

## THE ETYMOLOGY OF νέκταρ: EXOTIC SCENTS IN EARLY GREECE

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### (a) *Considerations of Method*

A. J. Van Windekens has recently resumed the morphological analysis of the intriguing Homeric word in an article « Grec νέκταρ 'suffisance, satisfaction,' » *Orbis*, XVIII (1969), 186-189. After a survey of his predecessors' notions, including one of his own which he now candidly rejects,<sup>1</sup> he argues that νεκ- has the sense of 'reaching (all the way)' as in ποδηνεκές 'foot-length, reaching down to the feet' (*Il.* 10.24, etc.) and in Germanic cognates, while -ταρ is the same suffix as in Hesychius' gloss θέλκταρ· θέλγητρον. Since this etymology has struck me as beyond proof but at the same time beyond refutation, I want to explore the difficulty of obtaining a conclusive etymology for such a word. Then I will explain my preference for a solution that is based upon the rendering of Maria Luisa Mayer and earlier Semitists — νέκταρ 'scented, fragrant'<sup>2</sup> — but departs from it appreciably.

That the etymology of νέκταρ is a crux, appears from the very fact of

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<sup>1</sup> It was published in *Revue belge de Philologie et d'Histoire*, XXI (1942), 146-148.

<sup>2</sup> « Gli prestiti semitici in greco », *Rendiconti dell'Istituto Lombardo*, Classe di Lettere, XCIV (1960), 331. First in F. L. Movers, *Die Phönizier*, vol. II, part 3, first half (Berlin, 1856), p. 104; for more detail, W. Muss-Arnolt, « On Semitic Words in Greek and Latin, » *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, XXIII (1892), 143, and Heinrich Lewy, *Die semitischen Fremdwörter im Griechischen* (Berlin, 1895), pp. 80-81, with bibliography of earlier scholarship. Though my predecessors are many, they have given only brief attention to the matter.

Hjalmar Frisk's verdict on νέκταρ, summarizing several Indo-European explanations but leaving the Semitic unmentioned, is « ohne sichere Etymologie »; *Griechisches etymologisches Wörterbuch* (Heidelberg, 1960-), II, 300. This was written before Van Windekens' recent publication.

so many linguists not coming out with something they can agree on. The obstacles to a clarification of it are many. The word refers, in the first place, to an imaginary rather than a real thing. It often figured in Greek poetry; an odd occurrence in prose of the « golden age » (Plato, *Phaedrus* 247e) is no less mythological than any poem. Nectar is ordinarily spoken of as the beverage of the gods (*Il.* 1.598, 4.3, *Od.* 5.93, *In Apollinem* 10, etc.), among whom it is served like wine among men. Although it is, on occasion, instilled into a hero's nose or chest by a goddess (*Il.* 19.38, 347, 353), such refreshment is a quite exceptional privilege. We are not to infer, from any of this, that nectar was a commodity to be found in some human households — not even in the richest ones; on the contrary the drinking of it was a custom of gods and distinguished them from all men.

Of course the idea of νέκταρ did not come to the early Greek poets out of nowhere, even if the thing did not exist in their actual experience and that of their nation. A postulate of linguistics, which we seldom have to make explicit, is that a valid etymology for such a word will show *what in real experience suggested the mythical thing to the minds of those who talked about it*. The turns that fancy may take are infinite; the etymologist will often fail to recapture the one that is truly appropriate to the prehistory of a certain word he is studying; he may, instead, excogitate an irrelevant figment.

That the food and drink of the gods are somehow unlike ours, is no harder to imagine than that they eat and drink altogether. Their food, in Homeric Greek, is called ἀμβροσίη (*Od.* 5.93, etc.), which can be construed either simply as a noun 'immortality' or less probably as an adjective 'belonging to immortals' with a feminine noun such as βρωσις understood (but never expressed!).<sup>3</sup> Anyhow the sense of 'undying' is plain; so scholars have gone on to look for an equivalent sense latent in νέκταρ. It can be extracted equally by two quite different strokes:

νε|κταρ 'un-dying' or 'un-killing'  
νεκ|ταρ 'death-surpassing'

One gloss of Hesychius κτέρες · νεκροί 'corpses' supports the first; another from the same lexicon νέκες · νεκροί supports the second. So one way or the other it is possible that the parts of the word νέκταρ virtually duplicate

<sup>3</sup> Of course it does appear often as an adjective with other nouns: νύξ... ἀμβροσίη 'night' (*Il.* 18.267-268, etc.); the masculine ἀμβρόσιος... ὕπνος 'sleep' (2.19), ἀμβρόσιος ἑανός 'robe' (21.507, etc.); the neuter πέδιλα / ἀμβρόσια 'sandals' (*Od.* 1.96-97, 5.44-45) and notably ἀμβρόσιον... εἶδαρ 'fodder' (for Aphrodite's horses and Poseidon's, *Il.* 5.369, 13.35; cf. τοῖσιν [for Hera's horses] δ' ἀμβροσίην Σιμβείης ἀνέτειλε νέμεσθαι, 5.777).

the meaning of ἀμβροστή, as one part signifies death and the other negates or cancels it. But what is clear in ἀ|μβρο|στή (from ἀμβροτος 'immortal, deathless,' following the ordinary morphology of the Greek language) is utterly isolated and anomalous in νε|κταρ or νέκ|ταρ; to that extent the analysis of Greek or Indo-European elements is weak.<sup>4</sup>

On the semantic side too these etymologies of νέκταρ as just a synonym of ἀμβροστή have the disadvantage of leaving out the flavor or aroma, or treating it as quite secondary and inferential. The gods' eating of ambrosia is a renewal of deathlessness, in uncomplicated mythical terms. Their drinking of nectar *ought* to signify something not identical, but whether more or less, at any rate somewhat different. While ambrosia and nectar are not contraries — ambrosia too being liquid rather than solid, as it can trickle into the nose or be rubbed on the skin to cleanse it (*Il.* 14.170) — the focus is still fairly distinct: upon the *preservative effect* of ambrosia, and upon the *unearthly smell* of nectar. The most surprising application is to *dead* heroes. Zeus has Apollo anoint Sarpedon with ambrosia (χοῖσόν τ' ἀμβροστή) and send him back to Lycia for burial (16.666-683). Thetis « instilled ambrosia and red nectar down Patroclus' nose, so that his skin should be steadfast » (19.38-39).

The two characteristics, preservative effect and unearthly smell, go together readily. By way of contrast, human food and drink are no protection against aging, death, and decay; nor is their odor and taste so superlative —

<sup>4</sup> Rüdiger Schmitt argues that the very absence of Greek reflexes of the Indo-European \**nek-* 'death' and \**terə<sub>2</sub>* 'overcome' points to an inheritance from the Indo-European common language; *Dichtung und Dichtersprache in indogermanischer Zeit* (Wiesbaden, 1967), p. 190. In this he follows Paul Thieme, *Studien zur indogermanischen Wortkunde und Religionsgeschichte*, Berichte über die Verhandlungen der sächsischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Leipzig, Philologisch-historische Klasse, vol. XCVIII (1950-51), no. 5 (Berlin, 1952), pp. 14-15. Both of them recognize, however, that there is no Sanskrit or other Indo-European cognate to νέκταρ, notwithstanding the numerous Sanskrit compounds of {-tūr} (nominative), {-tūram} (accusative), etc. These are masculine, whereas νέκταρ is unambiguously neuter. Not only the discrepancy in gender impresses me as a serious flaw in the comparison of -ταρ to {-tūr-}, but also the inanimate gender of a word supposed to mean 'death-surpassing' is in itself un-Indo-European (cf. the neuter noun *wif* in Old English, *Weib* in German, which has no connections outside of the Germanic group). Schmitt also mentions phonetic obstacles to the positing of a parallel between the Homeric Greek α and the Sanskrit {u}.

