John Lydus, De Mensibus (Book 4)

[114] APRIL

64. Since the first month, as I have said, was dedicated to honoring the intelligible [beings], in accordance with the preeminence of the *monad*, naturally the one after it, that is, the second, which the Romans in their own language call February, was appropriated for Pluto and the underground [spirits], in accordance with the unboundedness of the number [two]. And they call him Aides.¹ For the *dyad* is, as it were, formless and undefined; hence, he himself is said to be king of the formless ones, those who have made a departure from the divine [beings]. Rightly, therefore, Philolaus² says that the dyad is the consort of Cronus, whom one could clearly call "Chronus" [i.e., time]. And the dyad is connected to time, as to the cause of decay; and it is the very mother of matter in flux. The third [month], that is, March [115], they dedicated to this [same part of] the division of number, either [as being] the first odd [number], or [they dedicated it to] Ares as an ancestral god. For the *triad* is the beginning / first principle of number.³ And so, quite philosophically they join Ares with Aphrodite. For when the monad comes together with the dyad, the first number is born, which is called "perfect" by some, because it first indicates all things, and first shows a beginning, middle and end; indeed, it is the image of a plane figure, and a first instantiation of triangles (there are three kinds of [triangles]: equilateral, isosceles, and scalene). The fourth [month], <which> they name April, they dedicated to the number four in accordance with the nature of the elements-that is, to Aphrodite. For the nature of all perceptible [reality] consists of four elements—and this, according to the naturalists, would be Aphrodite. So then, this number is the first quadrilateral, and the *tetractys*,⁴ but indeed also first displayed the nature of a solid. For [there is first] a point, then a line, then a surface, then a solid—which is a body. And from four <elements (?)> the ... of the ... they dedicated the fourth number to Aphrodite, that is, to the nature of things.

But [now] I will tell briefly why the Romans decided to name the fourth month in this way; and during this time, in accordance with my prior promise, I will delineate a few of the theoretical considerations regarding Aphrodite.

Now then, the natural [philosophers] make Aphrodite out to be the spring-time—and this would be [when] the sun [is] in Taurus. And they portray her as turning away from Ares—the month of Ares, which [116] would be March—as I have said, and attaching herself to Adonis, that is, to May, at the time when the birds are now heralding the spring. This one [i.e., Adonis] was destroyed by Ares, who had taken the form of a boar—that is, the spring is destroyed by the summer; for the nature of the boar is hot, and the mythologists interpret it as [meaning] the summer. Or, as others think, Adonis is the crop, and Ares the boar—and [this] animal is hostile to the crops, just as the ox is beneficial; and for this reason, the Egyptians still today abstain entirely from [eating] cattle, but they make use of swine very much indeed for food.

¹ This version of the name Hades has an apparent etymology in the negative prefix $\dot{\alpha}$ - and the verb root $i\delta$ - ("to see"), thus meaning "unseen." The words John employs in the next sentence, translated "formless," have the same associations, and so could be taken to mean, "having no (visible) form."

² Cf. Huffman, *Philolaus of Croton*, pp. 350-52 (fr. 20a), taking the alleged fragment all the way to "matter in flux." ³ Cf. John's comments on the month of February (*De Mensibus* 4.26).

⁴ I.e., the first four numbers, represented as series of points arranged in four rows, making a triangular figure and yielding a total sum of 10. Cf. Hopper, *Medieval Number Symbolism*, p. 42.

Euripides judges that she was called Aphrodite from the fact that she renders lovers *foolish* [*aphronas*].⁵ Chrysippus⁶ considers that she is [rightly] named not Dione⁷ but *Didone* because she bestows [*epididonai*] the pleasures of reproduction, that she was named Kypris because she provides conception [*kyein*], and Kythereia likewise, because she bestows conception not only on human beings but also on wild animals [*thêriois*]. Hence, Hermes in the "Creation of the World" teaches that Aphrodite is male above the loins, female below them.⁸ For this reason [too] the Pamphylians at one time honored an Aphrodite who actually had a beard. And they deem it right that she was born from the genitals of Cronus—that is, from eternity [*aiôn*]—but the nature of things is eternal and incorruptible.

