

The Drowned God: Are Melicertes and Melqart Identical?

Somewhat ironically, before the interest in looking for Near Eastern parallels in Greek mythology started, Melicertes and Melqart were frequently seen as hypostases of the same god.¹ However, now that it can be taken for granted that ancient Greece was part of a Near Eastern/Eastern Mediterranean cultural *koine*, scholars consider the two gods independent and the similarity of the two gods' names a coincidence. This ultimate schism between the two gods can be traced back to a 1986 article by Corinne Bonnet in which she claims, "il semble donc, en définitive, que le rapprochement avec Melqart soit purement fortuit, comme d'ailleurs la nature fort différente des deux entités divine ou héroïque nous invitait déjà à le croire."² Though she considers her own arguments to be a definitive statement against any sort of relationship between the two gods (and scholars have followed her in her belief), her arguments cover only a very narrow area of possible convergences between the two gods: the depiction of the two gods on coins, child sacrifice, whether there were Phoenicians at Corinth, a single mirror that depicts what could be a conflation of Heracles and Melicertes, and the etymology of Melicertes' name.

¹ See Astour (1967), 204-12.

² Bonnet (1986), 63. Cf. Lipiński (1995), 227: "En revanche, il faut écarter l'identification de Melqart avec Mélécerte (Μελικέρτης) qui faisait l'objet d'un culte chez les Grecs, spécialement à Corinthe lors des Jeux Isthmiques."; Beaulieu (2016), 130 n. 68, "The theory according to which the name Melicertes is related to that of the Phoenician god Melqart (sic) has now been abandoned."; Gebhard/Dickie (1999), 160 n. 11, does not consider it likely that the two gods are synonymous. West (1997), 58, cautiously considers the possibility that the two gods might be related (mentioning only the similarity of the two names), but thinks the question needs more attention to be decided definitively.

Nowhere does she consider any overlap between the mythologies of the two gods, and she only passes over dismissively and briefly any convergences between the functions and domains over which the two gods exercise power, as though these are scarcely important qualities for gods. In short, I believe that the question of Melicertes' and Melqart's synonymy has been given short shrift over the past thirty years, and I would like to reopen the question. In doing so, I will revisit each of Bonnet's supposedly definitive arguments against the identification of Melicertes with Melqart, since I both see problems with her argumentation and also think that her evidence is almost entirely circumstantial. In addition, I will bring to bear on the question evidence from the two gods' mythology and cult that is similar. In particular, I will focus on the episode in Book V (and the context of the following Books VI-VIII) of the *Odyssey*, in which Ino-Leucothea (Melicertes' mother) saves Odysseus from drowning while traveling from Calypso's island to the Phaeacians'. Despite the antiquity of this reference, scholars have done little more than mention it in passing when considering the cult and mythology of Melicertes and his mother, perhaps because it is somewhat allusive. However, a full (philological) consideration of the episode and its context will reveal that many aspects of Melicertes' and Melqart's cult and mythology (that only appear in later texts) are already present in the *Odyssey*. This analysis will also show that a great deal of Phoenician elements are clustered in this sequence, perhaps pointing to a Greek awareness at this period that Melicertes was borrowed from the Phoenicians.

The cult and mythology of Melqart have been handled a number of times in recent scholarship,³ so there is little reason to review in detail the basis of what and how we know about Melqart. He was the patron god of the Phoenician city of Tyre, and as such was responsible for the well-being of the king, sailors, the city's crops, athletic contests held in his honor, and the

³ Lipiński (1970); Bonnet (1988), Lipiński (1995), 226-242; Mettinger (2001), 83-111.

city's colonies spread across the Mediterranean. Much like Eshmoun and the much older Ugaritic Baal, Melqart ritually died each year (in some situation involving fire) and was then reborn, symbolizing the continuing fertility of the crops.⁴ Melqart is also well known for his syncretism with Heracles and in Greek sources is usually known as the "Tyrian Heracles."

