

THE NYMPH BALTE, MOTHER OF EPIMENIDES*

So far the illuminating conclusion has been arrived at that the rich Cretan onomastica, albeit predominantly Greek in character, does contain numerous scores of non-Greek, resp. Semitic names¹⁾.

To cite a further possible bearing to the same effect, we are to recall a passage occurring in Plutarchus' biography of Solon which relates of Epimenides, the illus-

achieved by Horace's presentation of the catalogue, but only the assumption that there was any standard 'Alexandrian edition' from which Horace was deviating.

11) Horace clearly refers to three genres: dithyrambs, epinicians, and dirges. The fourth stanza (vv. 13–16) is vague. *Deos regesque* could refer to either or both the hymns or paeans.

12) B. Snell and H. Maehler, Pindarus, Pars II (Leipzig 1984) arrange the Pindaric fragments in the order given in the *Vita Ambrosiana*.

*) Abbreviations. AJSL = American Journal of the Semitic Languages and Literatures; ANET = J. B. Pritchard (ed.), Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament (Princeton 1969); CAD = The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago (Chicago–Glückstadt); JAOS = Journal of the American Oriental Society.

1) M. C. Astour, Second Millenium B. C. Cypriot and Cretan Onomastica Reconsidered, JAOS 84 (1964) 240–254; for a broad outline see also C. H. Gordon, Ugarit and Minoan Crete. The Bearing of Their Texts on the Origins of Western Culture (New York 1966).

trious Cretan seer, purificator and miracle-worker²): ἐδόκει δέ τις εἶναι θεοφιλῆς καὶ σοφὸς περὶ τὰ θεῖα τὴν ἐνθουσιαστικὴν καὶ τελεστικὴν σοφίαν διὸ καὶ παῖδα νύμφης ὄνομα Βάλτης καὶ Κούρητα νέον αὐτὸν οἱ τότε ἄνθρωποι προσηγόρευον (Sol. 12,7). 'He (scil. Epimenides) was reputed to be a man beloved of the gods, and endowed with the ecstatic and mystical wisdom in religious matters. Therefore the men of that time called him the son of a nymph named Balte, and a new Cures³).

The Suda, however, presents the reading of the nymph's name in a slightly different form: Ἐπιμενίδης, Φαίστου ἢ Δοσιάδου ἢ Ἀγιασάρχου υἱός, καὶ μητρὸς Βλάστας (<...>) (II 370 Adler). We surmise that it would seem most plausible to derive the stem found in the name(s) Βάλτη / Βλάσθη from the common Semitic appellation for the goddess, Canaanite-Ugaritic *bā'alāth*, Accadian *bēlit*, etc. ('Lady').

For substantiating this tentative suggestion, the few following instances can be adduced, the linguistic provenance of which apparently does not rouse the slightest doubt: Βααλίς / Βῆλις, the amply attested designation of Ba'alath Gebal⁴); Hesych. Βλαστά· Βλαστή Κύπριοι, which M. Schmidt corrects appropriately to Βλαττά· Βααλίς Κύπριοι; Βλάττα, allegedly the 'Phoenician name of Aphrodite' emerged by Io. Lyd. de mens. I 21 (p. 11, 10–14 Wünsch), "Ὅτι ὁ Νουμᾶς τὴν βασιλικὴν ἐσθήτα εἰς τιμὴν Ἡλίου καὶ Ἀφροδίτης ἐκ πορφύρας καὶ κόκκου κατασκευάζεσθαι διετύπωσεν – καὶ Βλάττα δέ, ἐξ ἧς τὰ βλάττια λέγομεν, ὄνομα Ἀφροδίτης ἐστὶ κατὰ τοὺς Φοίνικας, ὡς ὁ Φλέγων ἐν τῷ περὶ ἑορτῶν φησὶ (FHG III, 602 sq. Müller) and, to all appearances, also Παλλάς, the fixed epithet of Athene⁵).

2) See M. P. Nilsson, *The Minoan-Mycenaean Religion and Its Survival in Greek Mythology* (Lund ²1968), 582; E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley–Los Angeles 1966), 143–144 = *Die Griechen und das Irrationale* (Darmstadt 1970), 77–80; G. Pugliese Caratelli, *Epimenide, Antichità Cretesi*. Studi in onore di D. Levi II (Catania 1978), 9–15 (non vidi); G. Colli, *La sapienza greca II* (Milano 1978) (the latest collection of fragments with an Italian translation).

