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APHRODITE

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INTRODUCTION

Everywhere in nature primitive man detected "forces", which he could not see nor touch but which he could sense; they were strong. Their mystery attracted him and he attributed to them various inanimate objects like stones, twigs and pebbles, so that at least they were visible and tangible. These "forces" remained nameless and impersonal for many years, and it was only with the Greeks that they became the personalised gods and goddesses of mythology. The Greeks were essentially image-makers and when presented with these lifeless objects, they instinctively transformed them into human beings, sharing the same emotions, passions, vices and virtues as man. In this shape man could readily relate to them, for were they not like him? However, he realized that the gods, in spite of having much in common with man, possessed two characteristics that were denied to man and, as such, made them better than man. These two factors which accounted for the great respect that he had for the deities were immeasurable strength and eternal beauty. Being immortal the gods had neither fear of old-age nor of a decline in their beauty. They remained young and their power was superhuman. These factors kept the divinities supreme in the minds of the Greeks.

Another fact about the relationship between these mortals and immortals was that there was no pressure put to bear on man to believe in the mythological deities. He could accept or reject the stories told about them; all that was required of him was to serve and honour the god in ritual. This freedom of choice took fear out of the religion and in its place was created respect and deference. This, and the tendency of all polytheistic religions to readily welcome the introduction and incorporation of new and foreign gods, is in great contrast with Christianity, and is perhaps the reason why mythology has, to this day, so much appeal to the intellect, the emotions and the imagination of man.

Greek mythology, then, was the outcome of the Greek personality which was essentially iconist. These iconists started out with the raw materials of "forces" of nature, unknown and mysterious, and out of these they created their immortal gods and goddesses that dwelt high up on Mount Olympos.

It is interesting to note that Roman mythology is not mythology in the correct sense at all; it is merely Greek mythology borrowed and translated into Roman terms.

What role did Aphrodite have in this sphere of immortals and what is her ancestry?

The two basic necessities of life are fertility and food. These ensure man's continued existence, while hunger and infertility are a threat to his existence. The ancient Greeks knew this and, like the other peoples of that time, they created fertility deities, always feminine, which were worshipped and revered to this end. These goddesses were supplicated under many different names according to their geographical locations, but their basic function, namely that of ensuring fertility and a sufficient supply of food, remained.

Aphrodite had her origins in these fertility deities, and out of these crude forms she was to emerge and develop into the graceful and slender goddess of the Greeks, both in the plastic arts and literature and in the hearts of men. As ideas, demands and needs changed, Aphrodite too was altered to suit these requirements.

It has been written that for the Greek people Aphrodite held second-highest place of importance amongst the mythological deities; Zeus held first position. For this to be is proof enough that she was more than just the personification of love and beauty; she was, and this is Aphrodite in essence, the psychological drive to the act of love, a drive equally strong in man, beast and gods, however resentful or accomodating we are of the fact.

Today she still reigns within us all, but our beliefs and mental conditions are rather hesitant to acknowledge this as being Aphrodite. In the days of her greatest and most intense existence, i.e. in ancient Greece, she was supplicated, worshipped, beseeched, sacrificed to, adored and, in some instances, hated. For the people of that age she was powerful, but for us she has lost much, if not all, of the passion and fervour with which she used to be honoured and sought after. In spite of this she has survived and is in evidence today and will be for all times, as we shall see.

"Her must thou see with the mind, nor sit with eyes
bemused: she it is who acknowledged to be implanted in
the limbs of mortals, whereby they think kindly thoughts
and do peaceful works, calling her Joy by name and
Aphrodite. No mortal man is aware of her. . . ."

(Empedokles in the fifth century).

APHRODITE'S ORIGINS AND HER BIRTH

Historically, Greek Aphrodite came to Cyprus from the Phoenician mainland; the Phoenicians having inherited her from the Assyrians, Babylonians and Sumerians.

For the Sumerians she was Inanna, queen of heaven and goddess of the bed and procreation, accompanied by doves and temple-prostitutes. Her husband was Dumuzi, who became Aphrodite's Adonis.

Inanna gave way to Ishtar of the Babylonians and Assyrians, with Tammuz as her divine consort. Ishtar, too, had her temple-harlots. The Phoenicians adopted Ishtar, naming her Astarte and with Baal as her escort. Being great sea-traders the Phoenicians took Astarte to Cyprus on the prows of their ships to ensure calm seas and good sailing. It was on Cyprus that she was encountered by the Greeks and incorporated into their own pantheon.

The Phoenicians took her to the Greek mainland, to Corinth, which became the most famous city for her worship. Here her temple-prostitutes flourished and she was revered as the chief deity of the city. Her temple on Acrocorinthus became well-known throughout the ancient world for its prostitutes.

The Philistines at Askalon worshipped her as Atargatis, with fishes, dolphins, the sea and doves as her main attributes. She was attended in her temples by eunuch priests and sacred prostitutes. These Philistines acquired towns in Cyprus, and no doubt took Atargatis along with them. When the Greeks-- or rather, Achaeans, as they were then called-- entered Cyprus they brought with them their own fertility goddess. In the face of Atargatis, also a fertility goddess and well-established on the island, they combined the two and the outcome of this was Ashtoreth, or Ashtaroth.

In his book "The Goddess of Love", Geoffrey Grigson writes that the word "Aphrodite" came about through the inability of the Greeks to pronounce the word "Ashtoreth". And so the changes began; she became "Attorethe", then "Aphthorethe", and ultimately "Aphrodite". Being worshipped as the goddess of love, of the sea, of the fertile waters that bring forth the multiplying of fish, she was regarded by the Greeks as deriving from their word for foam, namely "aphros".

Mythologically, there are two theories as to the birth of this goddess. According to Homer she was the daughter of Zeus and the Titaness Dione, thus symbolizing the union of Heaven, Earth and Sea. Under the names of Aphrodite Urania (queen of heaven) and Aphrodite Pandemos (goddess of the people on earth), she was to become for Plato and others the embodiment of "celestial" and "earthly" love.

The other theory, and that which is generally accepted as the correct mythological one, is given by Hesiod in his "Theogonia", or "Genealogy of the Gods". Hesiod relates how Aphrodite was born of the foam of the sea which became pregnant by the genitals of Ouranos (Heaven):-

Heaven and Earth (Gaia) had, amongst other children, three sons whom their father hated. He hid them in the earth and rejoiced in his evil doing, but Earth vowed revenge on him for this. She invented the element of grey flint and from it she fashioned a giant sickle with jagged teeth. She approached her sons and asked which of them would be prepared to carry out the plot she had devised. None was willing, but then Cronos stepped forward and said he would do whatever his mother had in mind. So Earth took him, hid him, gave him the sickle and revealed her scheme to him.

"And Heaven came, bringing on night and longing for love, and he lay about Earth spreading himself full upon her. Then the son from his ambush stretched forth his left hand and in his right took the great long sickle with jagged teeth, and swiftly lopped off his own father's members and cast them away to fall behind him..... And so soon as he had cut off the members with flint and cast them from the land into the surging sea, they were swept away over the main a long time; and a white foam spread around them from the immortal flesh, and in it there grew a maiden. First she drew near holy Cythera, and from there, afterwards, she came to sea-girt Cyprus, and came forth an awful and lovely goddess, and grass grew up about her beneath her shapely feet. Her gods and men call Aphrodite, and the foam-born goddess and rich-crowned Cytherea because she reached Cythera, and Cyprogenes because she was born in billowy Cyprus, and Philommedes because she sprang from the members. And with her went Eros, and comely Desire followed her at her birth at the first and as she went into the assembly of the gods. This honour she has from the beginning and this is the portion allotted to her amongst men and undying gods, --- the whisperings of maidens and smiles and deceits with sweet delight and love and graciousness."

APHRODITE'S ISLAND

Cypriot tradition states the place of her birth, that moment where she stepped ashore as a new goddess, as the beach of Achni beneath the Petra tou Romiou --- today called Aphrodite's Rock --- on the south-west side of the island near Paphos. Her principal sanctuary on the island was at Paphos, where she had her doves and temple-prostitutes. And so she acquired a new title, namely that of 'Paphian'.