The myth of Melicertes and his mother Ino is attested in full in a number of sources, though relatively late.⁵ The story is also related in passing in a number of early sources.⁶ Ino, the daughter of Cadmus and the sister of Semele, took care of the baby Dionysus when Semele died. Hera, enraged by Ino's sympathy, decided to take revenge on her. In some sources, Hera makes Ino jealous of her husband's children and kills them by boiling them. Her husband, Athamas, chases after Ino with her son Melicertes and Ino kills herself and Melicertes by diving into the ocean. In other versions, Hera drives both Ino and Athamas mad (or sometimes just Ino), which leads them to kill their children Learchus and Melicertes. Sometimes Melicertes is first boiled in a cauldron before Ino dives into the sea with him, and other times the dive itself is what kills him and Ino. In any case, Ino and Melicertes always dive into the ocean and die there. Ino generally also ruins Thebes' crops as part of her revenge/madness. After Ino and Melicertes die in the ocean, Melicertes' corpse is rescued by a dolphin, which then brings him from the

⁴ There is no space here to enter into a full discussion, but there was recently a trend to criticize the concept of the so-called vegetal "Dying and Rising Gods." While taking a hardline Frazerian stance that essentially argues that all religions are Christianity is obviously foolish, I find the opposite tack (denying the existence of any dying and rising gods in the ancient East Mediterranean) equally problematic. While perhaps too many gods have been shoehorned into this category, some gods explicitly do die and rise (Heracles, Osiris, Dionysus, Melqart). Moreover, whereas the old Frazerian stance reduced all religions to Christianity, this new denial of any dying and rising gods similar to Christ essentially maintains (along with the faithful) that Christianity actually is purely unique with no forerunners that it could have grown out of in the ancient East Mediterranean. When it is impossible for scholars to wave away evidence of gods' dying and rising, they are then forced to argue that these gods gained their dying and rising aspects from influence from Christ worship. Christianity, then, in this view, ironically remains the central religion. For bibliography, sources, and more argumentation, see Mettinger (2001).

⁵ Apollodorus 3.4. Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 4.464-542; *Fasti* 6.473-568. Pausanias 1.44.7-8; 2.1.3-4

⁶ *Odyssey*, Book 5.332ff.. Alcman, frg. 50; Pindar, *Isthmians* frgg. 5-6 (Snell); Euripides, *Medea* 1282-91; Callimachus, *Aitia* 4. frg. 92 (Pfeiffer).

shore nearby Thebes to Corinth. There Sisyphus finds him and establishes the Isthmian Games in his honor.⁷ Ino and Melicertes are transformed into gods (Leucothea and Palaemon, respectively) who protect sailors. Only a Roman period shrine to Melicertes has been discovered at Isthmia (as part of the Caesars' colonial rebuilding program at Corinth starting in 44 BC), but the area has not been adequately cleared, so an earlier shrine cannot be definitively ruled out.⁸

Practically none of this basic information relevant to both gods was utilized by Bonnet in her argument against the two gods' synonymy (she mentions in passing the fact that Melicertes and Melqart both protected sailors). I will address each of her arguments in the order that she presents them since she clearly sees them as becoming stronger and stronger as she progresses.

Bonnet's first argument is that Melicertes' and Melqart's numismatic iconography is quite different.⁹ Melicertes' is depicted on Corinthian coins as a boy riding on a dolphin's back whereas Melqart rides a hippocamp (a horse with the backend of a fish) and holds a bow and arrows. While this fact could be circumstantial evidence that Melqart and Melicertes are different gods, it is by no means conclusive. A god's iconography can be radically different depending on circumstances and location. Moreover, Bonnet's evidence is extremely narrow: she considers *only* coins minted at Tyre in the 4th century BC and does not mention the fact that Melqart is depicted otherwise in other places at other times. It would be extremely inconvenient for her argument if she pointed out that Melqart was depicted with dolphins on Gaditanian coins (as she herself records in her book on Melqart).¹⁰ She also fails to mention that on other coins

⁷ The Isthmian Games were founded in the 6th century, so this aspect must be a relatively late part of the myth. However, it seems that Melicertes was worshipped as the patron of the Games from their inception based on Pindar *Isthmian* frgg. 5-6, cf. Gebhard/Dickie (1999), 161-5.

⁸ Gebhad/Dickie (1999), 159-60.

⁹ Bonnet (1986), 59.

¹⁰ Bonnet (1988), 229; Tsirkin (1981), 27.

minted at Tyre in the 4th century Melqart is depicted riding a hippocamp while accompanied by a dolphin.¹¹ This instance points up a consistent double problem in her argument's methodology. She only uses evidence for Melqart's cult from Tyre for her argument (and makes a point of it) as though Melqart worship elsewhere is degraded and not "original."¹² She also does not nuance her use of relatively late material. If Melicertes and Melqart were originally the same god but then drifted apart over time as Melqart and Heracles became more and more associated with one another (as I will argue), it would not be surprising if the two gods' iconography also decreased in similarity over time. In short, while 4th century numismatic iconography may be circumstantial evidence for the two gods' lack of synonymy, it is not the silver bullet that Bonnet claims that it is.

