A Poem of the Ainianes

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The Aristotelian work On Marvellous Things Heard relates that an ancient pillar, found near Hypate in Ainis, was inscribed with early letters, which the Ainianes could not read.¹ So they sent a deputation with it to Athens. On the way the messengers were escorted into the Ismenion in Thebes, because they had been told that the text was most likely to be read there, as certain offerings with similar ancient letters were preserved in that place.² Consequently the following verses were transcribed (I give the text according to Bekker and note variants):

1. ἡρακλέος τειμένεις Κυθήρας Φεραεφαίσση, Γηραννείας ἄγελας ἐλάων ἡδ' Ἐρυθειαν ἄγων. τὰς δ' εἰδάμασσε πῦθω Πασιφέασσα θεά. τῇδε δὲ μοι τέκνῳ τῷ δ' Ἐρύθου τε δάμαρ
2. νυμφαγενής Ἐρυθή· δὴ τὸδ ἐδωκα πέδων μναμόσων φιλίας, φηγῷ ὕπο σκιερᾶ.

1. ἡρακλέος Ba (Palatinus Vaticanus 162), Ra (Vaticanus 1302), et tc. Sa (Laurentianus 60 19): pr. enim ἡρακλέος. τειμενὶς τε vel τειμὲνεις Ba, Ra, et pr. Sa, τειμὲνει τε τc. Sa. φεραεφαίσση Ba, Na (Marcianus 215), Ra. 2. γηραννείας Na, γηραννείας Ba, Ra. ἄγελαν Ra, ἄγελων Ba. ἐρυθόν Sa. 3. τὰς δάμασσε Sa, an forte τὰς ἐ δάμασσε? πασιφέασσα Ba, Ra. 4. ἐρυθηννιτι Ba, Na, Ra. δάμαρ νυμφαγενῆς Sa, δάμαρτι νυμφαγενῆς Na, δάμαρτι νυμφαγενῆς Ta (Laurentianus 86 3). 5. ἐρυθηνὴ τόδ' Na. 6. φιλότα Ba, Na, Ra, Sa. φυτὰ Ba, Na, Sa, φυτὰ Ra. σκιερᾶ Sa.

The following variants in the printed Loeb text are noteworthy: 2. Γηραννείας. 3. δ', μ', Loeb.

The scheme of the poem was two hexameters followed by four pentameters. Of the corruptions those in the second line are deepest,
but even here the sickness is not incurable: there are too many words for a pentameter, but a hexameter is simply obtained by reading

\[ \text{Γηρώνεως ἀγέλαν ἐλάων ἵδ' ἄγων Ἐρώτειαν.} \]

The alternation of Ἐρώθη (v.5) with Ἐρώτειαν is quite acceptable: compare Penelope with Penelopeia. Joined to the epithet Κυθήρα, Φερσεφαάση can have nothing to do with Persephone. As in v.3, we must read Πασιφαέσα at the end of v.1; the divinity meant is Aphrodite-Pasiphaessa,³ Aphrodite in the guise of Pasiphae, whom some thought to be a daughter of Helios.⁴ In v.4 the name of the child of Herakles and Erythe is needed and the correction to Ἐρύθοντα gives good sense, though a hero of this name is, so far as I know, otherwise unknown. τέκνῳ τῷ δ' is opaque; read perhaps here τέκνον δῶκ'. In view of the μοι in v.4 we should read μ' for δ' in v.3, and hence a first person singular in v.1 gives even sense—τεμένισσα.

Thus corrected, the poem may be set out and translated:

\[ 'Ἱρακλέης τεμένισσα Κυθήρα Πασιφαέσας
Γηρώνεως ἀγέλαν ἐλάων ἵδ' ἄγων Ἐρώτειαν.
τᾶς με δάμασε πόθῳ Πασιφαέσασα θεά.
τῷ δὲ μοι τέκνον δῶκ' Ἐρύθοντα δάμαρ
νυμφογενὴς Ἐρώθη· ἦ τόδ' ἐδώκα πέδουν
μυκόμδειν φιλίας, φηγῷ ὑπ’ σκιρῇ. \]

“I, Herakles, dedicated a precinct to Kytheran Pasiphaessa when I was driving the cattle of Geryon and bringing Erytheia with me. The goddess Pasiphaessa subdued me with a yearning for her. Here did my newly wed spouse Erythe give to me a child Erython; then I gave this plain as a memorial to our love under a shady oak tree.”

