

Abstract

Hecate and Her Dogs

Bjarne Simmelkjær Sandgaard Hansen
University of Copenhagen

Three etymologies of the Greek theonym Ἑκάτη 'Hecate' (also an Artemisian epithet) prevail. Beekes (2010: 396-398) focuses on her presumed Carian origin, cf. e.g. Kraus (1960: 41-54) and Nilsson (1961: 78), and consequently assumes her name to be Pre-Greek. Thus, he follows von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf (1931: 325) who suggests an Anatolian origin and subsequent adoption by the Greeks to the known Apollonian epithets ἐκάτηβόλος or ἐκηβόλος. The second etymology, cf. Chantraine (2009: 313), takes ἐκάτηβόλος – according to the ancients either 'shooting from afar' (to ἐκάς 'afar, far off') or 'striking with hundreds' (to ἐκατόν 'hundred', cf. also Wackernagel 1927: 316-321) – as its point of departure. This epithet was then abbreviated to ἐκηβόλος and ἔκατος of which Ἑκάτη serves as the feminine. Thirdly, Liddell & Scott (1940: 500) translates Ἑκάτη as 'she who works her will' and refers to ἐκάτηβόλος as 'hitting the mark at will' (Gr. ἐκ- < PIE **mek-* 'wish'), cf. also Beekes (2010: 398) and Boisacq (1950: 236-237) on ἐκηβόλος (Boeotian variant: *φεκαβόλος*) as 'striking at will'. Frisk (1960: 473-474) modifies (either of) the latter two suggestions by regarding the epithets ἔκατος and ἐκάτη as abbreviations of ἐκηβόλος – and ἐκάτηβόλος as a secondary hybrid of these.

Despite Kraus (1960: 41-54) and Nilsson (1961: 78), however, we cannot disregard the earliest archaeological findings indicating that Hecate and her cult were of Hellenistic rather than Anatolian origin, cf. e.g. von Rudloff (1992: 54-55) or Berg (1974: 129-140) who even argues for a possible Hecatian cult in Mycenaean Greece. Also, even if the connections and confusions between Artemis and Hecate are manifold and frequent, cf. e.g. von Rudloff (1992: 62-67) or Nilsson's (1961: 79) claim that Hecate represented the chthonic side of Artemis, Hecate is never portrayed as an archer in art or myth (von Rudloff 1992: 69). Consequently, the association of her name to the epithets ἐκάτηβόλος and ἐκηβόλος, both involving 'shooting', may not be as straightforward as often claimed.

As indirectly indicated by the title of this paper – and of the novel by Paul Morand from which it has been copied – Ἑκάτη is often described as and depicted accompanied by dogs, cf. e.g. von Rudloff (1992: 117-120). In this paper, I therefore propose that Ἑκάτη is a theonym of Greek origin and not necessarily identical or related to the Apollonian and Artemisian epithets ἔκατος, ἐκάτη, ἐκάτηβόλος, ἐκηβόλος etc. Rather, I propose, it harks back to the exocentric compound PIE **smé-k̑h₂t-eh₂-* meaning 'who possesses her own dog(s)'.

On the formal side, however, two obstacles need to be overcome, viz. 1) the absence of **u/μ*, and 2) the presence of **t* in the part of the compound meaning 'dog'. As for 1), PIE **-k̑h₂-* would normally not yield Gr. *-k-* but *-pp-* as in ἵππος 'horse' < **h₁ék̑h₂mo-*. If, however, we allow the βουκόλος rule (cf. e.g. Sihler 1995: 156) to apply also here, distant dissimilation may cause the absence of *μ*, i.e. **smé-k̑h₂t-eh₂-* > **smé-k̑h₂t-eh₂-* (almost paralleled by **gʷom-kʷolh₁-o-* > **gʷom-kolh₁-o-* > βουκόλος 'tending kine'). As for 2), the stem of the PIE word for 'dog' is normally reconstructed as **k̑(u)h₂on-* ~ **k̑un-(V)* or *k̑h₂n-* (C), cf. e.g. Wodtko & al. (2008: 436-437) or Mallory & Adams (1997: 168). However, Olsen (2001: 74-76, 2004: 222-227) suggests that **nt* and **n* were originally conditioned variants with **nt* as the expected pre-vocalic form. Thus, the **t* in **k̑h₂n-* as well as in PGmc. **hunda-* 'dog' and Latv. *sūntene*, *sūntana* 'large dog' (< **k̑unt-*) is regular, and the latter two need not be explained as *t*-derivatives as per Wodtko & al. (2008: 437).

References

- Beekes, Robert. 2010. *Etymological dictionary of Greek* (Leiden Indo-European Etymological Dictionary Series 10/1). Leiden & Boston: Brill.
- Berg, William. 1974. Hecate: Greek or "Anatolian"? *Numen: International Review for the History of Religions* 21/2. 128-140.
- Boisacq, Émile. 1950. *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque*. 4. éd. Heidelberg: Carl Winter.
- Chantraine, Pierre. 2009. *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque. Histoire des mots* (Librairie Klincksieck série linguistique 20). Nouvelle éd. Klincksieck.
- Frisk, Hjalmar. 1960. *Griechisches etymologisches Wörterbuch 1: A – Ko*. Heidelberg: Carl Winter.
- Kraus, Theodor. 1960. *Hekate. Studien zur Wesen und Bild der Göttin in Kleinasien und Griechenland* (Heidelberger Kunstgeschichtliche Abhandlungen, Neue Folge 3). Heidelberg: Winter.
- Liddell, Henry George & Robert Scott. 1940. *A Greek-English lexicon*. New (9th) ed. Oxford: Clarendon.
- Mallory, James P. & Douglas Q. Adams. 1997. *Encyclopedia of Indo-European culture*. London & Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn.
- Nilsson, Martin P. 1961. Review of Kraus 1960. *American Journal of Archaeology* 65/1. 78-79.
- Olsen, Birgit Anette. 2001. Verb or noun? On the origin of the third person in IE. In Martin E. Huld & al. (eds.), *Proceedings of the Twelfth Annual UCLA Indo-European Conference, Los Angeles, May 26-28 2000* (Journal of Indo-European Monograph Series 40), 65-79. Washington, DC: Institute for the Study of Man.
- Olsen, Birgit Anette. 2004. The complex of nasal stems in Indo-European. In James Clackson & Birgit Anette Olsen (eds.), *Indo-European word formation. Proceedings of the conference held at the University of Copenhagen October 20th – 22nd 2000* (Copenhagen Studies in Indo-European 2), 215-248. Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum.
- von Rudloff, Ilmo Robert. 1992. *Hekate in early Greek religion*. Master's thesis, Department of Classics, University of Victoria.
- Sihler, Andrew L. 1995. *New comparative grammar of Greek and Latin*. New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Wackernagel, Jacob. 1927. Vergessene Wortdeutungen. *Indogermanische Forschungen. Zeitschrift für Indogermanistik und allgemeine Sprachwissenschaft* 45. 309-327.
- von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, Ulrich. 1931. *Der Glaube der Hellenen* 1. Berlin.
- Wodtko, Dagmar & al. 2008. *Nomina im indogermanischen Lexikon*. Heidelberg: Winter.