Bonnet's second argument involves the existence of child sacrifice rites to Melicertes.¹³ Bonnet maintains that even though Phoenician gods are also known to have had child sacrifice rites, Melicertes' cannot be used to demonstrate any similarity between Melicertes and Melqart because child sacrifice is a Carthaginian (i.e. Punic) phenomenon. Bonnet again falls into the fallacy of trying to build a wall between Phoenicia proper and the Phoenician west. Moreover, she ignores the fact that the Bible also criticizes Phoenicians' child sacrifice.¹⁴ The Biblical authors presumably did not coincidentally accuse the Carthaginians' eastern cousins of the exact same sin, so our archaeological evidence in the Levant simply does not preserve any record of this cultic activity (e.g. the Levantine Phoenicians did not build *tophets* like their western cousins

¹¹ Pictures of the coins from the Jezreel Valley can be found on the Israeli Antiquity Authority's webpage: http://www.antiquities.org.il/hoards_eng.asp.

¹² See also Prag (2015) for the problematic scholarly schism between so-called Punic and Phoenician cultures.

¹³ Bonnet (1986), 60. For child-sacrifice to Melicertes, see Lyc. *Alex.* 229-42 and Tzetzes *ad Lyc.* 229 for more context.

¹⁴ See Xella (2012-13), 264 for index of citations.

or by chance we have not uncovered any *tophets* in the Levant). We can therefore conclude that child sacrifice is indeed a shared trait between Melqart and Melicertes.

Bonnet next brings up the fact that though Melicertes and Heracles share the epithet Palaimon, no ancient source makes any correlation between the two.¹⁵ She believes that this fact ought to incline us to doubt that Melicertes and Melqart are synonymous. Although it is interesting to note, I am skeptical that it is relevant. It seems more likely (as I will argue) either that though Melicertes originally came from Melqart, the Greeks forgot the connection and only later associated Heracles with Melqart or that the Heracles-Melqart association arose independently of Melicertes' derivation from Melqart.

Here concludes Bonnet's supposedly definitive and conclusive evidence that Melqart and Melicertes were not the same god, and the only parts left of her argument are her own opinions on the origins of Melicertes. Before I attend to these two arguments, I would like to again point out how slim her evidence and argumentation are. Even if my counter-arguments are wrong, Bonnet has examined next to no evidence that strongly correlates the two gods: nothing about the two gods' deaths and resurrections nor anything about the domains that the two gods exercise power over and only a brief and narrow analysis of child sacrifice. Her entire analysis of the two gods' iconography is so brief that it seems like it should be only the beginning of a longer argument, and, as I have already pointed out, is highly problematic.

¹⁵ Bonnet (1986), 60-1. Bonnet also brings up the case of an Etruscan mirror that has been argued to show syncretism between Melicertes and Heracles as part of this argument (61-2). The mirror has written on it HERKLE and PAKSTE (=Pegasus) as well as a dolphin depicted. The dolphin is at least indicative of a possible Etruscan correlation of the two gods, but by no means conclusive and could point in other directions (perhaps the more obvious correlation between Heracles and his half-brother Dionysus, who is more commonly associated with dolphins).

I turn next to the two alternatives Bonnet presents as possibilities for Melicertes' etymological origins. Her first proposal is that Melicertes' name derives from Melqart's, but Melicertes himself is an independent, native Greek god. Her second is that Melicertes' name has a purely Greek etymology. I find both proposals as problematic as her previous arguments.

The first possibility that Bonnet proposes is that Palaimon was an entirely native Greek god worshipped at Corinth, whom traveling Phoenicians called Melqart (through a sort of *interpretatio Phoenica*); in time the Corinthians also called Palaimon "Melqart," which was corrupted into Melicertes.¹⁶ I find a number of problems with this argument. First, why would Phoenicians call Palaimon "Melqart"? Melqart was the head of the Tyrians' pantheon, whereas Palaimon, though important at Corinth and the Isthmus, certainly was not. And if Bonnet is correct that there is no similarity in terms of cult or mythology between Melqart and Palaimon, what would be left for Phoenicians to find resonant of Melqart in Palaimon since Palaimon is not even the head of the Corinthian pantheon? Furthermore, why would the Corinthians have adopted the Phoenicians' handle for Palaimon, especially if the two gods share no similarities? Bonnet's proposal also ignores Melicertes-Palaimon's mythology: the god's name is *originally Melicertes not Palaimon* and only gains the name Palaimon *later*. Granted, myths do not always preserve *wie es eigentlich gewesen war*, but this is not *carte blanche* to simply ignore them – a reason has to be given why the native story is not to be trusted. Moreover, Melicertes is a more likely original proper name than Palaimon since Palaimon is probably an epithet that means "the wrestler"¹⁷ whereas the etymology of Melicertes is less clear. I will also argue later (based on

¹⁶ Bonnet (1986), 62.

