. Syr.* 3, tr. Lightfoot 2003: 248f., 294f.; Seyrig 1953: 8-11 (69-72); Goldman 1949: 167f.; Shapiro 1983: 13f.

[71] Menander of Ephesus (2nd century BCE), Fr. 783 F1, apud Joseph. *Ant. Jud.* 8. 146 (5. 3); cf. Ps.-Clem. *Rec.* 10. 24. Nonnus (*Dion.* 40. 398) invoked the same deity, Astrochítōn Heraklēs, along with a list of other syncretistic names for the sun god, as he who "Having lost his old age in fire . . . obtains in exchange his youth".

[72] Diod. Sic. 4. 39. 2. The theme of Heracles' acquisition of immortality through marriage with Hēbē must have been known as early as the 8th or 7th century BCE, as it informs Hom. *Od.* 11. 601-604; Hes. *Th.* 950-955.

[73] On this vexing subject, see Suhr 1953: 258; Pötscher 1970: 170-173; Farnell 1921: 100; Kretschmer 1917. On the basis of Dumézil's (1983: 123-144) work, Nagy (1979: 303) observed "that the suckling of **Hērakléēs** by **Hḗrā** after his birth (Diodorus Siculus 4.9.6) and the adoption of Herakles by Hera after his death (Diodorus 4.39.2-3) are themes of beneficence that complement the prevalent themes of her maleficence towards this **hḗrōs** 'hero', and that together these themes of beneficence/maleficence constitute the traditional epic theme embodied in the very name of **Hērakléēs** 'he who has the **kléos** of **Hḗrā**'."

[74] Tümpel 1891: 617, cf. 619, seconded by Cook 1906: 370f.; Harrison 1927: 491; Pötscher 1970.

also at Argos.[75] In traditions such as these, Demeter, Hera or some other goddess like Asteria[76] relates to Heracles in the same way as Aphrodite to Phaethon, the handsome mortal fulfilling the archetypal function of a subservient and adopted son-lover in a *hieròs gámos* of matrifocal type.[77]

Finally, according to a tradition recorded at a late time, Esmounos, a Greek reflection of the Phoenician god Ešmun, was a 'very handsome youth' who castrated himself in order to escape the attention of Astronoe, 'mother of the gods'. Resembling Aphrodite's activities concerning Phaethon, the goddess then turned her lover into a deity *epì tēi thérmēi zōēs*, 'on account of his vital heat', as he emitted *polỳ phōs*, a 'bright light'.[78]

Such comparative material suggests that Phaethon's abduction by Aphrodite was a mythological expression of his death and apotheosis through 'adoption'.[79] The mythical type reflected or fed into a popular custom to bury the dead at night: "In classical Athens the funeral was conducted at night, partly from a reluctance to pollute

---

[75] Cook 1906: 372, 377; Kerényi 1978: 127; compare Suhr 1953: 258.

[76] At Philadelphia in the Decapolis, Heracles' partner was Asteria, 'starry one'. Seyrig (1953: 19 (80)) suspected that this tradition was an *interpretatio Graeca* of the Phoenician pair Melqart and Astarte.

[77] If, for argument's sake, the marriage hymn for Hymen and Aphrodite had originated as a Greek translation of a Phoenician hymn to Melqart and Astarte, the puzzling address to *tòn mégan tasde póleōs basilē*, "the great king of this city", would receive an elegant explanation in the etymology of Melqart's name: *Milkqart*, 'king of the city' (though note Brown 1995: 120), by which the underworld is originally thought to have been intended.

[78] Dam. *Isid.* apud Phot. *Bibl.* 242. 302-303 (352b). The motif of emasculation is absent from the myth of Phaethon, but echoes an earlier version of what must be a variant of the same story; in this (Lucian *D. Syr.* 19-27), a 'very handsome young man' called Kombábos is charged with the task of building a temple for the queen Stratonice—in whom some scholars see a cipher for the goddess Ištar or Astarte (Astour 1965: 258; Lipiński 1971: 20f.; Goossens 1943: 45; but see Lightfoot 2003: 390)—but castrates himself lest he become implicated in her adulterous desires. The description of Kombabos must have drawn upon the *kýbēbos* or 'devotee of Cybebe', the goddess of Carchemish, or on the Babylonian ogre Ḫumbaba, who was the custodian of "the Mountain of Cedar, seat of gods and goddesses' throne" (*The Gilgameš Epic*, Standard Version, 5. 6, tr. George 1999: 39) in the earliest versions, and the "warder of a goddess's shrine" more specifically in later versions such as the version from Nineveh, where he serves in the sanctuary of Irnini, a hypostasis of Ištar, Lightfoot 2003: 391f.; Goossens 1943: 36, 43 note 4.

[79] Von Wilamowitz-Möllendorff's suggestion that Aphrodite was Phaethon's intended bride requires either that this marriage never materialised due to Phaethon's premature death or that it was accomplished precisely through his death. Only the latter possibility is viable in view of the present argument.

the day and the living, partly to confirm the release of the soul at dawn. It was natural to express the reason for the practice in mythological terms, that Eos the Dawn carried off the dead 'on the wings of the morning', and to motivate the event by simple sexual attraction or love."[80] As the Stoic philosopher, Heraclitus (1st century CE) clarified:

> Quand mourait un jeune homme à la fois de noble famille et de grande beauté, on nommait par euphémisme son cortège funèbre, dans le jour naissant, « enlèvement par Héméra »: comme s'il n'était point mort, mais qu'une amoureuse passion l'eût fait ravir. On dit cela d'après Homère.[81]

Phaethon's Astral Aspect

Aphrodite as the Planet Venus

The analysis presented so far does not quite constitute the full picture; a vital element of the myth has so far evaded detection. When probing into the typological character of the myth of Phaethon's adoption, the *astral* import of the story appears unassailable.

According to Hesiod himself, Aphrodite appointed Phaethon as "a keeper of her shrine by night, a divine spirit." Following a scholastic variant variously attributed to Archilochus, Archelaus or Aristarchus, a number of notable authorities have preferred to read *mýchion*, "*inward, inmost*",[82] instead of *nýchion*, 'nocturnal, nightly',[83] as if Aphrodite's act had merely consisted in the youngster's concealment.[84] If the unproblematic and generally attested lection may

---

[80] Vermeule 1981: 163, who offers a detailed discussion of related imagery revolving around Eros, the Harpies, and the Sphinx.

