

Rafał Rosół, *Wschodnie korzenie kultu Apollona. Studium lingwistyczno-historyczne (The Oriental Roots of the Cult of Apollo: A Linguistic-Historical Study)*, Nomos, Kraków 2010, 152 pages (with an English summary).

When linguists revealed the common descent of the Indo-European languages, historians of religion, hand in hand with etymologists, started a hunt for Proto-Indo-European gods whose name and cult would survive into historical times. Those scholars would have been entirely satisfied if they had found an Indian equivalent for every Greek deity and its name. Two of their proposals are still generally accepted: certainly *Dyauḥ* can be identified with Zeus, and *Uṣas* with Eos. Many others, however, have been abandoned. Few scholars now believe that *Puṣan*'s name is cognate with that of Pan,<sup>1</sup> and nobody sees a connection between *Varuṇa* and Uranos or the goddess *Saranyū* and the *Erinyes*. Thus, in spite of fruitful comparative research of such scholars as Georges Dumézil, the Proto-Indo-European pantheon seems disappointingly small.

This, of course, leads to the question of the origin of Greek gods or at least of their names. An obvious possible source was Phoenicia. Some Phoenician etymologies of Greek mythological names, though of heroes rather than of gods, were proposed very early. Hesychius says that in Phoenician *Adonis* meant 'master'.<sup>2</sup> The name of Cadmus, a newcomer from Phoenicia, was as early as 1646 connected with the Semitic root *qdm* ('east'),<sup>3</sup> and later scholars noticed the similarity of the names of Cadmus' grandson Melicertes and the Phoenician god

---

<sup>1</sup> See the reviewed book, pp. 19–20.

<sup>2</sup> Hesych. α 1229.

<sup>3</sup> S. Bochart, *Geographia sacra, pars altera: Chanaan, seu De coloniis et sermone Phoenicum, Cadomi* (= Caën) 1646, 486–487. See R.B. Edwards, *Kadmos the Phoenician. A Study in Greek Legends and the Mycenaean Age*, Amsterdam 1979, 58.

Melqart.<sup>4</sup> All these analogies seem rather convincing, as opposed to one that concerns a much more important mythical personage – namely the derivation of Aphrodite’s name from that of her Phoenician counterpart Ashtoreth.<sup>5</sup> Here other factors strongly connect the goddesses, but the names are not similar enough.

Two recent proposals formulated by Polish scholars stand out against this background. The first one concerns Poseidon. Robert Sucharski accepts the long standing interpretation of his name as Πότις Δᾶς (‘the Lord of the Earth’), and presents the noteworthy hypothesis that it should be treated as a calque of the Semitic – probably Phoenician – theonym *bʿl ʿrs*.<sup>6</sup>

The second proposal, providing a Phoenician etymology for the name of Apollo, is the point of issue of Rafał Rosół’s book *The Oriental Roots of the Cult of Apollo*. The author derives the name of the god from the supposed Phoenician expression *ʿab ʿelyōn* (‘The Highest Father’). The etymology, presented earlier to the international public in an article in *Glotta*,<sup>7</sup> is here expounded with admirable clarity. Rosół compares all the dialectal forms of Apollo’s name and deduces from them the original form *\*apeljōn* (pp. 23–24, 91–94). On the other hand, he analyses phonetical changes in Greek borrowings from Semitic languages, and finds analogies for the supposed transition from *ʿab* to *ap-* (pp. 99–100).

For the general public, there might be something unexpected in the conclusion that Apollo, often called ‘the most Greek of all the gods’,<sup>8</sup> is a deity of foreign origin; but those who know recent works on history of Greek religion will be less surprised. I mean here especially Martin West’s *The East Face of Helicon*<sup>9</sup> and Walter Burkert’s *The Orientalizing Revolution*.<sup>10</sup> Both these books emphasize the huge role of Eastern influences in Greek religion, and Burkert says even: ‘There are strange ritual connections of Apollo himself with Semitic culture’.<sup>11</sup>

Rosół’s thesis leads, however, to another one, equally surprising for *hoi polloi*: this foreign guest is a newcomer. Though a scholar suspected the presence of

<sup>4</sup> J.M. von Loen, *Neue Sammlung der merkwürdigsten Reisebeschichten*, zweyter Theil, Frankfurt und Leipzig 1749, 104, n. 21.

<sup>5</sup> F. Hommel, ‘Aphrodite-Astarte’, *Neue Jahrbücher für classische Philologie* 125 (1882), 176. See the reviewed book, p. 18.