¹⁷ The name Palaimon, however, is also quite similar to the name of the Phoenician hypostasis of Melqart: Baal Hamon. Possible confirmation for this idea could be found in Melicertes' brother's name Learchus, "leader of the people," which is one of the suggested meanings for Baal Hamon's name. Learchus then would serve essentially as a doublet of Melicertes. See Astrour (1967), 210.

Book 5 of the *Odyssey*) that the Melicertes-Palaimon correlation goes back as far as our oldest literary evidence and is possibly original.

Bonnet's second proposal (and the one she clearly prefers) is that Melicertes has a purely Greek etymology, resurrecting the old argument that his name is made up of μέλι ("honey") and either κείρω ("to cut") or (her own new contribution) κεράννυμι ("to mix").¹⁸ Michael Astour already pointed out the absurdity of this argument in the 1960s,¹⁹ but I would like to buttress what he had to say. As he points out, honey and cutting have nothing to do with the mythology or cult of Melicertes,²⁰ and the "honey-cutter" is a purely modern folk-etymology of the name, proposed by those who do not want to admit that Melicertes has any relation with the Phoenicians. Furthermore, I would add that κέρτης is not an attested word in Greek, so we should be skeptical of accepting such a facile etymology of Melicertes' name. Bonnet's attempt to relate Μελικέρτης to the μελίκρατον, a mixture of milk and honey used in some sacrifices is also tenuous. Again, what does Melicertes' mythology or cult have to do with mixing milk and honey for sacrifices? Moreover, the -της ending indicates the doer of an action, therefore Melicertes would be the "honey-mixer," i.e. the sacrificer. However, in his mythology, *he* is the one killed and presumably the one who is therefore sacrificed. In other words, the supposed etymologies of his name make him the active subject, but his mythology indicates that he is the passive object.

While these two etymologies are, strictly speaking, possible, it is difficult to see what they have to do with Melicertes. It is important to note that no ancient author ever endorses such an etymology (even given the ancients' propensity to etymologize gods' names and play on

¹⁸ Bonnet (1986), 63.

¹⁹ Astour (1967), 209.

²⁰ One should also ask: what does cutting honey even mean?

apparent similarities between words), and it is purely modern speculation. In fact, the continuing insistence on the derivation of Melicertes' name from "honey-cutter" or "honey-mixer" shows more in common with folk-etymological processes than the methodologies of scientific historical linguistics,²¹ careful to consider the historical circumstances of the evolution of a word before leaping to conclusions based on surface similarities. The mythology, the cult, and the ancients' own testimony contain no reference whatsoever to mixing or cutting honey, so without any other convincing arguments, we should be skeptical of accepting this etymology for Melicertes, and we should finally lay this argument to rest.

Now that I have examined the supposedly conclusive arguments for a strict separation of Melicertes and Melqart, I would like to lay out briefly my understanding of the evolution of Melicertes' and Melqart's synonymy and Melqart's and Heracles' syncretism. In my view, the god Melicertes originally derived from Melqart while Greek and Phoenicians were living in close proximity to one another during the Late Dark Ages or Early Archaic Period, and his cult and mythology were adapted into Greek mythology and transformed by Greek understandings of Melqart's domains and functions.²² Aside from their names, Melicertes and Melqart are most similar in the following areas. The two gods are guardians of ships and sailors.²³ Both gods die and rise again, and this resurrection is celebrated in cult.²⁴ Even more specifically, Melqart's death and resurrection is connected with the return of the vegetation in the spring and the

²¹ Cf. the preferred spelling of *hiccup* as *hiccough* on a false assumption that the second element of the word derives from the word *cough* or the German reinterpretation of the Native American word *hammock* as *Hängematte* ("hanging-matt").

²² Cf. Astour (1967), 209-19. For the importance for understanding Greek mythology of Greeks and Phoenicians living cheek by jowl, see López-Ruiz (2010), 43-4. For the adaptation of Near Eastern traditions into Greek modes of thought, see López-Ruiz (2014), 160 and 187-8.