She had numerous temples and shrines on the island --- at Idalion, Amathos, Tamassos, Soli, Kourion, on the eastern tip of Cyprus, and on the mountain of Stavrovouni, to mention but a few. It was in the forests of Idalion that Adonis is said to have been killed by the tusk of a wild boar while hunting.

At the end of the island overlooking Khrysokhou Bay, legend says that Aphrodite used to bathe herself in the spring there, and today it is called either the Brusis ton Eroton (the spring of the Loves, Erotes being her children), or the Loutra tis Aphroditis (the bath of Aphrodite).

And Cyprus remains Aphrodite's true home. After the scene in the "Iliad" where Hephaestus catches Ares and Aphrodite in bed together and ensnares them in his finely-made net, Aphrodite immediately goes off to Paphos to be bathed in the sea whence she came.

Before setting out for Mount Ida, where her mortal lover Anchises is, Aphrodite first goes home to Cyprus, to her precinct at Paphos, to be bathed, clothed and adorned by the Graces (Charites) and the Seasons (Horai).

The Cypriot calendar marks the month of May as the time for the Flower Festivals of Larnaca and Famagusta known as Anthestiria, formerly in honour of Aphrodite, now for Cypriot womankind. On Whit Sunday and Monday the people of Larnaca celebrate the seaside festival of Cataclysmos, which stems from the Paphiot custom of celebrating the emergence of Aphrodite from the sea.

There are also festivals of Aphrodisia, held in spring and signifying Aphrodite's connections with birth and life; the Adonia, held at Amathos in autumn, signifies the death of Adonis and his descent into the Underworld, and thus Aphrodite's connections with death.

In several Cypriot village churches Aphrodite has been incorporated with the Virgin Mary, who is addressed there as Panaghia Aphroditessa.

And so Cyprus and "Aphrodite's Island" remain synonyms.

TITLES, ATTRIBUTES, AND ASSOCIATIONS

As the goddess in charge of the sphere of love, Aphrodite was sacrificed to and given offerings by men, women, boys and girls, so that she would guide and protect them in their relationships with others. She was the love between men, between women, and between the two sexes --- the homosexual and the heterosexual love-patroness.

She was sexual desire, sexual want, and so naturally was the goddess of whores --- Aphrodite Hetaira or Aphrodite Porne.

She was persuasion, Aphrodite Peitho; Aphrodite Psithyros, of the whispers between young lovers; Aphrodite Harma, who joins people both in emotional and in bodily love; Aphrodite Praxis of success, of reaching the climax of the act of love, where all clear thinking is lost and drowned in the ecstasy of the moment; Aphrodite Nymphae who guards over marriage, and Aphrodite Thalamon who watches over the bedroom and the bed. As the bringer of joy she was Aphrodite Charidotes; Aphrodite Androphonos who slays the hearts of men -- fatal Aphrodite; and Aphrodite Ambologera who postpones old-age, she herself being ever-young and always exquisite.

A goddess who presides over such a vast and important a sphere as this can never be completely eradicated from the human personality. Although circumstances and demands are never static, there will always exist relationships between people; people will always experience passion, desire and love, and this essence of Aphrodite is too deeply embedded in our nature for it to disappear altogether.

As the goddess of the love that begets life, Aphrodite had some connection with death and the Underworld. Love, life, death and rebirth --- the eternal cycle. In various centres Aphrodite was worshipped under titles connected with death. In late times she was worshipped as Aphrodite Epitymbia (on the grave) at Delphi, and at Argos and Lakonike she was Aphrodite Tymborochos (the grave robber) --- she who snatches the dead and gives them life again. She was Aphrodite Skotia (of darkness) at places in Crete and Egypt; Aphrodite Melainis (black Aphrodite) in Arkadia, Corinth and Thespiiai. On the whole these were minor associations; the goddess appealed more to the light, to the living and loving, and to the happier side of the personality. In fact, from the time of Homer onward Aphrodite was

written about, and then depicted as "golden"; not golden with regard to skin-colour, but golden in that she was hung with jewels of gold, robed in gold, and crowned with gold. She was awe-inspiring and breathtaking in her loveliness and radiance. To most people life has more value than death, and so Aphrodite's essential attraction remained that of love and life.

Attributes of Aphrodite expressed the feelings and needs which she personified, and of prime significance were her doves. These came with her from the East, but the Greeks had another, and a far more appealing, explanation for their presence. Aphrodite and her son Eros were competing in a flower-picking contest, and when it seemed that Eros was getting the better of her the nymph Peristera (meaning "dove" or "pigeon") came to Aphrodite's assistance. Eros was so enraged that he transformed Peristera into a dove, and from that time on the dove and Aphrodite have been inseparable.

For years the Greeks associated sparrows with Aphrodite. It was sparrows that drew her carriage through the air, as Sappho had written in her "Prayer to Aphrodite" in the sixth century B.C. Sparrows are lustful birds, and thus are well-suited to the concept of the wanton, lascivious Aphrodite of procreation. The Greeks believed that eating these little birds would increase their appetite for love --- they served as an aphrodisiac. The wryneck, or "cuckoo's mate", was used as a love-charm. By tying its legs and wings to the spokes of a revolving wheel, and by repeating the words of the incantation its purpose would be fulfilled. In the Pythian Odes IV--- "Then, for the first time, did the Queen of swiftest darts, in Cyprus born, bind the dappled wryneck to the four spokes of a wheel indissoluble, and brought unto men that maddening bird;".

Partridges and geese were, too, birds of Aphrodite. Partridge cocks are insatiable, and have even been accused of being homosexuals, which does fit in with the aspect of Aphrodite as the love between men. Geese (Plate 1) have the habit of cooling themselves in pans of water and in damp grass, just as Aphrodite came of the sea and would return to bathe herself especially after bouts of love-making.

Aphrodite Antheia, of flowers, is another attribute of this multi-titled goddess. Roses and love --- the scent of roses evokes many emotions and reflects the bloom of a woman in love. According to Bion's "Lament for Adonis" ---

"The Paphian weeps and Adonis bleeds, drop for drop, and
the blood and tears become flowers upon the ground. Of
the blood comes the rose, and of the tears the windflower"

--- the anemone nemorosa.

Straightaway at her birth, when she first stepped ashore on Achni beach,
flowers sprang up at her feet, and wherever the Cyprian went she was
surrounded by ---

"crocus and hyacinth and flourishing violet and the
rose's lovely bloom, and heavenly buds, the flowers of
the narcissus and the lily."

(from the "Cypria" by Stasinus).

In the East Astarte could be seen in the evening and in the morning sky as a
star. The Greeks, however, had no astral deities, and for them the planet ---
the Evening Star (hesperis aster) and the Morning Star (phosphoros aster
or heosphoros aster) --- belonged to Aphrodite in the sense of belonging to
or being suggestive of love, and not actually being Aphrodite herself.
The Evening Star symbolizes the time for lovers to come together for the
night, while the Morning Star warns them of the approach of dawn and their
imminent departure.

Aphrodite's keston, the ornately embroidered band which hung around her neck
and fell in coils between her breasts, of which Homer wrote in his "Iliad",
indicates the universality of her power in life, for in this keston were
all the magic enticements of love and loving, so that its wearer was
irresistible. Many of Aphrodite statues were hung with this keston, as if
to serve as a reminder of the omnipotence of the goddess.

LOVERS AND CHILDREN

As is to be expected of love's goddess, Aphrodite's lovers and children
were numerous. This capricious and fickle woman, although married to
Hephaestus, the god of fire and metal, preferred the company of the war god
Ares, especially in bed, and together they had Harmonia, Phobus and Deimus
(Fear and Panic). It should seem strange that she who unites and creates
harmony would join up with an opposing force, but taking into consideration
Empedokles' theory of Love and Strife as the prime cosmic forces, their union

is symbolic. The differences in their natures are expressed even in their children. With Hermes, Poseidon, Anchises, Butes and Adonis there were children, but with her legal husband Hephaestus there were none. Hera, the sister and wife of Zeus, resented Aphrodite's promiscuity, and so when Priapos was born of the union between Aphrodite and Dionysos, she made sure that he was an ugly child with enormous genitals.

