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THE ISSUE OF DESCENT OF THE DEITY MARS

An attempt to identify the functions of Roman deity Mars has been made in many research works.¹ Particular interest towards this god is motivated by his participation in so-called Roman genealogical myths. The father of Romulus and Remus, the main character of one of the earliest patterns of the surviving folk poetry, has for a long time remained in science in the shade of the Greek god of war Ares, and was perceived as his Roman interpretation.

Now "justice is restored", and under the influence of Greek mythology, he re-acquired the role of the god of war for the second time, though his primary function has not been definitely identified.

I believe that obtaining further insight into the essence of the problem is impossible without taking into consideration the "Italian context" of the Roman deity. In this case I mean the pantheon of the peoples living on the Apennines peninsula and participation of Mars' namesake gods in the formation of functions of the Roman deity.

These mythological characters and gods are: of Marsians – Marsia, Marsos, of Auzons – Mares, and Etruscan – Maris.

Let us consider the existing information on each of the deities, which in first two cases is fully based on literary sources.

¹ Georg Wissowa, *Religion u. Kultur d. Römer*, 2. Auflage, München, 1912, U. W. Scholz, *Studien z. altitalischen u. altrömischen Marskult u. Marsmythos*, Heidelberg, 1970, E. Simon, *Il dio Marte nell'arte dell' Italia Centrale*, Studi Etruschi, XLVI, 1978, 135-74, G. Hermansen, *Studien über d. Italischen u. d. römischen Mars*, Copenhagen, 1940; Attilio Mastrocinque, *Ricerche sulle religioni italiche*, vol. LXI. 1996, etc.

Several words should be said about the ethnonym of Marsians. Marsians, ancient inhabitants of Italy, associated their ethnonym with Lidian king Marsyas.² In Bayet's opinion, the legend about Marsyas' coming to Italy, which is included in the Roman Caco myth, is an absolutely extraneous element and was created under Greek and Etruscan influence in Capua in approximately the IV century B.C.³

The other parallel version explaining Marsians eponym is more trustworthy, and links Marsians with Circe's (Medea's) son, Marsos.⁴

Some scholars consider archaism of this version quite convincing since Circe's or Medea's participation (here I mean the goddesses of fecundity in general, whose names were later substituted for Circe) in formation of ethnonyms of different Italian tribes is rather widespread.⁵

In the paper "Circe and Italy" I have already discussed Italian legends about Circe and the motives of their association with Circe. In this paper, along with other goddesses, I considered Marsian goddess Angitia concealed under the name Circe (or Medea).⁶

At the same time, in the opinion of most of researchers, the myth about Marsos, in which he is either Angitia's husband or son, has to do with early Roman epoch, and its appearance in Marsian mythology is not related to an attempt of cultural unification of Italic tribes by the Romans.

What was Marsos' functions? There is no exact answer to this question; however, if one takes into consideration that his mother or wife was a goddess of fecundity and her descendants – Marsians had a reputation of snake-charmers,⁷ one can suppose that Mars represented a chthonic and vegetative deity.

There are two different myths about Auzon deity Mares. In accordance with the first version, which is confirmed by Diodor, Mares was considered the son of Circe and Odysseus, the ancestor of Auzons.⁸

According to other myth, the ancestor of Auzons Mares was a centaur who lived 123 years and rose from the dead three times.

² Plin., nat., III 108, Silv., VIII, 502-504, Sol., II, 6, Osid., Orig., IX, 2, 88.

³ J. Bayet, *Les Origines de l'Hercule romain*, Paris, 1926, 214.

⁴ Plin., nat., XXV, 11; Gell, XVI, 1.

⁵ Cesare Letta, *I Marsi e il fucino nell' antichità*, Centro studi e documentazione sull' Italia, Romana. Monografie supplemente degli Atti 3, Milano, 1972, 53.

⁶ E. Kobakhidze, *Circe and Italy, Caucasia*, *The Journal of Caucasian Studies*, Vol. 5, 2002, TSU, 70-80. (in Russian).

⁷ Sernius, ad. Aen., VII.

⁸ Diod., V. 7.