²³ Melicertes: among other places, Eur. *Iph. Taur.* 270-1; Virg. *Geo.* 1.436-7. Melqart: Melqart is frequently depicted with anchors. See Bonnet (1988), 75, 79, 107, and many other passing references *passim*.

²⁴ Melicertes: Pausanias: 1.44.7-8, 2.1.3-4; Apollodorus 3.4.3; Ovid, *Fasti* 6.473-550, *Met.* 4.464-542, see Gebhard (2005) on the antiquity of the rites celebrated in Melicertes' honor at the Isthmus. Melqart: Lipiński (1970) and Mettinger (2001) 83-111.

continuing prosperity of the city of Tyre. Similarly, Melicertes' resurrection is associated with fertility. Ino ruins the grain before killing herself and her son,²⁵ and the whole tale clearly falls within the paradigm of Greek scapegoat rituals, which were used to ensure the prosperity of a city.²⁶ While Melqart seems to have been engulfed in flames during his death and resurrection, Melicertes instead was boiled alive in a cauldron or simply drowned when Ino jumped off the cliff into the sea. The drowning aspect may again be seen as related to the Baal Cycle in which Baal fights Yammu, the sea god, before being defeated by Motu, death. Melqart's death and resurrection has been reinterpreted and fit into a common Greek mythological schema associated with transformations in bodily states: the boiling cauldron.²⁷

Furthermore, Melicertes and Melqart both were patrons of games held in their honor, the Isthmian and Tyrian respectively. Though the celery wreath is the more famous prize received at the Isthmian Games, we know that a palm branch was also awarded to the victor, and the victors at the Tyrian Games also received a palm branch.²⁸ This will be an important point later on in my argument. The Isthmian Games also were not founded until 560 BC, but I will argue later that the connection between Melicertes (and Melqart for that matter) and athletics went back further.

Though Bonnet has assumed that the Tyrian Games were simply a result of the Hellenization of Melqart and the syncretism with Heracles and were instituted by Alexander the

²⁵ Astour (1967), 207-8 has already connected this idea to the Baal Cycle and thereby to Melqart.

²⁶ For the Ino-Melicertes story, see Beaulieu (2016), 162. For the connection generally between scapegoat rituals in Greece and fertility/prosperity, see Bremmer (1983), especially 318-20.

²⁷ Medea brings Aeson back to life (chopped up body parts boiled in a cauldron), which results in the trick to kill Pelias (his daughters boil him in a cauldron). Procne serves the boiled Itys to Pandion which results in them all being turned into birds. Atreus boils Thyestes' children and serves them to him, resulting in the transition in the line of kingship. Examples could be multiplied.

²⁸ Isthmian Games: Bowie (1998), 5. Melqart: Bonnet (1988, 57).

Great after his conquest of Tyre,²⁹ a closer examination of the sources will reveal that this assumption is not necessarily the most logical conclusion to be made from the sources. Arrian tells us after Alexander captured Tyre that

Ἀλέξανδρος δὲ τῷ Ἡρακλεῖ ἔθυσέ τε καὶ πομπὴν ἔστειλε ξὺν τῇ δυνάμει ὀπλισμένη: καὶ αἱ νῆες
ξυνεπόμπευσαν τῷ Ἡρακλεῖ, καὶ ἀγῶνα γυμνικὸν ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ καὶ λαμπάδα ἐποίησε

Alexander sacrificed and held a procession with his army decked out to Heracles. The ships also accompanied the procession to Heracles and he held an athletic contest in the temple and a torch-race. (*An.* 2.24.6)

Bonnet interprets the scene as Alexander instituting the Tyrian Games and imposing a typically Greek institution associated with Heracles on the Phoenician Melqart (though aided by their prior assimilation). Arrian, however, does not say this at all. He only says that Alexander held games in the god's honor. If we stop to think about the implications of Bonnet's argument, it makes little sense. If Alexander actually had started games in Melqart's honor, why does Arrian say nothing about such an event? Surely founding games would redound to Alexander's glory. Moreover, the idea that Alexander would be imposing foreign aspects of Greek culture on conquered peoples at this point does not make much sense. Alexander's position was still precarious with the Persian Empire still fully operational and a Persian on the throne. Why would Alexander antagonize the conquered populations at this point by rubbing the new Greek hegemony in their faces? Such a reaction would surely have led to discontent and insurrection as soon as he left a region. Moreover, why would the Tyrians have continued to celebrate games