The νε|κταρ etymology is in Hermann Güntert, *Kalypso: Bedeutungsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen auf dem Gebiet der indogermanischen Sprachen* (Halle a.S., 1919), pp. 161-162; see Thieme, p. 5. With strange arrogance unworthy of a scholar, Güntert barely mentions the Semitic etymology only to dismiss it offhand: « Dass Nektar ein semitisches Lehnwort sei, was bei Gruppe Mythol. 397 gelehrt wird, bedarf keiner weiteren Widerlegung. » Yet this arbitrary rejection has been cited — in good faith — by Van Windekens, *Orbis*, XVIII, 187, as though it deserved to carry some weight.

good wine is just « honey-sweet. »<sup>5</sup> Only the superb wine which the priest Maron gave Odysseus is described appreciatively by Polyphemus the Cyclops:

ἀλλὰ τόδ' ἀμβροσίης καὶ νέκταρός ἐστιν ἀπορώξ

'but this is an efflux of ambrosia and nectar' (*Od.* 9.359). Odysseus in his narrative calls it θεῖον ποτόν 'a divine drink' (9.205, etc.) which the priest kept secret from his household, and whenever he poured one cup of it in with twenty measures of water,

ὄδμη δ' ἠδεῖα ἀπὸ κρητῆρος δδώδει,  
θεσπεσίη· τότ' ἂν οὐ τοι ἀποσχέσθαι φίλον ἦεν

'a sweet smell would come from the mixing bowl — marvelous; then you would not have liked to keep away' (9.210-211). Wine too luscious to be praised in terms of honey, that age-old, primeval delight!

#### (b) *The Proposed Semitic Etymology*

What substance or substances, if any, could have pleased the senses so extraordinarily? Could they also have had the property of preserving, immortalizing the human body, so that by inference they would sustain the anthropomorphic gods?

Exotic scents afford the most likely answer, and here the Semitic etymology νέκταρ is invaluable, as it implies a *Sitz im Leben*. The various spices imported to Greece from southern Arabia, Ethiopia, and the Far East, largely by way of Phoenicia or Syria, gave the poets a paragon of sensual delight surpassing anything in their inherited Indo-European vocabulary. While some, when added as condiments (in small amounts), enhanced the flavor of food and kept it from spoiling, I think that the drink νέκταρ, analyzed as a Semitic loan-word, refers not to wine seasoned in virtually the same manner as food<sup>6</sup> and credited with powers of healing (Dioscurides, e.g., 5.54-59 Wellmann) but rather to a *supernal beverage* (not necessarily wine) *scented with myrrh or other incense from the altar*.<sup>7</sup> The most apposite testimonium is from Festus (p. 144, Lindsay): « Murrina, genus potionis quae Graece dicitur νέκταρ. »<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> *Il.* 6.258, etc. The epithet is attached to picked grapes in 18.568, and to wheat in 10.569.

<sup>6</sup> As Pliny describes (*Hist. nat.* 14.107), *offis in mustum aut dulce uinum deiectis* 'by dropping bits into the must or sweet wine.'

<sup>7</sup> Such substances were used in Egypt for the most costly and effective mummification (Herodotus 2.86.3-5).

<sup>8</sup> The problem of *murrina* will be discussed in part (e).

νέκταρ fits exactly as a participle of the Semitic reflexive conjugation (called נפעל by Hebrew grammars). A reflexive participle נקטר {nqtr} of the triconsonantal root {qtr} 'fume, waft upwards as smoke or vapor'<sup>9</sup> would mean 'wafting itself upward, being wafted.' נקטר occurs in late Hebrew — e.g., Rashi's commentary on Genesis 22:13, expressing Abraham's prayer as he made a holocaust of a ram instead of his son: « May it be accepted that this be as though it were done to my son: as though my son were slaughtered, as though his blood were spattered, as though he were flayed, as though he were *beated to fragrance* [or *with incense?*] and made into ash »; similarly on Leviticus 24:7, « The frankincense was *burned* (נקטרת, participle with fem. ending) as they removed it [the shewbread] »; and the same participle, masculine or feminine, recurs in his remarks on Exodus 29:23, 30:34, Leviticus 5:12.

נקטר is not quotable from the Bible itself nor from the meager remains of Phoenician. If it were there — on the very « lip of Canaan » — that would virtually clinch the derivation of νέκταρ. But Hebrew, as known before the rabbinical period, used this root קטר in neither the simple conjugation (as Arabic does) nor the reflexive but in two others, which go under the labels « intensive » and « causative » and signify 'make fumes, send up fragrance.'<sup>10</sup> There are also passive formations from both the « intensive » and the « causative, » and their participles are recorded in the Bible:

מקטרה מל וכלונא 'fumigated, suffused with myrrh and frankincense' (Cant. 3:6, « intensive » passive participle, fem. in agreement with the noun ממתו 'his [Solomon's] litter');  
 מקטר מגש לשמי 'incense [is] being offered to my name' (Malachi

<sup>9</sup> In Arabic قتر {qtr} as also in Accadian, since Hebrew (like Ugaritic and Aramaic) makes the second consonant of the root « emphatic » to accord with the first.

<sup>10</sup> However, the fem. noun קטרה {qtóret} 'incense' is in form identical with an infinitive of a « stative » verb of the simple conjugation: מִזְבֵּחַ הַזָּהָב לְקִטְרָה 'the gold altar for fuming' or 'for incense' (Ex. 40:5). Cf. יָכֵלָה {yákel} 'being able' (Num. 14:16, Deut. 9:28), יָבֵשׁ {yóbšet} 'drying up' (Gen. 8:7). Furthermore the simple conjugation is clearly recorded in post-Biblical Hebrew: « Incense [the Biblical word קטרה] is a thing that fumes (שְׁקוֹטֵר) and rises » (קרייתות 6b in the Talmud; the active participle קוטר used as a present tense); « And her name was Keturah' [quoting Gen. 25:1, קֵטוּרָה, literally 'incense,' a passive participle; the woman that Abraham married after the death of Sarah], for she reeked of dutiful acts and good deeds » (the dictionary הערוך s.v. קטר; קטרה is the perfect tense with a suffix for 'she').

Elieser Ben-Iehuda, *Thesaurus totius Hebraicitatis*, s.v. קטר (VII, 5897), cites קטר from no other author besides Rashi. These passages have been unknown to scholars writing about νέκταρ and mistakenly believing that נקטר is just a theoretical form.

1:11, spoken by the Lord; «causative» passive participle {μυκτόρ} employed as a substantive).

Since the syntax of many other Hebrew verbs allows the reflexive as an alternative to the «intensive» passive or the «causative» passive, {μυκτόρ} seems equivalent to νέκταρ, which would be vocalized \* 𐤍𐤊𐤓𐤓 {niqtór} in Hebrew according to the best-known tradition of the language, the one contained in the Tiberias text of the Bible. νέκταρ matches perfectly another way of vocalizing Hebrew, fragmentarily recorded in the Greek-letter transcription of the II Column of Origen's Hexapla:

νεβαλ = 𐤍𐤊𐤓𐤓 {niḥól} 'frightened' (Ps. 30:8).<sup>11</sup>

The minor discrepancy between the Tiberias vowel sounds {i-ɔ} and ε-α appears somewhat correlated with accent, although in Origen's II Column the accent is just marked sporadically:

ουσέννα = 𐤍𐤊𐤓𐤓 {wcinnó<sup>h</sup>} 'and [your] buckler' (Ps. 35:2)<sup>12</sup> whereas a Hebrew word of similar structure is matched in Dioscurides (1.13.2) by the vocalization

κιντώ = 𐤍𐤊𐤓𐤓 {wqiddó<sup>h</sup>} 'and [a kind of] cassia' (Ex. 30:24). The recessive accent of νέκταρ could thus have come into Greek from the original Semitic source, along with the vowels [e-a].<sup>13</sup> The Greek phonological adaptation would then be minimal; and no suffix was needed to accommodate νέκταρ to a Greek declension. For the Semitic word ended in a consonant compatible with final position in Greek. -αρ furthermore admits the word into the category of neuter nouns, which goes acceptably with the meaning 'produced by' or 'product of perfuming.'<sup>14</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Einar Brønno, *Studien über hebräische Morphologie und Vokalismus, auf Grundlage der Mercatischen Fragmente der zweiten Kolumne der Hexapla des Origenes* (Abhandlungen für die Kunde des Morgenlandes, XXVIII; Leipzig, 1943), p. 107.