This version of the myth was preserved by Elianus. It is true that Elianus wrote in Greek but he never left Italy.⁹ He was born in Palestre (present Preneste), knew the land of Auzons well, and narrated the following:

"Τὴν Ἰταλίαν ᾤκησαν πρῶτοι Αὔσωνες αὐτοχθόνες. πρεσβύτατον δὲ γένεσθαι Μάρην τινὰ καλούμενον, οὗ τὰ μὲν ἔμπροσθεν λέγουσιν ἀνθρώπῳ ὅμοια, τὰ τὰ κατόπισθεν δὲ ἕππῳ. αὐτὸ δὲ τούνομα εἰς τὴν Ἑλλάδα φασὶν ἵππομιγῆς δύναται. δοκεῖ δὲ μοι πρῶτος ἕππον ἀναβῆναι καὶ ἐμβαλεῖν αὐτῷ χαλινόν, εἶτα ἐκ τούτου διφυῆς πιστευθῆναι. μυθολογοῦσι δὲ ἑκατόν, καὶ ὅτι τρεῖς ἀποθανῶν ἀνεβίω τρεῖς· ἐμοὶ δὲ οὐ πιστὰ δοκοῦσιν".¹⁰

In the opinion of many scholars, Mares is a centaur, and has to do with chthonic powers.¹¹

In particular, it should be noted that the age of the centaur (123) is in certain relation with the duration of Etruscan saeculum, which is confirmed by Censorinus.¹²

Mares' threefold rising from the dead is related to another Etruscan character from Palestre – Erulus, who rose from the dead three times, and who is the mythical son of goddess Feronia.¹³ Some scholars consider the 3 Mares represented on the Preneste trunk by different epithets reflect this myth.¹⁴

The Auzon fecundity goddess Marica,¹⁵ whose temple¹⁶ was discovered in Gariliano, has some relation with Auzon Maris.

Compared to Marsian Mares and Auzon Marsos, relatively more information can be found about Etruscan Maris. Besides literary sources, there is also archaeological material at our disposal: vases, mirrors, temples, gothic statues, inscriptions, etc.

The problem is created by the information about Maris which may at first seem unsystematic. At the same time, the existence of two layers, chronological and ethnical ones, is confirmed. Identification of Maris with Ares must be related to a later layer, though it must be said that later in mythological scenes shown on Etruscan vases Ares is depicted not as Maris but as the Etruscan deity of war Laran. I believe that this substitution was made after understanding Ares' cult, unlike the first case when Ares, in my opinion, was mechani-

⁹ Philostratus, *Vitae Sophist.* 31, 3.

¹⁰ *Varia Historia*, IX, 16.

¹¹ U.W. Scholz, mentioned in the work, 72-78.

¹² Censorinus, *De die natali*, XVII, 6.

¹³ *Studien* 62 f.

¹⁴ G. Hermansen, *Mares, Maris, Mars and the Archaic Gods SE*, Vol., LII, 1986.

¹⁵ *Serv., Aen.*, XII, 164, *Verg., Aen.*, VIII, 47.

¹⁶ Aelianus, *Var. hist.*, IX, 16; E. La Forgia, *Nuove osservazioni sul tempio di Marica*, *Aion. Archst. An.* XIV, 1992, 69-76.

cally identified with Maris because of the similarity of the names in imitating the patterns of Greek art in Etruria (comp. ARES-MARES).

What functions did Etruscan Maris have? In spite of the existing diversity of opinions, most of scholars consider this Etruscan deity as a bearer of vegetative and chthonic powers.¹⁷

The format of the paper does not allow for a broader consideration of this issue. I only want to note that I am guided by the perception of Etruscan Mares as a chthonic deity, and as an additional argument, I adduce a bronze model of liver found in Piacenza that was used for divination. Among the names of deities listed on it, Maris is mentioned twice in the following forms: Mari and Marisl Laθ, where the first form is a shortened version and the second one is an epithet. In both cases Maris is represented surrounded by deities embodying natural vital powers (Cilens, Erth – delivery patronizing deity, fufluns – the god of fecundity).

Is Maris, like Auzon Mares and Marsian Marsos, related to the genealogical myth or not?

I believe this relation really exists, which is verified by the identification of Maris's parents. In the opinion of some scholars, Maris's mother is Menrva, others believe that it is Turan¹⁸ (the latter must be the goddess of fecundity). I have already expressed my supposition concerning Turan and related her to fecundity and revival powers.¹⁹ At the same time, one of the epithets of Maris turans and Maris – "menita" or "bringing", verified by Maris's images, is also connected with the etymology of the word "turan" (tur – "quest, dedication"). Thus, here the relation of the goddess of fecundity to the chthonic god is also evident.

Scholars call Hercle the father of Maris, based on the mythological scenes depicted on Etruscan ceramics.²⁰ I, on my part, can add that we can see Hercle beside Maris on the bronze liver model. I will not draw your attention to Hercle since I have already expressed my ideas and arguments concerning him.²¹ I only want to point out that Hercle is in direct relation to Etruscan genealogical myth in accordance with which Hercle appears as Etruscan Pater indiges.