²⁹ Bonnet (1988), 57. There is also a troubling tendency to see athletic contests (especially with cultic or festival components) as an inherently Greek trait (and presumably, therefore, "Western") alien to Near Eastern peoples, which I assume lies behind scholars' (especially Classicists') continuing assumption that when Near Eastern societies adopted games, it was a Greek imposition. However, athletics were an important facet of elite ideologies in the Near East going at least as far back as the Ur-III Period. See Fink/Rollinger (2015).

that were instituted *celebrating the defeat of their own city* at the hands of a foreign king? It is difficult to imagine that such a ritual would have gained much popular traction at Tyre.

Similarly, the reference to the games in II Maccabees does not reveal any indication that Alexander founded the games:

ἀγομένου δὲ πενταετηρικοῦ ἀγῶνος ἐν Τύρῳ καὶ τοῦ βασιλέως παρόντος ἀπέστειλεν Ἰάσων ὁ μιὰρὸς θεωρὸς ὡς ἀπὸ Ἱεροσολύμων Ἀντιοχεῖς ὄντας παρακομίζοντας ἀργυρίου δραχμὰς τριακοσίας εἰς τὴν τοῦ Ἡρακλέους θυσίαν

When the quadrennial games were being held in Tyre and the king was present Jason the unclean one sent ambassadors, since they were Antiochenes from Jerusalem, to carry three hundred drachmas of silver for the sacrifice to Heracles. (II Macc. 4.18-9)

Again there is no mention of Alexander instituting games, and even though immediately before this passage the author was complaining about Judeans Hellenizing and initiating and participating in games, the author does not claim that the Tyrian Games were a Greek innovation. If they were, surely the author would have made sure to emphasize this fact given the context of the passage. The author seems to only direct his wrath at Jason for taking part in the Tyrians' games and sending money for the sacrifice to Melqart.

It is of course still possible that the Tyrian Games may have been influenced by Greek cultural practices, but I do not see any evidence from the scanty sources available that Alexander imposed a Greek custom on the Tyrians. I find it more likely that athletics (or something similar) already fell into Melqart's sphere and so, if the Tyrian Games were not a purely "native" Tyrian custom, then they were something that represented a blending of similar cultural elements.

Lastly, we should consider Melicertes' provenance and ancestry. Melicertes and his family are from Thebes, the epicenter of Phoenician interactions on mainland Greece.³⁰ Moreover, his grandfather is Cadmus, who is explicitly Tyrian in Greek mythological traditions (Her. 2.49.3). This point suggests two possible lines of interpretation. The first is that Melicertes originally entered Greek mythological traditions from contact with Phoenicians at Thebes and it is only a historical accident that the most important cult dedicated to him was at Corinth and the Isthmus.³¹ The second is that Melicertes entered Greek mythology through some other route, still via contact with the Phoenicians. Melicertes later on then was grafted into Cadmus' genealogy because of the Greeks' awareness of the association between Thebes and Tyre.

To sum up, Melqart and Melicertes, aside from the similarity of their names, exhibit a wide degree of common features. Granted, the surface features of their cults and mythology are fairly different: Melqart is an adult whereas Melicertes is a child; Melqart dies engulfed in flames whereas Melicertes dies either through boiling or drowning after jumping off a cliff; Melqart seems to walk through the flames whereas Melicertes is rescued by a dolphin. However, the deeper functions and domains of the two gods are identical: both gods' annual death and resurrection ensure prosperity; both look after sailors and navigation; both are patrons of athletics; both are connected with Tyre. The surface phenomena of the individual gods' mythological circumstances are easily malleable and most prone to being rearranged when transferred across cultures. The differences between how Melqart and Melicertes die and return

³⁰ West (1997), 448-50.

³¹ Note also that Bonnet completely ignores this aspect of Melicertes' background. She considers Corinth the only important Greek locale for analysing Melicertes' cult and mythology despite the importance of Thebes in all myths about Melicertes and Ino. We know also that Melicertes and Ino were even in the Archaic Period associated with Thebes since Homer says that Ino is the "daughter of Cadmus" (*Od.* 5.333).

to life can be explained by the fact that this idea was transferred into a mythological schema, already familiar to the Greeks, of children being boiled alive and returning as birds or gods. The appearance of the dolphin can easily be explained away since the Cadmeids are hopelessly entwined with Dionysus' mythology, and dolphins are an important symbol in Dionysiac contexts of changes in state.³² Therefore the expectation that the two gods should correspond to one another in all particulars is misguided.

