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ΔΑΕΙΡΑ, THE LADY OF THE WATERS

This paper examines the evidence for the obscure Attic goddess Δάειρα / Δαῖρα who received cult in some Attic demes in an Eleusinian context. It is argued that this deity originally had nothing to do with Persephone or Demeter with whom she is identified in some sources; instead, due prominence is given to the earliest mythographical sources according to which Daeira was an Oceanid and a «watery» ἡ ὑγρὰ οὐσία. Based on these testimonia, the name Δάειρα / Δαῖρα is etymologized as «the Lady of the Waters»: *δά-φειρα ‘having δα-’ from PIE **deh*₂- ‘water’, fully parallel to the name of Poseidon (**potei*₂ *dās* ‘Lord of Waters’ > Ποτ(ε)ιδᾶς).

Keywords: Ancient Greek religion, ancient Greek mythology, PIE reconstruction, etymology.

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Δάειρα, владелица вод

В статье рассматривается теоним Δάειρα/Δαῖρα, культовое почитание которой засвидетельствовано в ряде демов Аттики. Связь этой богини с мифом о Персефоне и Элевзинскими культурами предлагается считать вторичной: природа Дaeйры как водного божества следует из свидетельств Ферекида и других мифографов. В статье предлагается новая этимология: Δάειρα < *δά-φειρα ‘владелица вод’ < и.-е. **dh*₂-*uer*-*ih*₂ от того же корня, что и имя Посейдона (**potei*₂ *dh*₂-*es* ‘владыка вод’ > Ποτ(ε)ιδᾶς).

Ключевые слова: древнегреческая религия, древнегреческая мифология, индоевропейская реконструкция, этимология.

Δάειρα is an obscure minor goddess who received offerings in an Eleusinian context in at least two Attic demes: she is mentioned in the sacred regulations at Paeania (*IG* I³ 250, ca. 450–430 BCE = *LSS* 1962: 18), in the sacrificial calendar of the Marathonian Tetrapolis (*IG* II² 1358, 375–350 BCE) and a couple of other inscriptions¹ as a deity worshipped during the *Proerosia* festival at which she received an animal victim (a female lamb or a pregnant

¹ She is mentioned in the Athenian account of money received from the sale of skins of sacrificial victims (331 BCE, *IG* II² 1496.103 = *SIG*³ 1029); Robertson 1996: 352 plausibly restored [Δαίρ]αι τὴν πρηρο[σ]ίαν- in lines 5/6 of the calendar of the deme of Thorikos (*IG* I³ 256, ca. 430–420 BCE).

sheep)². Daeira appears to have had her own priests: according to Pollux 1.35, among Eleusinian priests and priestesses there was a cult functionary with the title δαιρίτης.

Non-epigraphic sources about Δάειρα (contracted Δαῖρα³) are confusing and contradictory in the extreme. In Aeschylus' «Ghost-Raisers» (Ψυχαγωγοί) Δαῖρα was apparently used as a designation of Persephone (fr. 277 Radt via Σ L Ap. Rh. 3.867) and in Lycophr. *Alex.* 706–10 Δάειρα is the wife of Hades⁴. Eusth. ad *Il.* 6.378 (p. 648, 42 van der Valk) mentions the theory that she was a warder of Persephone appointed by Hades. For Aristophanes she was the mother of Semele (fr. 804 Kassel–Austin from Phot. δ 5). Apollonius of Rhodes (3.847) uses Δαῖρα as a variant name for Hecate⁵. As a heroine, Daeira is the wife of Eumolpus and mother of Immaros / Immaradus (Clem. Alex. *Protr.* 3.45.1); in another story she is said to be the wife of Hermes and the mother of the eponymous hero Eleusis / Eleusinos (Paus. 1.38.7, Ael. Dio. D 1.1). A particularly intriguing testimony comes from Phanodemos of Athens (fr. 15 Jacoby = 279 Harding) according to whom the priestess of Demeter was required to be absent at sacrifices to Daira and to abstain from her rites⁶. Based on this animosity, Phanodemos theorizes that Daeira must be equated with Aphrodite, while Phot. δ 5 preserves another opinion according to which Daeira is supposed to be identical with Hera.