[81] Her. *Hom. All.* 68. 5-6, tr. Buffière 1989: 73. In this passage, "ravir" translates ἁρπαγὴν and Héméra is the goddess of Day.

[82] *archélochos dè gráphei mýchion, hoion en tōi mychōi, en tōi adýtōi prophaínonta tēi Kýprōi*, schol. Hes. *Th.* 991, ed. Di Gregorio 1975: 121, with variants listed in the note. For Aristarchus, an Alexandrinian scholar of Homer, see Nagy 2004: passim; Liddell & Scott 1968: 1157 s. v. 'μύχιος'.

[83] In general meaning 'nightly', Greek *nýchios* in this specific passage speaks "of persons, *doing* a thing *by night*", Liddell & Scott 1996: 1186 s. v. 'νύχιος'.

[84] For West (1966: 428), the place where the hero was thus 'hidden' was his allotment in the goddess' temple: "The hero has his own corner of the temple, where he is buried. . . . He is there all the time, not only at night." Compare (1988: 32): "Aphrodite . . . made him her closet servant in her holy temple . . ." Nagy (1979: 191) interpreted *mýchion* as meaning 'underground', in the sense of an "undisturbed corner plot, **mukhós**, of Aphrodite's precinct (hence **múkhios** at *Th.* 991)": "And she made him an underground temple attendant, a **dîos daímōn**, in her holy temple." Later (1990: 254), he modified this statement to

be given the benefit of the doubt, Phaethon's transformation into a *nēopólon nýchion*, a 'nightly temple keeper', "un guardien des nuits"[85] or a "night-watchman"[86] must be "an obvious night-luminary reference",[87] indissolubly related to Aphrodite's intimate association with the planet Venus, as intimated in a note contained in a number of 14th- and 15th-century Greek manuscripts: 'the star of Dawn (Ēōs) that brings up both the day and Phaethon is Venus (Aphrodite)'.[88] Venus' patronage of marriage had at least since the 1st century BCE been interpreted in terms of her planetary aspect, specifically in relation to Mount Oeta. For Claudian (±400 CE), a male Hesperus was the beloved one of Venus: "Hesperus, loved of Venus, rises and shines for the marriage with his Idalian rays."[89] Servius directly associated the tale of Heracles' cremation with Oeta, where the stars were seen to set and worship was made of Hesperus, the female evening star, 'who is said to have loved Hymenaeus, the most handsome of boys'.[90] And the Roman poet, Catullus († ±54 BCE), in no uncertain terms hailed Venus, rising as evening star above Mount Oeta, as the patron of wedlock, "Hesperus the same but with changed name Eous", who joins lovers by snatching them away from their parents.[91]

Although the earliest textual identification of Aphrodite with Venus dates no earlier than the Platonic *Epinomis* (4th century

---

the effect that "the adjective *múkhios* 'secreted' describing Phaethon in *Theogony* 991 implies a stay in the underworld, as we see from the usage of *mukhós* 'secret place' in *Theogony* 119." Diggle (1970: 10 and note 2) rejected such translations, applying the term to the *adyton* or inner shrine of Aphrodite's temple again: "This, rather than underground . . . is probably the implication of μύχιον."

[85] Mazon, in Grelot 1956: 27.

[86] McKay 1970: 454.

[87] Poirier 1999: 374.

[88] " . . .*ho heōios astèr ho anágōn tèn hēméran kaì tòn Phaéthonta hē Aphrodítē estín.*" schol. on Hes. *Th.* 990, ed. Di Gregorio 1975: 121. Nagy's (1990: 258) translation implies a reference to Phaethon's resuscitation: ". . . the star of Eos, the one that brings back to light and life [verb *an-ágō*] the day and Phaethon". This is acceptable in respect of the scholiast's preceding admission that Phaethon was made to undergo apotheosis: ". . . *hōs àn en tois hierois autēs naois apethēōsen autón, hieréa aphanē poiēsasa, epeidè ou phaínetai teleutésas.*"

[89] Claud. *Fesc.* 4 (14), 1-2.

[90] "*Oeta mons Thessaliae, in quo Hercules exustus est volens . . . et post in caelum receptus est. de hoc monte* stellae videntur occidere, sicut de Ida nasci, ut iamque iugis summae surgebat lucifer Idea. . . . *in eodem monte Hesperus coli dicitur, qui Hymenaeum, speciosum puerum, amasse dicitur . . .*" Serv. *Buc.* 8. 30, eds. Thilo & Hagen 1927: 98; compare Nonn. *Dion.* 38. 137; Von Wilamowitz-Möllendorff 1883: 417.

[91] Catull. 62. 1-5, 7, 20-28, 35.

BCE),[92] it is worth asking whether the lascivious goddess Aphrodite could have signified the planet as early as Hesiod's time. As the worship of Aphrodite—via her religious centre, Cyprus—was arguably based directly on the cults of the Semitic goddesses Astarte and Ištar, the latter of whom had been linked with Venus since the 2nd or even 3rd millennium BCE,[93] it is *a priori* likely that Aphrodite's association with the planet Venus had lingered in the background of her cult and myths from its first arrival in Greece, but whether Hesiod or other early mythographers were consciously aware of this intrinsic connection is debatable; they could have adopted and adapted Aphrodite's myths with or without awareness of the goddess' original planetary aspect.

