Aphrodite’s connection to the marine element is well attested in antiquity, with a series of epithets connecting her to the sea: *Pontia* (‘Of the sea’), *Pelagia* (‘Of the open sea’), *Limenia* (‘Of the harbor’), *Epilimenia* (‘By the harbor’), *Nauarchis* (‘Commander of the ships’), and *Euploia* (‘Of fair sailing’). Her worship was common in ports, islands, and promontories, as she was the protector of open-sea journeys and navigation.\(^1\) Her special relationship to the sea was formed as early as Hesiodic times.\(^2\) In the *Theogony* (188–202) Hesiod narrates that Aphrodite is the daughter of Ouranos, conceived in her father’s testicles and born in the foam (*aphros*) of the sea.\(^3\) As soon as she was born, Aphrodite embarked on a long sea voyage, from Kythera to Cyprus. This Hesiodic version of the birth of Aphrodite influenced the perception of the etymology of her

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\(^3\) For more on the connection between Aphrodite and *aphros*, see Pironti, *Entre ciel et guerre*, pp. 61–63. She writes that Aphrodite is the goddess of *mixis*, and *aphros* is the product of *mixis* and therefore a very suitable symbol for the goddess, in accordance with Arist., *Gen. an.* 736a8–21.
name. Thus, regardless of its actual etymology, at least in the Classical period, the derivation of her name was thought to allude to the marine element. Additionally, the sixth Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite begins with a mention of her journey to Cyprus and her connection to the waves and foam of the sea, implying her marine birth.

The mythological tradition that connected Aphrodite with Theseus’ journey to Crete further strengthened her bond with the sea. Pythian Apollo advised Theseus to count on Aphrodite to accompany and guide him in his sea voyage to Crete. Aphrodite also assisted in his seduction of Ariadne on Crete. As an acknowledgment of Aphrodite’s protection and help, Theseus founded the cult of the goddess on Delos, on his way back to Athens.

A Popular Goddess in Attika

Aphrodite was a particularly popular deity in Athens, where she had many urban and rural sanctuaries. In the fifth century she had five cult places in the asty (‘city’): an altar and possibly a temple in the Agora, three sanctuaries around the Akropolis, and a sanctuary in the Ilissos area. According to Pausanias, Aigeus (one of the mythical kings of Athens) and his son Theseus (the Athenian hero par excellence) instituted her cults. Most of the evidence for Aphrodite’s cults in the Piraeus comes from the fourth century onwards. In 394/393, Konon built a sanctuary to Aphrodite Euploia (‘Of fair sailing’), possibly on the promontory of Eetioneia, the north enclosure of Kantharos (also called ‘Great harbor’). In 333 merchants from Kition acquired permission to own

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6 Rosenzweig, Worshipping Aphrodite, p. 74.
7 Plut., Vit. Thes. 18.2.
9 Paus. 1.14.7.
10 Garland, The Piraeus, p. 112.