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### What does ΔΡΙΜΙΕΣ stand for?

*Аннотация:* Словом Δρίμιες в традиционной греческой культуре обычно обозначаются первые шесть дней августа, марта или (реже) сентября, в течение которых необходимо соблюдать запрет на контакт с водой. В статье рассматриваются известные версии происхождения этого термина, сопоставление с аналогичными представлениями у других балканских народов, а также приводятся соответствующие мифологические параллели, показывающие связь этого термина с женскими мифологическими персонажами (нереидами, анемикес и пр.).

*Ключевые слова:* Греция, народная культура, фольклор, Балканы, мифология, нереиды, дримы, новогреческая этимология

*Abstract:* In the traditional culture of Greece the word Δρίμιες usually meant the first three, six, or twelve days of August, March, or (very rarely) September. The time of δρίμιες is mainly characterized as dangerous and the contacts with water are strictly regulated as considered to be harmful. The article represents common versions of the origin of the term, a comparison with similar concepts in other Balkan cultures, as well as mythological parallels, which show the connection of this term with female mythological characters (nereids, anemikes etc.)

*Key words:* Greece, popular culture, folklore, Balkans, mythology, Nereids, drimies, Modern Greek etymology

In the traditional culture of Greece the word Δρίμιες usually meant the first three, six, or twelve days of August, March, or (very rarely) September. There are many dialect variants of this word: most widespread of them – δρίμιες or δρύμιες (Dodecanese, Peloponnese etc.), along with it meet variants δρίματα, δρίμιες, ντρίμιες.

From the point of view of etymology the most extended version is that the word δρίμιες ascends in Ancient Greek δριμύς ‘possessing sharp taste or a smell, hard, strong’. Then, at later time, in the Greek language of the Byzantine empire, there was a word δρίμαι which meant ‘a cold’. In modern Greek language the word δριμύς also is used, keeping its initial meaning. The variant δρίμαι, with the meaning ‘a cold’ is considered by some researchers as the proof of that δρίμιες (comes from) < δριμύς (compare the expression δριμύς καιρός ‘cold (bad) weather’, often in the folk etymology the name δρίμιες causes in this way – «γιατί ο

καιρός είναι δριμύς, κάνει κρύο» (because weather is hard, it is cold). Another acknowledgement of this etymology is also used: «ο ήλιος είναι δριμύς και δριμώνονται (τα πράγματα)» (Μπούτουρας 1923: 64) (the sun is strong and «dri-mies» come). One more variant of etymology of this word ascends to δρυμός ‘an oak grove, wood’ or even to Δρυάς ‘Dryad’. However this point of view already is considered erroneous (Μπούτουρας 1923: 64).

The word δρίμιες, as it was already marked, basically designates the first six days of August. Both the number of these days, and the month in which it happens, can vary. So, it can be not six, but three or twelve first days of month, and the month can be not only August, but also September or March. There are mentions that δρίμιες could be called also twelve days of Christmas (Μπούτουρας 1923: 64). The Greek researcher Buturas matches an interesting similarity, as through a mirror reflexion which can be noticed between twelve days of Christmas and the δρίμιες:

- the twelve days of Christmas passe during the period from December, 25<sup>th</sup> till January, 6<sup>th</sup>, δρίμιες – approximately from July, 25<sup>th</sup> till August, 6<sup>th</sup>;

- at twelve days of Christmas mythological characters kallikandzari become more active, making harm to people who do not keep certain interdictions. During δρίμιες it is also necessary to keep a number of interdictions not to suffer from them, and in some areas of Greece it is considered that especially during this period Nereides can activate;

- at twelve days of Christmas people get released from the harmful influence of kallikandzari after water consecration at Theophania. The «bad» time of δρίμιες also comes to an end with water consecration on Transformation (on August, 6<sup>th</sup>).

The time during which it is necessary to take special care, can be not defined particularly (it is said simply «first six days» or even «the beginning of August») or there are mentions that dangerous can be only one day (for example, only on August, 6<sup>th</sup>, «on Sotiros») or only one hour within these first days of month: «Not the whole the day is bad, only one hour of this day, but the man doesn’t know, what hour is this and suffers from it. This bad hour is know only Jews. People say that in one of these days a woman went to the river to rinse linen. She has already started to throw linen in water, and at this hour which was bad, one Jew was passing there, he was familiar to that woman, and he has disturbed her. That part of linen that has got to the water, was scattered in ashes, and only the part that the woman had not time to wet, was left.

Also tell that there was one woman who often damned her child. These damnations were listened by one neighbour who knew when bad hour comes. And as soon as the bad hour had come, she run to the woman and said: «Neighbor, now damn the child to make it squint-eyed!» «Get squint-eyed yourself, you, – she answered, – how can I damn my child?!» Well, the hour was bad, and the neighbor got squint-eyed» (Αθανασόπουλος 1915: 209).

The object, through which the person can get the harmful influence of δρίμιες, is almost in all cases water. Therefore during the time of δρίμιες it is necessary to follow strict regulations for contacts with water, as usual it is prohibited:

- to bathe in the sea;
- to bathe in springs of fresh water, to go at night to a well;
- to wash these days, especially – to wash hair (often in the places which are removed from the sea or big springs) otherwise hair will drop out or the man will get ill;
- to wash linen, otherwise the linen will be scattered in ashes.

