SHORTER NOTES

ASHERAH AND APHRODITE: A COINCIDENCE?*

It has long been known that there is a significant connection between Aphrodite and Semitic goddesses.[1] In Walter Burkert's recent words,[2] 'Behind the figure of Aphrodite there clearly stands the ancient Semitic goddess of love, Ishtar-Astarte.' This was already recognized by Herodotus (1.105, 131) and Philo of Byblos (Eus. *Prep. evang.* 1.812). I want here to note a curious and striking item of connection that has not been noticed.

Over a century ago, Paul Kretschmer[3] suggested a compelling etymology for the name Aphrodite, accepting the traditional view that ἀφρ- comes from ἀφρός 'foam', and adding that the latter part of the name represented ὀδίτη, a hypothesized female form of ὀδίτης. Thus, Aphrodite was the deity who was 'auf dem schaume dahinwandelnd' ('moving about on the foam').

It is well known that there was, with the passage of time, substantial confusion and conflation between Semitic goddesses. W.G. Dever comments,[4] '[There is] an extraordinary, almost bewildering fluidity in the conception of many Northwest Semitic deities', and points specifically to Asherah, Astarte and Anat: '[There is] a fusion of the three Canaanite fertility goddesses' (p. 29). He also notes how Asherah and Astarte 'interchange as consorts of Ba'al in the Hebrew Bible' (ibid.). Similarly, J.M. Hadley on the three major goddesses Athirat, Anat and Astarte: 'In places they all have similar attributes and characteristics, and at times they may play the same role in the myths.'[5] Also, R.A. Oden, Jr: 'The Old Testament … exhibits a confusion between the names and roles of Aserah and Astart; and this confusion … suggests the early mingling of all three major goddesses.'[6]

Let us turn to Asherah. In one of her facets, she served as a fertility/love goddess.[7] Apparently, she was originally Atṛt ym in Ugaritic[8] and the name was in time reduced to

* I am indebted to Professors Dennis Pardee and Wayne Pitard for helpful readings of this note.

[1] I refrain in this brief paper from getting into the vast *Problematik* surrounding the Canaanite (and Mesopotamian) goddesses.

[2] W. Burkert, *Greek Religion* (Cambridge, MA, 1985), 152.

[3] P. Kretschmer, *Zeitschrift für Vergleichende Sprachforschung* 33 (1895), 267.

[4] W.G. Dever, *BASOR* 255 (1984), 28.

[5] J.M. Hadley, *The Cult of Asherah in Ancient Israel and Judah* (Cambridge, 2000), 38.

[6] R.A. Oden, Jr, *Studies in Lucian's De Syria Dea* (Missoula, MT, 1977), 97.

[7] See Hadley (n. 5), 9. For an elaborate discussion of Asherah and fertility gods, see C. Frevel, *Aschera und der Ausschliesslichkeitsanspruch YHWHs* (Weinheim, 1995), 570–88.

[8] See W.F. Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan* (Garden City, NY, 1968), 121: 'Asherah has a name which was originally part of a longer appellation, which appears in Ugaritic as Rabbatu athiratu yammi'; see also Hadley (n. 5), 40: 'Her full title appears to be *rbt aṭrt ym*.'

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Aṯrt.[9] But the root atr in Ugaritic means 'to go',[10] just as it does in Hebrew (ashr, as in Asherah[11]). Thus, Aṯrt ym means, 'she who goes upon the sea'.[12]

In other words, if (as seems reasonable and is accepted by many) Kretschmer is correct, not only are Aphrodite and Asherah (Athirat) often the same goddess in terms of their roles, functions and characteristics, but they may actually have the same name ἀφρ/ὀδίτη (Aṯrt ym).[13]

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doi:10.1017/S0009838814000822

[9] The notion that ym here could be 'day' and refer to a solar deity (so T. Binger, *Asherah* [Sheffield, 1997], 42–5; also W.G.E. Watson, *UF* 25 [1993], 431–4) has no persuasive force. See also Hadley (n. 5), 40.

[10] See G. del Olmo Lete and J. Sanmartín, *A Dictionary of the Ugaritic Language in the Alphabetic Tradition* (Leiden, 2003), 126.

[11] See Köhler–Baumgartner (Leiden, 1995), 94.

[12] See Albright (n. 8), 121, 'The Lady Who Treads on the Sea' or 'The Lady Who Traverses the Sea'. See also Hadley (n. 5), 50 and W.A. Maier III, *Aserah: Extrabiblical Evidence* (Atlanta, 1986), 194–5. But S.A. Wiggins, *A Reassessment of 'Asherah'* (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1993), 192–3 is somewhat sceptical.

[13] The chronology of the development of the goddess' name in the Semitic and Greek versions I cannot determine.

TWO TEXTUAL NOTES ON PINDAR'S EIGHTH *NEMEAN**

πολλὰ γὰρ πολλᾷ λέλεκται, νεαρὰ δ' ἐξευρόντα δόμεν βασάνῳ
ἐς ἔλεγχον, ἅπας κίνδυνος· ὄψον δὲ λόγοι φθονεροῖσιν,
ἅπτεται δ' ἐσλῶν ἀεί, χειρόνεσσι δ' οὐκ ἐρίζει.
κεῖνος καὶ Τελαμῶνος δάψεν υἱόν, φασγάνῳ ἀμφικυλίσαις.

21. ὄψον δὲ λόγοι BD : δὲ λόγοι om. Triclinius
φθονεροῖσιν BD : φθόνῳ εἰσίν Vauvilliers (vel potius φθονερῷ 'ισιν)

I translate: 'For many things have been told in many ways, but to give novel things, when one has found them out, to the touchstone | For testing is pure danger: words are an *amuse-bouche* to the envious, | And it fastens on good men always, not taking issue with inferiors. | That too gnawed at Telamon's son, had him writhing on a sword.' The difficulty presented by the transition in 22 from the plural 'the envious' to the singular subject 'it' will be obvious. However, some commentators, including Mezger,[1] Fennell[2] and Bury,[3] have assumed that φθόνος can be supplied as the subject of ἅπτεται in 22 from φθονεροῖσιν in 21, and the modern texts of

* I am grateful to Professors James Diggle and David Kovacs, as well as the anonymous reader of *CQ*, for helpful comments on a draft of this note.

[1] F. Mezger, *Pindars Siegeslieder* (Leipzig, 1880), 328.

[2] C.A.M. Fennell, *Pindar: The Nemean and Isthmian Odes* (Cambridge, 1889[2]), 103: 'For the extraction of φθόνος from φθονεροῖσιν cf. Soph. Aj. 201 [*sic*] νόσου from νοσήσαν [*sic*].' The reference seems to be to νοσήσας at *Aj.* 207, but Fennell leaves it to the reader to extract what support he can from the cross-reference.

[3] J.B. Bury, *The Nemean Odes of Pindar* (London and New York, 1890), 153.

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