

An Epithet of Aphrodite

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The epithets of Aphrodite are extraordinarily numerous. Joh. Lyd. *De mens.* IV 64 p.118.16 Wuensch affirms that there are nearly 300; Theocr. XV 109 calls her *πολυώνυμος*. Indeed, there are still more; Bruchmann¹⁾ counted 350, and some further, uncertain, cases. The names can be classed into three groups, (1) epithets which express the genesis of the goddess out of (the foam of) the sea by Cyprus and her general connection with the sea, e.g. *Ἀφρογενής, Ἀφρώ, Ἀφρογένεια, Ἀφροδύτη, Γαληναία, Θαλασσία, Κυπρογενής, Κυπρογένεια, Κύπρις, Λιμενία, Πελαγία, Ποντία* etc., (2) epithets describing her functions and characteristics, *Ἄνθεια, Γλυκυμείλιχος, Ἐλικοβλέφαρος, Ἐνόπλιος, Κουροτρόφος, Οὐρανία, Πάνδημος, Πειθώ, Σωσάνδρα* etc., and (3) epithets indicating cultplaces.

In Anonymus Laurentianus, *Duodecim deorum epitheta*, ed. by W. Studemund in: *Anecdota Varia Graeca et Latina*, Berlin 1886, pp. 257–283, there is an epithet of Aphrodite which appeared problematic and obscure to the editor. The epithet is the first in the list (X 1, p.269), all of them in the genitive: *ἄλεισίας*. The editor confirmed the reading in the app.: ‘sic (neque *ἀλησίας* neque *ἀλεντίας*)’.

The word is not found elsewhere, and it has remained unexplained; nobody seems to have tried to explain it. It appears that the epithet has been overlooked or disregarded.²⁾

A possible derivation would be from *Ἀλείσιον*, a city in Elis, mentioned by Hom. *Il.* B 617; Strab. VIII 3.10; and by a glossator in Hesych. *Ἀλίσιον* (sic) *πόλις*. But as that place is otherwise unknown we are not entitled to assume a cult of Aphrodite there.

It appears that another epithet of that goddess provides a clue for the interpretation of the obscure *ἄλεισία*. It is found at Plut. *Quaest. conp.* 685 *Ε οἶμαι δὲ καὶ τὴν Ἀφροδίτην ἀλιγενῆ τοὺς ποιητὰς προσαγορεύειν καὶ μῦθον ἐπ’ αὐτῇ πεπλασμένον ἐξενεγκεῖν, ὡς ἀπὸ θαλάσσης ἐχούση* (Hu.: *ἐχούσης* MSS) *τὴν γένεσιν*. The word is

¹⁾ C.F.H.Bruchmann, *Epitheta deorum* (Roscher’s *Ausführliches Lexikon der griech. und röm. Mythologie*, Suppl. I) Lipsiae 1893.

²⁾ It is not listed by Bruchmann; or L. Preller & C. Robert, *Griechische Mythologie* I⁴, Berlin 1894, Register der Beinamen, pp.941 f.; or Tümpel, *RE* s. v. Aphrodite, cols.2773 f.; and M.P.Nilsson, *Geschichte der griechischen Religion* I³, München 1967, does not mention it.

ἀπαξ εἰρημένον.³⁾ As in the case of ἀλεισία students of Greek religion and mythology make no mention of this epithet.

The stem ἄλ- does not occur in any other epithet of Aphrodite, which we would expect considering the near relation of the goddess to the sea. However, it appears that this stem may be present in ἀλεισία, and that the epithet should be read Ἄλισία, 'the salty', 'the salted', formed with the suffix -σιος (assibilated from -τιος).

By this suffix a class of adjectives are derived from verbal adjectives or nouns ending in -τος or -της, e.g., ἄμβρο-τος: ἄμβρό-σιος, πλοῦ-τος: πλού-σιος, δημό-της: δημόσιος, ἐλά-της: ἐλά-σιος, ἐκβά-της: ἐκβά-σιος, ἐπιστά-της: ἐπιστά-σιος, εὐρέ-της: εὐρέ-σιος, καθαρ-τής: καθάρ-σιος, συμπό-της: συμπό-σιος, etc.⁴⁾ Presumably Ἄλισία is formed on ἀλίτης, 'salted', as ζευγίσιον from ζευγίτης.⁵⁾ This formation naturally explains the spelling εἰ, written for the long ī.⁶⁾ A formation with short ι is λαοκρίσιον, from λαοκρίτης. If we would try other derivations than from ἀλίτης we would arrive at ἀλείτης, 'sinner', or – presupposed the misspelling εἰ for η in ἀλεισία – ἀλήτης, 'wanderer'. The meaning of these epithets, either Ἄλεισία, 'the sinning', 'the sinful', or Ἄλησία, 'the wandering', 'the roaming', is, if not entirely impossible, clearly improbable as compared with the adequate sense of Ἄλισία, 'the Salty'.⁷⁾

³⁾ Eunap. *V. Soph.* VII 5.6 τὸ ἀλιγενὲς (τῆς Ἀσίας) is a mistake for ἀλιτενές.

⁴⁾ See R. Kühner, *Ausführliche Grammatik der griech. Sprache*, 3. Aufl. von F. Blass, Hannover 1892, II 292. Anm. 2; and E. Schwyzer, *Griechische Grammatik*, München 1939, I 466. 3.

⁵⁾ This appears to be the only extant parallel with a long ī since the long ī in ἡμερίσιος, νικτερίσιος etc., in some MSS has been recognized as written for -η-, see Schwyzer, *l. c.*; and P. Chantraine, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque*, Paris 1968, s. v. νύξ. (Kühner-Blass, *l. c.*, and A. Debrunner, *Glotta* 13 (1924) 169 n., id. *IF* 54 (1936) 55 argued that the forms with -ī- are correct.) The form καθημερίσια (*IG* I² 373. 245, 409/8 B. C.) should consequently be noticed as misspelled as well; for more instances of this orthographic variant in Classical Attic, see S.-T. Teodorsson, *The Phonetic System of the Attic Dialect 400–340 B. C.*, Göteborg 1974, pp. 90 f.

⁶⁾ For the question of vowel length in derivatives on -σιος, see F. Solmsen, *Untersuchungen zur griechischen Laut- und Verslehre*, Straßburg 1901, pp. 37–39. – The spelling at Aristoph. *Thesm.* 204 ἔργα νικτερείσια (= Ἀφροδίσια) may be an allusion on ἐρεῖδω.

⁷⁾ Beside ἀλίτης the verb ἀλίζω is a support for the assumption of a derived adjective ἀλίσιος, cf. ἀσπασίος, related to ἀσπάζομαι (*ἀσπα-τός or *ἀσπά-της are non-existent), ἀνάρσιος from ἀναίρω (not *ἀναρ-τός).