Catasterism of the Goddess' Lover in Ancient Near Eastern Traditions

Where does this leave Aphrodite's *zatheois . . . nēois* or 'sacred shrines', to which she transferred Phaethon? The key is that, for mortal heroes to be immortalised, the ancient mindset requires them to 'go to heaven', to be elevated into the sky and to be transformed into a celestial body. From a mythological perspective, *catasterism* is the indispensable mechanism to achieve immortality.[94] On a ritual level, where temples are widely conceived as mesocosmic replications of the sky, this presents the intriguing paradox that one's concealment in the earthly temple of a goddess equates one's symbolical promotion into the sky as a heavenly body. Such a line of reasoning informs Plutarch's revelation concerning the Egyptian practice:

> In regard not only to these gods, but in regard to the other gods, save only those whose existence had no beginning and shall have no end, the priests say that their bodies, after they have done with their labours, have been placed in the keeping of the priests and are cherished there, but that their souls shine as the stars in the firmament . . .[95]

Sure enough, the common fate of the male lovers of great goddesses in ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia is precisely death and subsequent resurrection through catasterism. According to the theology

---

[92] Pl. *Epin.* 987B.

[93] Certainly, the Sumerian goddess Inanna, whose cult eventually merged with that of Ištar, was already associated with Venus in the late 3rd millennium BCE, Szarzyńska 1993: 7-8, 14, and more sceptically, Kurtik 1999.

[94] Heracles, for instance, upon his reception in the sky, was thought to have turned into the constellation of the same name.

[95] Plut. *De Is. et Os.* 359C (21).

reflected in the ancient Egyptian *Pyramid Texts*, the god Horus' celebrated ascent to the sky in the form of the morning star constituted a form of rebirth which was really a unification with his mother Nūt, the personification of the sky.[96] Insofar as Nūt is interchangeable with Ḥatḥor in the funerary texts,[97] this trait may be compared to a sacred marriage of Horus and Ḥatḥor that was annually celebrated in Ptolemaic times from the day of the new moon in the third month of Summer to the day of the full moon in the temple of Horus of Beḥuṭeṭ at Edfu: ". . . Hathor boarded her great river-going processional barge and was towed up-stream towards Edfu . . . Eventually, the boats arrived at Edfu, and Horus and his bride entered the enclosure . . . this was the marriage proper, and Horus and Hathor spent their marriage night in the Sanctuary."[98] A recurrent Sumero-Babylonian motif, meanwhile, concerns the "various ill-fated liaisons of the goddess Ištar"[99] as well as her celebrated *hieròs gámos* with Adonis' distant precursor, Tammuz or Dumuzi. In a text found on one tablet, for which no date is given, Inanna sings of her passionate love for Dumuzi, whom she installed as the *en* or overseer of her temples in various Sumerian cities.[100] At Dumuzi's premature death, Inanna pleads for his funeral boat to be directed towards heaven: "Oh Maid, station him for me at the sky, / Station for me at the sky the greatest of wild oxen, / Station Dumuzi for me at the sky, / Station for me at the sky the greatest of wild oxen . . ."[101] Apparently, Dumuzi journeys to the

---

[96] *Pyramid Texts*, 379-381 (269); 392 (272); 910-913 (470); 1036-1038 (485C); 1320 (539); 1344-1345 (548); 2106-2107 (690). ". . . the coffin becomes the body of the sky- and mother-goddess, thus enabling the 'placing of the body in the coffin' to be transfigured into the ascent of the deceased to the heavens and the return to the mother-goddess (*regressus ad uterum*). . . . Through this rebirth, the deceased becomes a star-god . . . This rebirth . . . takes place inside the mother's womb, inside the coffin and sky." Assmann 1989: 139f.

[97] Compare *Coffin Texts*, 44 (I. 181); 300 (IV. 52); 696 (VI. 330).

[98] Fairman 1954: 196f.

[99] These are enumerated in the *Gilgameš Epic* (Ninevite version), 6, Frayne 1985: 11.

[100] "My vulva—the passionate one (has put (his) hand on it), / My vulva—the potent one (has put (his) hand on it / The spouse, the spouse . . ., / And so the son makes not (happy) the temple . . . / When I made the en supreme, when I made the en supreme, / When I made the en supreme in Erech, in the Eanna, / . . . / Of the (cities) of my land—their happy shrines, their temples, / I made for him, I installed an en in them." 'a *šìr-nam-šub* of Inanna' (BM 88318 obv.), 6-21, tr. Kramer 1984: 5-6.

[101] 'a *šìr-nam-šub* of Inanna' (BM 88318 obv.), 48-51, tr. Kramer 1984: 6. "Station Dumuzi for me at the sky" translates Sumerian ^{d}dumu-zi-de an-né gub-ba-ma-ab.

sky, where he is stationed "as a planet or a star, with the help of Inanna's mother Ningal and his own mother Zertur."[102]

Venus Immortalising an Adoptive 'Son'

Importantly, the instrumental role played by a goddess in general in such catasterisms was extended to the functional repertoire of Aphrodite herself. While classical mythographers indulged in the portrayal of Aphrodite's trysts with mortal men, it is noteworthy that Roman writers have also preserved a tradition in which the goddess immortalised a 'lover' by transferring him into the sky. The appearance of a comet during the funeral games Emperor Octavius Augustus held after the death of Julius Caesar († 44 BCE) was interpreted as the transportation of Caesar's soul into the sky as a means to immortalise him. On this occasion, Augustus allegedly declared:

> On the very days of my Games a comet was visible for seven days in the northern part of the sky. It was rising about an hour before sunset, and was a bright star, visible from all lands. The common people believed that this star signified the soul of Caesar received among the spirits of the immortal gods, and on this account the emblem of a star was added to the bust of Caesar that we shortly afterwards dedicated in the forum.[103]

The comet—dubbed the *sidus Iulium* or 'Julian star'—appears to be historic: it is mentioned in nearly a dozen classical sources[104] as well as two accounts from China and Korea and its course has tentatively been plotted by modern cometologists.[105] Quick to capitalise

---

[102] Kramer 1984: 5. While Kramer (1984: 7) argued that this "Maid", the goddess Ningal, "to judge from the context, cannot refer to Inanna", it might well refer to Inanna after all if these lines were sung, not by someone representing Inanna, but a chorus addressing her. Compare: "He is refreshed in the palace; they address him as follows: 'Dumuzid, radiant in the temple (?) and on earth! Mother Inana, Mother Inana, your mounds, your mounds (?)! Mother Inana, Inana of heaven . . ." 'a *šir-nam-šub* of Inanna' (BM 88318), 55-59, tr. Black *et alii* 1998-: 4.0.7.7. ". . . radiant in the temple (?) and on earth" renders *é-e-àm ki-àm dadag-ga*.