<sup>12</sup> Brønno, p. 423.

<sup>13</sup> The accentuation of reflexive verb-forms in the II Column, besides being very incomplete, is also inconsistent:

νέγρεσθι 'I have been cut off' (Ps. 31:23; Brønno, p. 424)  
 νεεμάναθ 'firm-standing' (fem. participle; Ps. 89:29; Brønno, p. 422)  
 οὐνάζερεθι 'and I am helped, and I get help' (Ps. 28:7; Brønno, pp. 103-104, 107, 422-423), but the verse is inadvertently repeated with different accentuation:  
 οὐναζέρεθι

The νέ- and -νά- accentuation disagrees offhand with that of the Tiberias text; yet the latter presents so many complexities, especially in the Psalms, as to indicate that the Greek accentual notation, erratic though it appears, may have been partly justified in each instance but unavoidably inadequate for Hebrew.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. my remarks on gender in note 4.

More pertinent than the Hesychian glosses νέκες and κτέρες are two others that contain all six letters of νέκταρ plus a suffix:

νεκτάρθη · ἐθυμώθη  
νεκταρουσιν · <sup>15</sup> ἐλαφρίζουσιν

νεκτάρθη must come from a poem; for otherwise the aorist passive indicative would need the augment ἐ-. The equation of νεκτάρθη with ἐθυμώθη calls for a sense 'his temper (spirit) was stirred'; however, we should not overlook the corporeal aspect of the latter verb, a denominative from θῦμός (cognate with the Latin *fūmus* 'smoke, vapor').<sup>16</sup> θῦμός, at the time when θυμίη and the verb θῦμιάω were formed from it,<sup>17</sup> must have been something discernible by its smell — presumably an exhalation that grew much stronger in moments of emotion and differed recognizably in each person. The meaning of νεκτάρθη 'he fumed' is at least roughly compatible with νεκταρουσιν · ἐλαφρίζουσιν 'they lighten (lift up)' or 'they become light.'<sup>18</sup>

The morphological characterization of νέκταρ as a Semitic participle used substantivally (like the Hebrew {מִקְטֹרֶת} makes it parallel to λιβανωτός 'frankincense' (Xenophanes 1.7, etc.). This helps to explain the odd morphology of λιβανωτός, a substantivized verbal adjective although no form exists of a verb \*λιβανόω 'make incense,' from λίβανος 'frankincense tree' or 'frankincense.'<sup>19</sup> λιβανωτός is accordingly a *manufactured product* from the natur-

<sup>15</sup> From Kurt Latte's ed. of Hesychius (Copenhagen, 1966) I am unable to determine which syllable is accented in the ms.; Latte unnecessarily emends to νεκταρουσιν (and still more unnecessarily ἐλαφρίζουσιν to κολάζουσιν, ἐθυμώθη to ἐζημιώθη!).

<sup>16</sup> See Frisk (above, note 2), I, 693-694.

<sup>17</sup> The noun θυμίη is rare; I find it only in ἤν δσφραίνηται ἡ ὑστέρη θυμίησι κακώδεσι (Aretaeus, Περὶ αἰτιῶν καὶ σημείων χρονίων παθῶν 2.11.11, p. 82.12-13 Hude-Zwicker, in *Corpus medicorum Graecorum*, vol. II<sup>2</sup> [Berlin, 1958]). The construction of δσφραίνηται is odd and probably due to corruption occasioned by a recurrence of the same word in the next line; but θυμίησι κακώδεσι 'with foul-smelling exhalations' is clear enough. The derived verb is common, with an aromatic substance for its object; e.g., λιβανωτοῦ τριηκόσια τάλαντα κατανήσας ἐπὶ τοῦ βωμοῦ ἐθυμίησε 'he heaped up and kindled three hundred talents of frankincense on the altar' (Herodotus 6.97.2; cf. 3.107.2, 8.99.1).

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Euripides fr. 530.8 Nauck, Callimachus *In Delum* 115, Moschus 2.130, etc. E. Benveniste, *Origines de la formation des noms en indo-européen*, 3d printing (Paris, 1962), p. 18, noted these verbal derivatives from νέκταρ. Albert Debrunner, « Zu den konsonantischen *jo-* Präsentiem im Griechischen, » *Indogermanische Forschungen*, XXII (1907), 202, broached the semantic problem of the verb \*νεκταίρω: to be derived from νέκταρ it would have to mean 'berauschen' or (in English) 'befog, befuddle.'

<sup>19</sup> Theophrastus, *Hist. pl.* 9.4.2; Pindar fr. 122.3 Schroeder = 109.3 Bowra, from Athenaeus 13.574a; Melanippides fr. 1.5, from Athenaeus 14.652f; etc. For a different treatment see Émilie Masson, *Recherches sur les plus anciens emprunts sémitiques en grec* (Études et commentaires, LXVII; Paris, 1967), p. 54.

ally fragrant λίβανος. The term νέκταρ lends itself also to the theory that it was divine precisely in being no natural substance but a *choice preparation*, served to the gods from the altar.

(c) Scents in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*

It is intriguing to reconcile this explanation of the Homeric word νέκταρ with Homer's silence about myrrh, frankincense, and — for that matter — the less exotic spices. They are mentioned neither as condiments for food nor as incense for the gods' altars;<sup>20</sup> the natural savor of the meat itself suffices. Only the cosmetic art of goddesses — not of mortal ladies! — makes use of certain fragrances. Hera in her own chamber, behind closed doors which she alone unlocked, « first with ambrosia cleansed all the dirt from her lovely skin, and anointed herself well with oil

ἀμβροσίῳ ἐδανῶ, τό ῥά οἱ τεθυωμένον ἦεν » (*Il.* 14.166-172).

Her oil was ambrosial (the meaning of the other adjective ἐδανῶ remains unclear), and she had got it scented.<sup>21</sup> Now τεθυωμένον is the perfect middle (or passive) participle of a verb formed from the neuter noun θύος 'fire-offering' or from θύον, a fragrant wood (*Od.* 5.60-61). The power of Hera's oil is further described (*Il.* 14.173-174): « As it was stirred in Zeus's bronze-floored house, a whiff (ἀϋτήμη) of it reached earth and heaven alike. » That, unmistakably, is a perfume.

Two passages, at least, indicate a custom of burning incense in the temples of goddesses, although no ingredients are specified. In a revealing episode Hector declines his mother's bidding to make a libation to Zeus and drink wine himself (his hands are gory), but instead tells her to gather the old women and go to Athene's temple σὺν θυέεσσιν (*Il.* 6.270) and lay her finest robe on the knees of Athene, promising to sacrifice twelve heifers if the goddess will ward off Diomedes from the city. As the women do not, of course, slaughter a beast at the time, we can deduce that σὺν θυέεσσιν refers

<sup>20</sup> This has been noted by many scholars; e.g., T. D. Seymour, *Life in the Homeric Age* (New York, 1907), pp. 215, 505.