Just like love, Aphrodite was not always laughter and tenderness. When shown disrespect and dishonour she would lash out in a wave of unmerciful rage. Total destruction of the offender was most often the result. She attacked with bitterness, savagery and spite. She slew Hippolytos when he declared that his devotion lay with the goddess Artemis and not with Aphrodite; she turned Arsinoe into stone, Polyphonte into an owl, and Myrrha into a myrtle tree. According to Stesichoros, when Tyndareus was sacrificing to the gods he forgot Aphrodite, and immediately she made his daughters the victims of numerous marriages, always deserting their husbands. Upon finding Ares, her paramour, in bed with Eos (Dawn), her intense jealousy was aroused and she cursed Eos with a constant longing for young mortals. She punished the women of Lemnos, who failed to worship her, by sending an unbearable smell to hound them. Herodotus records that the Scythians, having ransacked the temple of Aphrodite at Askalon, were afflicted with a female sickness, which touched all their succeeding generations.

If the wrongdoer himself were not punished Aphrodite would see to it that his offspring suffered.

As if to justify her bouts of revenge, Aphrodite, in Euripides' "Medea", says -----

"And wheresoe'er from Pontus to the far
 Red West men dwell, and see the glad day-star,
 And worship Me, the pious heart I bless
 And wreck that life that lives in stubbornness.
 For that there is, even in a great God's mind,
 That hungereth for the praise of humankind."

Her power influenced all moving creatures; even Zeus, the almighty head of the Olympian family, was subject to her will ---

"Yet there are three hearts that she cannot bend nor yet ensnare. First is the daughter of Zeus who holds the aegis, bright-eyed Athene,...Nor does laughter-loving Aphrodite ever tame in love Artemis, the huntress with shafts of gold;...Nor yet does the pure maiden Hestia love Aphrodite's works..."

She drives men wild; she stirs up their innermost passions. This was her function in life, namely to be "love's golden arbitress", and she plunged into her role with all the fervour of a dedicated love-goddess.

She herself, however, was not immune to those very desires that she aroused in others ---

"But upon Aphrodite herself Zeus cast sweet desire to be joined in love with a mortal man, to the end that, very soon, not even she should be innocent of a mortal's love; lest laughter-loving Aphrodite should one day softly smile and say mockingly among all the gods that she had joined sons of death to the deathless gods, and had mated the goddesses with immortal men."

And so Aphrodite goes off to Mount Ida to seduce Anchises, with whom she has fallen in love. At the end she says to him---

"And now because of you I shall have great shame among the deathless gods henceforth, continually. For until now they feared my jibes and the wiles by which, or soon or late, I mated all the immortals with mortal women, making them all subject to my will. But now my mouth shall no more have this power among the gods; for very great has been my madness, my miserable and dreadful madness, and I went astray out of my mind who have gotten a child beneath my girdle, mating with a mortal man."

Aphrodite was simply a victim of forces which were beyond her own control.

TEMPLES, TEMPLE-PROSTITUTES AND HETAIRAI (COURTESANS)

The temple of Aphrodite in Corinth seems to have been the only one on the mainland where she was served by temple harlots, an acquisition from her Oriental ancestry. Corinth's most famous courtesan was Lais, who, when she grew too old and wrinkled for the trade, dedicated to Aphrodite her mirror, in which she could no longer bear to see her image ---

"Lais, her loveliness laid low by time, hates whatever witnesses to her wrinkled age. Therefore, detesting the cruel evidence of her mirror, she dedicates it to the queen of her former glory. 'Receive, Cytherea, the circle, the companion of youth, since thy beauty dreads not time!'"

(Julianus, Prefect of Egypt, in the Greek Anthology.)

This became the pattern for most hetairai when they grew too old for the profession. They would dedicate their personal belongings to the goddess in gratitude for her protection over them in their years of body-trade. Nicias dedicated her sandals, locks of her hair, her bronze mirror, "and the things of which a man may not speak" (Philetas of Samos in the Greek Anthology) to Aphrodite. Other hetairai whose offerings appear in the "Greek Anthology" are Symaetha, Bitinna, Anticlea, Heraclea and Aristoteleia.

Another inheritance from the East was the custom whereby every woman, once in her life, had to present herself outside Aphrodite's temple and allow any man who so desired to toss a few coins at her and then have sexual intercourse with her outside the temple. By doing this the woman was free to go home, having paid her dues to the goddess. If, however, no man chose to go with her, she was obligated to return the following year, and keep on doing so until she had fulfilled the requirements. Herodotus has written that this "infamous custom" also occurred in some areas of Cyprus----at Paphos, no doubt.

At Lokroi Epizephyrioi, in the south of Italy known as Megale Hellas, the hetaira Polyarchis dedicated a statue of 'golden Aphrodite' to the goddess' temple there.

On Mount Eryx in Sicily, Aphrodite's temple was also served by temple maidens (ierodouloi). There were temples of Aphrodite in Egypt and Lebanon.

Once the Romans had come into direct contact with Greece, they adopted Aphrodite as Venus, mother of Rome. There was a temple of Venus Erycina on the Capitol and another by the Colline Gate, both without prostitutes. Mount Eryx kept its sacred prostitutes. Aphrodite or Venus as the mother of Rome has its roots in the relationship between Aphrodite and Anchises.

Their son was Aeneas who, together with his own son Iulus, fled from burning Troy under the protection of Aphrodite. They eventually came to Central Italy where Aeneas founded Lavinium. Iulus founded Alba Longa, whence came Romulus and Remus, the founders of Rome. All the Caesars of the blood of Julius Caesar believed themselves to be directly descended from Aeneas.

APHRODITE FOR POETS AND PHILOSOPHERS

"You of the sparkling throne,
O immortal Aphrodite, daughter of Zeus,
hatcher of plots,
I beseech you, my queen,
let not loathing or grief afflict my heart.

Come to me now, you that listened to my
voice in the past and came at my behest,
leaving the golden dwelling of your father

And harnessing your chariot:
and your fine and swift sparrows
drew you round the darkling earth,
beating their multitudinous wings, and,
from the height of heaven,
drove straight through the ether,

Till suddenly you were here.
Then you, O blessed one,
your immortal face lit up with a smile,
asked me what was this new tribulation,
why once again had I cried out to you,

And what burning desire was ravaging my crazy heart:
'Who is she that you beg once more, me,
the Persuader, to fetch for your loving?
Who is it, my Sappho, that is wronging you?

'Speak: if she flees from you now,
soon she shall pursue you;
if she rejects your gifts,
she shall offer you her own;
if she does not love you now,
She soon shall,
even if it be against her will.'

So, once again, come to me,
 free me from my bitter longing,
 grant me my heart's desire, and,
 in this battle,
 Stand once more at my side."

(Sappho's "Prayer to Aphrodite").

Sappho lived in the sixth century B.C. on the island of Lesbos, where she presided over a sorority (thiasoi) of young girls dedicated to the Graces, the Muses, and, above all to Aphrodite. Here she instilled in her girls the essence of womanhood----grace, love, and beauty----she herself believing that the best education and the art of living were based on love. For Sappho love was everywhere in evidence, and she expressed love in nature and love in emotion as two inseparable attitudes. Her central theme was always love, and, in her writings, nature and love joined forces and were expressed as a single entity, for there is nothing in love that is not sensitive to natural phenomena. Sappho well understood the physical and psychological character of Aphrodite, and in her works she clearly stated this understanding.

In strong contrast to Sappho's outlook, yet still within the sixth century, were the Ionian philosophers under the lead of Thales of Miletus. They initiated an inquiry into the nature of the universe by asking questions and giving them logical and rational answers. For these philosophers mythological explanations were no longer valid, and this spirit of enquiry persisted for many centuries.

In spite of this the dramatic poets and philosophers of the fifth century still expressed in their writings the omnipresence and unquestionability of love. No matter the controversies that existed, these artists never ruled out the truth of Aphrodite.

Euripides was the grand poet of the passions and jealousies of love, and in his "Hippolytos" and "Medea" Aphrodite is both woman and force. The stronger of these two aspects of Aphrodite is the latter-----she is a force of nature, most powerful and all the while playing havoc with human lives. As the nurse in the "Hippolytos" says---

"Nay, when in might she swoops, no strength can stem
 Cypris; and if man yields him, she is sweet;
 But is he proud and stubborn? From his feet
 She lifts him, and --- how think you? --- flings to scorn.
 She ranges with the stars of eve and morn,
 She wanders in the heaving of the sea,
 And all life lives from her. --- Aye, this is she
 That sows Love's seed and brings Love's fruit to birth;
 And great Love's brethren are all we on earth."