[103] Augustus, apud Plin. *HN*. 2. 23 (93-94). ". . . in the northern part of the sky" translates *in regione caeli quae sub septentrionibus est*, "the soul of Caesar received among the spirits of the immortal gods" *Caesaris animam inter deorum immortalium numina receptam*. For the comet's northern position in the sky, compare Serv. *Aen*. 8. 681; Jul. Obs. *Prod*. 68; Dio Cass. 45. 6. 4-7. 1.

[104] In addition to the sources cited above, see Sen. *Q. Nat*. 7. 17. 2; Suet. *Iul*. 88; Plut. *Caes*. 69. 3 (740); Calp. *Ecl*. 1. 82-83; Serv. *Aen*. 1. 287; 6. 790; 8. 681; *Ecl*. 9. 47.

[105] Ramsey & Licht 1997. Kronk (1999: 22f.) catalogued the comet as C/-43 K1.

on popular belief, poets such as Ovid were happy to rise above the strictly factual: ". . . . Caesar is god in his own city. Him . . . changed to a new heavenly body, a flaming star; but still more his offspring deified him."[106] Caesar had been a longstanding devotee of Venus, whose *gens*, the Iulii, claimed descent from the goddess. As his funeral games had been held in honour of Venus Genetrix, it comes as no surprise that a belletrist of Ovid's calibre would pinpoint Venus in its evening aspect as the protagonist in Caesar's apotheosis: "Then indeed did Cytherea smite on her breast with both her hands and strive to hide her Caesar in a cloud . . ."[107] Jove is introduced prodding Venus to spirit away Caesar:

> This son of thine, goddess of Cythera, for whom thou grievest, has fulfilled his allotted time, and his years are finished which he owed to earth. That as a god he may enter heaven and have his place in temples on the earth, thou shalt accomplish, thou and his son. . . . Meanwhile do thou catch up this soul from the slain body and make him a star in order that ever it may be the divine Julius who looks forth upon our Capitol and Forum from his lofty temple. . . . Scarce had he spoken when fostering Venus took her place within the senate-house, unseen of all, caught up the passing soul of her Caesar from his body, and not suffering it to vanish into air, she bore it towards the stars of heaven. And as she bore it, she felt it glow and burn, and released it from her bosom. Higher than the moon it mounted up and, leaving behind it a fiery train, gleamed as a star.[108]

Ovid's rendition of the event adheres in two vital respects to the 'archetypal' pattern of divine adoption discussed above. Firstly, in styling Caesar *hic sua*, "This son of thine", Jove brings Caesar's fate remarkably close to the characterisation of Hymenaeus as the foster-son of Aphrodite. And secondly, Caesar's double act of 'entering heaven' and 'having his place in temples on the earth' closely approximates Phaethon's installation in Aphrodite's temple as the

---

[106] Ov. *Met.* 15. 746-750. ". . . changed to a new heavenly body, a flaming star . . ." translates *in sidus vertere novum stellamque comantem*.

[107] Ov. *Met.* 15. 803-806.

[108] Ov. *Met.* 15. 816-821, 840-850. "That as a god he may enter heaven and have his place in temples on the earth" translates *ut deus accedat caelo templisque colatur . . .*; "and his son" or *natusque suus* refers to Augustus as Caesar's adoptive son. ". . . do thou catch up this soul from the slain body and make him a star" renders . . . *hanc animam . . . caeso de corpore raptam fac iubar . . .* The final sentence reads: *alma Venus . . . suique Caesaris eripuit membris nec in aera solvi passa recentem animam caelestibus intulit astris dumque tulit, lumen capere atque ignescere sensit emisitque sinu: luna volat altius illa flammiferumque trahens spatioso limite crinem stella micat . . .* The choice of word, *eripuit* or 'snatched away' reminds of Aphrodite's forceful abduction of Phaethon.

enactment of his ascension into the sky. The allotment of a different fate for Caesar's corpse and his soul, meanwhile, is paralleled at an early time in a spell in the Egyptian *Pyramid Texts*: "The spirit is bound for the sky, the corpse is bound for the earth . . ."[109]

Any doubt that Roman *literati* regarded the retriever of Caesar's spirit not merely as Aphrodite in her divine aspect, but in her planetary aspect is dispelled by Propertius' († ±15 BCE) enunciation: "But Father Caesar from the star of Venus looks marvelling on: 'I am a god . . .'"[110] Significantly, astronomical retrocalculations show that "the planet Venus is likely to have been visible in the evening sky not long after the *sidus Iulium* rose at about the 11th hour in late July. . . . Therefore, the planet Venus should have been visible at twilight as the evening star if the sky was relatively free of the volcanic dust veil by that time of the year. . . . the star of Venus would have been seen in the west for at least a short interval while the *sidus Iulium* was beaming in the NE. Surely this happy coincidence could not have been overlooked by those who wished to exploit the celestial phenomenon to argue that Caesar's soul was soaring to the heavens where it would join the rank of the gods."[111] As a final shared trait between Caesar's comet and the abducted Phaethon, both events were believed to mark the transition from one cosmological era to the next; just like Phaethon's conflagration was interpreted as an epoch-making watershed in cosmic history, so the Etruscan augur Vulcanius "*stated in a public meeting*" that the *sidus Iulium* "*was a comet* (cometes) *which indicated the end of the ninth and the beginning of the tenth age. . . . Augustus too included this information in book two of his* Memoirs."[112] This 'tenth age' is bound to be identical to the famous 'era of Augustus' that was widely believed to restore paradise-like conditions to the world. Thus, the popular myth of Caesar's deification by means of a comet would appear to have been moulded on the hoary theme of Aphrodite absconding with the soul of a mortal lover.

---

[109] *Pyramid Texts*, 474 (305), tr. Faulkner 1969: 94

[110] Prop. 4. 6. 59-60. The actual phrase Propertius used for "the star of Venus" is *Idalio . . . astro*, the 'Idalian star'.

[111] Ramsey & Licht 1997: 138f.

