

Daphnis and the Origins of Greek Bucolic Poetry

This paper pursues two goals: 1) to demonstrate Daphnis' origins in a Sicilian outgrowth of the Phoenician-influenced cult of Artemis Ortheia at Sparta, and 2) to propose a route by which Ortheia's cult and its mythology could have travelled to Sicily. In investigating these points, the paper pursues a larger objective: to propose a new theory of the origins of Greek bucolic poetry while unifying two existing strands of scholarship.

The connection of Greek bucolic poetry to the Near East has long been a subject of speculation. Various commentators point out that Daphnis has much in common with the *paredros* figure (e.g. Dumuzi/Tammuz/Adonis), the male consort of the Near Eastern fertility goddess in her many incarnations (e.g. Inanna/Ishtar/Aphrodite/Astarte; Berg 13, 17-20; Halperin 183-200). At the same time, the ancient scholiastic tradition preserves three accounts linking the origins of Greek bucolic poetry to Peloponnesian and Sicilian popular festivals to Artemis (*Schol. in Theocr.* 2.5-3.15 Wendel). One of these ancient accounts claims that bucolic poetry was invented when Orestes brought a statue of Artemis from Tauris to Tyndaris in Sicily, where the locals sang hymns to the goddess (*Schol. in Theocr.* 2.13-20 Wendel). However, the scholiastic accounts have been largely dismissed by modern critics (e.g. Hunter 5-6). This paper argues that the ancient hypothesis of bucolic's origins in festivals to Artemis is far more plausible than modern scholarship has allowed, especially when considered in light of the Near Eastern mythology brought to bear by earlier scholars. The missing link between the two theories is the Spartan cult of Artemis Ortheia, which bears the marks of Phoenician influence.

The effect of Near Eastern cult upon the worship of Artemis Ortheia has been demonstrated by Jane Burr Carter. Based on a survey of archeological evidence from Near Eastern and Punic Sites, Carter shows that masks found in the sanctuary of Ortheia at Sparta are modeled on masks used in Phoenician cults to worship the fertility goddess Asherah-Tanit and her male consort (Carter 355, 369-74, 379-80). Asherah-Tanit is the Phoenician incarnation of the Near Eastern goddess known as Astarte among West Semites, a figure parallel to Ishtar and Inanna. Her male companion was Baal, a figure with similarities to

Dumuzi, Tammuz, and Adonis (Carter 373-4, 376, 383). Ortheia and her male consort are the Spartan descendants of these Near Eastern figures (Carter 378).

Based on iconography found at the site, Carter (382) and Marangou (77-83) have argued that Ortheia's male consort is Aristaios, the hero associated with herding and pastoral activities. Given the pastoral significance of Ortheia's companion, as well as the ancient accounts linking Daphnis and the origins of bucolic poetry to Artemis (*Schol. in Theocr.* 2.5-3.15 Wendel; Diod. 4.84), I argue that Daphnis is in fact a Sicilian counterpart to Ortheia's *paredros* in Sparta.

Moreover, the scholiastic account of bucolic's origins in Sicilian Tyndaris, paraphrased above, is strikingly similar to the myth of Ortheia's arrival in Sparta. The statue of Artemis Ortheia in Sparta was rescued by Orestes from the Taurians, just like the statue of Artemis that Orestes brought to Tyndaris when bucolic song was invented (Paus. 3.16.7). The common narrative suggests that the cult of Artemis at Tyndaris is related to the cult of Artemis Ortheia. A route by which the Ortheia cult and its mythology could have been introduced to Sicily is to be found in the Messinian migrations to the island. As Luraghi points out, the Messenians also worshiped Artemis Ortheia (Luraghi 134, 166). Furthermore, it was Messenian refugees who founded Tyndaris in 396, most likely bringing the cult of Ortheia along with them (Luraghi 236-37).

Daphnis is a figure born of Doric Sicily, but his forebear is the companion of Artemis Ortheia at Sparta, whose cult was shaped by Near Eastern mythology about the fertility goddess and her male consort. This theory therefore justifies the scholiastic attention to festivals of Artemis, and also validates scholars who have looked to Near East for antecedents of Greek bucolic poetry. Unlike previous theories incorporating Near Eastern myth, however, this account clarifies the genre's connection to a specifically Doric and Sicilian milieu.

Works Cited

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