<sup>6</sup> R.A. Sucharski, *Posejdon w świetle tekstów tabliczek w greckim piśmie linearnym B*, [Poseidon in the light of the Linear B Greek texts], Warszawa 2000.

<sup>7</sup> R. Rosół, ‘Die Herkunft des Gottesnamens Apollo’, *Glotta* 83 (2007), 222–242.

<sup>8</sup> E.g. J.A. Crow, *Greece: The Magic Spring*, New York 1970, 186.

<sup>9</sup> M.L. West, *The East Face of Helicon: West Asiatic Elements in Greek Poetry and Myth*, Oxford 1997.

<sup>10</sup> W. Burkert, *The Orientalizing Revolution: Near Eastern Influence on Greek Culture in the Early Archaic Age* (transl. M.E. Pinder), Cambridge, Mass. 1995 (the original version: *Die Orientalisierende Epoche in der griechischen Religion und Literatur*, Heidelberg 1984).

<sup>11</sup> Burkert, *The Orientalizing Revolution*, 63, quoted by Rosół on p. 58.

Apollo's name in one of Linear B texts,<sup>12</sup> the author's analysis of that evidence proves that there is no solid basis for this view. To be sure, there exists a Cnossus tablet mentioning the god Paeon,<sup>13</sup> but Rosół points out that the identification of Paeon with Apollo probably occurred later (pp. 42–44). Of course, the absence of Apollo from Mycenaean texts, being an argument from silence, has a limited value as a proof of his late appearance, and the author is aware of it (p. 45); but his point is made stronger by archeological evidence: he emphasizes that the oldest traces of Apollo's sanctuaries in Delphi and on Delos come only from the 9<sup>th</sup> century B.C., which would make probable that his cult in Greece started not long before (pp. 48–49).

Rosół supports his hypothesis with some observations pertaining to Apollo's cult in historical times. He points out that the ritual belonging to the Thargelia, the festival of Apollo at Athens – viz., the exile of the *pharmakoi*, two men burdened with wrongdoings committed by the whole community – has much in common with the ancient Jewish rite of expelling a goat into desert on Yom Kippur to atone for the people's sins, and similar customs attested for other Semitic religions (pp. 69–72).

Here the author presents another interesting etymology, though this time not invented by himself, but revived after more than a century of neglect. In a fragment of Helladius' *Chrestomathy* (4<sup>th</sup> century A.D.), describing the ritual of cleansing the community by expulsion of two men, the *hapax legomenon* *σὺβάκχοι* is mentioned as a synonym for *φάρμακοί*.<sup>14</sup> Rosół (pp. 72–76) adduces convincing arguments in favour of the largely forgotten proposal by Heinrich Lewy, connecting this curious word with the Hebrew and Phoenician root *zbh* ('offering').<sup>15</sup>

Out of Rosół's many other arguments taken from the cult of Apollo, it seems worthwhile to mention the importance of the number seven in the Thargelia and other festivals in honour of that god. This corresponds to the frequent appearance of this number in various Semitic cults (pp. 52–60).

Not contenting himself with derivation of Apollo's name from the supposed Phoenician theonym, the author tries to pinpoint the Phoenician god to whom the name of the 'Highest Father' would best apply. Using epigraphical and iconographical evidence, he comes to the conclusion (pp. 107–116) that the ideal candidate would be Baalshamem ('the Lord of the Sky').

<sup>12</sup> KN E 842. See C.J. Ruijgh, *Études sur la grammaire et le vocabulaire du grec mycénien*, Amsterdam 1967, 274.

<sup>13</sup> KN V 52 (*pa-ja-wo-ne*).

<sup>14</sup> Phot. *Bibl.* 279, p. 534a Bekker.

<sup>15</sup> H. Lewy, *Die semitischen Fremdwörter im Griechischen*, Berlin 1895, 256–257. See R. Rosół, 'The Etymology of Greek *σὺβάκχος*', *Mnemosyne* 63 (2010), 445–449.

Rafał Rosół develops his brilliant etymological hypothesis, using Greek and Semitic linguistics, history of religion and archeology for its confirmation. I doubt if any etymology was ever so thoroughly discussed from so many points of view by its author.

***Mikołaj Szymański***

mikszyman@poczta.onet.pl

Institute of Classical Studies  
University of Warsaw  
Krakowskie Przedmieście 1  
00-047 Warsaw, Poland