

MĀYĀ IN A GREEK POPYRUS (?)

By DR. O. STEIN

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EGYPT may be, as the father of history very aptly said, a donum of the Nile; one could vary this and say that the unexpected enrichment of the knowledge of the classical world, in the fields of literature, science, public and private law, as well as by religious documents and others, is till this day an inexhaustible gift of this—also in that direction—fruitiferous soil of Egypt. And why, may an Indologue ask, should not this soil bring forth, in the smallest rag amongst the many thousands of papyri, the spreading of a little light on the relationship between these two ancient source- and foster-countries of culture, between Egypt and India ?¹

This question, so modestly put, seemed to have got an answer already, when the well-known Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 413 brought a mimus-like scene on the shores of India, where Greek people are seen conversing with an autochthonous Indian king and his followers in their mother-tongue.² It is the privilege of the next lines to show that the hope, set also upon another papyrus, has been disappointed for a second time.

This is the P. Oxy. 1380 (vol. xi, 1915, p. 190 *ff.*, in the edition of GRENFELL-HUNT), which belongs to the second century A.D., and contains a prayer³ to Isis. For the readers

¹ There are some other papyri, which indicate relationship between Egypt and India, apart from the literary and known historical sources. The author hopes to publish a survey of the Greek papyri dealing with India in this year.

² In this forthcoming paper the hypothesis is shown as wrong.

³ About the real character of the papyrus controversies are still proceeding.

of this Journal the lines 103 and 226 are of special interest. In the former passage the goddess, who is invoked under different names in different places of the world, is called ἐν Ἰνδοῖς *Maïan*. Supplying a verb, such as: I pray to thee, or, We call on thee, we have Isis invoked as *Maïa* among Indians, or in other words, the Indian *Maïa* is Isis. The editors have remarked already that there is no proof of a cult of Isis in India. K. F. W. SCHMIDT¹ took *Maïa* as equivalent to an Indian *māyā*, 'Wunderkraft, Weisheit, Zauberei,' from which the derived *māyīn* has the sense of 'wunderkräftig, weise, zauberkräftig.' And B. A. van GRONINGEN² was the first to give the suggestion of identifying the Greek word with Buddha's mother *Māyā*. Merchants who came to India may have heard of *Māyā*, and there is nothing surprising to find this name here, thinks van GRONINGEN, as not only the P. Oxy. 413 (but see preceding page, n. 2) proves connections, which were intensified in the time of the Roman emperors, but also the missionary activity of Aśoka and ambassadors, like this of Ptolemaios Philadelphos, may have brought some knowledge of Buddhism. Lastly, in his book 'Die Geburt des Kindes' (1924, p. 112 f., n. 3) NORDEN calls the words of the papyrus, cited above, the greatest surprise and seems to be convinced that they must refer to *Māyā*, though he cautions against the utilizing of them in an incorrect manner.

The second passage (11.223 ff.) runs: [σ]ὺ τῆς γῆ[ς κ]υ ρία\α.ς[. . . πλῆ] μμυραν ποταμῶν|τ[.] . . [.] . [. . .] Η ἄγεις· καὶ τοῦ ἐν Αἰ|γύπτῳ Νε[ί]λου, ἐν δὲ Τριπόλει Ἐλευθη- ρου, ἐν δὲ τῇ Ἰνδικῇ Γάγγου, etc. Here the goddess is called the cause of flood or inundation of the Nile, of the Eleutheros and of the Ganges. That is by no means an argument for a cult of Isis in India; the juxtaposition in thought of the Nile and of the Ganges is only a new alternation of the known association Nile and Indus, because from the earliest times of Greek geography India has been identified, or at least in some direction connected, with Aethiopia or

¹ 'Göttinger Gelehrte Anzeigen,' 1918, p. 112, n. 11.

² 'De papyro Oxyrhynchita, 1380,' Thesis GRONINGEN, 1921, p. 37 f.