[112] Serv. *Ecl.* 9. 47, eds. Thilo & Hagen 1927: 173-174, tr. Ramsey & Licht 1997: 164-165; compare *Aen.* 10. 272.

Phaethon's Abduction as an Interpretatio Graeca of a Myth of Catasterism

The 'repugnance' classicists sensed at the thought of a *daímōn* or 'demon' marrying a goddess of Aphrodite's stature[113] ought to evaporate if Phaethon's 'marriage' to the patroness of love was merely construed as a metaphor for his posthumous elevation to the sky, all the more if this motif was simply an *interpretatio Graeca* of a theme exceedingly widespread in ancient Near Eastern lore: that of the exaltation of the king's soul into the sky—annually during his life and permanently after his death—in order to conjoin with a celestial goddess in a *hieròs gámos*. In the light of the comparative evidence, Aphrodite's removal of Phaethon apparently involved not only his death and apotheosis, but his assumption into the sky and his transformation into a planet, star, or constellation.[114]

This conclusion allows three further speculations. Firstly, the 'brightness' expressed etymologically in Phaethon's name[115] is readily understood in terms of a radiant celestial object.[116] Secondly, Phaethon's exceptional beauty, noted by Hyginus, and his description as *phaídimon hyión* or "a splendid son" by Hesiod warrant the same suggestion, buttressed by Hyginus' straightforward interpretation of Phaethon's beauty contest with Aphrodite in terms of planetary brightness. And thirdly, an isolated citation from an unknown work of Euripides by Plutarch, in which the release of a mortal soul is compared to a meteor, may have belonged to *Phaethon* and

---

[113] Von Wilamowitz-Möllendorff 1883: 416; Diggle 1970: 159.

[114] "Das alte Naturmärchen konnte einfach erzählen, Aphrodite nimmt sich den Jüngling den sie liebt, und lässt ihn zum Sterne werden." Von Wilamowitz-Möllendorff 1883: 433. At the juncture in Euripides' *Phaethon* where the youngster's smoking body is discovered, "Sie mag dann auch die Verstirnung des toten Jünglings verkündet haben." Lesky 1932: 3.

[115] Greek Φαέθων *Phaéthōn* is a present participle with *th*-suffix, based on a thematic aorist *pháe-*, 'to light up, radiate, be bright'. From the same stem were derived the verb *phaeínō*, 'to gleam', the noun *pháos*, 'light', later contracted in Attic to *phōs*, and many other words, Frisk 1957: 989-991 s. v. 'φάος'. The form *pháe-* derived from a Proto-Greek stem **p^{h}awe-*, which was itself a *u*-extension to the Proto-Indo-European root **b^{h}eh$_2$-*, 'to shine': **b^{h}h$_2$-u-*. The same root is contained in Sanskrit *bhā-*, 'shine, light, lustre', and *bhā-ti*, 'luminary', Avestan *bā-*, 'to shine, appear, seem', Old Irish *bān*, 'white', Tocharian A *paṃ*, 'clear, bright', and other forms, Pokorny 1959: 104-105 s. v. 'bhā-, bhō-, bhə'; Chantraine 1968: 1168-1170 s. v. 'φάε'. Nonnus (*Dion.* 38. 142-144) devised an obvious play on the name when he related that Phaethon was *phaesphóron*, "brilliant with light", upon his birth: "Then Clymene's womb swelled in that fruitful union, and when the birth ripened she brought forth a baby son divine and brilliant with light."

[116] Reckford 1972: 427 note 23.

referred to the character's posthumous transit to heaven if it is allowed that Plutarch counts Phaethon among *thnētōn* or "mortal men":

> Nature has placed within our ken perceptible images and visible likenesses, the sun and the stars for the gods, and for mortal men beams of light, comets, and meteors, a comparison which Euripides has made in the verses:
>
> He that yesterday was vigorous
> Of frame, even as a star from heaven falls,
> Gave up in death his spirit to the air.[117]

Clearly, the myth of Phaethon—whether Hesiod's version or the standard one—presupposes a nature myth with a radiant celestial body for a protagonist. Interpreted along these lines, Hesiod's reference to Phaethon is more easily reconcilable with the standard myth of Phaethon's accident with the solar chariot. The necessity of Phaethon's death for his catasterisation brings Hesiod's passage considerably closer to the 'other' Phaethon, who was likewise given a tragic death as a youngster. Crucially, a late tradition, exclusively known from the Roman period onwards, appends an episode of catasterism to the story of Phaethon's fall from heaven, in which the lad was fittingly turned into the constellation of *Hēníokhos* or *Auriga*, the Chariot:

> But Father Zeus fixed Phaëthon in Olympos, like a Charioteer, and bearing that name. As he holds in the radiant Chariot of the heavens with shining arm, he has the shape of a Charioteer starting upon his course, as if even among the stars he longed again for his father's car.[118]

Not all difficulties are resolved with this comparison, as Phaethon's connection with Auriga—though this is the only constellation ever

---

[117] Eur. Fr. 971, ed. Kannicht 2004: 968, apud Plut. *Def. Or.* 13 (416D). Compare: ". . . Euripides says / He who but now / Flourished in health, has like a shooting star / Vanished." *Non Poss. Suav. Viv.* 4 (1090C). Yet: "However attractive it may be to attribute the fragment to the speech describing Phaethon's death, such an attribution is merest guesswork." Diggle 1970: 176f.

