

Book Reviews

Ruth B. Edwards, *Kadmos the Phoenician. A Study in Greek Legends and the Mycenaean Age*. Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1979, XIII + 265 p.

The book of Dr. R. B. Edwards is, generally speaking, a comprehensive valuable account of the problem whether certain elements of Mycenaean history have been reflected in the legend of Kadmos. Conclusions are drawn not only from literary sources, but also from objects of art, archaeological records, epigraphy, etymology, etc. In the present review, we shall not enter into the discussion of the bulk of evidence provided by the author. The unavoidable disparateness of the material dealt with throughout the book makes us confine our criticism to several statements pertaining to the comparative mythology only. This is the area in which we may venture some remarks and suggestions.

I. Turning her attention to a somewhat crucial question (p. 64): was Kadmos originally a Phoenician in the tradition?— the author infers that if his “Phoinikertum” were proved to be only a later invention, then all the attempts to find a historical basis for this part of the legend would be but lost labour.

Without further refinement, this claim does not seem correct to us. One should be well aware of the fact that the Greek tradition is far from being expected to reflect explicitly the exotic background of its constituents, either of large structural units (narrations, plots) or of minor ingredients (symbols, attributes) with one and the same preciseness whatever the case. On the contrary, it emerges clearly that in most striking cases, the external subsoil of which was not yet overshadowed by various indigenous adaptations, the tradition, as a rule, still has no literal bearing on their true homeland.

For the sake of brevity, two instances are sufficient to be mentioned:

a. As has been recognized long ago, Apollo (in Hom. Il. 1:43-53) betrays his non-Greek origin and points directly to Resheph, the Canaanite god of fire, pestilence and destruction. This information is due to the *comparative* method; the Homeric description of Apollo is not in a position to indicate any relationship actually existing between the two deities.

b. It is impossible to evaluate the “Kingship in Heaven” theme on its proper grounds unless the comparative evidence. The same holds true for a considerable lot of themes as well.

We should not rule out the possibility that, in a number of cases, the tradition known to us may be misleading, either: a very provocative idea was adhered to by G. Nagy¹ that there was a tendency to attribute foreign origins to early elements of Greek culture which, with the passage of time, appeared somehow exotic, so that the Greek writers may have associated them with those foreign places where these elements might have seemed to be “at home”.

To sum up. It is extremely doubtful, therefore, whether the search for the original nation-

1. D. D. Boedeker, *Aphrodite's Entry into the Greek Epic* (Leiden 1974) pp. 4-5. The both examples G. Nagy and D. D. Boedeker refer to, namely Dionysos and Aphrodite, hardly belong with this tendency.

ality of Kadmos in the Greek literary tradition will afford much light upon the whole problem. The foreign, presumably West Semitic, origin of Kadmos is neither confirmed² nor disproved by stating merely the fact that he never figured as a Phoenician in the earliest Greek writings survived.

II. Fresh interest is directed by R. B. Edwards at the oriental parallels to the legend of Kadmos proposed by several scholars and most notably by M. C. Astour³. In her somewhat sharp criticism of M. C. Astour's deductions the author, we admit, may be right on marginal questions. It proves, however, to be one thing to voice scepticism and quite another to present a new and supposedly trustworthy explanation of the putative West Semitic background of the legend. We daresay that the comparative Ugaritic and more remote Mesopotamian material assembled by M. C. Astour in his superior book deserves a positive approach rather than a negative one, while R. B. Edwards is inclined to disqualify it at all. First, R. B. Edwards rejected the comparison of Kadmos with the Sumerian god Ningišzida, the personification of the sun-rise, the city- and temple-founder, who takes on the serpent form and kills a dragon at once. Instead, the author referred to the wide spread attestation of the "serpent-killer/dragon-fighter" motif in the world folklore and beliefs.

This argument can not sound compelling. Unlike a typological study, that historical one which aims at establishing the fact that the contacts between Ugarit and Greece actually took place in the Mycenaean period, should not be based on parallels as wide as the world folklore. Such comparisons appear to be excessive and not decisive: if we study the interactions of Apollo and Resheph on Chypre, the parallel between the former and, for instance, the principal Indo-Iranian deity Mithra⁴ must be left aside in our discussion, since it obviously belongs with a different group altogether.

