

Πότνια Αὔωσ The Greek Dawn-goddess and her Antecedent*

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Many of the features regarded as typical aspects of the Indo-European Dawn-goddess (**h₂eusós*) in Greek poetry are not principally recognized as properties of the goddess who inherited her name in Greek mythology, Ἥως (Aeolic Αὔωσ), but rather of the goddess considered to have developed as her hypostasis, namely Aphrodite. Extensive evidence for this transfer, on the level of both theme and diction, is found in an article by Gregory Nagy from 1973 (a revised version appeared in 1990) and in Deborah D. Boedeker's book *Aphrodite's Entry into Greek Epic* from 1974. Some more recent contributions to the problem should be noted in addition, especially Euler (1987), Dunkel (1991), Matasović (1996), and Janda (2000 and 2005). For the details of the argument, I refer the reader to these studies. I will only rehearse the observations made by Nagy and Boedeker on some crucial points.

By means of two cognate epithets, both Aphrodite and the Vedic Dawn-goddess Uṣas are characterized as daughters of the Sky-god (PIE **d₁éus*), i.e. as Διός θυγάτηρ and *divá(s) duhitár* (PIE **diuós dhugh₂tér*).¹ While Eos is never explicitly referred to as daughter of Zeus, but rather as daughter of Theia and Hyperion, a faint echo of this designation (*θυγάτηρ Διός Ἥως) is still discerned in the metrical shape of the fixed

* Since the submission of this article in the Spring of 2003, a new book by Michael Janda has appeared (Janda 2005) in which one of the conclusions drawn in this article (the Indo-European Dawn-goddess conceived as "mistress") have apparently been drawn independently by Janda.

¹ A similar epithet (applied to the Sun-goddess) occurs in Lithuanian, but it is uncertain if this should be considered a real reflex of the Indo-European epithet or as an accidental juncture (see discussion in Schmitt 1974: 173).

epithet frequently preceding her name in epic diction, ῥοδοδάκτυλος (in both cases the metrical shape is $\cup\cup - \cup\cup$) (Nagy 1990: 247f). Another feature no longer connected with Eos in poetic diction, but nevertheless shared by Aphrodite and Uṣas, is that of smiling. Aphrodite is allotted the smiles (μειδήματα) of maidens (*Theogony* 205) and she is frequently associated with the epithet φιλομμειδής² (“smile-loving”) in her role as a goddess of sexual love (Boedeker: 24, 32ff). In the case of Uṣas, furthermore, her smile as well as its erotic implications are attested in the Vedic hymns as typical features of the goddess. Consider, for instance, a passage quoted by Boedeker (1974: 25): “Like a maiden proud of her body, you go, goddess, to the desirous god. *Smiling (saṃsmáyamānā)* you unveil for him your breast, like a young wife, when you shine in the East” (RV 1,123,10). The feminine participle *-smáyamānā* (of the middle present stem *smáy-a-*) is derived from the same verbal root (PIE **smei*) as Greek μειδιάω/μειδάω³ (Boedeker 1974: 25). Collocations of such markers in one and the same text may thus be held to reflect the earliest poetic contours of this figure. E.g. RV 1,92,5d: *citraṃ divó duhitā bhānūm asret* [---] 6bc: *uśā uchāntī vayūnā kṛpoti | śriyē chāndo ná smayate vibhāf* < **diuós dhugh₂tér* [---] **h₂eusós* [---] **sméjeto* √**b^heh₂*.

In order to argue for such drifts and transfers it is necessary to pin-point all the pre-Greek or Indo-European features of Eos that were not transferred to her hypostasis. Although the issue has already been studied thoroughly by others, notably by Rüdiger Schmitt (Schmitt 1967), there are still points that deserve further consideration. Schmitt (1967:173f.) singled out

² A different interpretation of the original epithet was suggested by Heubeck (1984 [1965]: 265-267), who regarded the reading φιλομμηδής (Hes. *Th.* 200) “genital-loving” as preferable to φιλομμειδής.

³ The loss of σ explains the doubled μ of the compound φιλομμειδής. A similar case is the loss of σ in νίφος (IE **sneig^h-*) as reflected in the doubled ν of the Homeric compound ἀγαννίφος “snow-capt” (Boedeker 1974: 24).