<sup>21</sup> Similarly the oil with which Aphrodite rubbed Hector's corpse, to keep it from being torn, is described as ῥοδόεντι 'rose-laden, rose-scented' and ἀμβροσίῳ (*Il.* 23.185-186). Cf. *Od.* 8.364-365 on the Graces rubbing Aphrodite:

ἔνθα δέ μιν Χάριτες λούσαν καὶ χρίσαν ἔλαιῳ  
ἀμβρότῳ, οἷα θεοῦς ἐπενήνοθεν αἰὲν ἔόντας,

and 18.192-194 on Athene cleansing Penelope's face κάλλει.../ἀμβροσίῳ, οἷω περ ἑϋστέφανος Κυθήρεια / χρίεται.



to incense. But the sequel, while it tells all about the robe and the prayer to Athene, somehow omits the fetching and kindling of the incense; so the narrative comes out a little flat and dissatisfying. In the *Odyssey* Aphrodite arrives at Paphos in Cyprus, ἔνθα τέ οἱ τέμενος βωμός τε θυήεις 'where she has a precinct and a fuming altar' (8.363). Considering this goddess, the place, and the beauty treatment that she immediately received, we naturally understand from θυήεις the odor of incense rather than animal grease.

However, the same words in reference to Zeus on Mt. Ida (*Il.* 8.48) would just as well refer to the burning of fat on his altar.<sup>22</sup> And the βωμός . . . θυήεις of the river-god Spercheios (23.148) is the site for a sacrifice of fifty sheep. How the sacrifices nourish the gods remains vague, as Homer seems hesitant about the connection between what the worshippers send up and what the gods consume:

οὐ γὰρ σῖτον ἔδουσ', οὐ πίνουσ' αἶθοπα οἶνον

'for they [the gods] eat no bread [cereal food], they do not drink sparkling wine' (5.341). They do dine on meat with the mythical people that they visit, the Ethiopians and the Phaeacians (*Il.* 1.423-424, 23.206-207, *Od.* 1.22-25, 7.201-203); but among the really known nations they at most approach the κνίση, the aroma of fat (*Il.* 1.66-67). As Zeus declares, in appreciation of the piety of the Trojans,

οὐ γὰρ μοι ποτε βωμός ἐδέυετο δαιτὸς ἔϊσης,  
λοιβῆς τε κνίσης τε· τὸ γὰρ λάχομεν γέρας ἡμεῖς

'for never did my altar lack a fair feast, both libation and fat-savor; that is the honor allotted to us' (4.48-49 = 24.69-70).

The communicable essence that reaches upward to the gods would thus have to be vaporous. My theory is that in their own halls the nectar they drink is constituted of the bouquet from the libation or from the heating of spices (not, of course, from fat, however delicious). Libation and incense are not absolutely distinct from each other; for not only were they part of the same act of worship (cf. Jeremiah 44:17-25), but also — according to Theophrastus — to improve myrrh for incense, it was steeped in grape syrup (πρὸς τὴν ἀναθυμίασιν βρεχθεῖσα ἐν τῷ γλυκεῖ, *De odoribus* 44; likewise *De causis plantarum* 6.17.2: ἡ σμύρνα δοκεῖ <κρεῖττον> τ(ῆς) ἀμίκτ(ου) θυμιασθαι καταβραχεῖσα μελικράτῳ ἢ γλυκεῖ· μαλακωτέρα γὰρ ἢ ὁσμὴ κεραυνυμένη καὶ γλυκυτέρα γίνεταί 'myrrh is thought to give better incense when

<sup>22</sup> So the « fragrant cloud » (θυόεν νέφος, 9.153) that crowned him round about, as he sat on the mountain-peak, could have either sort of smell — not to mention that of θύον wood.

it has been steeped in honey-milk or grape syrup than the unmixed does; for the smell becomes milder and sweeter when blended'). Wine had a similar effect: ποιεῖ δὲ καὶ ἡ τοῦ οἴνου κατάμιξις καὶ μύρα ἕνια καὶ θυμιάματα εὐοσμότερα, καθάπερ τὴν σμύρναν 'The admixture of wine also makes some perfumes and kinds of incense more fragrant, such as myrrh' (*De odoribus* 67).

Ambrosia (according to *Od.* 12.63) is carried by doves to Father Zeus (cf. the poetess Moero in Athenaeus 11.491b). The lower aspect of the picture may be of them scavenging around the altar, as many birds naturally do, so that pigeon's milk, regurgitated from the crop, would furnish the image of ambrosia.<sup>23</sup> ὄρνιθων γάλα in Aristophanes (*Ves.* 508; cf. *Aues* 1673) is proverbially the paragon of all dainties;<sup>24</sup> whether or not anyone ever tasted it, they talked as though it were delicious. A comparable source on earth for the image of nectar is the aim of our investigation.

Wine, with no spice added, could conceivably give off a fragrance fit for gods, when poured upon a hot altar (*Il.* 1.462-463, 11.775, *Od.* 3.459-460). But the interpretation of νέκταρ as something *fragrant* depends on commerce with the Semites (who had the root {qTr}), and therefore points to spices that they trafficked in. Besides the evidence already cited of goddesses receiving such choice scents (although these are not called νέκταρ), there are also the garments worn by Helen and Achilles and described as νεκτάρεος, which must convey the meaning 'scented' or 'sprinkled with nectar.'<sup>25</sup> Since garments were dipped in oil (*Od.* 7.107, *Il.* 18.596), the scent was probably applied that way. What we miss in Homer's narrative and scene-painting, and therefore in his vocabulary, is the scent-giving substance itself, being handled by men or women. He speaks of it only when it is in a state intangible (or no longer tangible) for human beings. When served to the gods, he calls it νέκταρ; a lady's robe or a hero's tunic is νεκτάρεος. But for scents *as a*

<sup>23</sup> It could thereby provide a mythical basis for the scruple which protected birds in a sacred precinct (cf. Euripides, *Ion* 179-181; Herodotus 1.159.3). See also Jack Lindsay, *The Clashing Rocks* (London, 1965), pp. 8, 96 et passim.

<sup>24</sup> The same phrase, with the same implication, in other comedies: Mnesimarchus fr. 9 (*Philippus*), from Athenaeus 9.387a; Menander fr. 936 Edmonds, from Strabo 14.1.14 = C637.

<sup>25</sup> *Il.* 3.385, 18.25. Schmitt (above, note 4), pp. 187, 191, hesitantly translates the adjective 'nektarfarben.' The color of nectar is ἐρυθρόν in *Il.* 19.38, *Od.* 5.93, just as wine is red (*Od.* 5.165, etc.). Yet the « essence » of nectar, or that superb quality of it which could be transferred to cloth, would be perceptible to the nose rather than the eye. In Pindar, *Isth.* 6[5].37, the hero Telamon bids Heracles νεκταρέαις σπονδαῖσιν ἄρξαι 'to open with nectary libations' and hands him a wine bowl (οἰνοδόκον φιάλαν); so the adjective ought to describe the fragrance of the liquid.

ἄμβρόσιος describes the garments of the goddesses Leto (*Il.* 21.507), Aphrodite (5.338), and Hera (14.178).

*commodity* he has no word, neither a general one<sup>26</sup> nor a set of specific terms — σμύρνα (= μύρρα), λίβανος (or λιβανωτός), etc.

I attribute the gap rather to the sensibility of this kind of poet than to the utter inexperience of the whole Greek nation in his time. Particular aromatic substances were, beyond question, known to some of the population; archaeological discoveries prove that. The most conclusive is a little stirrup-jar found at Mycenae, with a clay stopper; « when it was removed there was a sweet fragrance from within, a perfume 3,500 years old, which vanished in a moment. »<sup>27</sup> The OLEVUM or OIL ideogram of the Linear B tablets is ligatured many times with one or another syllabic character that has been interpreted as an abbreviation of a term for a scent mixed into the oil.<sup>28</sup> While I have reservations about the attempts to identify the additives,<sup>29</sup> it is fair to presume that qualifiers of the OIL ideogram — some if not all of them — should refer to perfumes, domestic or imported.

