THE NAME OF DEMETER

I do not propose to add to the long list of «solutions» to this riddle. Most recently, A. J. Van Windekens[1] has added his name to the mournful series. I propose instead to point out where, as it seems to me, the realistic possibilities lie.

The ultimate etymon of the first element seems to me, at the present state of our knowledge, in principle uncertain, perhaps unknowable. It may be pre-Indo-European; it may (with Heubeck) be «pre-Greek», perhaps even (with Pisani and Georgiev) «Illyrian» (whatever that is); it may even be good Greek, either with an otherwise unattested root or with a disguised shape of a well-known root.

Van Windekens agrees essentially with Kretschmer and Frisk in rejecting *dem- 'house', which was advocated by Fick-Bechtel and Ehrlich. Instead, he would replace this by an equally inappropriate guess[2], *dē(i)- 'divide, distribute, (ap)portion, etc.' Hence we would have 'Mère de la portion, de la nourriture'. The semantic trouble here is that we are faced with a specialization of sense that is by no means certain or motivated.

Formally, in order to justify the necessary pre-forms in the various dialects, Van Windekens must start from *dēiā-, *dāiā-, and *daio-. Apart from the fact that he has already dismissed the gemination in the Thessalian form on the weak argument of «expressive gemination»[3], this multiple of sources is less economical as a solution than others which have been proposed.

Other arguments have attributed the etymon to the set represented by χθών, Phrygian Γδαν-, and the like. If this is so, of course the source must be «pre-Greek»; but then, as will be seen

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[1] *Die Sprache* 12.94-7, 1966. For references to earlier work, see this last, and the entry in Hj. Frisk, *GEW* 1.379-80.

[2] *Op. cit.* 96.

[3] *Op. cit.* 95.

below and in agreement with Van Windekens's objections on the probable fate of -νμ-[4], there is no trace of the nasal. On this score, it is worth pointing out that the Albanian *dhe*, often adduced[5], is by no means of certain affinity here. The Albanian initial is, of course, quite ambiguous; *d(h)*- or *ǵ(h)*- would do equally well, and alongside Albanian *dje* 'yesterday' an IE *dǵh*- (Hittite *degan*, gen. *d(a)gnaš*) is phonologically quite without parallel. But what is not normally brought out is that the vocalism and final of the Albanian word are also highly problematic. Alb. *e* (*not* diphthongized *ie*) goes back plausibly to *ō. But there is no trace of the nasal. The usual definite form of this masculine vowel-stem is *dheu* 'the earth'. We might have expected, to match χθών, *humus*, Skt. *ksam*-, something on the order of *dhem(ë)*, or Geg. *dhê-ni*[6] Tosk *dhë-ri*. Thus, Albanian *dhe* looks superficially like *(d)ǵhō- or a longer dissyllable containing some such vocalism and an intervocalic voiced obstruent.

Finally, to make matters worse, γῆ γᾶ could also be related to Albanian *dhe* (and then to a pre-Greek Δᾱ-), but it is of course itself quite opaque, as Frisk flatly states[7].

Let us, then, abandon for now guessing at what this ambiguous etymon might be. Instead, let us inspect the internal Greek probabilities.

Van Windekens insists rightly that we must take full account of the variants attested in the ancient dialects; it is a pity that as yet no sure direct Mycenaean evidence has come to light, but more on this below. But, in speaking of the variants, Van Win-

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[4]   *Op. cit.* 94.

[5]   See Frisk 379.

[6]   I assert this despite the fact that we actually find in the isolated Geg. dialect of Arbanasi (earlier Borgo Erizzo), near Zadar in Croatia, the form *le-ni* (C. Tagliavini, *L'albanese di Dalmazia*, Firenze 1937, 170), and in the Krajina dialects north of Scutari the form *lë-ni* (I. Ajeti, *Istorijski razvitak gegijskog govora Arbanasa kod Zadra*, Sarajevo 1961, 128-9). These North Geg. dialects have extended the use of -*n*- in the definite form of such monosyllables, as also in *mi* 'mouse'. The plural *dhena*, Tosk *dhera*, is a productive type that proves nothing in this regard.