However, because the surface characteristics of the two gods were so different, I would argue that the Greeks had trouble maintaining the connection between Melicertes and Melqart. Eventually, the Greeks forgot that Melicertes and Melqart were the same god, and the loss of their identification perhaps allowed for the syncretism of Melqart and Heracles (if it had not already occurred).

For the final portion of this paper, I will turn to Books 5-8 of the *Odyssey*. Heretofore, the importance of this set of books to an understanding of the early relationship between Melicertes and Melqart has not been recognized. There is a good reason for this state of affairs: the episode is highly elliptical and does not mention Melicertes by name. Moreover, the passage has been approached by philologists and mythology specialists in entirely different ways, and the proponents of the two methodologies do not seem to read each other's work. Because mythologists tend only to read this passage in isolation without considering the wider context (and usually only to mention that Ino is attested early in Greek epic), they are unaware of the broader thematic issues surrounding Ino's appearance in the *Odyssey*. Philologists are seemingly unaware of the question of the origin of the Melicertes-Ino mytheme. By looking at the wider

³² Beaulieu (2016), *passim*, but especially 119-44 and 167-87.

context of the Phaeacian episode, I will show that the poet of the *Odyssey* was well aware of Melicertes³³ and that even this early he was associated with the Phoenicians, strongly suggesting that Melicertes' origins lie in the Phoenician god Melqart.

Ino-Leucothea appears at a critical point in the narration of Book 5 (333ff.). While Odysseus is leaving Calypso's island Ogygia on a raft, he is beset by a storm sent by Poseidon. Close to losing his life, Ino comes to him and provides him with a veil to tie around himself and instructions on how to survive the storm. Up until now, scholars have only mentioned in passing that Ino is a goddess who protects shipwrecked sailors and have not delved any deeper into the mythological reverberations of her appearance.³⁴

We might first consider why Ino is the goddess that condescends to rescue Odysseus. Of course, part of the answer lies in the fact just mentioned above that she is the protectress of sailors, but we can identify more reasons if we look at the situation more closely and juxtapose Ino's own mythological background with the circumstance in which Odysseus finds himself. The first thing that springs to mind is that Ino's and Odysseus' situations are remarkably similar. Ino was forced to dive into the ocean and die because Hera was angry with her, and likewise because of his grudge against Odysseus, Poseidon drives the storm against Odysseus while Odysseus is sailing away from Ogygia (5.282ff.). That is to say, both mortals are forced into terrible circumstances by an angry god's wrath. We could conjecture then that not only does Ino fulfill her role as protectress of sailors, but that she feels sympathy for Odysseus' predicament that is so like her own and so intervenes to save him.

³³ For the importance of importing mythological narratives known from elsewhere to understand allusive Homeric mythological references, see Slatkin (2011).

³⁴ Cf. Heubeck/West/Hainsworth (1988), 282.

Ino in fact tells Odysseus to jump off the raft into the ocean, just as she herself had done, but she provides the veil so that he survives his leap unlike herself. We also know that the poet is aware of this story since he says of her:

...καλλίσφυρος Ἴνώ
Λευκοθέη, ἣ πρὶν μὲν ἔην βροτὸς ἀυδήεσσα,
νῦν δ' ἄλως ἐν πελάγεσσι θεῶν ἔξ ἔμμορε τιμῆς

Ino Leucothea of the beautiful ankles, who used to speak as a mortal, but now has taken a portion of the honor of the gods of the sea (5.333-5)

Ino therefore has recreated her very own situation for Odysseus without any of the attendant death or grief that she had to experience.

That Ino feels some sort of sympathy for Odysseus' woes because of similar experiences is an idea that can be pushed even further. Odysseus could be seen as a surrogate for the child that Ino lost at sea: Melicertes. Ino then would be mournfully tending a stand-in for Melicertes. Interestingly, scholars have perhaps inadvertently and unknowingly confirmed that a great deal of Melicertes imagery pervades the entire Phaeacian episode. Scholars have stressed that Odysseus' passage from Ogygia to Scheria is depicted as Odysseus' rebirth from a metaphorical death on Ogygia.³⁵ Odysseus' journey then corresponds well with Melicertes', who literally died before crossing the sea and was reborn in a new land. Therefore, Ino in Book 5 of the *Odyssey* presides over a metaphorical death and rebirth that mimics precisely that of her own son, Melicertes.

