(Aetia, book 1, frag. 31g, and frag. 620 and 731)
Τώς μὲν ἔφη· τὰς δ᾽ εἴθαρ ἐμὸς πάλιν εἴρετο θυμὸς
ἀγνωστὸν μηδὲν ἔχομι καλὸν
τὴν θεὸν Ἀρτεμιν οἱ ἐπαθεν

What the—
why does this statue of Artemis, whom I revere,
have a clove of garlic tied to her left ear,
and why do the temple tenders place a shallow
mortar, for garlic, over her fine short hair?
Does this sort of thing have any basis in myth?

It does—I keep back nothing for reasons of tact,
nothing that I consider beautiful;
the goddess herself once chose this crown, or halo.
When the Epirians attacked
this town, they tried to mock, desecrate, and defile
her manless status
by smearing her head with garlic.
The idea
was that she had not truly rejected marriage
but rather stank so bad no man could want her.
(What girl hasn’t heard, and heard again,
that if we work too hard, no man will date us?)

The citizens drove the Epirians into the sea.
Pounded raw garlic means a campfire, a meal for
a hunter, and for the friends of a hunter.
The goddess has never cared to pair off with men,
not now, and not in any former age,
but the regional cuisine
now emphasizes garlic and faskomilo,
also known as sage.
Remember when we didn't get along?
And now you blush, telling your story—
which isn't all mine to tell—while you squeeze my hand.
I can, however, share an allegory,
or maybe more of a long-ago parallel.
Myus and Milesia—which are cities,
not people—were at war. For decades.
Stupidly at war. No one knew how to end it
without sacrificing some potentate's dignity.
No one could safely or legally cross the border,
except at one shrine that, according to ancient treaty,
had to welcome citizens of both
to the festival for Artemis.
Her temple columns glistened, as if
to soften and oil the world, saying "All
worshippers are welcome; no sword
on shield will mar this space, and no spears thrown,
no horses whipped to frenzy or retreat.
Would it were thus in forest and field."

She loved
to see this temple as her gathering place,
where prayers rose only to her. But it was hard
for women from Myus to get there.
They could claim safe passage. But they were exhausted
from passing through war zones. They arrived afraid.
So after many a season of hints and omens
and disregarded divinations, fletchings,
and bronze spear tips interpreted
across the temple floor,
the goddess reached out
to that other goddess from Cyprus,
the one who was born out of foam,
and challenged her to prove that she—
having started a war—could stop one,
that she, the Cyprian, was a diplomat
to excel all diplomats, that she could inspire
oratory enough, not just
to make people disrobe,
    but to make them disarm.
The next two
    adult women in the temple,
the planners of next year's procession, were Katia,
    granddaughter of Cydippe, from Milesia,
and Yana from Myus. They came
    holding maps, only slowly meeting each other's gaze,
protected by winter blankets that doubled as cloaks,
    so they could spend the night on that cold floor,
and wary of the mission, wondering if
    they could even get home
unharmed . . . they removed their thick boots . . .
    they began to talk about swords, and parades,
about the sources for the purest spring,
    about how to dress
a fresh-killed deer and craft a glove
    out of deer velvet, their hands
as models . . . their wrists . . . about how to make
    the best cloak (trying out
each drape and each trace on each other) . . .

    Since that day the two of them
have lived inseparable.
    Even their names fit together: Katyana.
Myus and Milesia are at peace,
    as if they were one home,
and Artemis, lovely, fierce Artemis,
    whose shadow is sleek at twilight, gone
at sunrise, knows
    she need not act alone.