[118] Nonn. *Dion.* 38. 424-431; compare: *stat gelidis Auriga plagis*, "the charioteer is there in his icy zone", Claud. *Cons. Sext. Aug.* 28. 168-172. Scholiasts matter-of-factly attest to catasterism in general, without specification of the asterism involved: "Post fulminis ictum caelo receptus",*Schol. Basileensia* on German. *Arat.* 43. 9, ed. Dell'Era 1979: 370; ". . . et a Sole patre inter sidera collocatus."*Schol. Strozziana* on German. *Arat.* 46. 47-52, ed. Dell'Era 1979: 231, cf. 40. 1-16, ed. 1979: 222; Knaack 1884: 2179; Grelot 1956: 25 note 3; Allen 1963: 84f. s. v. 'Auriga'; Diggle 1970: 194f. Knaack (1884: 2182) branded this catasterism 'free Alexandrinian speculation', but as Diggle has shown, there is no evidence for an Alexandrinian source common to Ovid and Nonnus.

identified with him—is difficult to square with the reasonable assumption that Aphrodite's 'sacred shrines' in the sky are stations in the orbit of the planet Venus and competes with indications that a planet, a comet or a meteor was envisioned as the original referent of the myth. While the intricacies of this subject are best reserved for another discussion, it is noteworthy that a deity's joint association with a planet and a constellation certainly formed no obstacle within the Mesopotamian tradition; during the early 1st millennium BCE, "Many names are shared between planets, and between planets and constellations or stars . . ."[119]

Conclusion

In sum, the theme of apotheosis through catasterism followed by consummation of the 'holy marriage'—as familiar from ancient Near Eastern traditions—forges a link that allows for the ultimate unity of the two divergent lines of tradition concerning Phaethon. Allowing for the usual level of variation in genealogical and other finer details when comparing different versions of a myth, the above then enables the following reconstruction of the 'full' myth of Phaethon:

> Phaethon was a radiant and young mortal 'man' who approached his father, the sun, with the request to ride the solar chariot for a day, perhaps in an attempt to evade the marriage planned for him. Unable to control the reins, he crashed and, setting himself and the world ablaze, fell into the river Eridanus and died. Envious of his beauty, an enamoured Aphrodite in her aspect as the planet Venus then intercepted and immortalised his soul by transporting it into the sky, adopting and marrying it as her own son-lover, and installing it as a bright celestial body protecting her own 'shrine'.[120]

---

[119] Brown 2000: 53. "The identification of various stars and planets with each other, and especially of constellations with planets, is a very distinctive feature of Babylonian astrology. Nevertheless, in the letters and reports the fixed stars appear mostly either as planets or in connection with planets . . . that planet is understood as giving the fixed stars their colours, or making them bright or faint . . . Bezold . . . developed the idea, first proposed by Boll, that the identification worked by likeness in colour rather than mythologically, phonetically or otherwise . . . The rules of identification are often obscure to us . . ." Koch-Westenholz 1995: 130f., 142.

[120] Von Wilamowitz-Möllendorff (1883: 433) attributed a similar reconstruction to Euripides: "In dem Momente, wo Euripides den Gedanken fasste, Phaethon die Liebe Aphrodites als seiner unwürdig verschmähen und lieber die Fahrt wagen zu lassen, die ihm den Tod bringt, und andrerseits, wo er Aphrodite den Geliebten zum Stern machen liess, weil sie ihn verloren hatte, war das Naturmärchen zur

Acknowledgments

Without the generous support of the Mainwaring Archive Foundation this article could not have been completed. I am also grateful to Ev Cochrane and Peter James, with who I have had the pleasure to exchange many thoughts and notes on this subject over the years. Ev helpfully supplied me with a copy of Kramer's article, which was hard to find. Thanks finally to Walter Burkert, James Diggle, Gregory Nagy and Martin West for saving me from possible embarrassment with their stimulating feedback and suggestions, and to Karel Jongeling for answering questions about Punic morphology.

Bibliography

Albright, W. F., *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan; A Historical Analysis of Two Contrasting Faiths* (New York: Doubleday, 1968)

Allen, R. H., *Star Names; Their Lore and Meaning* (New York: Dover Publications, 1963)

Assmann, J., 'Death and Initiation in the Funerary Religion of Ancient Egypt', in J. P. Allen *et alii* (eds.), *Religion and Philosophy in Ancient Egypt* ('Yale Egyptological Studies', 3; New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1989), 135-159

Astour, M. C., *Hellenosemitica; An Ethnic and Cultural Study in West Semitic Impact on Mycenaean Greece* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1965)

Bergk, Th. (ed.), *Poetae Lyrici Graeci* (3; Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1882[4])

Black, J. A., G. Cunningham, E. Fluckiger-Hawker, E. Robson, and G. Zólyomi (trs.), *The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature* (http://www.-etcsl.orient.ox.ac.uk; Oxford, 1998-)

Breysig, A. (ed.), *Germanici Caesaris Aratea cvm Scholiis* (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1867)

Brown, D., *Mesopotamian Planetary Astronomy-Astrology* ('Cuneiform Monographs', 18; Groningen: Styx Publications, 2000)

Brown, J. P., *Israel and Hellas* (1 of 3; 'Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft', 231; Berlin: Walter de Gruyer, 1995)

Buffière, F. (tr.), *Héraclite; Allégories d'Homère* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1989)

Burkert, W., *Greek Religion* (tr. J. Raffan; Cambridge, Massachusetts; Harvard University Press, 1985)

Chantraine, P. (ed.), *Dictionnaire Étymologique de la Langue Grecque; Histoire des Mots* (2 of 2; Paris: Éditions Klincksieck, 1968)

Collard, C., M. J. Cropp & K. H. Lee (eds.), *Euripides: Selected Fragmentary Plays* (1; Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1997)

Cook, A. B., 'Who Was the Wife of Zeus?', *The Classical Review*, 20 (1906), 365-378, 416-419

Tragödie geworden." Similarly, Knaack, in Gruppe 1886: 647-649. Collard *et alii* (1997: 197), more neutrally, hypothesise that, towards the end of the play, "a god would have interrupted to rescue Clymene, confirming Phaethon's divine parentage and his future after death (fr. 6D . . .)."