one example of cognate words that could function as epithets of the Dawn-goddess in both Greek and Vedic texts. They are independently derived from the root $\sqrt{*d̥iu}$ (as in $*d̥i̯eus >$ Dyaus, Zeus) and consequently belong to the sphere of the luminous, diurnal sky. Eos is associated with this root in Homeric expressions, such as Ἡὸα διαν (*Iliad* 9,240 and passim) and ἥως ὅτε δια φανήηι (*Iliad* 24,417). The epithet δια is a reflex of $d̥i̯u̯i̯éh_2-s$ “divine, heavenly,” and Uṣas is occasionally referred to as *devī* (< $d̥e̯i̯u̯i̯h_2-$ “id.” → “goddess”) in the *Rigveda* (e.g. the vocative *úṣo devī* in the beginning of a verse [RV 1,123,3b; 1,124,12d; 3,61,2a; 6,64,2d;7,77,5b]). Schmitt concluded that “mit der Wendung homer. Ἡὸα διαν können wir denn einige Veda-stellen vergleichen, die in analoger Weise Uṣas- als *devī*, also mit dem (sprachlich jungen) gebräuchlichen Femininum zu *devā-*, bezeichnen.” The expression quoted from *Iliad* 24,417 (ἥως ὅτε δια φανήηι) meets with a nice parallel in RV 3,61,2a, which simultaneously highlights another common feature of the Greek and Vedic goddesses ($\sqrt{*b^heh_2}$ “to shine”⁴ [see also below]): *úṣo devy ámartyāvi bhāhi* “O divine Uṣas, immortal one, may you shine forth!” In both phrases, the three hereditary components, the proper noun ($*h_2eusās$), the epithet ($d̥i̯u̯i̯éh_2-s/d̥e̯i̯u̯i̯h_2$), and the verb ($\sqrt{*b^heh_2}$), co-occur in the same order.

Il. 24.417: ἥως ὅτε δια φανήηι
 RV 3,61,2a: *úṣo devy ámartyā vi bhāhi*

Schmitt observed in passing that, among the frequent attestations of *divá(s) duhitár/duhitár divá(s)* in the *Rigveda*, the epithet once co-occurs with the word *pátnī* “mistress” (7,75,4d). He regarded this as a notable coincidence due to the combination of the cognate πόννα (shorter form of πόννια) and θύγατηρ Διός at *Odyssey* 20,62 (1967: 170).⁵ Significant as it may seem on a formal level, however, the line does not involve

⁴ Discussion in Matasović (1996: 29-34).

⁵ Cf. also the discussion on Uṣas and Persephone in Janda 2000: 184.

Eos or any apparent hypostasis of Eos, but rather the goddess Artemis: Ἄρτεμι, πότνια θεά, θύγατηρ Διός, αἴθε μοι ἦδη. Schmitt could perhaps have made a stronger case by pointing out that Eos is also associated with the epithet πότνια. Consider the following lines in the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite*:

223: νηπίη, οὐδ' ἐνόησε μετὰ φρεσὶ πότνια Ἥως
230: τοῦ δ' ἦ τοι, εὐνήσ μὲν ἀπείχετο πότνια Ἥως

As indicated by the following lines from Sappho, the epithet was not restricted to epic diction:

Fr. 147 (from the *Et. Mag.* 174.43ss.): (οὕτως λέγεται παρ' Αἰολεῦσι, Σαπφώ) ποτνία Αἴως
Cf. also fr. 6, according to D. A. Campbell's emendation: 10 πότνια [δ' Αἴως/] χρυσοπ[αχυσ

It is conceivable that **pótnih*₂⁶ was a distinct epithet of the Indo-European Dawn-goddess. However, since πότνια could function as an honorific title applied to any goddess⁷, this assumption must be based on some external evidence for the marked usage of the inherited term.

In most Rigvedic passages, *pátnī* seems to be used (without any obvious association with Uṣas) in the sense "spouse" (*vṣṣṇaḥ pátnīr* "spouses of the bull (= Indra)" (5,42,12b) or *devānām pátnīr* "spouses of the gods" (5,46,7a)). To the best of my knowledge, only Uṣas (or the Uṣasas [pl.], i.e. the successive Dawns) and the Âpas (the Waters) are referred to as *pátnī* or *pátnīs* (pl.) (followed by a genitive) in the sense that they themselves possess the property signaled by the genitive:

⁶ The somewhat confusing *n* in reflexes of the feminine noun (besides πότνια and *patnī*, cf. Avestan *dəmaqrñō.pəθnī* and Lithuanian *vieš.patnī*) as opposed to the masculine **póti-* (Vedic *páti-*, Greek *πόσις*, Latin *potis*, etc.) could be explained as the result of interference in the protolanguage [*réǵ-n-i-h*₂ → *pót-nih*₂- (instead of ***póti-ih*₂-)]. Cf. Mayrhofer (referring to G. Dunkel, Gs Cowgill 23, 27f., 35) 1996 s.v. *patnī*.

⁷ *Potnia* (*po-ti-ni-ja*) occurs, presumably as the name of a particular goddess, in the tablets from Pylos and Knossos (cf. Chadwick: 1957).

3,61,4b: *uṣā*[...] *svásarasya pátnī* “Dawn, mistress of the pasture”

7,75,4d: *divó duhitá bhívanasya pátnī* “Heaven’s daughter, mistress of the world”

4,5,13cd: [...] *devīr amṛtasya pátnīḥ* [...] *uṣāsaḥ* “the divine mistresses of immortality, the Dawns”

10,30,10c: *bhívanasya patnīr* “mistresses (= the Waters) of the world”

10,30,12c: *svapatásya patnīḥ* “mistresses (= the Waters) of beautiful offspring”

When the word occurs in compounds, there is a general tendency to use it in the sense “spouse,” as in *indrapatnī* (10,86,9d,10d) or *devápatnīs* (1,61,8a;5,46,8a). A significant exception is *vājápatnī* (*vāja-* means “reward”), which is said of Uṣas in 7,76,6c. The only fitting translation of this epithet would be “mistress of rewards” (cf. the god Agni as “lord of rewards” [*vājapatis*] [4,15,3a]).