3) A noteworthy link between nymphs and Curetes is furnished by some Cretan texts as well, H. Jeanmaire, *Couroi et Courètes* (Lille 1939), 437–38, and also R. F. Willetts, *Cretan Cults and Festivals* (London–New York 1962).

4) The Canaanite word reappears in Accadian in the form *ba'latu*, W. von Soden, *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch I* (Wiesbaden 1965), 98. On the goddess of nature and vegetation commonly worshipped under the name of 'the Lady' and at different times occasionally identified with Asherat/Astarte, Hera, Aphrodite, Dione and other entities, see, e. g., W. W. Graf von Baudissin, *Adonis und Esmun* (Leipzig 1911) reviewed painstakingly by O. Eissfeldt, *Kleine Schriften I* (Tübingen 1962), 136, H. Zimmern, *Bēlti* (Bēltija, Bēletja), eine, zunächst sprachliche, Studie zur Vorgeschichte des Madonnenkults, in: C. Adler–A. Ember (eds.), *Oriental Studies* dedicated to P. Haupt (Baltimore–Leipzig 1926), 281–292; R. du Mesnil du Buisson, *Études sur les dieux phéniciens hérités par l'empire romain* (Leiden 1970), 58–59; W. Helck, *Betrachtungen zur großen Göttin und den ihr verbundenen Gottheiten* (München–Wien 1971), 269; R. du Mesnil du Buisson, *Nouvelles études sur les dieux et les mythes de Canaan* (Leiden 1973), 84–85.

5) F. Cumont, *Baltis*, RE II (1896) 2842–43 und RE Suppl. I (1903) 240.

6) This derivation, first advanced by H. Lewy, *Die semitischen Fremdwörter im Griechischen* (Berlin 1885 – Hildesheim/New York 1970), 251, had been taken up by O. Carruba and O. Szemerényi, see O. Szemerényi, *The Origins of the*

Finally, it must be however stressed that on the scanty evidence before us, and particularly because of the fluidity of such rather obscure designations as 'nymphé?') (the value of which could alter considerably in various, especially secondary and late contexts), it is virtually impossible to suggest as to the actual *religious* significance of this figure on her indigenous soil⁸).

Erlangen

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Greek Lexicon: Ex Oriente Lux, JHS 94 (1974) 155; W. Burkert, Griechische Religion der archaischen und klassischen Epoche (Stuttgart 1977), 220.

7) See M. P. Nilsson, Geschichte der griechischen Religion I (München ⁴1974), 244–253.

8) Anyway, cf. the remarks of R. F. Willetts, The Civilisation of Ancient Crete (London 1977) on Europa (a goddess → a nymph). The close traditional connections of various female nature divinities with wisdom and mantic is admirably discussed by W. F. Albright, The Goddess of Life and Wisdom, AJSL 36 (1920) 258–294. Only in passing let it be noted that some other traces of affinity with ancient Near Eastern notions are to be discerned in the legends relating to the Cretan seer, too. – We are inclined to believe that, for instance, Diog. Laertius' story (recapitulated on the authority of Theopompus) I 115 = A. Giannini, Paradoxographorum Graecorum Reliquiae (Milano 1966), 365, about Epimenides building the temple of Zeus (but originally of the Nymphs, as the text explicitly states) may well be paralleled by the Gilgamesh Epic I 19, 'Did not the Seven [Sages] lay its (scil. the wall of Uruk) foundation?'; XI 305, 'And if the Seven Wise Ones laid not its foundation!'; cf. E. A. Speiser, Accadian Myths and Epics, ANET, p. 73 and 97, respectively. On *muntalku* 'judicious, sage, clever one', see W. von Soden, Akkadisches Handwörterbuch II (Wiesbaden 1972), 673; CAD X 2 (1977) 207 and Th. H. Gaster, Myth, Legend and Custom in the Old Testament (London 1969), 324. E. A. Speiser's standard translation of the Gilgamesh Epic is most recently reproduced in J. B. Pritchard, The Ancient Near East I (Princeton 1973). – Finally, it is hardly necessary to argue at length that Alban. *bal'te* 'Sumpf, Erde', Ruman. *baltă*, Greek Byz. βάλτα, as well as the place names Βάλτα (Dorf in Messenien), Βάλτος (Dorf im Nomos Korinth), etc, on which see, e. g., M. Vasmer, Schriften zur slavischen Altertumskunde und Namenkunde I (Berlin 1971), 9, have nothing to do with the Cretan name discussed in this paper.