Sophocles describes in the "Antigone" the passion of love---she
 distracts, she destroys man's peace, both of mind and of body---

"Great is love, and what shall prevail against it,
 When from the deep and quiet eyes of a maiden
 Sallying forth, it mocks at our laws and powers,
 Pride and possessions?"

Wave of the sea is love, wind on the mountains:
 Neither deathless gods nor mortals escape it.
 The good it turns to evil, the wise to folly,
 All men to madness."

Empedokles put forward, in his poem "On Nature", his theory that Love and Strife were the two fundamental cosmic forces. Love is Aphrodite, not an impersonal physical force of attraction, but a psychological power that lives within us all. Love united and created harmony; Strife brought about chaos and hatred. Although these two powers had influence firstly psychologically, their spiritual nature and their physical form could never be separated. And so, with Empedokles, Love remained the controller of man and of nature. Without her there could be no life.

Lucretius, a Roman writing during the Hellenistic and Roman period, too believed that it is Aphrodite, and she alone, who governs the nature of things, and that nothing which is beautiful and delightful can come about without her.

Theocritus (third century B.C.) wrote of love, and every kind of love in his idylls. In his "Thyrsis" he tells the story of Daphnis the shepherd who, having vowed to his first love that she would be his last, pined away and died for the love of another. Because of this, Aphrodite intervened and scolded the dying Daphnis, saying---

"Ah, braggart Daphnis, that wouldst throw Love so featly!
Thou'rt thrown, methinks, thyself of Love's grievous
guile."

---to which Daphnis replies---

"O Cypris cruel, Cypris vengeful yet,
Cypris hated of all flesh! think'st all my sun be set?
I tell thee even 'mong the dead
Daphnis shall work thee ill:--"

and he goes on to tell her how he will avenge himself.

In the first century B.C. Chariton of Aphrodisias wrote a novel, which took place in Greece at the end of the fifth century B.C. This work included numerous divine interventions, but it was now always Aphrodite who appeared, no longer the other gods and goddesses.

Bion's "Lament for Adonis" shows how Aphrodite, although a deity, is very much a woman with human emotions, who suffers the most terrible sorrow and anguish upon finding her young lover, Adonis, dead, killed by the tusks of a boar.

"She unbraids her tresses and goes wandering distraught,
unkempt, unslipperd in the wild wood, and for all the
briers may tear and rend her and cull her hallowed
blood, she flies through the long glades shrieking
amain, crying upon her Assyrian lord..."

Much closer to our own day there is evidence of Aphrodite having influence in the literary sphere, namely George Bernard Shaw's "Pygmalion". Pygmalion, a legendary king of Cyprus, was a sculptor and he fashioned the image of a most beautiful young girl in marble, calling her Galatea. She

was so beautiful that Pygmalion fell in love with her and prayed to Aphrodite to bring her to life. True to the course of love there was no immediate result, and Pygmalion suffered the agonies and desperation of his emotion. One day he was so moved by the image of the statue that he kissed Galatea's lips. At that moment Aphrodite breathed life into the marble, and in time Pygmalion and Galatea became husband and wife.

APHRODITE IN ART

The Greeks were always fascinated by life, movement and power, and so naturally turned to the human body to express this attraction. Besides, man was what really interested them, as was the characteristic of the ancient Greeks. Their artists believed that the body was just as expressive as the face, and that it had its own varieties of expression, and as such they approached their art. However, depicting the body as possessing only an outer superficial beauty was never the aim of the Greek artist. Apart from being a mass of flesh, it was also the abode of the soul (the psyche), and could only be effectively rendered when imbued with a spiritual and moral beauty. The one without the other had no value to them. This tendency reflects the workings of the Greek mind-- he saw things as a whole, as a unified entity-- and his firm belief that the powers that rule Nature and human nature are one and the same.

As has been mentioned before the Greeks were essentially iconists, and this, together with the fact that their religion was implicitly anthropomorphic and naturalistic, accounted for their depicting the characters of their mythology in human likenesses. They showed these gods and goddesses as people, like us, but imparted to them the highest qualities and grandeur, for they were greater than man.

What characterized Greek art was its devotion to beauty, not merely any kind of beauty but the beauty of the race. The art of the fifth century B.C. was particularly ideal and generic, but from the fourth century onwards it was the individual who began to come to the fore. At this time man was beginning to look inwards, seeing himself as an individual and not only as a member of the city-state, the polis.

The history of art has always been influenced by social, political and economic conditions, and ancient Greece was no exception. Far from it. After military victories the people would erect dedicatory monuments, temples and statues to their respective city deities or their personal favourites, in gratitude for their protection and assistance in times of need. The styles of art, too reflect the general spirit of the people. For instance, the swing to the individual and the more human side of life in the fourth century was imaged in the youthful and passionate renderings of gods and goddesses. This was the age when the more human concepts of deities like Aphrodite and Artemis took over.

It was from the traditions of folk-lore that the poets and artists of that time gleaned the material for their creations. This mass of stories was their inspiration, and from this they wove their own tales and formed images of the gods, in writing and in the plastic arts. Their task was to make their art speak directly to the people, and as long as this was achieved the Greeks would have faith and believe.

Homer's epics were the beginnings. He depicted with vivid word-pictures the gods and goddesses in all their facets. These beings felt hatred, anger, jealousy, love; they were kind and spiteful; they gossiped and they laughed and joked. At this stage (the eighth century B.C.) in Greek religion the mental images that the people had of their gods were based on verbal descriptions only, for the art of sculpture came to the Greeks in the seventh century only, and at the outset it was very crude and primitive. At the time of Homer's writings, then, the gods of Olympos were merely spiritualized. With the advent of vase-painting and sculpture began the process of making them more human, and the faith of the people was anchored firmly. And it was to remain as such for many centuries, despite the intrusion of philosophical thought on this sacred domain.

The preoccupation of the Greeks with beauty led them naturally to Aphrodite, and it was she whom they moulded, shaped and refined until, in the fourth century, she reached her climax, for this was the age of her perfection, the age when she was the ideal of feminine grace and beauty.

Her beginnings in sculpture were, like those of the other deities, as an unshaped conical stone, or baetylos, without any distinguishing features or attempts at organic form. Into this aniconic stone, which was placed in her temples and at her shrines, the observer had to impart his own feelings and ideas as to her features and personality. Its purpose was merely to act as a visual statement of her presence and as an embodiment of Aphrodite. There were also wooden images (xoana), which were tree-trunks with slight indications of facial features and arms. Instead of lower limbs there was simply a plain round base. Xoana literally means "hewn objects". These baetylos and xoana were not objects of direct worship, but were suggestions of divinity.

As technical skills and tools improved Aphrodite stepped out of this crude form and took on the shape of the tall, slender and exquisite goddess that

we know about today from copies of her original statues. Through the centuries she emerged from her squat and dumpy proportions to life-size perfection, and in the process she became the Greek expression of ideal womanly beauty. In early Greek sculpture Aphrodite was always draped, and it was not until the fourth century, with Praxiteles and Scopas, that she was depicted nude. Male nudity was a common occurrence, but female nudity, especially in statues of the goddesses, took a long time in coming about. When it did, of the female deities only Aphrodite was revealed nude. It is true that figures of nude goddesses did appear in early Greek art, but these were of Oriental origins and were purely symbolic in character, without any attempt at expressing the divinity of the subject. It will suffice to say that the motives behind the creations of nude goddesses in early Hellenic art were not, in essence, Greek ones. They were Eastern, foreign ones, and do therefore not have a prominent place in the aspect of purely Hellenic art.

Much of the early sculpture of the Greeks was coloured. A head of Aphrodite which was found in Rome, and a statue of the goddess found in Pompeii both reveal distinct traces of colouring in light pink, black and yellow.