The correct approach consists in proceeding from the study of the legend (and its recorded versions, cf., for instance, an interesting piece conserved by Schol. Eurip. *Phoen.* 670) within the context of the coexistent cultures which are not independent but admittedly related. If any detail does not yield to such analysis, it may be said to represent the legacy of some different structure; accordingly, there is still room for *new* insights into the Indo-European mythological heritage, too⁵.

2. To be more precise, the following words of M. C. Astour, "The Problem of Semitic in Ancient Crete", *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 87 (1967) p. 291, are apparently worth citing: "The Greeks themselves had a tradition that the mythical king Minos was of Phoenician origin. It is easy to dismiss this as sheer fantasy, though myths linking, for instance, the Pylian dynasty with Thessaly are not rejected as such. A historian with some inclination toward determinism would, however, ask himself: what made the Greeks exercise their fantasy in just that direction?"

3. M. C. Astour, *Hellenosemitica. An Ethnic and Cultural Study in West Semitic Impact on Mycenaean Greece* (Leiden 1965; ²1967). We would like to record here our deepest gratitude to Prof. M. C. Astour, who always courteously discussed with us many perplexing problems and also presented us with a great number of his fascinating and extremely valuable publications.

4. On Mithra and Apollo, with regard to their arrows, cf. most recently G. Bonfante, "The Name of Mithra", J. Duchesne - Guillemin (ed.), *Études Mithriaques* (Leiden 1978) p. 54.

5. The notorious tripartite pattern can not go beyond reproach for ignoring a good deal of Greek evidence as well as for turning it, in some cases, upside down. Uncritical repetitions

After this interlude, it will perhaps be helpful to recapitulate in brief the few items of our enlightening West Semitic evidence so far.

1. The derivation of the name Κόδμος from Ugaritic *qdm* "eastern", or "ancient", is surely anything but convincing. As this word is capable semantically of receiving more than one rendering, showing right from the start two not easily reconciled strands, we must ascertain beforehand which of them we accept as a basic starting point for comparative investigations. Support is gained from the parallelism *qdm* makes with the well known Ugaritic term for dawn, *šhr*, *Shahar*, "(the god) Dawn, Morning Star"⁶. It maintains, therefore, that the former word shares something common with the celestial notions in general⁷. Besides, in the Accadian text CT XXV, 6:11, this name occurring as ^d*Qadmu* is written with the determinative ^d(DINGIR) which is used elsewhere in cuneiform records to denote the *divine* beings only.

2. Aside from etymological considerations and the direct Ugaritic (*šhr* // *qdm*) and Accadian (^d*Qadmu*) testimonies on the possible original divinity of Kadmos in his homeland, there is a neglected indirect evidence at our disposal to corroborate the old view that Kadmos is very likely to be the off-shoot of an "Augenblicksgott", obviously of solar provenance⁸. It comes, significantly, from the same area: the name of Kadmos, or "Eastern", is comparable semantically to the name of the West Semitic god *Amurru* (ideographically written AN. MAR. TU, designating the god Ninurta in Sumerian⁹) that means "Western".

3. Another salient parallel to the legend of Kadmos proposed by M. C. Astour seems to have been overlooked by R. B. Edwards. It concerns two related Ugaritic texts containing extremely interesting conjurations intended to prevent the serpent from biting. They were first published by Charles Viroilleaud as Nos. 7 and 8 (RS.24.244 and RS.24.251, respectively) in his section of the admirable "Ugaritica V". The relevant passage in M. C. Astour's basic study of these tablets runs as follows¹⁰: "Only in passing let it be noted that the role played by "r (d) *qdm* / literally "the City of the East", the abode of the god Ḥoron--Th.P. / in the two Ugaritic serpent charms may be reminiscent of CT XXV,6:11 (quoted in K. Tallqvist, APN,

of this scheme are many in number (on Kadmos, cf., for instance, recently the standard list of correspondences by D. Briquel, "La Triple Fondation de Rome", *RHR* 189 (1976) p. 176). It remains to be hoped that the Theban mythological cycles and traditions will be evaluated in a more rigorous fashion and in a less dogmatic way.

6. C. H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Textbook* (Rome 1965) 75:I:7-8, *šhr* "dawn" // *qdm* "east". Cf. J. Krašovec, *Der Merismus im biblisch-hebräischen und nordwestsemitischen* (Rome 1977) p. 41.