Libya.¹ Especially the inundation of the Nile and Indus, and also their crocodiles, favoured such a conception, and no other than Alexander the Great, who himself had visited Egypt some six years ago, supposed, entering India, that he had found the sources of the Nile (*cf.* Onesikritos, fgt. 5).

Now to return to the first passage, where *Maîa* is mentioned: there must be taken into consideration the character of the whole papyrus before concluding anything. Its contents show the cult of Isis, as it seems, spread over the whole oikumene; but, in fact, there is nothing else than a tiresome enumeration of names of cities, countries, islands and the like, with which the veneration of a female deity, declared to be Isis, is associated. It would, of course, be worthless to dispute with the author of the papyrus whether those deities, whom *he* took to be a form of Isis—we would say an *avatāra*—may in reality be interpreted in this way; stress must rather be put on the question whether Isis *can* be meant here. On the Greek continent, on the islands, in Asia Minor, in Arabia, Italy, etc., the cult of Isis is proved by many documents such as sculptures, inscriptions, coins; but for India an incontestable proof would be sought in vain, though the coins of Huviṣka show the legend of Serapis, in the form *Σαραπο*,² which represents a survival of the coins of the fore-runners only of Greek and Bactrian kings. Literary testimonies also—like that of Phylarchos, that Dionysos brought from India the bovine pair, Apis and Osiris, to Egypt—are without any value, as such a statement has been duly rejected already by Plutarch (*Phyl.*, fgt. 80=*Plut. De Iside*, 29). No better verdict can be pronounced on the passage (iii, 11, 2-5) in the romance of Xenophon Ephesios, where Psammis, the king of the Indians, comes to Alexandria, buys the virgin

¹ *Cf.* Onesikritos, fgt. 12 and 17; Aristobulos, fgt. 29; and generally, for India and Aethiopia, STEIN, 'Επιτυμβιον Heinrich Swobodas,' Reichenberg, 1927, p. 313, n. 4.

² *Cf.* DREXLER, 'Mythologische Beiträge,' i, p. 4, n. 4; von SALLET, 'Die Nachfolger Alexanders des Grossen,' pp. 62, 205; GARDINER, 'Catalogue of Indian Coins of Greek and Scythic Kings,' p. 149, No. 110; SMITH, 'Early History,' p. 287.

Antheia as slave, but does her no harm, because she passes herself off as a devotee of Isis.

The identification of Māyā with Isis is impossible for different reasons; the first proof against it are the names and epitheta of the goddess Isis in general. Thus in 1.102 the Amazons are held to exist, and with them Στρατία is associated, apparently a form of Isis, but clearly indicating the martial character of her worshippers; the same name of Isis is said to have existed in Rome (1.83),¹ as well as in the unknown Μενούφι (1.71). But here already the remark may find a place, that one would expect the name of the goddess in that form which is indigenous in the language of each people. Indeed, it is 'curious,' as the editors said, if the Persians (1.104) venerate Isis as Λατείνη;² the counterpart is the deity Ἐλλας of the Στράτωνος Πύργος (1.94);³ no less doubt must be expressed considering the statement of 1.22-23, that Isis has been venerated in a purely Egyptian town like Πεφρήμι as Ἐστία; or that, in Delphi, she bears the names ἀρίστη, καλλίστη; while no temple consecrated to her is known to have existed in that sacred seat of Apollo; Plutarch, however, tells of a lady, to whom he dedicated his paper on Isis and also Osiris, as initiated in the cult of Osiris (DREXLER, in ROSCHER's Lexicon, ii, col. 387, 60).

These examples, some of many, will be sufficient to show how inconsistent the namings of the goddess are in relation to the language of the people respectively.

¹ Van GRONINGEN thinks, because the Egyptians came especially into contact with martial Rome, WEINREICH ('Philologische Wochenschrift,' 42, 1922, 795) would prefer the conception of the militant Isidis, the victory-bringing deity.