As if this embarrassment of riches were not enough, we also find ancient testimonies about Δάειρα / Δαῖρα that have no connection with the Eleusinian context whatsoever. The most recalcitrant testimony of all is the one according to which she is the very principle of wetness: Αἴλιος μέντοι Διονύσιος Δαῖραν γράφων δυσυλλάβως τὴν Δάειράν φησιν, ὅτι οἱ περὶ τελετὰς καὶ μυστήρια τὴν ὑγρὰν οὐσίαν

² The fullest account of evidence along with ancient and modern interpretations can be found in Moraux 1959: 30–8; see also Clinton 1974: 98; Kearns 1989: 153; Parker 2005: 340; Robertson 2010: 12–2; Johnston 2013: 381–3; Fowler 2013: 16–17.

³ The form Δάειρα is found in *IG II²* 1492.103 = *SIG³* 1029 line 39.

⁴ Possibly a reminiscence from Aeschylus, see Schade 1999: 11.

⁵ According to the scholion on this verse, some other ancient commentators proposed identification with Persephone; this must be the reason why the gloss Κούρη eventually replaced Apollonius's original Δαῖραν in some manuscripts of the poem.

⁶ Serv. ad Verg. *Aen.* 4.58 reports a similar prohibition for the priestesses of Juno to partake of the offerings made to Ceres: *cum Iunoni Eleusine fit, templum Cereris clauditur, nec sacerdoti Iunonis licet gustare unde Cereri sit libatum.*

Δαῖραν ὀνομάζουσιν ‘however, Aelius Dionysius, writing Daeira in two syllables as Daira, says (it is so) because those (writing) about rites of initiation and secret doctrines call the watery substance δαῖρα’ (Aelius Dionysius δ 1 Erbse (= *BNJ*² 368 F 1) via Eusth. ad *Il.* 6.378 p. 648, 42 van der Valk ~ Phot. δ 25 (p. 375 Theodorides)). The idea of moistness recurs in the claim made by Pherecydes (fr. 45 Fowler) that Δάειρα was a sister of the Styx, viz. an Oceanid: the Pherecydes’ fragment is quoted by Eustathius from Pausanias the Atticist (δ 1 Erbse) who adds that ἐπὶ γὰρ ὑγρᾶς οὐσίας τάπτουσιν οἱ παλαιοὶ τὴν Δάειραν «the ancients assign Daeira power over ‘moistness’». Genealogical connection of Daeira with the Styx was accepted by the travel writer Pausanias (1.38.7; cf. Harp. ε 35 (Keaney) s.v. Ἐλευσίνα) who adds that Δάειρα’s father was either Oceanos or Ogygos.

Pherecydes’s account is our earliest testimony, and it should be given our most serious consideration: clearly a goddess representing «watery substance» cannot be easily reconciled with Demeter or Persephone, even though Daeira’s relationship with the Styx may have provided the grounds for her secondary association – and even probable syncretism – with the divine queen of the Underworld. Daeira’s watery nature is the *difficilior* among the testimonies, as it were⁷.

According to Johnston 2013: 383, «it is difficult to decide what ἡ ὑγρὰ οὐσία means», but the problem appears in a different light altogether when viewed from a comparative, Usenerian angle: instead of trying to make sense of enigmatic watery substance in the

⁷ Note that the scene of Aeschylus’ *Ghost-Raisers* (where Daira is identified with Persephone) is λίμνη, a lake in the Underworld, and the souls of the dead are invited to arrive from the «mouth of the river whose offshoot is this body of water [...] rising up from the streams of Styx» (fr. 273 Radt, trans. Sommerstein). Is it unreasonable to speculate that appearance of Δαῖρα in this context may have had something to do with her association with (subterranean) waters?