"Doing the business of Aphrodite" [i.e., having sexual intercourse; Gk. aphrodisiasai] is called *benisai / venisai*⁹ by the common people. Plato teaches [that there are] two Aphrodites, the Heavenly and the Common; the one attends the gods, the other, human beings.¹⁰ But others [117], who are poets, teach [that there are] four: one, born from Heaven and Day; another, [born] from sea-foam [aphros]—from her and Hermes was born Eros; a third, [daughter] of Zeus and Dione-from her and Ares, they say, was born Anteros; a fourth, [daughter] of Syria and Cyprus, the one called Astarte.¹¹ Others say that first [was the daughter] of Heaven and Day the Heavenly [Aphrodite]; second, [the daughter] of Aphros and Eurynome the Oceanid; and third, the one who was joined to Hermes the son of Nilus-from her [was born] the second, winged, Eros; fourth, [the daughter] of Zeus and Dione, whom Hephaestus married, but with whom Ares secretly had relations, producing Anteros. And in many places she is also called Pasiphaë—the one who sends forth [*epaphieisa*] pleasures to all [*pâsi*]; and Erykine, because she stimulates [kinein] loves [erôtas]. From her and Hermes, the story goes, was born Hermaphroditus¹²—that is, well-spoken and refined speech, which softens harshness by virtue of pleasure. And they say that the star of this [Aphrodite] attends the moon, on account of their nightly conjunctions—and hence, [they say,] it brings about shadow, on account of its being productive of bodies.¹³ They would sacrifice geese and partridges to her, because they [i.e., these birds] take pleasure in waters—and Aphrodite belongs to the sea—and because they [i.e., the males of the birds] are led off and caught by the voices of the females. Such are the opinions held by the ancients regarding Aphrodite, as regards mythical and natural speculation.

⁵ Cf. Euripides, *Trojan Women* 989.

⁶ Von Arnim, Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta II.1098.

⁷ Dione is frequently Aphrodite's *mother* (e.g., in Homer, *Iliad* 5.370ff.), not an alternate designation for Aphrodite. It may be that something has been garbled in transmission; but see below for the equation of Aphrodite and Dione.

⁸ A doubtful Hermetic fragment: see Nock-Festugière, *Corpus Hermeticum*, 4: 145-6; Scott-Ferguson, *Hermetica* 4: 231

⁹ Röther (in CSHB edition) suggests this reflects a Lat. *venizare*, which is, however, unattested. It may be instead be a distorted version of Gk. βινέω (aor. infin. βινῆσαι).

¹⁰ Symposium 180d.

¹¹ This list is nearly identical to that given by Cicero, *De natura deorum* 3.23.59. The alternate list is similar, but includes details otherwise only partly attested: Eurynome the daughter of Ocean is one of the primordial ruling deities in Apollonius of Rhodes' Orphic cosmogony (*Argonautica* 1.498ff.)—but fragments of Epimenides and Ister (cited in a scholium on Sophocles, *Oedipus at Colonus* 42) appear to make Aphrodite the daughter of *Euonyme* [= Earth] and the sister of the Fates and the Furies. Hermes the son of Nilus is mentioned in Cicero, *De natura deorum* 3.22.56. For more references see Hadzsits, "Aphrodite and the Dione Myth," *American Journal of Philology* 30 (1909), p. 44.

¹² Cf. Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 4.288.

¹³ The logic of the second half of this sentence is opaque: at the very least, John is naturally associating Venus [the star of Aphrodite] with sexual reproduction—but the connection to "bringing about / producing shadow" is unclear.

But the philosophers say that Aphrodite *is* Dione¹⁴—that nature which pervades all being;¹⁵ and that she was born from the genitals of Heaven and from the sea—that is, from even number and odd number: odd, from the form,¹⁶ and even [118], from the sea, that is, from unbounded matter. But Cincius the Roman sophist says that Aphrodite was born from the sea-foam [*aphros*], that is, spring is produced from snowy *aer* and cold material. So much regarding Aphrodite.

