

M I S C E L L A N E A

A NOTE ON ANCHISES' NAME

In *Dictionnaire étymologique de la mythologie gréco-romaine*, Carnoy has suggested that « Anchises » is related to IE *ank-*, « to bend », « puisque Anchise fut rendu estropié par Zeus »¹. Such an etymology is weak on two counts. First of all, on linguistic grounds it is difficult to explain in Greek the addition of the aspirate (from *ank-* to *ankh-*). Secondly, the myth of Anchises' crippling, upon which Carnoy relies, is probably a late variant or even a misunderstanding, as Rose argues². While Anchises is said to have been struck by a thunderbolt in Vergil's *Aeneid* (II, 647-649), in the much earlier *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* (286-288) there is only the *threat* of the thunderbolt. Anchises himself does express concern in the Hymn that his union with the goddess will make him ἀμενηνὸν ἐν ἀνθρώποισιν (188), but the significance of ἀμενηνὸν (« powerless ») has been disputed. Rose³ and others have seen this as a reference to the sexual exhaustion which the male partner experiences after his attempt to satisfy the Great Mother. More recently, however, Boedeker⁴ has argued that ἀμενηνὸν implies not fear of sexual impotency, but rather a fear that, like Eos' consort Tithonus, Anchises will waste away in a « powerless » immortality. Whatever ἀμενηνὸν signifies, however, it does not mean « crippled ». It appears unlikely, therefore, that « Anchises » could have been derived from IE *ank-*, as Carnoy suggests.

While even the Greek origin of Aphrodite's Trojan lover has periodically been questioned⁵, his name has traditionally been derived from ἄγχι. The citation under Ἄγχιστος in the *Etymologicum magnum* reads: παρὰ τὸ ἄγχι, τὸ ἐγγύς γενέσθαι τῆς Ἀφροδίτης⁶. This etymology probably can be traced back to the *Homeric Hymn* (200), where the goddess herself includes her human consort among the ἀγχιδεοὶ . . . καταθνητῶν ἀνθρώπων.

It has recently been suggested by several scholars that the preposition ἄγχι may have close linguistic ties with ἄγχω, « to squeeze ». Chantraine⁷ argues that ἄγχι may be from ἄγχω with the ending of περί, ἀμφί and Frisk⁸ has noted that ἄγχι may be explained as a set locative of a name derived from ἄγχω, as in ἀγγέ-μαχος. If this association between ἄγχι with ἄγχω is correct, then it may be possible to link Anchises' name with both ἄγχι and ἄγχω and to interpret it to mean both « he who is near [the goddess] » and « he who is squeezed ». Anchises could then be traced back through ἄγχω to IE *angh-*, « narrow, to squeeze, to tie ». While ἄγχω commonly refers to the

¹ A. J. CARNOY, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la mythologie gréco-romaine*, Éd. Universitas, Louvain 1957, p. 20

² H. J. ROSE, *A Handbook of Greek Mythology*, Dutton, New York 1959, p. 26.

³ *Ibid.*,

⁴ D. D. BOEDEKER, *Aphrodite's Entry into Greek Epic*, Brill, Leiden 1974, p. 79.

⁵ See A. PAULYS - G. WISSOWA - W. KROLL, *Real-Encyclopädie d. klassischen Altertumswissenschaft* (1893), s.v. *Anchises*.

⁶ F. LASSERRE - N. LIVADARAS (eds.), *Etymologicum magnum genuinum*, Ed. dell'Ateneo, Rome 1976, s.v. Ἄγχιστος.

⁷ P. CHANTRAINE, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque*, Klincksieck, Paris 1968, p. 16.

⁸ H. FRISK, *Griechisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch*, Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, Heidelberg 1960, p. 17.

painful squeezing associated with being strangled or hanged, the word can also be applied to the pleasurable squeezing of a sexual embrace (re *Anacreonteia* 57.23 μὴ δέλο-υσαν ἄγγει) ⁹. Anchises' nearness (ἄγγι) to Aphrodite may thus entail both the pleasure and pain of being squeezed (ἄγγω) by the goddess, of being loved, but also of being ἀμενηνόν (*Hym. Aph.*, 188).