Croon, J. H., 'Artemis Thermia and Apollo Thermios (with an Excursus on the Oetean Heracles-Cult)', *Mnemosyne; Bibliotheca Classica Batava*, 4. 9 (1956), 193-220
Dell'Era, A. (ed.), *Una Miscellanea Astronomica Medievale: Gli* Scholia Strozziana *a Germanico* ('Atti della Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei'; 'Classe di Scienze Morali, Storiche e Filologiche', 8. 23. 2; Rome: Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 1979)
———, *Gli* Scholia Basileensia *a Germanico* ('Atti della Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei'; 'Classe di Scienze Morali, Storiche e Filologiche', 8. 23. 4; Rome: Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 1979)
Diggle, J. (ed.), *Euripides: Phaethon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970)
Di Gregorio, L. (ed.), *Scholia Vetera in Hesiodi Theogoniam* (Milan: Pubblicazioni della Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, 1975)
Dumézil, G., *The Stakes of the Warrior* (tr. D. Weeks; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983)
Etz, D., 'Is Isaiah xiv 12-15 a Reference to Comet Halley?', *Vetus Testamentum*, 36 (1986), 289-301
Fairman, H. W., 'Worship and Festivals in an Egyptian Temple', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library Manchester*, 37 (1954-1955), 165-203
Farnell, L. R., *Greek Hero Cults and Ideas of Immortality; The Gifford Lectures Delivered in the University of St. Andrews in the Year 1920* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1921)
Faulkner, R. O. (tr.), *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969)
Forsyth, N., *The Old Enemy; Satan and the Combat Myth* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1987)
Frayne, D. R., 'Notes on the Sacred Marriage Rite', *Bibliotheca Orientalis*, 42 (1985), 5-22
Frisk, H. (ed.), *Griechisches etymologisches Wörterbuch* (4 of 4; 'Indogermanische Bibliothek', 2; Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1957)
Gain, D. B. (tr.), *The Aratus Ascribed to Germanicus Caesar; Edited with an Introduction, Translation & Commentary* (London: The Athlone Press, 1976)
Gantz, T., *Early Greek Myth; A Guide to Literary and Artistic Sources* (1 of 2; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993)
Garr, W. R., 'Prenasalization in Aramaic', in C. L. Miller (ed.), *Studies in Semitic and Afroasiatic Linguistics Presented to Gene B. Gragg* ('Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization', 60; Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2007), 81-109
George, A. (tr.), *The Epic of Gilgamesh; The Babylonian Epic Poem and Other Texts in Akkadian and Sumerian* (London: Allen Lane, Penguin Press, 1999)
Goldman, H., 'Sandon and Herakles', *Hesperia Supplement*, 8 (1949), 164-174
Goossens, G., *Hiérapolis de Syrie; Essai de Monographie Historique* ('Publicaties op het Gebied der Geschiedenis en der Philologie', 3. 12; Leuven: publisher not given, 1943)
Grant, M. (tr.), *The Myths of Hyginus* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1960)
Grelot, P., 'Isaïe XIV 12-15 et son Arrière-plan Mythologique', *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions*, 149 (1956), 18-48
Gruppe, O., review of G. Knaack, *Quaestiones Phaethonteae*, 1886, in *Wochenschrift für klassische Philologie*, 3 (1886), 647-651
Gunkel, H., *Schöpfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit; eine religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung über Gen 1 und Ap Joh 12* (Göttingen: VandenHoeck & Ruprecht, 1895)
Harrison, J. E., *Themis; A Study of the Social Origins of Greek Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1927)

Helm, R. (ed.), *Fabii Planciadis Fvlgentii V. C. Opera Accedvnt Fabii Clavdii Gordiani Fvlgentii V. C. De Aetatibus Mvndi et Hominis et S. Fvlgentii Episcopi Svper Thebaiden* ('Bibliotheca Scriptorvm Graecorvm et Romanorvm Tevbneriana'; Stuttgart: B. G. Teubner, 1970)

Jolles, A., 'Hymen, Hymenaios', in G. Wissowa (ed.), *Paulys Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft* (17; Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 1914), 126-130

Kannicht, R., review of J. Diggle, *Euripides: Phaethon*, *Gnomon*, 44 (1972), 1-12

Kannicht, R. (ed.), *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta (TrGF)* (5; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004)

Kerényi, C., *The Heroes of the Greeks* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1978)

Knaack, G., 'Phaëthon (Φαέθων)', in W. H. Roscher (ed.), *Ausführliches Lexikon der griechischen und römischen Mythologie* (3 of 6; Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1884-1937), 2175-2195

Koch-Westenholz, U., *Mesopotamian Astrology; An Introduction to Babylonian and Assyrian Celestial Divination* ('Carsten Niebuhr Institute Publications', 19; Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 1995)

Kramer, S., 'BM 88318: The Ascension of Dumuzi to Heaven', *Recueil de Travaux et Communications de l'Association des Études du Proche-Orient Ancien*, 2 (1984), 5-8

Kretschmer, P., 'Mythische Namen: 5. Herakles', *Glotta; Zeitschrift für griechische und lateinische Sprache*, 8 (1917), 121-129

Kronk, G. W., *Cometography; A Catalog of Comets* (1; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999)

Kugler, F. X., *Sibyllinischer Sternkampf und Phaëthon in naturgeschichtlicher Beleuchtung* ('Aschendorffs Zeitgemässe Schriften', 17; Münster: Aschendorffsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1927)

Kurtik, G. E., 'The Identification of Inanna with the Planet Venus: A Criterion for the Time Determination of the Recognition of Constellations in Ancient Mesopotamia', *Astronomical and Astrophysical Transactions*, 17 (1999), 501-513

Lesky, A., 'Zum Phaethon des Euripides', *Wiener Studien; Zeitschrift für klassische Philologie*, 50 (1932), 1-25

Liddell, H. G. & R. Scott (eds.), *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996[9], 1968)

Lightfoot, J. L. (tr.), *Lucian: On the Syrian Goddess* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003)

Lipiński, E., 'El's Abode; Mythological Traditions Related to Mount Hermon and to the Mountains of Armenia', *Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica*, 2 (1971), 13-69

Lloyd-Jones, H., review of J. Diggle, *Euripides: Phaethon*, *The Classical Review*, 21. 3 (1971), 341-345

Loretz, O., 'Der kanaanäisch-biblische Mythos vom Sturz des Šaḥar-Sohnes Hêlēl (Jes 14, 12-15)', *Ugarit-Forschungen; Internationales Jahrbuch für die Altertumskunde Syrien-Palästinas*, 8 (1976), 133-136

Maehler, H. (ed.), *Pindari Carmina cum Fragmentis; Pars II: Fragmenta; Indices* ('Bibliotheca Scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana'; Leipzig: Teubner Verlagsgesellschaft, 1989)