The τέμενος in the plain is dedicated to Pasiphaessa, but Erythe, not she, is perhaps the recipient of the gift in the last sentence; this would be certain if we were to read τῷ δὲ δέωκα πέδουν in v.5. If however the precinct is to be supposed to include the whole plain, φιλία may mean ‘Pasiphae’s affection for me’. There is no sign that the Ainianes are the intended recipients. The plain was the birthplace of the son of Herakles and Erythe, but we are not told that it was also where their nuptials

⁴ For the kinship: [Apollod.] Bibl. 3.1.2.
were consummated. The mention of the shady oak points to Dodona, which, we infer, Herakles visited during his journey to fetch the cattle of Geryon to Mycenae.

It is fitting that Aphrodite-Pasiphaessa blessed the love of Herakles at Dodona, because Aphrodite was the daughter of Dione, who was the special consort of Zeus at Dodona. Dione’s kinship with Aphrodite is recalled by Theokritos (15.106) in the Adoniazousai by the invocation Κύπρι Διώναια or Διωναια.8

Pasiphae or Pasiphaessa, who in her mortal guise was a wife of Minos, may well be a Greek memory of a Minoan goddess. Her appearance at Dodona is remarkable because of the important rôle of doves in the foundation legend of the Epirote sanctuary.10 We may well have in this Ainianian poem an allusion to the Minoan dove goddess who in historical times was manifest as Aphrodite.

The epithet ‘Kytheran’ is not less interesting than the link between Aphrodite and Pasiphae. The form Kυθῆρας is rare, the regular Homeric epithet being Kυθήρεια. It has been doubted that Kυθήρεια is to be connected with Aphrodite’s island of Kythera, but Kυθῆρας is surely a variant of Kυθήρεια, and the two epithets can reasonably be associated with the name of the island, where, moreover, there was a Minoan colony. The variation between long and short e may have been due as much to the peculiarities of the non-Greek language to which the name ‘Kythera’ belonged as to metrical adaptation by epic poets.

When Herakles stopped in Ainis with Erythe and the cattle of Geryon, he was not, to be sure, on the way back from the region of Tartessos and the island in the far western Ocean, of which Stesichoros sang.12 Ainis lies beside the Spercheios river, not far from Mount Oeta whence Herakles ascended to the immortals from his pyre; the territory is approached from the west by way of the upper Spercheios (through

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8 This was pointed out by N. G. L. Hammond, “Prehistoric Epirus and the Dorian Invasion,” ABSA 32 (1931/32) 158.
6 Iliad 5.370.
7 Strabo 7.7.12, C 329.
9 [Apollod.] Bibl. 3.1.2.
10 Hdt. 2.55.
12 Stes. fr.184 Page.
the modern Karpenisi), the starting point of this ancient west-to-east route being Amphilocharian Argos. It cannot be a coincidence that Hekataios supposed Herakles to have driven the cattle of Geryon, not from the land of the Iberians and the island of Erytheia, but from the mainland of Ambrakia and Amphilocheia; here, the historian claimed, Geryon had been king. Hekataios' statement has been regarded as a rationalising of the earlier legend, but as the Ainianian text shows, it may rather have been a return to the earliest and least extravagant form of the tale. After his encounter with Erythe at Dodona, we may suppose, Herakles took her to Amphilocheia, whence they travelled with the oxen to Ainis. The author of the Περὶ θαυμασίων ἀκονυμάτων (133.4) correctly denies, therefore, that the Herakles of the Ainianian poem brought the cattle from Iberia, but we need not agree with his inference that their home was near Hypate in Ainis at a place called Erythos. Nor need we agree with Hammond when he writes that the Thebans interpreted the inscription "to mean that Herakles had given them (the Ainianes) their land in memory of their friendship 'under the shady oak'" of Dodona: for neither the Peripatetic author nor the text of the inscription proves that φιλία between the Ainianes and Herakles at Dodona is meant. The allusion is to the love between Herakles and Erythe at Dodona or to Pasiphaessa's kindness to the hero there. The Ainianes, it is true, wandered from upper Molossia deviously to the Spercheios valley and once dwelt near a Dodona, perhaps the Molossian; but our inscription does not record those ancient ties. Its concern is with the journey of Herakles.

No archaic inscriptions have been found in Ainis, and our text cannot be confidently claimed as one; but it does have the merit of showing that Herakles, as the Thebans and Ainianes believed, had ties with the Spercheios valley as well as with Trachis and Oeta nearby. It helps, too, to illumine the earliest cults of Aphrodite and the earliest form of the legend of Geryon's oxen.

The Περὶ θαυμασίων ἀκονυμάτων does not state when the Thebans deciphered the text from Ainis, but Herodotos shows (5.59) that

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13 Hammond, op.cit. (supra n.5) 143 and 158 n.4.
14 FGrHist 1 r 26.
15 supra n.5.
17 Iliad 2.748-50.
attempts to read early inscriptions at Thebes had begun in the fifth century B.C. The Theban reading of the inscription may well date from this period of awakening interest in epigraphy.

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