Another tablet from Pylos (Un 267), transcribed

o-do-ke	a-ko-so-ta			
tu-we-ta	a-re-pa-zo-o			
tu-we-a	a-re-pa-te	[[ze-so-me]]		
ze-so-me-no	[[ko]]			
ko-ri-a <sub>2</sub> -da-no		AROMA	6	
ku-pa-ro <sub>2</sub>		AROMA	6	157 16
KAPO 2	τ 5	VINVM	20	ME 2
145 2		VINVM (?)	2	

seems to record quantities of wine and spices, among other things, in its last four lines. The first four lines are rendered thus by Ventris and Chadwick:<sup>30</sup> « Thus *A(r)xotas* gave spices to Thuestas the unguent-boiler, for unguent which is to be boiled . . . » If their translation is substantially

<sup>26</sup> μύρον is attested by the poets of the next age: Archilochus fr. 28 Diehl, from Athenaeus 10.447b; Alcaeus fr. 362 (Z 39) Lobel & Page, from Athenaeus 15.687d; Sappho fr. 94.18 Lobel & Page. As Athenaeus remarks (15.688c-d), ὁ δὲ Ὅμηρος τὴν μὲν χρῆσιν οἶδε τῶν μύρων, ἔλαιον δ' αὐτὰ καλεῖ μετ' ἐπιθέτου 'Homer knows the use of perfumes but calls them oil with an adjective'; Athenaeus goes on to cite *Il.* 23.186 and 14.170-174.

<sup>27</sup> Frederik Poulsen, *Delphi*, tr. G. C. Richards (London [1920]), p. 62. I wish Poulsen had documented this, so that the delightful incident could be traced back to the original witnesses.

<sup>28</sup> Emmett L. Bennett, Jr., *The Olive Oil Tablets of Pylos*, suppl. 2 to *Minos* (Salamanca, 1958), pp. 15-24.

<sup>29</sup> See my book, *The Linear B Decipherment Controversy Re-examined* (State University of New York, 1964), pp. 185-187.

<sup>30</sup> *Documents in Mycenaean Greek* (Cambridge, 1959), p. 224.

correct (which I doubt), the product is to be an ointment rather than a beverage.<sup>31</sup>

(d) *The Human Beverage νέκταρ in Later Greek Sources*

After the Homeric age, flavored wines — and perfumes too — were well known to the Greeks;<sup>32</sup> one (if not more) of the former was actually called νέκταρ, according to several writers. While the connotation in Homer is scarcely that nectar is a luxurious kind of wine which some rich people enjoy, Athenaeus nevertheless reports (1.32b): Χαιρέας δὲ ἐν Βαβυλῶνι οἶνον φησι γίνεσθαι τὸν καλούμενον νέκταρ 'Chaereas says that the wine called nectar is made in Babylon.' Thus the source of a certain real product, going under the name of nectar, lay in Semitic territory. The date of the obscure author Chaereas is unknown;<sup>33</sup> still less can we determine how long before him that Babylonian wine was already manufactured and liable to be called νέκταρ by a Greek. But at the very most, if the drink itself or some rumor of it was accessible to our early epic poet, who does not mention Babylon and may never have heard of the place, nectar to him was something utterly *fabulous*, no article of normal trade. The remoteness of it from the poet's actual milieu, so that he cannot imagine his heroes ever sipping it — not even when Odysseus is at table with the goddess Calypso and her maids serve it to her (*Od.* 5.195-200) — such remoteness is essential to the function of nectar to adorn the gods' diet (or way of life) in their own abode, a part of the world created poetically. Had it been a concoction whose recipe was common knowledge, nectar would have seemed unworthy of Olympus.

Yet another of Athenaeus' authorities, Ariston of Ceos (3d century B.C.), speaks of nectar in a less distant place than Babylon: καλῶς οὖν Ἀρίστων ὁ Κ(ε)ῖός φησιν ἡδιστον ποτὸν εἶναι τὸν ἅμα μὲν γλυκύτ(η)τ(ος), ἅμα δ' εὐ(ω)δίας κοινωνοῦντα. διὸ καὶ τὸ καλούμενον νέκταρ κατασκευάζειν τινὰς περὶ τὸν Λυδίας Ὀλυμπον οἶνον καὶ κηρία συγκιρνάντας εἰς ταῦτά καὶ τὰ

<sup>31</sup> On three tablets from Knosos (Fh 347, 371+5448, 5452) Anna Sacconi, «La mirra nella preparazione degli unguenti profumati a Cnosso,» *Athenaeum*, n.s. XLVII (Pavia, 1969), 286-289, interprets the single character 23 — transcribed MU — as an abbreviation for μύρρα. On two of them (the third is a minute fragment) the amount of MU is in proportion to the amount of OLEVM measured just before it on the same line, and is therefore presumed to be intended for mixing.

<sup>32</sup> John Pairman Brown, «The Mediterranean Vocabulary of the Vine,» *Vetus Testamentum*, IX (1969), 160-164; «Literary Contexts of the Common Hebrew-Greek Vocabulary,» *Journal of Semitic Studies*, XIII (1968), 169-173. I am much indebted to him for the line of research that I pursue here, although he has not treated νέκταρ as a Semitic word. William Sale has also helped me by reading a draft of this essay and suggesting numerous improvements.

τῶν ἀνθῶν εὐώδη 'Ariston of Ceos says rightly that the most pleasant drink is that wine which shares in sweetness and fragrance at the same time, and that is why some people around [Mt.] Olympus in Lydia prepare what is called nectar by mixing together wine and honeycomb and fair-scented flowers' (2.38f). If the people of that locality already had such a wine in Homer's time and its reputation had spread beyond the range of practical commerce, the poet's fancy could have seized upon it and attributed it to the gods. Geographically the citation from Ariston does not strengthen the etymology of νέκταρ as a word of Semitic provenance; but semantically it does, for it emphasizes the superlative aroma and taste.<sup>34</sup>

A third text, in the *Geoponica* (a medieval compilation of ancient material), gives four recipes for οἶνόμελι 'honey-wine' (8.25-26); one of them mentions both myrrh and nectar: σμύρνης γράμματα ζ' κασίας γράμματα ιβ' κόστου γράμματα β' νάρδου γράμματα δ' πεπέρεως γράμματα δ' μέλιτος Ἀττικοῦ ξέστ. ζ' οἴνου ξέστ. κδ' μίσγουσι καὶ ἀποτίθενται ἐν ἡλίῳ ὑπὸ τὴν τοῦ κυνὸς ἐπιτολὴν ἐπὶ ἡμέρας μ'. τοῦτο καλοῦσιν τινες νέκταρ 'They mix 6 scruples of myrrh, 12 scruples of cassia, 2 scruples of *kóstos*, 4 scruples of nard, 4 scruples of pepper, 6 pints of Attic honey, 24 pints of wine, and store in the sun at the rise of the dog-star for 40 days. Some call this nectar.' Myrrh is prominent as the first ingredient, along with the other seasoning. It is an interesting coincidence, or more than a coincidence, that this one kind of mead is called nectar, while the term is not applied to the other three kinds, made without myrrh or any imported spice. The attestation, though late, is more exact than those in Athenaeus because it comes from a person who has

<sup>33</sup> See M. Wellmann in Pauly-Wissowa s.v. Chaireas (8).