The ending of the name « Anchises » still presents linguistic difficulties. The masculine -ης ending may be related to that in such words as πώλ-ης (from πωλέω) and παιδο-τριβ-ης (from τριβέω) ¹⁰. The internal sigma appears to be part of the root, since it is contained in several derivatives of « Anchises »; e.g., Ἀγγίσι-ιας, an epithet of Aphrodite mentioned by Rose ¹¹ and Ἀγγίσι-αιος, the name of a Cyprian month ¹². While ἄγγις from ἄγγι is unattested, a final sigma is added to two prepositions which Chantraine ¹³ compares to ἄγγι: πέρις from περί, maybe in Boeotian ¹⁴, and ἀμφίς from ἀμφί in Epic.

The difficulties connected with the second part of the word « Anchises » not withstanding, the association of « Anchises » with both ἄγγι and ἄγγω argues an agreement between linguistic and mythological data which is not unknown in Greek. The derivation in the *Odyssey* (τ, 406-409) of « Odysseus » from ὀδύσσομαι, « to cause pain », has been shown by Dimock ¹⁵ to be appropriate to a man who inflicts pain upon all those around him. Certainly Anchises' affair with Aphrodite, his « nearness to » the goddess, is the kernel of the Trojan's story, and it would be fitting that his name suggest not only this nearness (ἄγγι) but also the pleasure and pain resulting from sexual union (ἄγγω) with a goddess. While in the Homeric Hymn Anchises' pain remains only a potentiality, for other mortal lovers of goddesses, such pain becomes an actuality. For example, the passionate affairs of Attis and Adonis with goddesses led to the real pain of castration and death. This pattern of sexual union with a goddess followed by misfortune has been developed by Rose ¹⁶ into the theme of the fertility goddess whose insatiable sexual demands destroy her lovers. « Anchises » may reflect this pattern as well, if the derivation of the hero's name from IE *angh-* is correct.

However, the danger of Anchises' union with Aphrodite is not just a danger based upon the sexuality (ἄγγω) of the goddess but also upon the nearness (ἄγγι) of the mortal to divinity. On this level the risk of Anchises is closer to that of Moses on Mt. Horeb, where God in the burning bush warns Moses to come no nearer and « Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God » (*Exodus*, 3:6) ¹⁷. This fear which Moses shares with Anchises is clearly based upon the weakness of mortal men before divinity, upon the danger that men may be destroyed by venturing too near to deity. Would it be stretching the etymology and the mythology too far to suggest that Anchises' story implies that sexual/intellectual (ἄγγω/ἄγγι) proximity to a deity may lead mortals inevitably to destruction? « He who is near » is also « he who is squeezed ».

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⁹ See H. G. LIDDELL - R. SCOTT - H. S. JONES, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, Clarendon, Oxford 1968, s.v. ἄγγω.

¹⁰ On this ending, see H. W. SMYTHE - GORDON M. MESSING, *Greek Grammar*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Ma.) 1956, 843 note and 859.

¹¹ H. J. ROSE, *Anchises and Aphrodite*, « Classical Quarterly », XVIII (1924), p. 13.

¹² See H. G. LIDDELL - R. SCOTT - H. S. JONES, *Supplement to a Greek-English Lexicon*, Clarendon, Oxford 1968, s.v. Ἀγγίσιαιος.

¹³ P. CHANTRAINE, *Dictionnaire étymologique . . .*, cit., p. 16.

¹⁴ See H. G. LIDDELL - R. SCOTT - H. S. JONES, *Lexicon*, cit., s.v. πέρις.

¹⁵ G. E. DIMOCK JR., *The Name of Odysseus*, « Hudson Review », IX (1956), pp. 52-70.

¹⁶ See H. J. ROSE, *Anchises and Aphrodite*, cit., and *A Handbook of Greek Mythology*, cit.

¹⁷ Translation is that of *The Holy Bible. Revised Standard Version*, Catholic Truth Society, London 1966,