Most of today's writings on Aphrodite statues are based on Graeco-Roman copies of lost or destroyed originals. In fact, from the great period of Greek art i.e. 480 B.C. to 300 B.C., there remains not one single original temple statue of Aphrodite. All that remains of the goddess are 2000 marbles, which includes heads and fragments, many little bronzes and terracotta statuettes and figurines.

It is distressing that from the time of her greatest age she must remain to us in Roman copies, for surely these are not exactly as the masters themselves created her.

THE SIXTH CENTURY AND FIRST HALF OF THE FIFTH

In archaic sculpture it is difficult to distinguish between man and god, as the sculptor was still in the embryonic stages of his craft; he was struggling with his medium and his tools were poor. Deities were identifiable only by their attributes and not yet by features or gestures. A figure with a dove or a dolphin was at once recognizable as Aphrodite,

because of her associative symbols. Because of technical inadequacy, drapery, hair and forms were, on the whole, very stiff and formal, as can be seen in the "Colossal Head of Aphrodite" (Plate 2) which dates from between 500 and 475 B.C. When compared with later heads of Aphrodite, this one is gross and heavy. Her face is round, her eyes prominent and with heavy lids, the grooves in her hair and the tight pattern of curls are stylized and stiff. She has none of the mystery and grace of later Aphrodites, but instead suggests a detached, impenetrable and imposing deity. Her chin, and this is characteristic of archaic art, predominates over the upper part of the face. This tightness in technique, and consequently in the mood of the subject, is due to lack of confidence and experience on the part of the carver.

Another work to come from about the same time is the marble relief that has been called the "Ludovisi throne" (Plates 3, 4 and 5), which was found in Italy but is attributed to a Greek artist. It is a carved triptych, the wife and the hetaira on the two side panels, and Aphrodite coming out of the sea assisted by two Horai (Seasons). The clothed woman offers incense to Aphrodite, while the naked hetaira plays the double flute to the goddess. The centre panel of Aphrodite and the two Horai, although seemingly stylized and symmetrical, attempts transparent clinging drapery which falls in conventional folds. The face of the goddess does not yet have the enigmatic quality of later times, but taking this triptych within its age, its meaning is evident. It is Aphrodite's birth from the sea according to Hesiod's "Theogony", and it depicts two aspects of her role in life, namely as the personification of marriage and motherhood, and as the patroness of courtesans, as is depicted on the two side panels.

Of the sixth century are several little terracottas of Aphrodite with doves, goats and riding on dolphins. These show a sweet and dumpy Aphrodite still within the bounds of archaic art and resembling the kouros and kore figures in stiffness and full-frontal approach.

THE SECOND HALF OF THE FIFTH CENTURY

The time that spanned these fifty years was the time of a massive art programme in Athens, which was recovering from its defeats in the Persian Wars. It was a time of grandeur and splendour, with the building of temples, the carving of statues on a large scale, and the age of men like

Pericles, Empedokles, Sophocles and Euripides. Much of the treasury of Athens was poured into the arts, and every encouragement was given to create. With Pheidias, Alkamenes and Kalamis the human figure was freed from all hieratic stiffness and archaic conventions. Figures were no longer static but moved with the breath of living people. Fifth century art did not seek to portray the features of the individual, but rather the beauty of the race as a whole. Sculptors were still less interested in the female figure than in the male, but the female nude did make a hesitant appearance. The straight line, which bisects the body from head through groin to feet, now became slightly curved, and in following centuries it became even more curved. The sculptor now felt his power over his medium and, with improved tools, he could surge ahead and carve to perfection. Fifth century sculptors, generally, tended to create Aphrodites that were heavily symbolical and monumental.

Alkamenes with his now vanished "Aphrodite in the Gardens" may have invented one type of Aphrodite. This statue was the cult statue of the temple of Aphrodite and Eros on the northern slope of the Acropolis in Athens, and showed the goddess draped in transparent clothing, the folds of which hung naturally and acknowledged the true shape of the body beneath.

To Kalamis, also a contemporary of Pheidias, has been ascribed the "Ludovisi throne". Lucian wrote of his statue of "Aphrodite Sosandra" as being modest, with its noble and unconscious smile.

To Pheidias belongs a gold and ivory Aphrodite, as well as an "Aphrodite Urania" - standing with one foot on a tortoise - for her temple at Elis, but of these there is no trace.

THE FOURTH CENTURY

Still within the grand period of Greek art, this must surely be the greatest age of Aphrodite, the age of Praxiteles and Scopas and naked Aphrodite.

By this stage all anatomical details of the human body had been solved and sculptors could pay more attention to the quality and the texture of flesh and muscle.

Whereas in previous centuries Zeus and Athene had held sway in the arts, now the more human concepts of Aphrodite, Eros, Apollo and Dionysos predominated. In these figures the stress is on youthfulness, with the idealised cosmic conceptions giving way to individualized figures, and the religious tone to grace and sentiment. Statues of women were, for the first time now, carved with deliberate sensuality, their multi-sided purpose having been fully realized.

The rise of individualism could be attributed to the ascendance of portrait-sculpture. Through studying the human face the sculptor achieved great skill in rendering the various moods and passions of his subject. The artists of the fourth century, by setting the eyeballs deeper under the brow and by emphasizing the long drooping curve of the upper eyelid, greatly enhanced their command over the transient qualities of emotion and expression. But where they achieved this, they lay themselves open to the introduction - whether consciously or not - of sentiment and prettiness into the art of sculpture.

This growing tendency towards individualism can be seen in the representation of drapery. The artist now dwelt on the beauty of the lines of dress for their own sake and not merely because they enhanced the beauty of the person to whom the dress belonged. This change from the universal to the individual is characteristic of the age. There was also a new freshness in the treatment of the human body, which conveyed the impression of living flesh as never before.

The emergence of Aphrodite from her clothes is what marks the fourth century statues of the goddess. She is as naked as at her birth, reflecting the irresistible attraction which the Greeks of all times discerned in the entire spectrum of love. This is the real Aphrodite, the Aphrodite that they knew about and felt, but who had never been presented in this way -- naked, modest, suggestive, and in her eyes the enigma and mystery of love. She is surely sensual, but the modesty which Praxiteles gave her in her gestures and attitudes prevented her from becoming self-aware and ostentatious in manner; she is subtle, delicate and refined.

Now, for the first time, Aphrodite and her shell appeared together in the arts. There is a pottery oil-flask from the late fifth century showing Aphrodite surrounded by the valves of the scallop, flowers and winged

Erotes. Although there is no mention of a shell in Hesiod's description of her birth, it does seem logical that the Greeks would create some kind of a womb for this goddess conceived in the pregnant foam of the sea, and what better means of conveyance than a shell. Geoffrey Grigson notes that kteis is the Greek word for a scallop shell as well as for the private parts of a woman. In the Hellenistic age little terracottas of Aphrodite actually appearing from the shell were being produced, and in some of them she is holding a man's member in her hand, imaging Hesiod's Philommedes, Lover of Genitals, which have their counter-organ in the kteis.

Between Aphrodite clothed and Aphrodite naked or undressing are the statues of Aphrodite naked to the waist or to the thighs, suggesting the goddess preparing for her bath or for bed.

Although Scopas is said to have made the first naked Aphrodite, it is Praxiteles who brought the goddess to perfection, imprinting her in all minds as the ideal woman in so far as beauty and grace were concerned. His most famous statue of her is the "Aphrodite of Cnidos" (Plate 6), which was erected in her temple in Cnidos where she was worshipped as Euploia, goddess of prosperous voyages. Phryne, the beautiful Athenian hetaira and mistress of Praxiteles, was the model for this, as well as several other depictions of Aphrodite. According to Athenaeus:-

Phryne had to appear in court on a capital charge, and when her Counsel felt that the defence of his client was not succeeding sufficiently with the jury, he told Phryne to drop her clothes in the middle of the court. The jury, overcome with fear for this woman who was a servant of Aphrodite, there and then dismissed the case. The Greeks always believed that there was divinity in beauty, and to be in the presence of Phryne was to be under the patronage of Aphrodite herself.

The "Cnidian Aphrodite" is represented nude, preparing for the bath, her garments draped over a vase at her side. She shields her body with her right hand, not from the gaze of human onlookers, but as a half-conscious shrinking away from this sudden and complete unveiling of her beauty. Although she is modest and graceful, and her gestures are without prudishness, she is not altogether ignorant of her beauty.