<sup>34</sup> The Lydian Olympus may be the one that Pliny speaks of (5.118), in the vicinity of Smyrna; see Salomon Reinach, «Deux inscriptions de l'Asie-Mineure,» *Revue des études grecques*, IV (1891), 272. Heinrich Kiepert, *Formae orbis antiqui*, no. IX (Berlin, 1894), marks two mountains in Lydia «Olympus,» the more northern with a question mark (explained in his comment, p. 3). His successor Richard Kiepert in no. VIII (1910) omits the latter (see his comment, p. 6). The mountain near Smyrna is identified with an ancient Olympus because of a Byzantine monastery (now in ruins) situated on ὄρος τῶν Λέμβων or τὰ Λέμβου; A. M. Fontrier, «Le monastère de Lembos près de Smyrne,» *Bulletin de correspondance hellénique*, XVIII (1892), 380. In Turkish the mountain was called Nif-Dagh; but along with the town Nif it has been renamed Kemalpaşa in honor of the man who established Turkey as a republic and reconquered the region of Smyrna from the Greeks.

The town Σμύρνᾶ or Σμύρνη is homonymous with the usual Greek word for 'myrrh'. μύρρα, though attested earlier (Sappho fr. 44.30 Lobel & Page), is infrequent: μύρρα γὰρ ἢ σμύρνα παρ' Αἰολεῦσιν (*Athenaeus* 15.688c). Alfred Heubeck, «*Smyrna, Myrina* und Verwandtes,» *Beiträge zur Namenforschung*, I (1949), 273, argues that the term σμύρνα for the scent, deviating greatly from μύρρα which is close to the Semitic original, owes its name to the city. Smyrna would thus have been a center for the trade in myrrh.

not only heard of nectar as a human drink but learned the proportions of every ingredient.

The Semitic interpretation of νέκταρ would not necessarily require that the bouquet be of myrrh or similar gum, to the exclusion of flowers. Although no Hebrew passage mentions flowers in connection with the root נֶטֶר; some passages leave unspecified what natural substance the odor was obtained from. Spices and fresh flowers are to some degree interchangeable; yet the evidence for the latter in religious contexts is, surprisingly, less ancient. Flowers were of course too perishable for international trade.<sup>35</sup> They could easily be gathered to crown a local altar, as well as the priest and the victim, imparting to them a sweet odor along with bright colors. Typical as such garlands are of Greek life in the later Classical period, we must note their absence from the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*; the attestation of them is no earlier than the fourth century B.C.<sup>36</sup> But in any case imported incense, though costly, had great advantages over flowers: given a little artificial heat, it would produce a much more concentrated, overpowering odor;<sup>37</sup> it could be securely stored, even for years (Theophrastus, *De odoribus* 34; cf. 38-39), and thus be on hand for a celebration at any season; and the smoke from it would rise visibly toward heaven.

Homer's notion of ideal delicacies could hardly help but be colored (so to speak) by a slight awareness of some which existed but were so rare as to fascinate or tantalize the poet. Materially ambrosia might be pigeon's milk and nectar a fragrant red beverage of a place in Lydia or some more distant Semitic country; but in Greek epic they are the ultimate in food and drink, which the lips of mortal men never touch. It is possible that after Homer whatever actual liquid or liquids were called νέκταρ owed their name merely to a flattering application of a word available from the Homeric and the general poetic vocabulary, while many other beverages may have deserved it quite as much. Certainly the Hellenistic poets treated the word as just a handsome substitute for οἶνος.<sup>38</sup> καλούμενον in the two passages of Athenaeus and καλοῦσίνες in the *Geoponica* — 'the wine that is called nectar,' 'that which is called nectar,' 'some call this nectar' — such words evince a degree of reluctance to accept νέκταρ as the simple, appropriate designation of that wine or mead.

<sup>35</sup> Roses, to be sure, were eventually imported to Rome from Egypt in wintertime (Martial 6.80). See G. Lafaye in Daremberg-Saglio, *Dictionnaire des antiquités*, s.v. «hortus,» pp. 292-293.

<sup>36</sup> G. Leroux in Daremberg-Saglio, s.v. «serta,» p. 1258, citing Pliny 21.3-4.

<sup>37</sup> A rose garland was enhanced by wetting it in perfume; Meleager in *Anth. Pal.* 5.136. Edm. Saglio, *Dictionnaire des antiquités*, s.v. «corona,» p. 1522, also refers to «Plut. *Sympos.* VII, 4, 14»; but I cannot find the passage.

<sup>38</sup> Callimachus fr. 115; Nicander, *Alex.* 44; Eudemus apud Galenum *De antidotis* 2.14 (XIV, 185 Kühn).

For outside of the immediate area where people produced it, any other Greeks must have known the Homeric word νέκταρ primarily from Homer's verses; so to apply it to any human drink, however fine, seemed figurative.

No such reservation attaches to νεκταρίτης (sc. οἶνος), for which Dioscorides (5.56) gives a recipe requiring the dry root of the herb Ἐλένιον or νεκτάριον to be steeped in must for three months.<sup>39</sup> As plant nomenclature is one of the most whimsical parts of the vocabulary of any nation, it is superfluous for us in the twentieth century to guess what, in particular, prompted the ancient Greeks to single out a certain plant as 'little Helen' or 'little nectar'; at any rate it must have been a favorite to some of them.

(e) Murrina, *the Latin Equivalent of Nectar*

That νέκταρ in prosaic usage stood for a liquor *literally perfumed* is well attested by Festus and the other Latin glossators who equate it with *murrina*.<sup>40</sup> The identity of the latter has been disputed. The word looks as if derived from *murra* (= μύρρα), the famous gum from southern Arabia; and Pliny (14.92) among others explained it so. But no Latin author after Plautus seems to have known it at first hand. Even Plautus may be suspected of having never tasted this particular drink, so that he just transcribed *murrinam* or *uinum murrinam* a little inaccurately from the Greek μυρρίνην (οἶνον). The form, with a single -ρ-, is established by the meter of

υ υ υ \_ | υ υ \_ | υ / \_ | υ υ \_ | υ \_ | υ \_  
 χαριεῖ πολὺ μᾶλλον ἢ μυρρίνην προσεγγέας

'you will gratify [them] much more than by pouring in perfumed [wine]' (Diphilus fr. 17.10 [Ἀπολείπουσα] Edmonds, from Athenaeus 4.132d); and the form in turn establishes the meaning, as a derivative of μύρον 'perfume'

<sup>39</sup> At 1.28 he has a different ending νεκταράλαν, according to codex C; *nectarium* in Pliny's version (14.108). They supply still other names for the plant. The medical writer has no occasion to praise this wine for its taste; he only remarks that « it works for the stomach and the chest, and moves the urine too. » See J. André (ed. and tr.), *Pline l'Ancien: Histoire naturelle, livre XIV* (Budé series; Paris, 1958), p. 131.

<sup>40</sup> The spelling of the Latin word in the mss. is generally corrupt: *murina*, *marrina*, *mirrida*, *murruna*, *murmurena* (!), *murmurina* (!); citations by J. André, « Murrina 'Vin myrrhé'? » *Annales de la Faculté des Lettres d'Aix[-Marseille]*, XXV (1951), 58-60. The first of these, with a single -r-, is reasonably explained by André as just an accidental reversion to etymological correctness — *murrina* being originally from μυρρίνης. An older article by Moritz Voigt, « Ueber muriola, murrata und murrina, » *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie*, XXVIII (1873), 56-64, is still useful.

(in general), not the particular perfume μύρρα.<sup>41</sup> The delicacy is spelled by Plautus with *-rr-*, as shown in the trochaic meter of *Pseudolus* 74:

— ∪ | — — | — — | — — | ∪ ∪ — | — — | — ∪ | —  
*murrinam, passum, defrutum, melinam, mel quoiusmodi.*<sup>42</sup>

The context calls for a list of *sweet* beverages, to counterbalance the vinegar in the breast of a character named Simia. The bitter taste of myrrh<sup>43</sup> would be quite out of place, *unless applied sparingly and along with some* (unnamed) *sweetener*.