April, [they say,] meaning "of Aphrodite," was named by Aeneas in honor of his mother; but some allege that it was so named by Romulus. For indeed, since the first month was dedicated to Ares, it was natural that the second be dedicated to Aphrodite. So [say] the Greeks; but the Romans say [that it was called] April [Aprilius]—that is, Aperilius—with reference to its "opening"¹⁷ of time. For after nature has been, as it were, "locked up" by winter, spring by nature "opens" things up. And it was logical for the month of Aphrodite to be linked together with that of Ares, as has been said—because, as the Egyptians say, the star of Ares is made gentle through the gentleness of Aphrodite. And in hymns we find that Aphrodite is called by nearly 300 names. The Phoenicians maintain that Aphrodite is Astarte, their civic protector-[her name] meaning "starry" [asterian] or "the virtue of the city" [asteos aretên] [119]. For from the Libanus-there is a mountain there called by that name, from its orientation toward the south-west [*liba*]—two rivers come down toward the sea: the greater, more transparent of these is called Adonis; the smaller, more earthy one is called Ares. And when Ares flows into Adonis it does not preserve its own proper designation as far as the sea. So because Adonis in its entirety is mixed up with the sea, it appears that *he / it* [i.e., Adonis] is loved more by Aphrodite—that is, by the sea.

65. So then, on the Kalends of April¹⁸ the respectable women would honor Aphrodite, for the sake of unity of mind and a chaste life. But the women of the multitude would wash themselves in the men's baths, garlanded with myrtle, to worship her—either because myrtle is well-fitted for babies (for it strengthens the bodies of the new-born, and the myrtle is in fact the most fragrant, beyond all others, of the evergreen plants)—or because it alone among plants takes joy in the sea. And Aphrodite was honored with the same [offerings] as Hera. In Cyprus, they would sacrifice a sheep covered with a fleece to Aphrodite¹⁹—but the manner of this priestly practice passed to Cyprus from Corinth once upon a time—and then, they would sacrifice wild boars to her, on account of the plot against Adonis, on the fourth day before the Nones, that is, the second day of April. [120]

66. The natural [philosophers] say that those females who have the opening of their "vessels" on a straight line are fertile, those who [have it] sideways [are] barren.

¹⁴ For the complete assimilation of Aphrodite and Dione, see (e.g.) Ovid, *Fasti* 2.461, 5.309, and further references at Hadzsits, p. 45 n. 3.

¹⁵ Lit., "is *through* all (things) that *exist*"; Gk. <u>*dia pantôn ousan tôn <u>on</u>tôn*.</u>

¹⁶ Cf. Ps.-Iamblichus, *Theology of Arithmetic*, p. 51: "The triad is the form of the completion of all things..."

¹⁷ The Latin verb *aperire* is here in view.

¹⁸ 1 April.

¹⁹ Robertson Smith, *Religion of the Semites*, pp. 450-60 ("Additional Note H: The Sacrifice of a Sheep to the Cyprian Aphrodite"), argues for an emendation whereby the worshippers themselves, not the sheep, are here described as "covered with a fleece"; he is followed by Burkert, *Homo Necans*, p. 115.

67. On the third day before the Nones of April,²⁰ Heracles the Victorious was honored, as giver of good health. And it was customary for the Romans to abstain from cabbage in this month. Heracles was called "Time" [chronos] by Nicomachus-but indeed, also the sun; he spoke as follows: "Now then, Heracles [is] the one who breaks around the air with the turning cycle of the seasons—that is, the sun."²¹ Indeed for this reason too in his mysteries they adorn the males with feminine robes, in that, after the winter's wildness and sterility, the embryonic offspring begins [now] to be feminized. And they would carry this out in the spring. He [has] three apples / sheep²² in his left hand, as a symbol of the division of time [effected] by him—for the apple / sheep [is relevant] on account of its affinity for the Ram [i.e., Aries]; and the spring equinox is the beginning of time. And further, [there were] three, because time is three-fold. And he is said to bring the three-headed dog up from Hades, because time is a guardian and a destroyer, just as the dog [is]; and it [has] three heads: past time, present time, and future time. And alternatively, the three apples / sheep are to be interpreted in reference to Heracles in accordance with a philosophical teaching, [namely,] that the hero seems to be perfect after completing the three periods of active life. Thus [121] he is also called "of the triple evening," according to Lycophron; for he says:

...the lion of the triple evening, whom the saw-toothed dog of Triton once brought down with his jaws.²³

For the myth tells that Heracles was conceived on three nights. And it gives him [as wife] beautiful-ankled Hebe, that is, the creative power, and the good that is in the world. The garland is a symbol of perfection—therefore, it was given in the first place to gods and kings and priests. But when Fortune took the garland away from Virtue, the priests thereafter, cutting off their hair, placed a kind of circle of hairs around their head instead of a garland. Now, they refer to him as "of twelve labors" on account of his traversing the twelve signs of the Zodiac. And he revived Alcestis and gave her back to Admetus, as the sun brings back to the world the life-giving nature that was moribund during the winter. For the world is [called] Admetus on account of its being untiring [*akamanta*] and ever-living.²⁴ And he is said to have destroyed Augeas; for indeed, the sun when it rises disperses the time of morning, which most people call *augê*.²⁵ And Heracles was commanded to carry out his twelve labors by Eurystheus—meaning that the sun, by the order of the great god, with Hera—that is, the sphere—moving against it, runs in counterpoise to her through the heavens with its twelve signs of the Zodiac. So [say] the philosphers.

²⁰ 3 April.

²¹ For this fragment, see Mueller, *FHG* 2: 615 (citing Nicomachus as one writer besides Manetho who wrote about Egyptian festivals). For the content, cf. Porphyry, fr. 359 Smith (cited by Eusebius, *PE* 3.11): "And as the Sun is a warder off of earthly evils, they called it / him Heracles, on account of his breaking against the *aer* as it / he goes from east to west." The word I have translated in John's text as "seasons" could alternatively be rendered "hours" (Gk. ώρῶν), and Porphyry's reference to the sun's movement from east to west might support such an interpretation—but Porphyry (like John below) goes on to identify the twelve labors as symbols of the sun's progress through the Zodiac (cf. also Eusebius, *PE* 3.13, commenting on another citation from Porphyry).

 $^{^{22}}$ Gk. $\mu \tilde{\eta} \lambda \alpha$, which can mean either "apples" or "sheep"—on one level, then, this is a reference to Heracles' fetching the golden apples of the Hesperides; but the reinterpretation relies on the homonymy of the terms to make a connection with the first constellation of the Zodiac, Aries.

²³ Lycophron, *Alexandra* 33-34.

²⁴ The etymological meaning of Admetus is "unconquered / unbroken" (from the verb $\delta \alpha \mu \dot{\alpha} \omega$).

²⁵ Augê means "sun-beam," "sun-light," or indeed "dawn" (Acts 20:11).

But from the histories we find that there have been seven Heracles: First, [the son] of Zeus [son] of Aether and Lysithoe [daughter] of Ocean; second, the child of Nilus [122]; third, [the son] of Hellen [son] of Zeus and the nymph Anchiale; fourth, [the son] of Zeus and Thebe the Egyptian; fifth, the [son] of Libanus and Nyssa—the one who was among the Indians; sixth, [the son] of Zeus and Alcmena; seventh, [the son] of Zeus and Maia [daughter] of Atlas.²⁶

68. Apelles, when painting the Graces, who are three, Aglaia, Euphrosyne and Thalia, depicted one as going away, the other two as coming. For when one grace / favor is being given, more are accruing to the ones who have given.