The bisecting line from head to groin, which in archaic art was straight and tense, has relaxed into a curve, giving the figure a fluidity and ease of poise. This pose was typical of all Praxitelean statues, as is the humanity of the goddess. Her personality and moods are fully realised, and on her face is an expression of vagueness and dreaminess, as if she is lost in her own reverie. This expression is achieved largely through the treatment of the eyes, which are not fully open and with the lower lids fading into invisibility at the outer corners. Yet there is no slackness or lack of vitality in this Aphrodite; her expression is simple and innocent as to accord with the youthful face. Another contributing factor to this mood of day-dreaming is that her eyes do not look directly at the spectator but rather at some spot beyond.

Her hair, effectively rendered in waves, gives a roughness of surface which contrasts with the smoothness of her face and the rest of her body. Her lips are full, and there is just a hint of a smile on her mouth as befits one who is quietly dreaming. The original of this statue was flesh-tinted, the hair, eyes and drapery coloured by encaustic painting.

There is a poem, ascribed to Plato, about this statue ---

"To Cnidos, to examine her own likeness there, Paphian
Cytherea came across the heaving seas,
And stared at that statue which can be seen from every side,
And cried, Now where was I seen naked by Praxiteles."

Although this was a statue in the round, Praxiteles no doubt intended it to be viewed from the front, and this goes for all his works.

Lucian, in the second century A.D., compiled a list of lovely goddesses, beginning with the "Cnidian Aphrodite", and concluding it with the situation of an imaginary sculptor carving the ideal woman, choosing features of beauty as follows -

"From the Cnidian he takes only the head.... the arrangement of the hair, the forehead, and the fair line of the brows are to remain as Praxiteles made them; and in the eyes also that gaze so liquid, and at the same time so clear and winsome ---- that too shall be retained as Praxiteles

conceived it. But he will take the round of the cheeks and all the fore part of the face from Alkamenes and from Our Lady Aphrodite in the Gardens; so too the hands, the graceful wrists, and the supple, tapering fingers shall come from Our Lady in the Gardens.... In the measure of her years, whatever it may be, she shall agree most closely with the Cnidian Aphrodite; that, too, Praxiteles may determine..."

Also attributed to the hand of Praxiteles and believed to be originals, again with Phryne as the model, are two marble heads of Aphrodite --- the "Kaufmann Head" (Plate 7) which was carved when Phryne was still very youthful, and the "Petworth Head" which shows a much older Phryne--- which are good examples of why Aphrodite was looked upon as being the personification of perfect beauty.

Praxiteles also established two other types of Aphrodite, both naked --- Aphrodite Pseliunene, with arms raised above her shoulders, ornamenting herself with bracelets (pselia) or necklaces; and Aphrodite Stephanousa, raising her hands to put on a head-dress or a diadem (stephane).

From the fourth century there are the "Bartlett Head" (Plate 8) and the "Head of Aphrodite" (from Salamis in Cyprus), and both of these have a softness in expression and a quietude of mood. The heads have a downward droop and the eyes are full of enigma, desire and tenderness.

Emotions and attitudes like these were what made fourth-century Aphrodites, particularly those of Praxiteles, so human and endearing, and subsequently enduring.

THE HELLENISTIC AND THE GRAECO-ROMAN AGE (320 B.C. to 300 A.D.)

Alexander the Great had changed the course of life in Greece. His conquests had opened up the world, and, with extended trade routes and intermingling of the many different cultures, ideas and influences abounded.

The spirit of the age after his death in 323 B.C. was one of restlessness and uncertainty, for the Greeks had lost faith in their gods, in their future and in their own lives. Consequently they began searching, for new deities, new subjects in art and a new meaning to their lives.

The arts, on the whole, showed a more grandiose and sumptuous style, with sculptors constantly experimenting with highly complex compositions. Their search for fresh subject-matter led to some of them finding the new in the old, and for the first time now there was a conscious imitating of the styles and manners of the masters of the preceding centuries. This tendency to classicize was further fostered by the Roman demand for copies of Classical works. Art, and life, had become artificial and superficial.

There were Academies everywhere stressing the importance and value of learning, and artists began to study the minuter details of, amongst other things, the human anatomy, with the result that their art lost its freshness and spontaneity and became academic. Precision and exactitude were in vogue.

The types of the chief deities became stereotyped and conventional, and Praxiteles' "Cnidian Aphrodite" was greatly copied. New poses for the goddess were devised, e.g. that of the "Crouching Aphrodite" by Doidalsas (Plate 9), who was working in the first half of the third century B.C. This is a variant of Aphrodite at the bath, showing the goddess crouching while being washed by invisible attendants. The Graeco-Roman copy of the original, which is lost, shows a plumper Aphrodite squatting and turning her head away from the fall of the water. This pose and the painting of "Aphrodite Anadyomene" by Apelles, who was Alexander's court painter, no doubt influenced the sculptors of the "Benghazi Aphrodite" and the "Aphrodite of Rhodes", both of which portray the goddess holding up her hair and ringing the water from it. The "Benghazi Aphrodite" is believed to be directly derived from Apelles' painting of Aphrodite rising from the sea (Anadyomene), for which Phryne, it is said, was the model.

Also from this period are the late dolphin Aphrodites, slender, elongated and unclothed, and held to descend from a lost original by a sculptor of about 300 B.C., who produced a variant of the "Cnidian Aphrodite". This original would no doubt have resembled the "Medici Venus", the "Aphrodite of Italica" and the Aphrodite found in Cyrenaica, the ancient Garden of Aphrodite (Plate 10). Of the three the only intact copy is the "Medici Venus".

The "Venus Genetrix" (Plate 11), a first-century B.C. Graeco-Roman copy by Arcesilaus of the Greek original (430 to 400 B.C.), was adopted as

the embodiment of Venus as the mother of Rome and ancestress of the Julian family. She stands with her right arm raised, her transparent chiton having slipped off her shoulder and revealing her left breast. In her left hand is the apple, the symbol of Aphrodite's victory over Hera and Athene on Mount Ida during the judgment of Paris. Her pose is affected and the clinging drapery, with its tiny pleats, elaborate. Her head is very hard and masculine in appearance; no more the soft rounded features of earlier Aphrodites.

Whether the Greek originals and the Roman copies were in any way identical is not known, but it is doubtful when one considers and compares those original heads of Aphrodite by Praxiteles with the Roman copies. In fact, the concept of Aphrodite and her subsequent transformation to Venus, in the field of sculpture, seems to be of an entirely different nature. Under Roman patronage she lost her spiritual beauty, and her physical appeal declined into priggishness and stuffiness; there remains hardly a trace of the divinity of the goddess. Somehow the aura that surrounded her in her purely Hellenic time has disappeared.

APHRODITE AND CHRISTIANITY

"Wild love, wild intense desire, wild lust,
though lust is a word of sin, and sin
belongs to Israel and Christianity."

(Geoffrey Grigson).

Under the Roman Empire Christianity was introduced to the peoples of Greece. The Christian morality was alien to the Greek mind, and as such could not and did not want to share in the beauty of Love's goddess. The champions of this new religion set out, at first, to eradicate all traces of the deities and made no attempt to conceal their contempt for, specifically, Aphrodite.

One such man was Clement of Alexandria who lived from about 150 to 215 A.D. He rejoiced when temples were burnt down and scoffed at the statues of the deities which he believed deserved destruction. His disgust for Aphrodite was made clear, and he tried to lure the Greeks away from her. However, by the third century A.D. he had still not succeeded: the Greeks persisted in the worship of their Love goddess; her initiates at Paphos still gave coins to her, in return for which they received little phallus-images and cakes of salt, the former as tokens of her connections with sex, the latter her emergence from and continued allegiance to the sea. All of this, much to Clement's chagrin and annoyance.

If Clement tried to destroy Aphrodite morally, then Constantine the Great set to destroying all physical evidence of her, which is, of course, a far simpler task. As Emperor of both East and West he did not prohibit the old religion, namely that of the mythological gods. He simply discouraged it by wiping out all visible traces of it!

Temples and statues of Aphrodite were surely amongst the first to be despoiled, and with what glee. Doors were pulled out of their frames, the roofs were stripped of their tiles, columns were turned over and broken, and the temple-statues hurled outside and left to the exposure of the elements.