³⁵ Generally: Whitman (1958), 298-9; Segal (1994), 19, 38, 46. For the waves as labor pains and the veil as umbilical cord, see Holtsmark (1966). For Odysseus' appearance at Arete's feet as ritual rebirth, see Newton (1984). For the veil as an important magical symbol of transition between states, see Kardulias (2001).

However, the Phaeacian episode's resemblance to the Ino-Melicertes mytheme does not end with the hero's death and rebirth. After Odysseus has been introduced into Phaeacian society, the Phaeacians honor him with athletic contests (8.97ff.). Odysseus' experiences in this episode again mimic Melicertes': Melicertes' death is recompensed with the Isthmian Games and here in Book 8 Odysseus receives games in his honor after his metaphorical death and rebirth. Furthermore, as will be recalled from above, a palm branch was the prize given at the Isthmian Games and at the Tyrian Games held in Melqart's honor. Here in the Phaeacian episode, the prize that Odysseus ought to have received for his excellence, Nausicaa,³⁶ he explicitly compares to "the young branch of the palm-tree (φοίνικος νέον ἔρνος) that [he] once saw near the altar of Apollo at Delos (6.162-3)."³⁷ Therefore, not only is Odysseus honored with games like Melicertes (and Melqart), but the prize for those games is the same.

In turn, Nausicaa and the φοίνιξ have interesting implications of their own that will allow us to trace the passage back to Melqart. The exact context of Odysseus' comparison of Nausicaa with the palm branch is a type-scene (foreigner meets maiden by well, expectation of marriage) that, as Bruce Loudon has argued, is found several times in the Old Testament.³⁸ Presumably, the Greeks would not have adopted/adapted this type-scene from the Hebrews, but rather shared it with the Phoenicians, their commercial companions and adversaries.³⁹ It is striking then that Nausicaa would be compared with a φοίνιξ, Greek for "palm-tree" but also "Phoenician," in the midst of a type-scene that would likely be derived from the Phoenicians. Heliodorus of Emesa was one author at least who played with the various other meanings of the word Phoenician,⁴⁰

³⁶ Segal (1994) 23, 30.

³⁷ Delian Apollo's cult also has important rebirth/renewal aspects to it (Bremmer (1983), 319), perhaps reinforcing the importance of the rebirth imagery.

³⁸ Loudon (2011), 136-45.

³⁹ Cf. López-Ruiz (2010), 43-44.

⁴⁰ Bowie (1998), *passim* but especially 5.

and it seems unlikely that the Greeks in general would not have seen the connection between the two senses of the word.⁴¹

Furthermore, Carol Dougherty has argued that the entire Phaeacians' episode is meant to evoke and play off Greeks' stereotypes about the Phoenicians.⁴² In fact, later in Book 13 when Odysseus has just returned to Ithaca and Athena has approached him in disguise, Odysseus lies to her and tells her that the *Phoenicians* saved him and brought him to Ithaca rather than the *Phaeacians* (13.271-5). That the Phaeacians seem to be sort of anti-Phoenicians forces the audience to think of them as Phoenicians. Combined with the Levantine type-scene and the comparison of Nausicaa to the φοίνιξ, the entire Phaeacian episode is steeped in imagery of the Phoenicians.

When we consider, then, that Odysseus functions as a surrogate for Melicertes in the context of this episode, the implications for Melicertes' origins are important. Although the majority of our mythological evidence for Melicertes comes from a later period, when the Greeks clearly did not consider Melicertes and Melqart identical, I have shown by analysing the Phaeacian episode in the *Odyssey* that already in the earliest parts of the Archaic Period the same mythological story and functions were already attributed to Melicertes and Ino. Furthermore, we can conjecture based on the attestation of Ino's double names and her resurrection as a goddess in this Homeric passage that Melicertes was also already Melicertes-Palaemon and a dying-and-rising god. These same attributes (dying and rising, protection of sailors, and patronage of sports) were also important facets of Melqart's cult. And since the Phoenicians loom so large in the background of the Phaeacian episode, it increases the likelihood that the Greeks in the time

⁴¹ Cf. Dougherty (2001), 112.

⁴² Dougherty (2001), 102-21.

of Homer knew that Melicertes' origins lay among the Phoenicians. Therefore, Melicertes' cult and mythology, though only fully attested quite late, seem to have remained mostly consistent from the Archaic down to the Roman Period. Arguments that Melicertes' cult and mythology are late and only coincidentally similar to Melqart's need to be reconsidered in light of this fact.

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