69. Fire...when the blasts of wind are breaking on the clouds, lightning-bolts are squeezed out.

70. Miletus was formerly called Anactoria.

71. Amalthea, the nurse of Zeus, the one who simultaneously [hama], all together, at one time grew the things that exist [ta onta] for Zeus. For althein means auxein ["to grow / increase"].²⁷ But Crates maintains that Zeus²⁸—the one who reaches through [*diêkonta*] into all things—was named from the fact that he moistens [diainein], that is, enriches [piainein] the earth.²⁹ Posidonius [says] that Zeus [was named as] the one who manages [*dioikounta*] everything; and Chrysippus, [that he was named] because everything exists on account of him [di' auton]. Others allege that Zeus was named from "necessity / binding" [dein], that is, that he binds and holds together the entire material [world]. Others, from "living" $[z\hat{e}n]$.³⁰ And some, in accordance with the heroic, divided account, make out that there are three [named] Zeus: One, [the son] of Aether; the second, born in Arcadia, from which they say Athena [was born]; third, the Cretan [Zeus] [123].³¹ The Phoenicians say that he was a very just king, such that his reputation grew greater than Time [chronos]. In this way, he is said to have expelled Cronus from his kingdom, meaning that he went beyond *Time* and the forgetfulness that [comes] from it. But †Melias [says] that he was nursed by Amalthea-meaning, from potency, that is, from "unsoftenability" [*amalakistia*].³² Crates, however, says that Cronus ruled roughly over Sicily and Italy and the majority of Libya, and that this [man's] son attacked his father; he drove him to the farthest [region] of the west, and took over the kingship most gently—and for this reason, he was honored as a god.³³

Eratosthenes, for his part, says that Zeus was born in Crete, and was taken from there to Naxos for fear of Cronus³⁴. But Eumelus the Corinthian maintains that Zeus was born in what we know as Lydia, and he is rather truthful, as far as [is possible] in history. For even now, in

²⁶ Cicero provides a somewhat similar list (*De natura deorum* 3.16.42).

²⁷ Wuensch's text reads ἄλθειν (otherwise unattested) for the first verb; the very similar ἀλθεῖν, however, would be the 2^{nd} aorist infinitive of ἀλθαίνω, "to heal."

²⁸ In the accusative form, $\Delta i\alpha$ [*Dia*].

²⁹ Crates of Mallos fr. 8 (Wachsmuth).

 $^{^{30}}$ Cf. variant forms of the name Zeus: nom. Z η v; gen. Z η vć.

³¹ Cf. the nearly identical list in Cicero, *De natura deorum* 3.21.53.

³² Cf. Diodorus 4.35.4 and (e.g.) *Etymologicum Magnum* s.v. Ἀμάλθεια. "Melias" is unknown; presumably the text is corrupt.

³³ Crates fr. 9 (Wachsmuth). Cf. Diodorus 3.61.

³⁴ Ps.-Eratosthenes, *Catasterismi* 30 (Aquila).

the western part of the city of Sardis, on the ridge of Mt. Tmolus, there is a place, which was formerly called "Births of Rainy Zeus" [*Gonai Dios hyetiou*], but now, as the language has been altered over time, is called *Deusion*.³⁵ The Curetes were [Zeus'] guards. Others say [he] is the son of Prometheus, or "Foresight." But the majority of the natural philosophers assert that Zeus is Idaean and was born on Ida—that is, in the sky that is seen at Ida. And they say [124] that he is the father of Core [i.e., Persephone], that is, that he became the cause of repletion [*koros*] and feasting. For it is said that when he first became ruler he taught human beings how to farm.

But there are many *Dioi* [i.e., "Zeuses"], from the overall *Zeus*,³⁶ like [the plural] Apollos or Dionysi.

72. On the 17th day before the Kalends of May,³⁷ the high priests used to go to the theater and throw flowers upon the people; and they would make sacrifices at sowing-time for the sake of prosperity, and outside the city, at predetermined stations, they would pray as sacrificial priests to Demeter. The name of the sacrifice [was] Fordicalia.³⁸ In the ancestral language, they called the stations *milia*, meaning "thousands" of steps. Hence also they called soldiers *milites*. For Romulus mustered only 1000 "shield-bearers"³⁹ and called them *milites*, from their number—i.e., 1000; formerly they had been designated *satellites*. For indeed, in ancient times the multitude [of soldiers] was numbered in thousands, not in myriads,⁴⁰ as Homer himself [says]:

... as loudly as nine thousand or ten thousand giving a battle-cry.

