

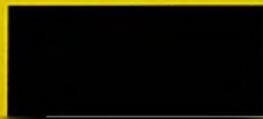
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Demeter as 'Earth-Mother' and Dionysos as 'Earth's Bridegroom'

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Abstract. The present author intends, on the one hand, to bring some new arguments in favour of an older (very credible) interpretation of the Greek theonym *Demeter* as literally meaning 'Earth-Mother'; on the other hand, the main part of this article is meant to demonstrate that the much discussed theonym *Dionysos* once meant 'Earth's Bridegroom', rather than 'Zeus's Son'.

In a synthetic book on Greek religion, Robert (1998:100) asserts, without any linguistic explanation, that there was an archaic goddess „*Ga* or *Ge*, whose name could also be pronounced *Da* or *De* (as in *Demeter*, the Earth-Mother).“ There certainly had been earlier discussion on that theonym. Towards the end of the 19th century, Max Müller (as quoted in Brown 1966: 12) had to admit: „Phonetic conscience might rebel against the change in the name of Demeter of *g* into *d*, but so far as the ancient Greeks are concerned there can be no doubt that they had accepted *Demeter* as *Ge-meter* or Mother Earth.“ The same scholar believed that the ancient interpretation of the theonym under discussion „has to be accepted, the material evidence being too strong in favour of Demeter being an earth-goddess.“ Along a similar line (see the Chantraine dictionary, s.v. *δα* and *Δημήτηρ*), Kretschmer was in favour of the ancient view on Demeter's name, as well as the equivalence between the ancient Greek interjection *da* and the better-known *ga* for 'earth'¹.

According to Kretschmer - as quoted by Chantraine (see above) -, *Δημήτηρ* (also recorded as *Δαμάτηρ* and *Δωμάτηρ*) appears as a compound containing a clearly Indo-European word for 'mother', preceded by „an old name of the earth, *da*.“ That view appeared as „séduisante“, but not as credible enough to more recent specialists: Chantraine (s.v. *Δημήτηρ*) tells us that there have been doubts about the very existence of a Greek word *da* 'earth'. What I can say here is that, against such doubts, there are several important facts which prove that a Greek (or even a pre-Greek) *da/de* 'earth' would not be so singular after all. Among other things, the Chantraine dictionary itself gives another theonym, *Daeira*, as name of a goddess of the Persephone type². Chantraine does not comment on the fact that the name *Δάειρα* („formation de féminin en -ειρα“) suggests chthonic functions by its very first part, which happens to be exactly the above-mentioned *da*. Therefore, *Daeira* must have referred directly to „earth“, just like *Demeter*.

¹ For a comparison, see American English *gee* (as exclamation of surprise), born of an euphemistic abbreviation of the name of *Jesus*; or see Romanian oath-interjection *zău* < Lat. *deus* - cf. Rom. *Dumnezeu* < Lat. *Dominus Deus*.

² „La difficulté est que l'existence d'un mot *da* 'terre' (d'ailleurs inexpliqué) a été contestée“ (Chantraine, s.v. *Δημήτηρ*).

³ Chantraine presents *Δάειρα* as „nom d'une divinité chthonienne proche de Déméter, qui l'on identifie parfois à Perséphone.“