We have considered four epithets, none of which is uniquely associated with the Dawn-goddess, but all of which have a tendency to interlock with respect to this particular goddess in a fashion that seems unique in both Greek and Vedic poetry. This set of epithets could thus be derived from a particular area of the poetic tradition shared by the early Hellenic and Vedic tribes, namely the conventional characterization of the Dawn-goddess and her mythical attributes. She was regarded as daughter of the Sky-god (**diuós dhugh₂tér*), of heavenly nature (**diu₁éh₂-s/*deiu₁éh₂-*), shining (*√*b^heh₂*), smiling as a sign of sexual love (*√*sme₁*), and conceived as “mistress” (**pótnih₂-*) of certain more or less specified properties.

A more remote parallel between the Greek and Vedic characterizations of the goddess also deserves attention in this connection. Although the expressions in question are not always etymologically connected, the extent to which etymological matches are attested elsewhere with regard to the Dawn-goddess increases the possibility that we are dealing with the superposition of an older formulaic constituent. The original shape of this constituent may have been replaced in one or both of the languages concerned. Relying on the argument of Theodor

Knecht, Schmitt (1967: 175) rejected the idea that the Homeric expression φαεσίμβροτος Ἥως (cf. also Bacchylides' Epinician 13,128-129: φαεσίμ[βροτος/'Αοτ]) has the same background as the Indo-Iranian parallels *uśasam vībhatīm* (RV 3,61,5a) /*uśāṅgam viuuaitīm* (Yt. 5,62) "radiant Dawn." Although the Greek expression contains the same root ($\sqrt{*b^heh_2}$ "to shine") as the Indo-Iranian ones, its proper sense in this context does not seem to be (as suggested by Durante) "che illumina i mortali," but rather "die Menschen sehend" (Knecht 1946: 9).

The Greek formula does not lose its interest on account of this interpretation, because a similar thing is said of Uṣas in a verse preceding one of the verses quoted above (7,75,4cd): *abhipáśyantī vayúnā jánānām' divó duhitá bhúvanasya pátnī* "observing the ways (?) of men (i.e. 'the born ones'), Heaven's daughter, the mistress of the world." Or, perhaps even more striking, in 1,113,11 (with an explicit reference to mortals [Vedic *márta-* ~ Greek βροτός]): *īyúṣ té yé púrvatarām ápaśyan' vyuchántīm uśasam mártýāsaḥ | asmābhir ū nú praticákṣyābhūd' ó té yanti yé aparṣu páśyān* "gone are the mortals who saw the earlier Dawns shining; now she is being seen by us; also those are coming that shall see (them?) in the future." The crucial verb in these passages is not $\sqrt{bhā}$, which in Vedic always seems to mean "to shine," but rather $\sqrt{paś}$ "to see." The semantically adjacent, suppletive verb $\sqrt{dṛś}$ is also associated with Uṣas, but usually in the passive sense "to be seen" (by mortals) or "to appear" (e.g. 1,92,12d; 7,78,3a). It takes little imagination to realize how these functions of Uṣas could interact, i.e. how she could be both singular and multiple, how she could simultaneously shed light upon, observe, and be seen by mortals of the past, the present, and the future.⁸

However, this association with mortals could also include less trivial themes. Uṣas constantly re-enters the place "evacuated" or "deserted" (\sqrt{ric}) by her sister Night (e.g. 1,113,

⁸ The reciprocity of seeing (or *dárśana*) in the context of devotional practice is a salient feature of contemporary Hinduism.

1d; 1,124,8a) just like humans enter, as the remains of another mortal, into the world left behind by other mortals. The latter idea constitutes the underlying theme of a passage concerning the nature of Yama, the first one to die and the king of the dead (10,13,4). While Yama brings mortality to humankind, he simultaneously introduces the capacity of progeny and reproduction. He “has evacuated his body” (*tanvàm prārireçī* [*prā √ric*]) or, as Geldner puts it, “hat seinem [...] Leib fortgepflanzt,” thus creating progeny by giving up his own body. These ideas – the double role of the Vedic Dawn-goddess as a spectator of human affairs and someone perpetually re-entering the ruins of night as a new-born child – are vaguely echoed in a cosmological fragment by Empedocles (d13-d14)⁹. This fragment once more deploys the verbal roots associated with Uṣas in her capacity as “being seen” (*√dṛ̥s* < **derk̑*) by mortals and re-entering an “evacuated” (*√ric* < **leik̑*) space: φυτάλμια τεκνώθη(η)σαν ... [ν]υν ἔτι λείψανα (< **leik̑*) δέρεται (< **derk̑*) ἥως “things being able to be parents were born ... even now Dawn gazes on their remains.”

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⁹ Cf. the edition of the Strasbourg papyrus (P. Strasb. Gr. Inv. 1665-1666) by Martin and Primavesi (1999: 146-147, 313-315).

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