

## The *Selloi* at Dodona

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THE NAME Σελλοί, given by Homer to the priests of the Pelasgian Zeus,<sup>1</sup> has most recently been discussed by Lochner-Hüttenbach,<sup>2</sup> who, adhering to the view of many authorities, is certainly right in rejecting the so-called Homeric variant Έλλοί. As concerns the explanation of Σελλοί, Lochner-Hüttenbach follows Güntert and Brandenstein in their comparison with Goth. *saljan* "to bring an offering, sacrifice," and with Brandenstein he assumes for Σελλοί the meaning "offerer, sacrificer." Now, it is evident that the proposed interpretation deserves some consideration. I wish, however, to draw attention to the fact that, so far as I know, no etymology of Σελλοί based on the whole text of Iliad 16. 233—235, has yet been suggested; the solution must, therefore, be sought for in the light of the materials quoted.

It is remarkable that the Σελλοί clearly show connections with the earth. The epithet *χαμαιεῦναι* "lying, sleeping on the ground" proves that the Σελλοί are firmly attached to the soil of the most ancient oracle of Zeus. In the same way is to be explained the epithet *ἀνιπτόποδες* "with unwashed feet," which is applied to the same priests and which in this Homeric passage immediately precedes *χαμαιεῦναι*. That is to say, *χαμαιεῦναι* is the basis we must start from for the elucidation of *ἀνιπτόποδες*: "with unwashed feet" means here "barefooted." For the Dodonaean priests the physical contact with the earth was not a pollution but a holy necessity.

<sup>1</sup> *Il.* 16. 233—235: Ζεῦ ἄνα, Δωδωναῖε, Πελασγικέ, τηλόθι ναίων, | Δωδώνης μεδέων δυσχειμέρου ἄμφι δὲ Σελλοί | σοὶ ναίουσ' ὑποφῆται, ἀνιπτόποδες, χαμαιεῦναι ("Zeus, Dodonaean and Pelasgic king, that dwellest far from here and rulest over snow-cold Dodona, where around thee dwell the Selloi, priests who never wash their feet and sleep on the ground": cf. Marris, *The Iliad of Homer* (London, etc., 1934.)

<sup>2</sup> *Die Pelasger*, (Wien, 1960), pp. 147ff.

These conclusions prompt me to suggest for Δωδώνη, the name of the seat of the oracle, an explanation which places this word in the semantic field of χαμαιεῦναι and ἀνιπτόποδες. We may suspect that Δωδώνη, in which we meet at any rate a reduplication, is etymologically equivalent to Gk. χθών: the phonetic development of -δων- can then be compared with that of Alb. *dhe* "earth" and also with that of OIr. *dū*, gen., acc. *don* "place." The original meaning of Δωδώνη, according to the sense found in χαμαιεῦναι and ἀνιπτόποδες, would have been "earth." In view of the close connections of the Σελλοί with the earth, we certainly have the right to assume that the form Δωδώνη was a nursery word denoting "Mother Earth;" the reduplication in Δωδώνη must therefore be regarded as very usual.<sup>3</sup>

Since the whole text of Iliad 16. 233–235 seems to move in the sphere of religious ideas associated with the earth, there is perhaps a reason for supposing that the Dodonaean Zeus (cf. Ζεῦ ἄνα, Δωδωνάϊε . . .) was the well-known Zeus καταχθόνιος, who is mentioned in the passage of Iliad 9. 457, as the husband of the chthonian goddess Persephone. On the other hand, the fact that the seat of a chthonian cult is also that of an oracle causes no difficulty for, as Guthrie has said in his most interesting publication on Greek religion, "Gaia, the Earth herself, was 'the first of prophets,' and the best-known example of such an oracle of inspiration was Delphi, where it was universally acknowledged that Gaia had been the earliest occupant of the shrine."<sup>4</sup>

We may now go back to the name Σελλοί. The foregoing analysis of conceptions expressed in the above mentioned verses of the Iliad furnishes the clue for the right explanation of this word: not only do χαμαιεῦναι, ἀνιπτόποδες, Δωδώνη and, perhaps, the Dodonaean Zeus himself directly or indirectly point to the earth, but so also Σελλοί, which corresponds to Lat. *solum* "bottom, base, sole (of the foot or shoe)" and especially "ground, soil" (> It. *suolo*, Fr. *sol*, etc.).<sup>5</sup> With regard to "ground, soil" we can take Σελλοί as "(the

<sup>3</sup> This interpretation of Δωδώνη appears more plausible than the current view (discussed by Lochner-Hüttenbach, *Die Pelasger*, pp. 155ff.), which considers the word as a derivation from a so-called river-name Δῶδων.

<sup>4</sup> *The Greeks and their Gods*, (London, 1950), p. 229.