In general, Daeira’s semi-syncretism with Persephone may be due to a variety of reasons: for instance, the location of the cult may have played a role; alternatively, one may hypothesize that her identification with the cult of Demeter and Persephone was caused by the similarity between Δάειρα and δαῖς ‘torch’ (cf. Δαῖρα παρὰ τὴν δᾶδα advocated by John Tzetzes in his comment on *Lyc. Alex.* 710, cf. *Et. Magn.* 244.34; it is also possible, however, that we find here a secondary inference from the cult in which Daeira had become conflated with Demeter). Be that as it may, linguistic considerations speak strongly against seeing in Δάειρα «another feminine agent of δαίω» (so Robertson 2010: 120): -ηρ (< *-er-, fem. *-er-ia) is not a known agent noun suffix in Greek.

Eleusinian context, we can dispense with the latter altogether and assume instead that the goddess' association with water is original. The theory would be that initially Daeira had nothing to do with the myth about the rape of Persephone and Demeter's response to it, but she was secondarily pulled into it as a heroine or a divine character. One benefit of this approach is that it may explain the otherwise bewildering prohibition for the priestess of Demeter's cult to be present during the sacrifice made to Daeira; the other benefit is linguistic⁸.

According to etymological dictionaries, the etymology of Δάειρα is unknown⁹, but the name may in fact be given a perfectly straightforward linguistic analysis (and even an Indo-European mythological pedigree) under the theory that Pherecydes' ὕγρα οὐσία reflects the original function of the goddess. Δάειρα appears to represent a substantivized feminine adjective made with the same suffix as πείρα 'fatty, rich' (next to masc. πίων) for which we have an exact Sanskrit correspondence in *pīvarī* 'swelling, fat' (next to masc. *pīvan-*). The suffix *-φειρα < *-φειρᾶ (from Proto-Indo-European *-u_{er}-ih₂) had a possessive meaning, and the base word from which πείρα was derived is preserved in Gk. πῖαρ 'fat'; the derivational relationship between these words can be schematically presented as follows:

πῖαρ 'fat' (< *pīh_xur_o) → πείρα 'having fat, fatty' (*pīh_xu_{er}ih₂)¹⁰

Using this morphological parallel, we can parse the adjective that underlies the name Daeira as *δά-φειρα 'having δά-'. Now, what is *δά¹¹? In view of Pherecydes' testimony, I propose to identify the root of Δάειρα with the root that means 'water' and is found in Greek in the second part of the name of Poseidon: Doric

⁸ For a similar application of comparative method to Greek theonymy see recently Kazansky 2009.

⁹ Nilsson 1935: 82–5 believed that Δάειρα was Hades' sister, and van Windekens 1984 suggested that the name may be related to Greek δᾱήρ 'husband's brother'; however, the Greek term for 'husband's sister' is γάλωος. (Moreover, if Δάειρα was Demeter's sister-in-law, why is the goddess inimical to her in the cult?). The analysis of Δάειρα as «the Knowing One» advocated by the *LSJ* is not based on anything that can be inferred from the testimonia and is based solely on the formal comparison with the root δα- of διδάσκω, δήνεα (PIE *dens-).

¹⁰ See Risch 1974: 135.

¹¹ The quantity of -α- in the first syllable is indeterminable: the only metrical passage in which the full form Δάειρα is attested is Lyc. 710 where the first two syllables of the name fill the second foot in an iambic metron.

Ποτ(ε)ιδᾶς along with the extended variant *Ποτειδάων (> Ποσειδάων, Ποσειδῶν, Ποσειδάν) has long been analyzed as a univerbation based on a vocative collocation *Ποτει δᾶς < **potei dās!* ‘O Lord of the Water(s)!’¹²

Ancient testimonies about the «watery nature» of Daeira are thus in perfect harmony with the results of linguistic reconstruction: viewed in comparative perspective, Δάειρα emerges as the «Lady of the Waters», potentially even a déclassé consort of Poseidon.

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¹² As a parallel to such vocative collocation compare Lat. *Iūpiter* / *Iuppiter* < Indo-European **d̥iēu ph₂ter* ‘O father Sky’ (Gk. Ζεῦ πάτερ). For etymological analysis see Littleton 1971 and Janda 2000: 292–6; the latter further plausibly compared Vedic *dānu-* ‘water’ and Iranian river names Don and Danube.

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