Marshall, P. K. (ed.), *Hygini Fabvlae* ('Bibliotheca Scriptorvm Graecorvm et Romanorvm Tevbneriana'; Stuttgart & Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1993)

McCracken, G. E. (tr.), *Arnobius of Sicca: The Case against the Pagans* (2 of 2; 'Ancient Christian Writers; The Works of the Fathers in Translation', 8; London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1949)

McKay, J. W., 'Helel and the Dawn-Goddess; A Re-examination of the Myth in Isaiah XIV 12-15', *Vetus Testamentum*, 20 (1970), 451-464

Merkelbach, R. & M. L. West (eds.), *Fragmenta Hesiodea* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967)

Micyllus, Iacobus (ed.), *C. Ivlii Hygini Avgvsti Liberti Fabvlarvm Liber, ad Omnivm Poëtarum Lectionem Mire Necessarius & Antehac Nunquam Excusus; Eiusdem Poeticon Astronomicon, Libri Quatuor; Palaephati de Fabulosis Narrationibus, Liber 1; F. Fvlgentii Placiadis Episcopi Carthaginensis Mythologiarum, Libri III; Eiusdem de Uocum Antiquarum Interpretatione, Liber. 1; Arati Phainomenōn Fragmentum, Germanico Cæsare Interprete; Eiusdem Phænomena Græce, cum Interpretatione Latina; Procli de Sphaera Libellus, Græce & Latine; Index Rerum & Fabularum in his Omnibus Scitu Dignarum Copiosissimus* (Basel: Ioan. Hervuagius, 1535)

Munckerus, Th. (ed.), *Mythographorum Latinorum Complectens Fabii Planciadis Fulgentii Mythologias, Continentiam Virgilianam, & Libellum de Prisco Sermone; Lactantii Placidi Argumenta Metamorphoseôn Nasonianarum; Albrici Philosophi Commentariolum de Imaginibus Deorum* (2; Amsterdam: Joannis à Someren, 1681)

Nagy, G., *The Best of the Achaeans; Concepts of the Hero in Archaic Greek Poetry* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979)

———, *Greek Mythology and Poetics* ('Myth and Poetics', 2; Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990)

———, *Homer's Text and Language* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2004)

Nilsson, M. P., *The Mycenaean Origin of Greek Mythology* ('Sather Classical Lectures', 8; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932)

Pokorny, J. (ed.), *Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch* (1 of 2; Bern: Francke Verlag, 1959)

Poirier, J. C., 'An Illuminating Parallel to Isaiah XIV 12', *Vetus Testamentum*, 49. 3 (1999), 371-389

Possanza, D. M., *Translating the Heavens; Aratus, Germanicus, and the Poetics of Latin Translation* ('Lang Classical Studies', 14; New York: Peter Lang, 2004)

Pötscher, W., 'Der Name des Herakles', *Emerita; Revista de Linguistica y Filologia Clasica*, 38. 1 (1970), 169-184

Ramsey, J. T. & A. L. Licht, *The Comet of 44 B. C. and Caesar's Funeral Games* ('American Philological Association: American Classical Studies', 39; Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1997)

Reckford, K. J., 'Phaethon, Hippolytus, and Aphrodite', *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, 103 (1972), 405-432

Robert, C. (ed.), *Eratosthenis Catasterismorvm Reliqviae* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1878)

Robert, C., 'Die Phaethonsage bei Hesiod', *Hermes; Zeitschrift für classische Philologie*, 18 (1883), 434-441

Rose, H. I. (ed.), *Hygini Fabvlae Recensvit, Prolegomenis Commentario Appendice Instrvxit* (Leiden: A. W. Sijthoff, 1934)

Sauer, B., 'Hymenaios', in W. H. Roscher (ed.), *Ausführliches Lexikon der griechischen und römischen Mythologie* (1. 2; Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1886-1890), 2800-2804

Schmidt, K. L., 'Lucifer als gefallene Engelmacht', *Theologische Zeitschrift*, 7. 3 (1951), 161-179

Seyrig, H., 'Héraclès-Nergal', *Syria*, 24 (1945), 62-80, reprinted in *Antiquités Syriennes* ('Institut Français d'Archéologie de Beyrouth: Publications hors Série 8', 4 (1-6); Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1953), 1-19

Shapiro, H. A., '*Hêrôs Theos*: The Death and Apotheosis of Herakles', *Classical World*, 77. 1 (1983), 7-18

Simon, B. (tr.), *Nonnos de Panopolis: Les Dionysiaques* (14; Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1999)

Stallbaum, J. G., *Eustathii Archiepiscopi Thessalonicensis Commentarii ad Homeri Odysseam ad Fidem Exempli Romani Editi* (1; Leipzig: J. A. G. Weigel, 1825)
Suhr, E. G., 'Herakles and Omphale', *American Journal of Archaeology*, 57. 4 (1953), 251-263
Szarzyńska, K., 'Offerings for the Goddess Inana in Archaic Uruk', *Revue d'Assyriologie*, 87 (1993), 7-28
Thilo, G. & H. Hagen (eds.), *Servii Grammatici qui Feruntur In Vergilii Carmina Commentarii* (3 of 3; Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1927)
Tümpel, K., 'Zu koïschen Mythen', *Philologus; Zeitschrift für das classische Alterthum*, 50 (1891), 607-636
Vermeule, E., *Aspects of Death in Early Greek Art and Poetry* ('Sather Classical Lectures', 46; Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1981)
Von Wilamowitz-Möllendorff, U., 'Phaethon', *Hermes; Zeitschrift für classische Philologie*, 18 (1883), 396-434
Watson, W. G. E., 'Helel הילל', in K. van der Toorn, B. Becking & P. W. van der Horst (eds.), *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible (DDD)* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995), 746-750
West, M. L., (ed.), *Hesiod: Theogony* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966)
West, M. L., (tr.), *Theogony and Works and Days* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988)
West, M. L., *The East Face of Helicon; West Asiatic Elements in Greek Poetry and Myth* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997)
Whitbread, L. G. (tr.), *Fulgentius the Mythographer* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1971)