According to the existing data, the information about Mars, given in the myths of the peoples and tribes of ancient Italy, can be presented in the following way:

¹⁷ Grenier., A., *Les religions, étrusque et romaine*, Paris, 1948, 41; A. J. Pfiffig, *Religio Etruca*, Graz, 1975, 249-250.

¹⁸ A. J. Pfiffig, mentioned in the work., 249.

¹⁹ E. Kobakhidze, *Turan – The Goddess of Love? MNEME*, logos, Tbilisi, 2000, 127-133. (in Georgian)

²⁰ G. Hermansen, mentioned in the work, 154-155.

²¹ E. Kobakhidze, "Italian Heracles", logos, 2, logos, 2002, 174-182 (in Georgian).

Auzonians
 Circe – Odysseus (?)
 ↓
 Marsos – Angitia
 ↓
 Marsians

Auzons
 Circe – Odysseus (?)
 ↓
 Maris – Marica
 ↓
 Auzons

Etruscans
 Uni – Tinia
 ↓
 Hercle – Menrva
 ↓
 Maris – Turan
 ↓
 Etruscans

It is obvious that, out of the three schemes, the Etruscan version is the most complete and least influenced by Greek influence, and, in my opinion, it is a prototype of Marsian and Auzon versions.

What kind of Roman is Mars, how does he correspond to the context of "Italian version" of Mars? Let us compare Italian schemes with the scheme of Roman deities:

Juno – Jupiter
 ↓
 Mars – Rea-Silvia
 ↓
 Romulus, Remus
 ↓
 1-st "Romans"

The scheme clearly shows the relation to Rea-Silvia as fecundity powers (comp. the etymology of the name), and to the fact that Mars appears as the father of the first Romans. This information about Roman Mars, Romulus and Remus should indicate the relation of the existing myth to Etruscan mythological reality, or to Etruscan Mares. Interesting is the trace of relation be-

tween Hercules and Mars in Roman mythology; in particular, it should not be a mere coincidence that Hercules, like Mars had rocks as pagan priests.²²

In the end, let us consider the etymology of the name. Here scholars' opinions differ and some of them believe that Roman Mars originated from Etruscan Mares, others think the other way. There are those who consider these terms separately.²³ In my opinion, for identification of etymology, first of all, the productivity of the stem should be considered. For instance in case with Mars, the stem of which is Mart, I do not share the idea about the productivity of the stem (here I mean, first of all, verb stems and not the proper names, the productivity of which is secondary).

Etruscan Maris, whose stem should evidently be Mar- (comp. Mari – mar, mars) which is expressed in verb forms: mar, mare, marv, marcne, marcni, etc. The meaning of this verb is related to votic sphere.

In consideration of Maris' etymology, I believe, three circumstances should be taken into account:

1. In my opinion, the word combination Maris turans, which is verified by Etruscan image of Maris, can possibly mean not the son of Turan but a man, a husband (comp. Maritus – a husband, mas, maris – a man) comp. to the song dedicated to marmar – mars.

2. There is a stem $\mu\epsilon\rho\alpha\xi$ in Greek language (young man), the etymology of which is not yet known, and some scholars associate the ancient Greek world with Etruscan Maris.²⁴

3. It is interesting that a similar stem exists in Svan language as well. "Mare" means a young man.

I believe in the end it is possible to restore the "mythological core" which the inhabitants of the Mediterranean region of the ancient Greece and Italy "handed over" to Etruscans, and was metamorphosed in their mythology.

I

Zeus – Alkmene – Greek

Tin – Uni – Etruscan

II

Heracles – Medea – Greek

Heracle – Menrva, Catha – Etruscan

III

Maris – Turan (Cavatha) – Etruscan

Greek –

²² Serv., Verg. Aen., VII, 285; Ovid. Fast., III, 12, 7.

²³ A. J. Pfiffig, Die Etruskische Sprache, Graz, 1969, 249.

²⁴ In this connection, see E. Kobakhidze, Etruscan Cult Terminology (semantics, genesis), logos, Tbilisi, 2001, 103 (in Georgian).

The story of the marriage of Greek Heracles and Medea in the other world was preserved in Greek mythology.

Thus, Roman Mars represents an example of cult borrowing from Etruscan Maris who, in its turn, is associated to one of well known main characters of a famous genealogical myth of the Mediterranean region.

Obviously, his father Heracles must be Hercle who also was a very important god among the autochthonic population of the whole Mediterranean region. Greek mythology did not preserve the name of Mars. Mars' function is patronizing of chthonic powers, and through his union with the goddess of fecundity the ethnos is born.