[7]   *GEW* 1.303. Tagliavini, *op. laud.* 170, summarizes the equations made by Meyer, Pedersen, and Barić with γᾶ and with χθών (the latter preferred) without bringing out these difficulties.

dekens makes the puzzling statement[8] «...ō en face d'un ancien
ā n'entre pas dans le cadre des alternances apophoniques». And
again[9] «dans le domaine de l'apophonie ō de Δω- est inconciliable
avec ā de Δᾱ-, Δη-». Surely, this conclusion is in any case un-
justified. If, provisionally, we agree with Van Windekens that
Thessalian Δαμμ- represents gemination of some sort, we may
equate Attic-Ionic Δη- = Doric Δᾱ- ∼ Aeolic Δω- ∼ Thessalian
*Δᾰ- exactly to the series φημί : φωνή : φατός etc.[10]. That is, we
have ᾱ : ω : ᾰ < *ā : ō : ə, or *aə : oə : ə. This is a perfectly res-
pectable IE ablaut series that may be expressed in laryngeal
terms as *deH_a- : doH_a : dH_a-. If that were so, the root would
be *dā-, or *deH_a-. But, though this is formally possible, a weak-
ness still remains in the fact that we cannot directly motivate the
ablaut alternation any better than Van Windekens's multiple base-
and-suffix formations. For that reason, and because I still find a
gratuitous gemination in Thessalian unsatisfying, I reject for
the present this possibility.

The Greek forms that must be accommodated are Attic-Ionic
Δημήτηρ = Doric etc. Δᾱμᾱτηρ, Thessalian Δαμματηρ, East
Aeolic Δωματηρ. Heubeck, pace Van Windekens, is clearly
on solid ground in urging that the Thessalian form points to an
assimilated consonant. That is, we have a situation parallel to
Thess. ἀμμέ, Doric ἀμε-, Attic-Ionic ἡμε- (1st pl. pronoun) < *ασμε;
and Lesb. σελάννᾱ, Doric σελᾱνᾱ, Attic-Ionic σελήνη. Thus, we
have, as Ehrlich posited, *Δασ-μᾱτηρ; but there is no necessity
to follow him in deriving *Δασ- from *dms-, genitive of *dem-.

On the other hand, if we are to harmonize Δω- with this,
the only possibility seems to be a contraction of *Δαο-. The evi-
dence for this is summarized below, where it is shown that the
form must moreover be *Δαŏ- and not *Δᾱŏ-. Now, a virtue of
the analysis *Δασ-μᾱτηρ is that it is morphologically and syntac-
tically parallel to δεσπότης, whatever the first elements. I submit,
then, that Δωματηρ is best viewed as based on a revised form of

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[8]   Op. cit. 94.

[9]   Op. cit. 96.

[10] The first two portions of this complex equation are reflected in the literature,
      e.g. in Brugmann, Gr.Gr.[4] 1913, 110, fn. 2, with references to earlier literature.

this archaic genitive; thus, *Δασ-μᾱτηρ → *Δαοσ-μᾱτηρ. It might be objected that in light of Lesb. μῆννος < *μηνσός (I know of no clear example of *-σμ- after long vowel) we should expect *Δαομμᾱτηρ < **Δωμμᾱτηρ. However, it should be noted that alongside μῆννος we find also μῆνος, and in Thessalian μεινος alongside μειννος.

Hence, our multiplicity of forms reduces by well known developments to a single original construction *Δα-ς + μᾱτηρ. The only way to understand the reshaping to Δαος- is by assuming an original genitive *Δα-ς; otherwise there would have been no motivation for dismembering what would become a fossilized simplex. Therefore, with a zero-grade -s ending (a moribund form in Greek, on which there would have been tremendous pressure for replacement by -ος), the stem must have been *δα- in early Greek; cf., for zero-grade in both elements, Av. nərəš.

This seems to be as far as we can go on the evidence of Classical alphabetic Greek. From the morphological shape of *δα- it seems unlikely that the α goes back to a syllabic nasal. We will return presently to the matter of the length of the α.