² SCHMIDT (*l.c.*, p. 112, n. 12) refers to *rati*, 'love-enjoyment, delight,' and proposes a suffix-formation *ratina* with the change of *r > l*, which, according to WHITNEY (§ 1,223*d*) and LINDNER ('Altind. Nominalbildung,' p. 127, § 12), does not correspond to the sense of that suffix; van GRONINGEN (p. 38) and WEINREICH (p. 795) plead for a Persian deity; according to CUMONT's correction ('Rev. de philol.,' 40, 1916, p. 133 *f.*) it should be Ἀναείτη, Ἀναίτις.

³ Van GRONINGEN (p. 29) and WEINREICH (795) remind us of Ἀλλάτ, the Arabian Aphrodite, Herodot. i, 131, the feminine noun Allāt to the male Allāh 'God,' which is in no way convincing.

A further argument for the refusal of the equation *Maîa* = *Māyā* is to be found in the occurrence of the same name in other towns: 1.39: ἐν Ἀθρίβι *Maîan*, ὀρθωσίαν, that is Tell Atrîb, near Benha; 1.42: ἐν τοῖς Βουκολεῦσι *Maîan* (Boukoloi are the rapacious herdsmen who inhabit the marshy country on the north-west shore near Alexandria, and from whom the Bucolic mouth of the Nile borrowed its name); 1.116: ἐν Βηρυτῶ *Μεαν*, which may be read as *Maîan*, and indicates a cult of *Maîa* in Beirût. It is impossible, as is seen from these citations, to construct a distinction between *Maîa* of 11.39, 42, 116 (in 16 the reading *μίαν* must be maintained; see van GRONINGEN, p. 8 [against SCHMIDT, p. 106 *f.*, n. 4], and WEINREICH, 793), and the *Maîa* of 1.103; on the other hand, hardly anyone would be inclined to plead for a cult of Buddha's mother—*e.g.*, in Beirût. There remains, however, only this: to interpret *Maîa* in such a sense that it should conform to all the passages where it occurs. *Maîa* or *Maiás* is the mother of Hermes; of course, in Greece she remained always an unreal, bloodless form (see WEIZSÄCKER in ROSCHER's Lexicon, ii, 2234); a cult of her is unknown; in art, too, she plays no rôle (*ibid.*, 2235), though she has been identified with Isis in consequence of the parallel equation of Hermes with Horos. Even in Plutarch's paper, *De Iside*, 12, Isis is called the daughter of Hermes; on the other hand, the question may be just raised:—could not the common idea of Isis and *Maîa* be the conception of mother Earth, *Mâ*, since Isis is declared to be Earth, Demeter (DREXLER, *l.c.*, ii, 442 *ff.*), and a confusion of *Mâ* with *Maîa* lies not beyond all possibility? Be that as it may, whichever side of the Isis conception may have caused the identification with *Maîa*, whether one should think of mother Earth, as who Isis appears in 1.222 (σὺ τῆς γῆς κυρία), or not, Buddha's mother *Māyā* remains beyond all serious consideration.

The result cannot be wrong, as it is corroborated from the standpoint of Indology. For the supposition of an Isis-*Māyā* cult would mean a cult of *Māyā* in India itself. There is an important witness, the reflected image of the Buddhist cult: Buddhist art. It is true, *Māyā* occurs on sculptures, but

she never has been by herself a subject of representation; she is only the mediator of the Lord, be it in the scene of nativity, when the white elephant enters her womb, be it when Buddha comes out from her right side.¹ In the legend she is merely mentioned in the same way, as art testifies, before and after the birth of the future Buddha; in *Lalitavistara* (ed. LEFMANN, 252, 15 f.), she comes down from heaven, weeping because of her son seeming to be near his end in consequence of his excessive penances, without having become the Saviour of the world. 'Aber mit ihrem Tode ist Māyā nicht nur vom irdischen Schauplatz, sondern auch von jeder Wirksamkeit abgetreten. Einen Kult hat die indische Immaculata nicht gefunden,' says WINDISCH.² Her glorification in *Mahāyāna*³ does not alter this fact, because that period of Buddhism lays already beyond the time of P. Oxy. 1380.