Neither in Greece itself nor in any of the Greek colonies is there much left of the temples in which Aphrodite was once hailed and worshipped.

The gold and silver from the temples was used by Constantine to embellish his own Christian churches, which were either built on the ruins of the destroyed temples or next to the ruins. Those temples which escaped total destruction were transformed into Christian churches.

However much these men tried to obliterate Aphrodite, in the physical as well as the spiritual spheres, she was too deeply rooted in the souls of men to be annihilated. The degree of her intensity will vary, but Aphrodite in essence, as that psychological drive embodying irresistible desire and rapture, will never pass away.

"But the mystery of life and of love,
that begets life, remains unsolved
and the godhead of Aphrodite remains."

(Jane Ellen Harrison).



PLATE I



PLATE 2





PLATE 4



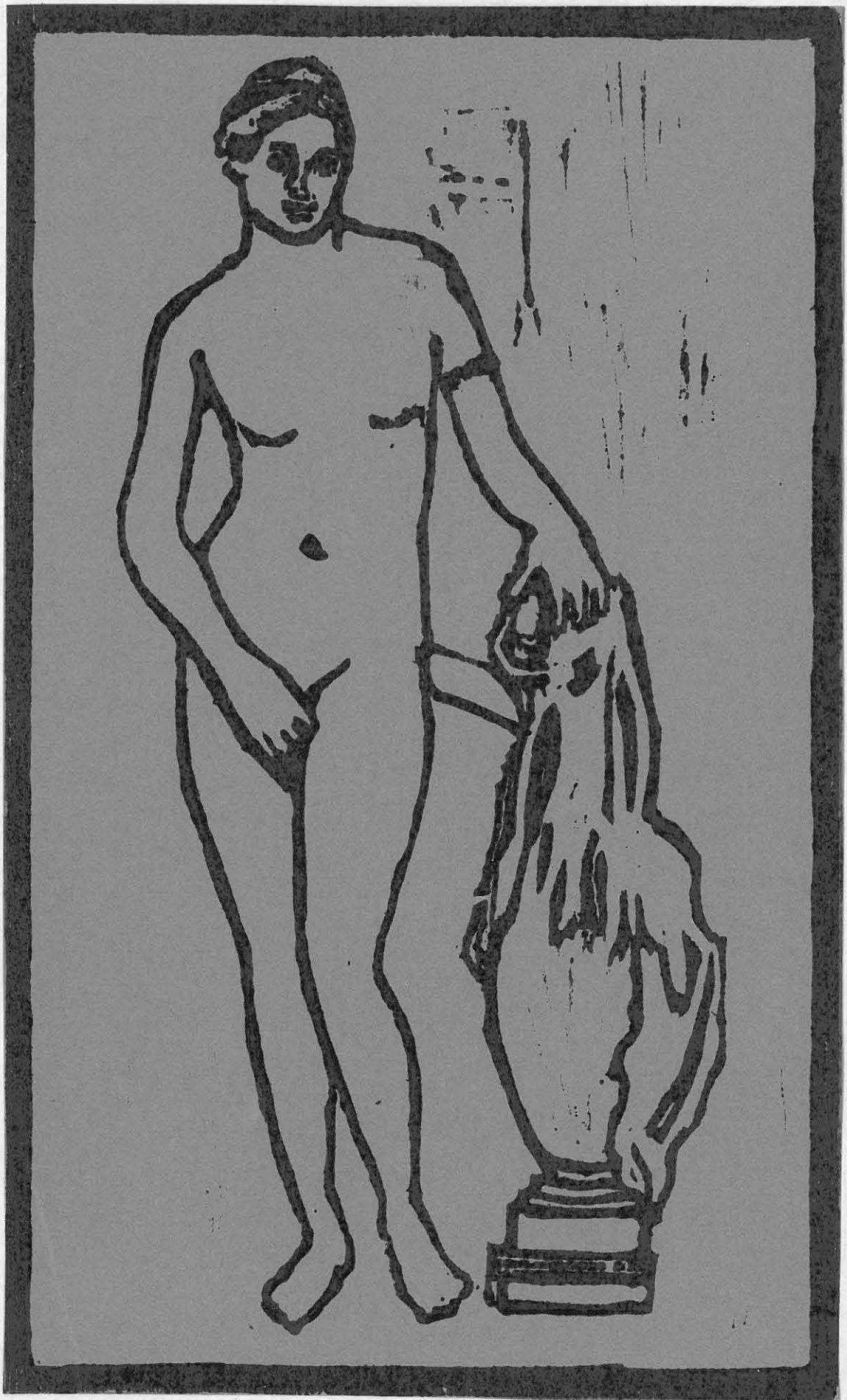


PLATE 6



PLATE 7

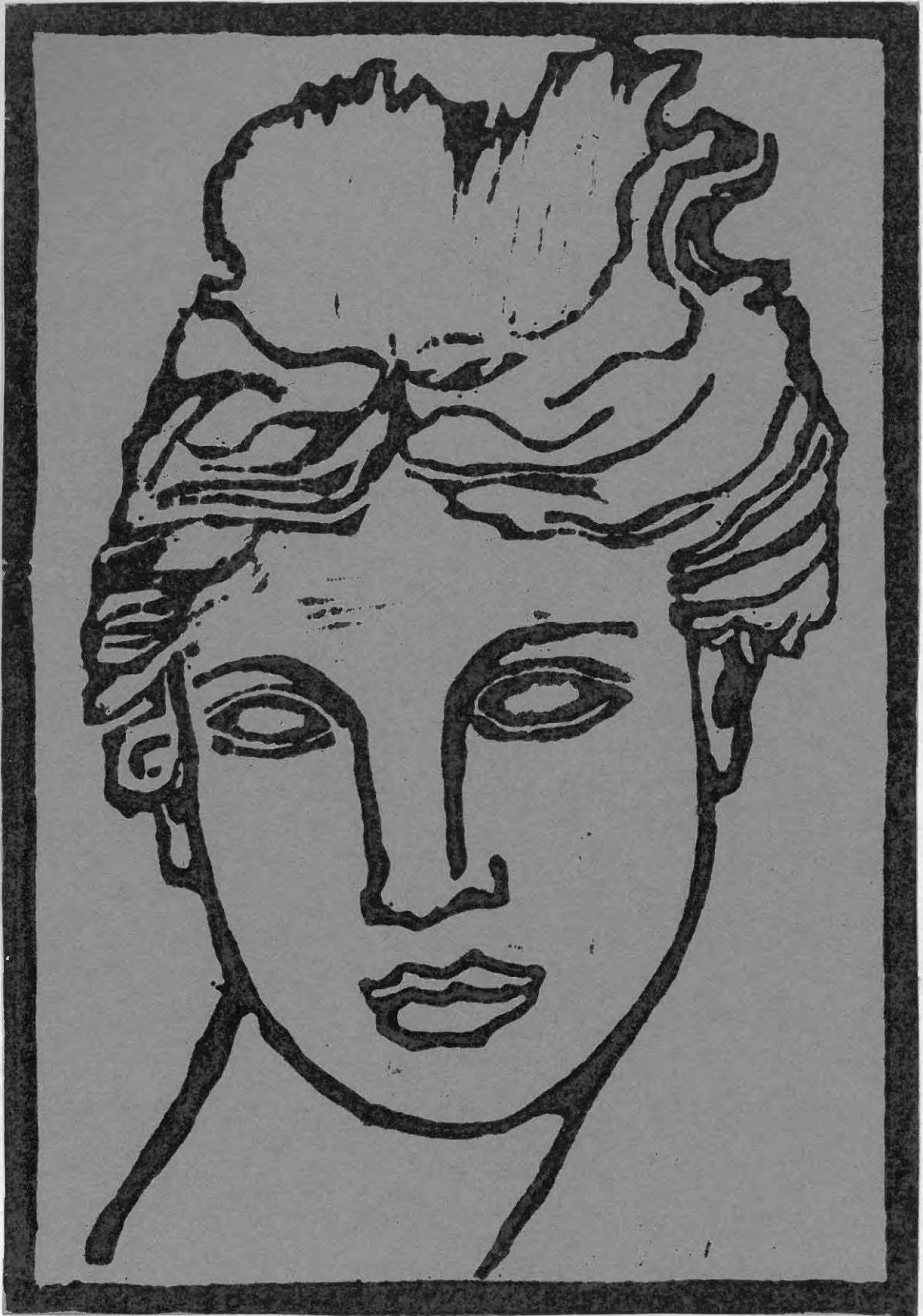


PLATE 8

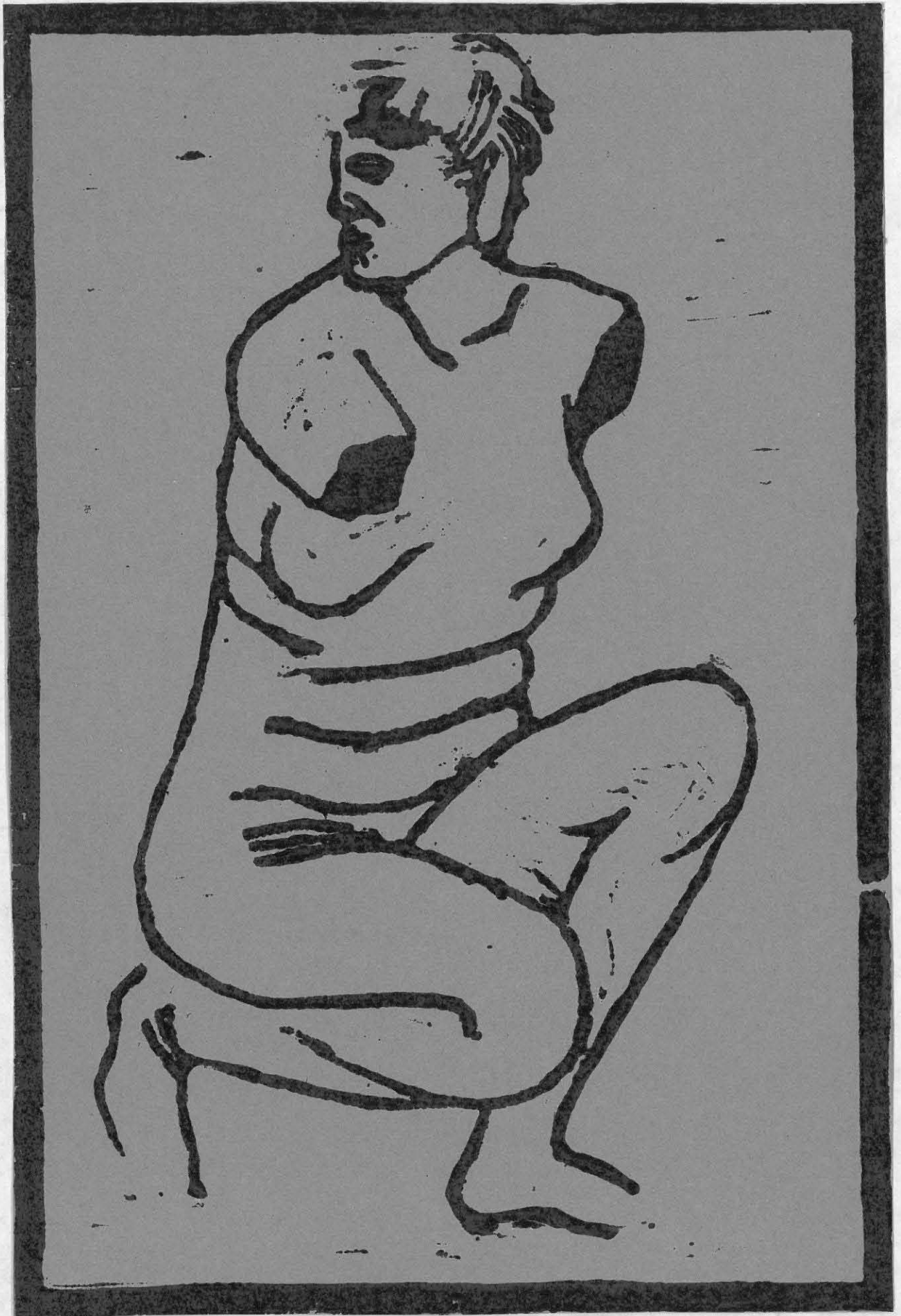


PLATE 9

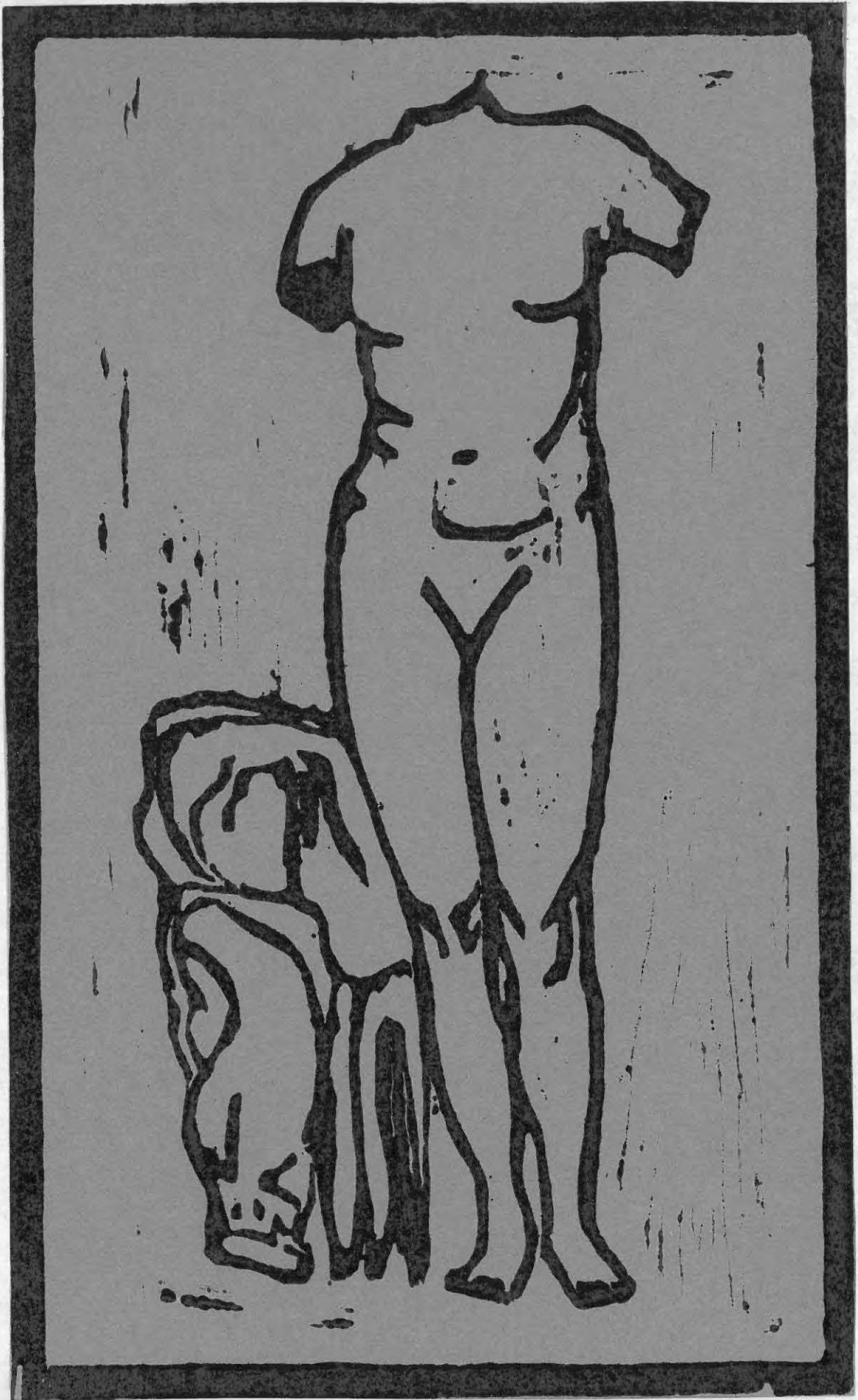


PLATE 10



PLATE II

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