Although Mycenaean does not yet show us a reflex for Demeter, it has shed valuable confirmatory light on the form of the name of Poseidon. Now Fick long ago hypothesized a relation between *Ποσει-Δᾱς(-ων) and *Δᾱ-μᾱτηρ.[11]. The form of Poseidon's name should long ago have been clear to us on the basis of the abundant dialectal attestations. But the digamma in the inconsistent Corinthian ΠοτΕδᾱϝονι (disagreeing with ΠοτΕδᾱνι) misled us where we should have been more rigorous. Thus, the exemplary Lejeune[12] clearly stated: «Devant ω, la longue η s'abrège en ε; de plus, en attique, εω se contracte en ω (sauf si l'hiatus résulte de la chute d'un ϝ)». Note this last, which correctly accounts for νεῶν < *νᾱϝῶν. Yet Lejeune continues: «ion. Ποσειδέων, att. Ποσειδῶν (de -ᾱϝων; contracté en attique, malgré le caractère récent de l'hiatus)». Obviously, the hiatus cannot be recent, and can only be old, as all the other dialect evidence

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[11]   L. R. Palmer, *Mycenaeans and Minoans*[2], 1965, 138, traces it back only to Kretschmer, who elaborated the notion.

[12]   *Traité de phonétique grecque* 225, § 254.

tends to show. On the other hand, the Attic evidence shows by
the loss of the η > ε that the alpha was originally incontrovertably
long *ᾱ.

Frisk[13] gives a full listing of relevant variant forms, a quick
survey of the interpretations of the elements in the name, and a
good summary set of references to the literature. Yet, following
Schwyzer, and with the Mycenaean forms before him, he gives
an incorrect account of the implications of the vowel contractions:
«Aus Ποτειδᾱϝων (wie Μαχᾱ-ων, ’Αρετᾱ-ων u.a.; Schwyzer 521)
entstand durch Kontraktion -δῶν, -δᾶν; daneben -δᾶς». As we
have just seen, if a digamma had really been present, we would
never find the stage of contraction reached in Attic -δῶν.

On the basis of Ποσειδῶν, Ion. Ποσειδέων, Hom. Ποσειδάων,
Corinthian ΠοτΕδᾶν, Cret. Ποτειδᾶν, Lesb. Ποσείδᾱν, Boeot.
Ποτειδᾶονι, Arc. Ποσοιδᾶνος, we may reconstruct only *Ποτ(ε)ι-
δᾱων. The forms of Myc. po-se-da-o(-nV), po-si-da-i-jo etc.[14] now
bear this out.

Heubeck has tried[15] to account for the background in the
following fashion: The derivative in -a-i-jo shows that we have
an old s-stem. Therefore, we start from *potei-da(h)ōn / poti-da(h)os[16],
with *dns- seen in δαῆναι.[17] *poti-da(h)os > *posi-da(h)os, posi-
da(h)i(i)os, which then contaminates *potei-da(h)ōn to *posei-

[13]   GEW 2.583 (1966).

[14]   See A. Morpurgo, Lexicon 258-9.

[15]   IF 64.225-40, 1959.

[16]   Frisk, GEW 2.583, accepts, without justification, the old view that Ποσι- is a more
      recent form of the vocative Ποτει-. That they are both of substantial age, and,
      more important, that they are allocated to clear syntactic functions (vocative
      generalized in the god's name, and nominative [-accusative] in the phrasally
      compounded derivative adjective) is shown by the highly consistent Mycenaean
      forms. Given the phrasal source of these forms and such derivatives as Ποσιδήϊος,
      Ποσιδηϊών -δεών, Boeot. Ποτιδάϊχος, one might have reconstructed the same
      situation without the aid of Mycenaean; but the confirmation should settle all
      doubt. Kretschmer is correct in rejecting Ποτοι- (Pergam. Ποτοιδαν, Arcad. Ποσοι-
      and the Laconized Ποhοιδάν) as an ablaut variant. Morphologically it should
      not occur in such a range of forms. Instead, it must represent an assimilation to
      the preceding syllable (not an infrequent phenomenon in Greek) of an earlier
      Ποτει-.