More probably Plautus was led into paronomasia by his appreciation for

<sup>41</sup> In a line of another comic poet Posidippus (fr. 34 Edmonds, from Athenaeus 1.32d):

διψηρὸς ἄτοπος ὁ μυρίνης ὁ τίμιος  
 ∪ ∪ ∪ / ∪ ∪ ∪ — ∪ ∪ ∪ / ∪ — | ∪ —

the scansion again favors ἄτοπος ὁ μυρίνης over ἄτοπος ὁ μυρρίνης (which would entail an awkward caesura within an anapest). The mss. give *-rr-*, but a vagary of the copyists does not constitute trustworthy evidence that a drink μυρρίνης ‘perfumed with myrrh’ existed among the Greeks. Aelian (*Varia historia* 12.31) explains that wine was mixed with perfume (μύρω, not μύρρα): μύρω γὰρ οἶνον μὴ γνύντες οὕτως ἔπινον καὶ ὑπερῆσπάζοντο τὴν τοιαύτην κρᾶσιν· καὶ ἐκαλεῖτο ὁ οἶνος μυρίνης. μέμνηται δὲ αὐτοῦ Φιλίππιδης ὁ τῆς κωμῶδιᾶς ποιητῆς ‘Mixing wine with perfume they would drink it thus and relished such a blend exceedingly; and the wine was called μυρίνης. Philippides the comic poet [fr. 39 Edmonds] mentions it.’ Even here the mss. have μυρρίνης, which ill befits the author’s train of thought. μυρίνης was a thing of the past in Aelian’s time. All three citations of it from «new comedy» show it was considered a wonderful treat.

Furthermore Theophrastus (*De odoribus* 10) remarks: μύρον καὶ τᾶλλα εὖσομα τοὺς μὲν οἶνους ἡδύνει, τῶν δὲ βρωμάτων οὐδέν ‘perfume and other fragrant things make wines tasty but no foods.’

<sup>42</sup> The other two occurrences are in lines from lost plays, cited incomplete by Pliny (14.92): *mittebam uinum pulchrum murrinam* and *panem et polentam, uinum murrinam*. To restore a spelling \**murinam* would be metrically possible but unnecessary, and unjustified as far as attestation goes. It is better to find a cause for Plautus’ looseness than to credit him with rendering μυρίνην accurately here but as *murrinam* in *Pseud.* 741.

<sup>43</sup> Pointed out emphatically by André (above, note 40), p. 47, who believes that all references to «vin myrrhé» are misapprehended. However, Aristotle (fr. 95, 96 from Athenaeus 11.464b-d) tells of myrrh being boiled with other spices and added to wine to make it less intoxicating; and two verses of the comic poet Eubulus (fr. 128 Edmonds), about pounding κόκκον Κνίδιον ‘a Cnidian berry’ or some pepper with myrrh, are cited by Athenaeus (2.66d) with the implication that this would be put into the πρόπομα, or wine served before the meal. That myrrh could be agreeable to the mouth as well as the nose, is also suggested by Cant. 5:1, «I have come to my garden, my sister bride; I have culled my myrrh with my balsam, eaten my honeycomb with my honey, drunk my wine with my milk.» The bitterness of myrrh could have been welcome seasoning; sweet food or drink is liable to cloy otherwise.



the *smell* of myrrh — *Arabus, murrinus, omnis odor* (Poen. 1179) — since *murra* from the Greek μύρρα was part of the Latin vocabulary as early as the XII Tables, but μύρον was an utterly foreign word. However, whereas the suffix of *murrinus* (agreeing with *odor*) is perfectly compatible with Latin morphology, the incongruous « first declension » ending in *uinum murrinam* betrays the Greek source. Besides μυρίνης, several other masculine derivatives in -ίνης designate kinds of wine — ὄξίνης, γραπίνης, δευτερίναρ (doubtless Laconian).<sup>44</sup> The few Greek texts dealing with μυρίνης do not link it to νέκταρ as the Latin glossaries link *murrina*.

It is therefore unclear whether the latter got their information originally from a Greek author defining νέκταρ as μυρίνης (perhaps misspelled μυρρίνης) or inferred independently that *murrina* and νέκταρ were identical, since both had been spoken of generally as sweet, famous in former times, and fit for the gods, and νέκταρ (as we saw in one account) was said to be made with myrrh. André judges both *murrina* and νέκταρ to stand for a « vin de liqueur » (*dessert wine* in English, *dulce* in Latin). He sharply distinguishes *dulce* or « vin de liqueur » from *aromatites* (ἀρωματίτης, Dioscurides 5.54), although Pliny himself thought that *murrina* was both (14.92-93,107). I am no expert when it comes to wine; but I see little difficulty in accepting Pliny's authority, in spite of André. 'Wine with myrrh' could be understood to contain other substances, so long as the myrrh was what gave this wine its distinctive flavor.

If *murrina* came into Latin with adaptations of Greek comedies, a notice in Festus shows that a liquid containing myrrh was in use earlier, at least in religious ceremonies: *Murrata potione usos antiquos indicio est quod etiam nunc aediles per supplicationes dis addunt ad puluinaria, et quod XII tabulis cauetur ne mortuo indatur, ut Varro in Antiquitatum lib. I* 'A sign that the ancients used a drink with myrrh is that even now the aediles at supplications put it to the gods at their cushioned couches, and that in the XII Tables it is forbidden to put it inside a dead person, as Varro says in the first book of the *Antiquities*.' Festus' inference that it had once been for drinking seems unjustified by his own datum that the law prohibited the use of it for embalming. But it was a drink *for the gods*, a liquid offered to their images at the celebration.

In that regard it was a counterpart to the Homeric nectar, drunk by the gods on Olympus. The only reason to think the liquid was basically wine is Festus' choice of the word *potione*; but that is inconclusive, just as nothing

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<sup>44</sup> C. D. Buck and W. Petersen, *A Reverse Index of Greek Nouns and Adjectives* (Chicago [n.d.]), p. 7. On the basis of *melinam* in *Pseud.* 741 (see above), we can probably add \*μελίνης (accusative -ίνην) 'honey-wine'; but the attestation is uncertain. Other -ίνης words stand for various fish, cheeses, cakes, etc. — some masc. noun being in the background.

in the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey* proves that the gods' nectar was a sort of wine. Fragrant myrrh was the capital ingredient of the liquid at the *supplicatio*.<sup>45</sup> Likewise, if my theory about νέκταρ is correct, its intrinsic quality was fragrance due to myrrh or some such perfume, and anything so mundane as wine was irrelevant.<sup>46</sup>

(f) *Scents Imparted by Smoking Rather than Steeping*

On both the mundane and the Olympian level, the Semitic etymology of νέκταρ stands to gain if we can legitimately think of the beverage receiving its flavor through the air. If only the aroma of myrrh entered, without the body or substance, the taste might have been exquisite indeed to human lips; and the sublime drink of the gods would be understandably related to the sacrificial burning of incense on their altars.