For the number 10,000 can be indeterminate.⁴¹

73. On the 11th day before the Kalends of May,⁴² Romulus founded Rome, calling together all the neighboring people and bidding them to bring a lump of earth from their own territory, thus presaging that Rome would be master over every region. He himself, taking up the sacred trumpet [125]—in their language the Romans customarily called it a *lituus*, from *litê* ["prayer"]—proclaimed the name of the city, taking the lead in the whole sacred initiation. And the city had three names:⁴³ an initiatory [name], a sacred [name], and a political [name]. The initiatory [name] <was Amor>⁴⁴, that is, Love [*Erôs*], so that all were held fast around the city by divine love—and for this reason, the poet enigmatically calls the city Amaryllis in his bucolic

³⁵ See Bengisu, "Lydian Mount Karios," in Lane (ed.), *Cybele, Attis & Related Cults* (1996), p. 6, for discussion. ³⁶ The genitive form, used here, is *Dios*—which appears to have been reinterpreted as a nom. sg. (2nd decl.) to

produce the plural *Dioi* from it.

³⁷ 15 April.

³⁸ The name is usually *Fordicidia*, but there is significant variation (see Warde Fowler, *Roman Festivals*, p. 71).

³⁹ I.e., "squires" or rather, elite infantry (*hyspaspists*).

⁴⁰ I.e., tens of thousands.

⁴¹ I.e., it is sometimes used generically for very large numbers—"myriads" without the specific meaning "tens of thousands."

⁴² 21 April.

⁴³ For a critical review of the evidence for the "secret" name(s) of Rome, see F. Cairns, "*Roma* and Her Tutelary Deity: Names and Ancient Evidence," in Kraus et al. (eds.), *Ancient Historiography and Its Contexts* (2010). John Lydus is unique in offering *three* names; other Late Antique sources refer to the name Flora but not to Amor, although there is frequent wordplay with the anagrams ROMA – AMOR.

⁴⁴ I have supplemented the text here; Wuensch's text only preserves the Greek version of the name (Erôs), but the word oioveì (here translated, "that is") implies that something is missing just before it.

poetry.⁴⁵ The sacred [name was] Flora, that is, "Flowering" [*Anthousa*]—hence the festival of Anthesteria [was named] in accordance with it. The political [name was] Rome. Now, the sacred name was manifest to all, and was pronounced without fear, but the initiatory [name] was entrusted to the high priests alone to pronounce at the sacred rites. And it is said that one of the magistrates once paid the penalty because he had dared to pronounce the initiatory name of the city openly, before the people. And after the initiation at the public proclamation of the city, he [i.e., Romulus] yoked a bull with a heifer and made the circuit of the walls, putting the male on the side of the plain, the female in the direction of the city, so that the males became terrifying to those outside, the females fertile for those inside. And taking a clod of earth from the region outside the city together with those that had been brought by the others, he hurled them at the city, thus presaging that it would forever increase by the contributions of those outside it... *And a little later*...⁴⁶ Once many foreigners had gathered together in it, Romulus' picked men granted half of their own properties to the immigrants, persuading them to live in Rome—those whom [126] Romulus had proclaimed first as patricians, on account of their noble birth; and to give up their surplus [property] to the foreigners, on behalf of the country.

Ilia—the mother of Romulus.

74. To those who argue against Providence and blame these little creatures—that is, locusts and rust and [those which] seem to have been introduced inappropriately—Apollonius says that it is laughable, or rather ridiculous, to bring a charge against Providence, if fleas and bugs have come into being. For in order that there not be fleas, it would be necessary for there not to be any animals at all; to prevent bugs, [there could be] no human beings—because bugs come into being from the rubbing of a human being against some [types] of wood; fleas, from all urine; and flies, from excrement or other warm, moist substances.⁴⁷

75. Rome—Flora; and Constantinople—that is, Anthousa.

⁴⁵ Cf. Vergil, *Ecl.* 1.5; Servius (*ad loc.*) dismisses the "allegorical" reading of Amaryllis as Rome here.

⁴⁶ It appears that these words, indicating where a compiler has abbreviated the material, are included by mistake in Wuensch's text.

⁴⁷ For similar ideas, see McCartney, "Spontaneous Generation and Kindred Notions in Antiquity," *Transactions of the American Philological Society* 51 (1920), pp. 101-115, available online at http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Journals/TAPA/51/Spontaneous Generation*.html