7. Cf. Mithra's title "Eastern", *Oriens* revealed by a Latin inscription, *CIL* VI 556, F. Cumont, *Textes et Monuments figurés relatif aux mystères de Mithra II* (Bruxelles 1896) p. 102, no. 48bis. This appellation undoubtedly features Mithra's solar essence prominently manifested elsewhere in Roman paganism.

8. Having said that a god or a hero is of solar provenance, one should immediately guard against misunderstandings. Thus we bear in mind a reasonable definition of J. E. Harrison, *Themis. A Study of the Social Origins of Greek Religion*² (New York 1961) p. 370.

9. We infer that some interesting features Kadmos shares with Ninurta, the great warrior god representing the eastern (and morning) sun, may suggest a continuity which as yet can not be demonstrated and requires a lot of special attention.

10. M. C. Astour, "Two Ugaritic Serpent Charms", *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 27 (1968) pp. 13-36; cf. especially p. 23, n. 54 and also p. 32, n. 94.

p. 259b), in which ^dQadmu (^dKUD) is described as the vizier (*sukkal*) of ^dSataran (^dKA.DI.), the well known Mesopotamian serpent god, and of the very pronounced ophite character of Kadmos, the mythical Phoenician founder of Thebes”.

Following through on this keen observation, we also may tentatively formulate a Greek mythological pattern making its appearance *before* the age of syncretism wherein the sun god and his various epiphanies would be closely associated with the serpent symbolism.

III. Let us now turn to matters of detail. The rape of Europe by Zeus in the bull form¹¹ can hardly be a measure of Minoan influence; in this myth, the bull form Zeus takes on is rather traceable back to that of El, the chief of the Ugaritic pantheon (cf. his stock epithet *tr 'el*, Shor El or, literally, “El the bull”). The obsolete guess that “Phoinikes” = “red-skin people”, even if accepted, may not necessarily imply the strict ethnical connotation: as was suggested, the red colour of skin may have been taken as a symbol of strength, health, or something alike¹².

On the Semitic root MZL “to get round”, “to grope” discussed by R. B. Edwards, cf. also the survey of G. Del Olmo Lete¹³; on the Ugaritic myth about the “Good Gods”, D. T. Tsumura’s Brandeis dissertation may be consulted¹⁴. Not long ago, three new Sumerian hymns to the god Ningišzida have been masterfully brought to light by Å. W. Sjöberg¹⁵. The study of J. Chr. Billigmeir¹⁶ and at least two ingenious works of R. du Mesnil du Buisson¹⁷ are to be mentioned, too.

Finally, there are perhaps other details in R. B. Edwards’ book about which one might wish to dispute, but criticism in no way diminishes the value of this important, highly informative and reliable work.

TH. POLJAKOV

11. B. C. Dietrich, *The Origins of Greek Religion* (West Berlin - New York 1974) p. 178, sets this image in its wider Mediterranean framework.

12. Cf. J. Zandee, *Egyptological Commentary on the Old Testament — Travels in the World of the Old Testament*. Studies presented to M. A. Beek (Assen 1974) p. 275; C. H. Gordon, *Before the Bible. The Common Background of Greek and Hebrew Civilisations* (London 1962) pp. 136, 168, 231; B. Landsberger, “Über Farben im Sumerisch-akkadischen”, *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 21 (1967) pp. 139-173; cf. esp. p. 142 and n. 19 (“bright” and “red” denote healthy skin colours in physiognomic and diagnostic omnia). On “purpureus” cf. most recently B. J. Edgenworth, Does “purpureus” mean “bright?” *Glotta* 57 (1979) pp. 281-291.

13. G. Del Olmo Lete, “Notes on Ugaritic Semantics” I, *Ugarit-Forschungen* 7 (1975) pp. 91-93.

14. D. T. Tsumura, *The Ugaritic Drama of the Good Gods. A Philological Study*. Diss. Brandeis Univ. June 1973. Univ. Microfilm 73-32, 411 (Ann Arbor 1973).

15. Å. W. Sjöberg, “Three Hymns to the God Ningišzida”, *Studia Orientalia* 46 (1975) pp. 301-322.

16. J.-Chr. Billigmeir, *Kadmos and the Possibility of a Semitic Presense in Helladic Greece*. Diss. Univ. of California, Santa Barbara 1976, DA 37 (1977) 5980-5981A.

17. R. du Mesnil du Buisson, *Études sur les dieux phéniciens hérités par l’empire romain* (Leiden 1970); *Nouvelles études sur les dieux et les mythes de Canaan* (Leiden 1973).