[17]   Frisk cites this equation with doubt on lexical (semantic) grounds. See below
      the stronger phonological argument.

da(h)ōn. The last is then contaminated in the final element by
Παιᾱϝων = Myc. *pa-ja-wo* > Παιᾱων, and gives Ποσειδᾱων >
Ποσειδέων. The flaw in this argument, which is certainly unobjec-
tionable as far as the Mycenaean stage, is in the later chronology,
involving the cross with Παιᾱϝων. In order to get the long alpha
Heubeck is obliged to accept too the digamma. But, as we have
just seen, Attic shows us crucially (apart from the other direct
but ambiguously manipulable evidence) that the digamma was
never there; or else the contraction would have failed to take
place.

Thus we need no intervention of Παιᾱϝων (a gain in itself),
and we must start directly from **potei-dā(h)ōn / poti-dā(h)os*.
Underlying this, we posit a phrase, often heard in the vocative,
naturally[18], **potis das* 'Lord of (the) Da[19]'.

Now let us return to Demeter. To explain Aeolic Δω- we
invoked **Δαο-*. That is **ᾱŏ* yields Aeolic ω (e.g. Boeot. σουλῶν-
τες, as in verbs in -ᾱω). The assumption of this contraction also
helps to explain as hyper-forms such Lesbian formations as πονᾱω,
πτοᾱω, and ἀξιᾱω in expected -έω and -όω types. On the other
hand, **ᾱŏ* yields Aeolic ω, Attic-Ionic (ε)ω (e.g. Lesb. ᾱς, Boeot.
ᾱς, Att.-Ion. ἕως, though this is probably from **ᾱϝος*; gen. pl.
Lesb. Thess. Boeot. -ᾱν, Ion. -έων, Att. -ῶν < **-āsōN*). Therefore
Δωματηρ cannot be explained at all by starting directly from a
pre-form **Δᾱο-*. We must, for maximum economy and expla-
natory power, posit **Δᾱος* + μᾱτηρ > **Δᾰ-ς* + μᾱτηρ.

On the other hand, we have just seen that the name of Poseidon
requires an origin in **Ποτις* + δᾱς[20]. It should be clear, then,
that the first element of Demeter and the final element of Poseidon
cannot be, in simple terms, identical; that is, they are *not* in origin
the *phonetically same form of the same word*. They could thus easily
be unrelated.

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[18]   Many given names in modern Romanian, Bulgarian, and Serbo-Croatian are
    frozen vocatives. There is a rich and dispersed Balkanist literature on this. Cf. also
    the Boeotian hypocoristic names in -ει, thought also to be frozen vocatives.

[19]   If Albanian were to continue this we would expect **dua do-*, or perhaps (from
    an old sandhi form) **dhua dho-*.

[20]   This, of course, eliminates on strong phonological grounds Heubeck's suggestion
    of **dns*: δαῆναι.

However, this does not prevent them, if they are morphologically Indo-European[21], from being regular variants of the same word. In that case, we would have *-δᾱς < *dās, and *Δας- <*dəs. In laryngeal terms of IE ablaut these would be *deH$_a$s and *dH$_a$s respectively. Now both these have been analyzed earlier as being old genitives; and so they may well have been regarded by prehistoric Greeks. But, if the root was actually *deH$_a$s-, it might have had a declension of the form:

nom.	*deH$_a$s-s	<	*dās
gen.	*dH$_a$s-(e/o)s	<	*dəsés, dəsós, dəs(s)
combining form	*dH$_a$s-	<	*dəs-

Thus, unless we assume vocalic levelling in the paradigm, *Ποτις Δᾱς could have meant the (titular) 'Lord Das'[22], while *Δᾱς-μᾱτηρ could have meant 'the Das-mother' or 'the mother of Das'. If that were so, *dās- would have no obvious known common-noun meaning.

If such a noun lies behind the forms of Demeter, it is even possible that Δω- and Δη- etc. are equally old. For *Δᾰσ-μᾱτηρ could contain the combining form *dəs-, while *Δᾰος + μᾱτηρ could reflect the old genitive *dəsós.

Finally, if the latter reasoning is correct, on grounds of morphological and syntactic argument, but in ignorance of the original semantics, Demeter was the mother of Poseidon.

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[21] Either by inheritance or by very early prehistoric assimilation that would be by definition without distinctive chronological characteristics.

[22] The syntax would be the same as Juppiter, but the order (which has been suggestively linked with the Semitic Levant) would be different.