The recipe quoted from the *Geoponica* calls for myrrh and the other spices to be steeped in the wine and honey; but exposing the wine to fumes was also known. The most cogent text, again, is from a comedy (Pherecrates fr. 130 [*Persae*] Edmonds, from Athenaeus 6.269d):

ὁ Ζεὺς δ' ὕων οἴνω καπνία κατὰ τοῦ κεράμου βαλανεύσει

'Zeus, raining smoked wine down the roof-tiles, will douse [us].' The context shows that οἶνος καπνίας must be delicious and — in real life — scarce.<sup>47</sup> In a comparable vein Anaxandrides (fr. 41.70-71 [*Protesilaus*]

<sup>45</sup> If *puluinaria* 'cushioned or upholstered couches' entitles us to equate *supplicationes* with *lectisternia* (a kind of ceremony first instituted during the war against Veii around 400 B.C., according to Livy 5.13.6; see Pauly-Wissowa s.v. «lectisternium»), it would be pertinent to cite two Linear B tablets from Pylos, Fr 343 and 1217 — Bennett (above, note 28), pp. 30-31, 39, 48-49. Besides the OLEVM ideogram, they contain the word transcribed *re-ke-to-ro-te-ri-jo* or *re-ke-e-to-ro-te-ri-jo* and another word thought to describe the scenting of the oil (*e-ti-we* or *pa-ko-we*). The parallel *lectisternium*: \*λεχε(σ)τρωτήριον is attractive since the latter would be tolerably close to the norm of Greek morphology, although \*λεχεε(σ)τρωτήριον is not. We are not entitled to infer that at the *supplicatio* the scent was added to oil rather than wine (this would be at most a possibility), nor that any scents employed at Pylos were imported as myrrh was later imported to Rome. Of course, wherever scenting was done with local herbs, there could be a motive for changing over to superior foreign essences as they became available.

<sup>46</sup> Besides *murrina*, *caroenum* too is equated with *nectar* by certain Latin glossaries, none of them early. It was must boiled down; see *Thesaurus linguae Latinae*, III, 488.

<sup>47</sup> If there were any reason to doubt the meaning 'smoked,' it should be dispelled by Hesychius: καὶ οἶνος δὲ καπνίας λέγεται ὁ κεκαπνι[α]σμένος. The form κεκαπνισμένος is attested by Musurus; the Hesychius ms. has κεκαπνιασμένος, which cannot be right,

Edmonds, from Athenaeus 4.131f) celebrates the wine to be served at a most elaborate banquet that will surpass the wedding of the general Iphicrates and the daughter of Cotys, king of Thrace:

οἶνοι δέ σοι, λευκός,  
γλυκύς, αὐθιγενής, ἡδύς, καπνίας

'Your wines will be: white, sweet, home-grown, nice, smoked.'<sup>48</sup> It follows that smoked wine is among the very best.

Many writers of the Roman period tell of wine being smoked to ripen it sooner.<sup>49</sup> Smoke from random firewood or charcoal might, however, hurt the flavor: Martial (10.36) complains about some expensive wine from the *fumaria* 'smoke chambers' of Massilia; it tastes like poison.<sup>50</sup> Horace (*Car.* 3.8.9-14), on the other hand, has a jug of wine which « learned to drink smoke in when Tullus was consul » (nearly forty years earlier) and which will be opened and served copiously to his patron Maecenas for a celebration; it must be choice wine, although the context does not prove that the smoking was what improved it. By that time much wine, whether good or mediocre, was smoked in the normal routine of maturing it.<sup>51</sup>

Galen gives instructions, learned from his father in Asia Minor, for a hot room to season wine and keep it from ever turning to vinegar: A local herb called *κολυμβάς* or *στοιβή* is heaped up, and the jugs are set in it; heat from the nearby oven and fireplace comes through holes in the wall and makes the herb give off a pungent aroma, which has a highly preservative effect upon the wine. But while wholeheartedly recommending his father's procedure, Galen notes that in many parts of Italy, where the wine is preserved similarly,

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since the lexicographer would scarcely have glossed *καπνίας* with a participle of a rare (or, I dare say, non-existent) verb derived from *καπνίας*.

<sup>48</sup> The last line, ending the long fragment, is perfect; but the previous one is metrically defective although clear enough in its general sense.

A further citation by Athenaeus (1.31e), Πλάτων δ' ὁ κωμικός *καπνίαν*, tells us no more about this kind of wine.

<sup>49</sup> E.g., Columella 1.6.20, Pliny 23.39-40, Palladius Rutilius 11.14.8.

<sup>50</sup> In 3.82.22-25 he ridicules a host who serves him *cocta fumis musta Massilitanis* but toasts his pet cretins with *Opimianum . . . nectar*.

<sup>51</sup> Our information from this period either states or implies that the wine was in jars while being smoked. Two earlier passages speak, however, of wine-skins in smoke; it may or may not have been deliberately to season the wine. The Psalmist (119:83) likens himself to « a [wine-]skin in smoke » (רִיבְיָא, a noun from the same root {qTr}); the point of the simile is unsettled, as the context is meager and gives little direction. Aristotle tells of a bizarre treatment of new wine in one part of Greece (*Meteor.* 4.10.388b.5-7): ἐν Ἀρκαδίᾳ οὕτως ἀναξηραίνεται ὑπὸ τοῦ καπνοῦ ἐν τοῖς ἀσχοῖς ὥστε ξυόμενος πίνεται 'in Arcadia it gets so dried up in the skins by the smoke that you drink it by scraping.'

it takes on an undesirable quality from the smoke and you get a headache from drinking it.<sup>52</sup>

A smoking process like Galen's, but using more exquisite aromatic substances from the Orient, ought to have yielded a veritable nectar that not only would never change to vinegar but had the positive virtue of smelling better than any unscented wine can smell, and tasting better too. No text combines all the essentials of such a description. Homer glorifies the νέκταρ drunk only by gods; the comic poets praise their καπνίας but in no way describe it; Galen tells how to preserve wine by exposing it to the fumes of an aromatic herb, but not one famous for flavor; Ariston of Ceos describes the nectar of Mt. Olympus in Lydia, a wine mixed with honeycomb and flowers; the *Geoponica* gives a recipe for a kind of mead also called νέκταρ and made with myrrh and other imported scents, but it is prepared by steeping, with only the heat of the sun; finally, Theophrastus notes that myrrh for incense is soaked in wine, grape syrup, or honey and milk — not, of course, for drinking. So close do we come to identifying the original nectar. Had Theophrastus applied the term νέκταρ to that preparation of myrrh, we would not hesitate to equate it with the {μυκτόρ} 'incense' of the Bible, containing the same Semitic root; and we would understand that a god can « drink » it, indirectly or mythically, but not a man.<sup>53</sup> Staying within the data, we do not fully grasp the word: it remains the possession of the Muses, just as Odysseus saw nectar being served to Calypso but never had a sip of it himself.

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#### ADDENDUM

After my essay was all set in type, I learned of Johann Knobloch's article « Nektar » in Wolfgang Meid (ed.), *Beiträge zur Indogermanistik und Keltologie Julius Pokorny zum 80. Geburtstag gewidmet* (Innsbrucker Beiträge zur Kulturwissenschaft, Band 13, 1967), pp. 39-43. His analysis is most like Van Windekens' in identifying the suffix -ταρ as in θέλκταρ. But the root \*nek-, according to Knobloch, means 'drink' on the basis of the Hittite {nink-} 'drink one's fill.' The morphology, however, as well as the transcription is a matter of some dispute among Hittitologists.

<sup>52</sup> *De antidotis* 1.3 (XIV, 17-19 Kühn); cf. *De simplicium medicamentorum temperamentis* 4.14 (XI, 663), ὡς ἐνλους αὐτῶν [sc. τῶν οἴνων] ἀηδεῖς γίγνεσθαι τῆν ἀπὸ τοῦ καπνοῦ δεχομένους ποιότητα.

<sup>53</sup> On this very score W.H. Roscher in *Nektar und Ambrosia* (Leipzig, 1883), though contributing so much to the elucidation of these two terms and of Greek mythology in general, fell short of his own goal. For in identifying nectar and ambrosia with honey or honeydew — i.e., sap on the surface of leaves — he put aside his principle of finding in nature an adequate basis for the mythical (pp. 1, 6). Nothing so accessible to human consumption can suffice to differentiate gods from men; and Roscher himself argues (pp. 51-55) that ambrosia and nectar are precisely what makes the gods immortal, and are therefore denied to mankind.