<sup>5</sup> For some Celtic and Greek cognates, cf. Pokorny, *Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, 1 (Bern-München, 1959), p. 1046.

priests) of the earth" in general (cf. Δωδώνη) or as "(the priests) of the ground" = "(the priests) who lie or sleep on the ground" = χαμαιεῦναι. If the meaning "bottom, base, sole (of the foot)" is correct, we can understand a semantic parallel to ἀνιπτόποδες: the Σελλοί would thus be "(the priests) whose soles (of the feet) directly touch the ground, the earth."

That Σελλοί does not belong to the category of true Greek words is indicated by the retention of initial *s*. To me the theory of an Illyrian origin advanced by Mayer<sup>6</sup> and accepted by Lochner-Hüttenbach,<sup>7</sup> does not seem cogent. There is also the possibility that Σελλοί is a borrowing from Pelasgian, a pre-Greek but still Indo-European language, which was the source of several Greek cultural terms.<sup>8</sup> IE initial \**s* remains in Pelasgian:<sup>9</sup> cf. σειρά "cord, rope" corresponding etymologically to Lat. *series*;<sup>10</sup> σίλλυβος "parchment-label" containing σιλ(λ)- = OHG *silo* "cord, leather-strap."<sup>11</sup> No doubt in Pelasgian IE \**sm̥*- has been simplified to *s*-. The Pelasgian form Σελλοί apparently represents IE \**sm̥el*-; Lat. *solum* can be derived from the same Indo-European form (cf. *soror* "sister" < IE \**sm̥esōr*, *socrus* "mother-in-law" < IE \**sm̥ekr*-, etc.), but IE \**sm̥ol*- would also have yielded Lat. *solum* (\**μ* was lost before *o* in Latin: cf. *fores* "door" < IE \**dh̥mor*-).<sup>12</sup> As for *-ll-* in Σελλοί, the Latin form *solea* "sandal" (cf. *solum*) gives a good account of it: Σελλ- < \*Σελ-ι-, etc. (assimilation \**-li-* > *-ll-*), of which Lat. *solea* < \**solei-a* shows the strong grade in the suffix. There are other Pelasgian words with the same *-ll-*: cf. καβάλλης "nag";<sup>13</sup> σάτιλλα· πλειάς τὸ ἄστρον.<sup>14</sup>

There perhaps is decisive evidence to attribute Σελλοί to Pelasgian rather than to Illyrian: indeed, it is worth mentioning that

<sup>6</sup> *Die Sprache der alten Illyrier*, 2 (Wien, 1959), pp. 102f.

<sup>7</sup> *Die Pelasger*, p. 150.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. my monographs: *Le pélasgique. Essai sur une langue indo-européenne pré-hellénique*, (Louvain, 1952); *Contributions à l'étude de l'onomastique pélasgique*, (Louvain, 1954); *Études pélasgiques*, (Louvain, 1960).

<sup>9</sup> *Le pélasgique*, p. 13.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 134ff.

<sup>11</sup> *Études*, pp. 55ff.

<sup>12</sup> For \**sm̥ol*- see Pokorny, *Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, 1. 1046.

<sup>13</sup> Van Windekens, *KZ* 76 (1959), pp. 78ff.

<sup>14</sup> Van Windekens, *Orbis* 5 (1956), pp. 198ff.

in the above quoted text of Iliad 16. 233—235, Zeus is invoked by Achilles. Now, the name Ἀχιλ(λ)εὺς is a Pelasgian loanword containing Ἀχ- = Lat. *aqua* “water” and identical in formation with Venetic *Aquileia*, Ἀκυλις = *Aquilis* and Illyrian *Aquilo*.<sup>15</sup> The form Ἀχιλ(λ)εὺς clearly differs from *Aquileia*, etc. and *Aquilo* in having *kh* < IE \**qʷ*: the labial element of the IE labiovelars is lost in Pelasgian;<sup>16</sup> the development of \**qʷ* to the aspirate is also in strict accordance with the Pelasgian sound-shifting.<sup>17</sup>

To the argument of the Pelasgian origin of the name Ἀχιλ(λ)εὺς we may add that of the epithet of Zeus Πελασγικός, which has received a very satisfactory explanation in the light of the Pelasgian theory.<sup>18</sup>

Ἀχιλ(λ)εὺς and Πελασγικός speak for the Pelasgian origin not only of Σελλοί, but also of Δωδώνη. The name of the oracle may well have come into Greek in the form \**dōm*: the development \**m* > *n* in final position would then have taken place in Greek; this \**Δων* would have been extended by the suffix *-ā*.

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<sup>15</sup> *Le pélasgique*, pp. 144f.; *Contributions*, p. 41; *Études*, pp. 109f.

<sup>16</sup> *Le pélasgique*, p. 14.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13 and pp. 17f.

<sup>18</sup> Van Windekens, *Names*, 6 (1958), pp. 184ff.