I may be allowed to adduce, not as a compensation for the refused explanation, not as a new hypothesis of the identification of Isis with an Indian deity, but only as a parallel in religious conception, some remarks on another individuality in the Indian pantheon, who shows some corresponding features to Isis. This is the frightful, yet for human feeling in some direction so sympathetic, figure of the later pantheon, the great mother Durgā. No doubt the (certainly popular) roots of her veneration reach back, at least, to the younger Vedic stratum, but full development she found first in the Tantra. The accentuation of the motherly character, of her being the source of energy and creation, brings her near to the Isis conception. The great mother, the great goddess of nature,⁴

¹ Cf. FOUCHER, 'L'art gréco-bouddhique,' i, p. 294 f., fig. 148 f.; p. 301, fig. 152; p. 303, fig. 153; p. 306, fig. 154; SMITH, 'A History of Fine Art,' p. 380.

² 'Buddhas Geburt,' p. 198 f. and n. 1.

³ When БЕККН ('Buddhismus,' i, p. 31, n. 1) speaks of that, he refers probably to her elevation into Indra's heaven, but that is a literary invention and proves no cult of Māyā.

⁴ See E. MEYER, Roscher's Lexicon, ii, pt. 1.367, 370; in pt. 1.106 one reads: ἐν Σούσις Ναρία. SCHMIDT (*l.c.*, p. 112, n. 14) wants to propose an Iranian word, deriving from Sanskrit *nanā* ('little mother'), which,

finds her Indian sister in the *jagadmātā*; indeed, it would not be too difficult to draw some other parallels, such as her origin without father, sometimes alluded in Tantra scripts (cf. Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa, 82, 12 ff., with P. Oxy., 1.19, see van GRONINGEN, p. 9 f.). Apart from the many epitheta, which may arise from the average train of ideas of a believer, who likes to see his deity equipped with the best and highest of the world's virtues, there are some parallels which bring the two conceptions of Isis and Durgā near together. Thus the plurality of names and forms (1.9), Ἴσις πολυώνυμος, μυριώνυμος, μυριόμορφος (DREXLER, *l.c.*, 546). Durgā also has an immense number of names and appears under different forms. Interesting is 1.214 f. of the papyrus: 'Thou hast made women equal to men in vigour'; the *δύναμις* of the women (cf. also the name of the goddess *δυναστίς* in 1.34, 41, 57, 97-98) reminds us of the *śakti* of Durgā. Finally, the stylistic form of the papyrus, which has been called an imploring or litany,¹ just as the hymns and praises, occurring in Purāṇas and the purāṇa-like passages of the Mahābhārata and Tantra, of Hindu deities, the *stutis* and *stotras*, show some affinity; namely, the endless joining of names together (for instance, *sahasranāmastotra*, 'the praise of thousand names' of Śiva, Viṣṇu, etc.), the careless syntax, the endeavour to express the whole universe by the epitheta of the deity, careless of truth: all that involves a certain affinity. WEINREICH is, no doubt, right when he remarks that the papyrus, with its geographical enumerations in the first part, exhibits an un-Greek character; for the second part, too, one must, as did van GRONINGEN quite correctly (p. 79 ff.), look to Egypt for the intellectual soil; but from the standpoint of comparative religion the hint of the Indian parallel, indicated above, may be allowed as well.

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just like Greek *Maia* or *Mήτηρ*, could designate a goddess of 'fertility.' *Nanā*, however, occurs in that meaning only (Rgv. ix, 112, 3), and belongs apparently to child-language, while in Iranian tongue no proof seems to be known.

¹ Cf. WEINREICH, *l.c.*, 797 ff.