Somewhere it is a common belief that these days are simply «bad», without the further explanations or prohibitions concerning the contacts with water, e. g. these days are not considered suitable for harvesting because the crops will get rotten (Αθανασόπουλος 1915: 209), for cutting trees for winter because the wood will get decayed, for working in a vineyard, as grapes will dry up (Μπούτουρας 1923: 64). It is also impossible to start any new business as it will not be successful (Κεφαλληνιάδης 1979: 144), etc.

Among the Modern Greek mythological characters *neraides* have the closest connection with the water:

- they live in springs, usually fresh watered (however somewhere the «*neraides*» are believed to be sea inhabitants);
- they swim and wash in springs (narratives put special emphasis on their hair washing);
- they sleep in the water, therefore it is impossible to drink water from a spring «without having preliminary awoken» *neraides* who sleeps there.

The connection between δρίμιες and *neraides* is proved by the existence of the term Αλουστίνες (Πολίτης 1904: 391–392, 429, 489) which, on the one hand, is used for the nomination of *neraides* in many areas of Greece (e.g. These island). Αλουστίνες etymologically derived from λούζω ‘to wash hair’ + a negative prefix α – so Αλουστίνες literally mean «those who do not wash hair». On the other hand, the word Αλουστος is a popular name of August in the Greek calendar, because – which is important to keep in mind – during the several days in August any contact with water is strictly prohibited. Perhaps, *neraides*, that are thought to possess the greatest activity these days, get their name after August.

The above mentioned connection between *neraides* and δρίμιες is also proved by the Arcadian narrative (published in 1917 in Λαογραφία journal:

«Do you know why it is impossible to bathe on Savior day (celebrated on 6th August)? Once *neraides* had a brother called Sotiris (literally Savior), and he sank. And early in the morning on Savior day they [i. e. *neraides*] go joyfully to the seashore to pull him out, therefore if they meet anybody they give them everything they would ask for. Well, there they go to the seashore coast and try to pull the brother out by hair. But when they are about to manage to get him out, he slips out of their hands and again drops into water. Then they get angry, God save you to meet them on their way back: the person will be made curved, warped mouthed, they suffice person’s neck and do much more harm» (Φραγκούλης 1917: 250).

The word Ανεράιδες (<<air>>) is frequently used for the *neraidos*' nomination as *neraides* are considered to move by air (Πολίτης 1904: 390, 396, 410, 473, 424, 479), and also Ανεμικές – «windy» (compare with the believes that, about a whirlwind as caused by *neraides*' dance). In the Greek Macedonia Ανεμικές are special «spring» demons: «...it is demons of spring (in particular month of March), they are invisible, but do harm. In first nine days of March their influence is especially strong, therefore it is necessary to accept safety measures: women cannot wash hair, it is impossible to sleep in the afternoon, it is impossible to urinate the holes where they throw out ashes. If someone falls asleep in the afternoon in the street and will wake up «spoilt», it is necessary to spread the earth with honey, to collect a dry grass and other subjects from that place where he «have spoilt», to bring them home and to burn in the centre. Once get smoked with a smoke from this fire, you will be released from damage» (Λουκόπουλος 1917: 113). The same source informs that in Macedonia there are some places named ανεμονέρι 'windy water', which are told to possess curative elements and used for treatment of the illnesses sent by mythological characters, and also all illnesses in general.

In general δρίμιες appear to be connected not only with *neraides*, but with other characters (e. g. *kalikantzory*). The important is that δρύμιες connected with *neraides* in the greatest degree, as we have already seen.

Similar representations about «bad» first days of March or August are meet and in other Balkan traditions (see Bulgarian дрибни дeнe 'bad first three days of March' – СД, 2: 95) or even wider (see Ukrainian and Russian believes that after St. Ilya's day (on August, 2nd) it is impossible to bathe, as from this day devils again start their living in the water or «мідвiдь ускочiу at water» (СД, 1: 387) or «Илја has pissed into the water»).

So, what δρίμιες stand for? Or who are these δρίμιες? The time of δρίμιες is mainly characterized as dangerous and the contacts with water are strictly regulated as considered to be harmful. In modern Greek mythology traditional «water» characters are (as it's mentioned above) *neraides* first of all. So it would be possible to consider that these days are devoted to *neraides*. However direct instructions on this communication are meet extremely seldom, besides, δρίμιες last only during certain time whereas *neraides* are usually active all over the year, and δρίμιες keep the special name, which genesis is still unknown.

Perhaps, we deal with the special mythological characters (*drimes*) who live in the water and become more active during this period of time (compare *kalikantzari* at twelve days of Christmas). In the Greek Macedonia it is a common belief that there are some spring demons, Ανεμικές by name, and that can be seen as an example of existence of such kind of characters. From the grammatical point of view a word δρίμιες – of a feminine gender, as well as all words nominating days (η μέρα, names of all days of week etc.) Therefore it cannot be a proof of that originally this word didn't mean days, but certain female mythological characters. Here it is worth putting into account the rejected etymology of a word δρύμιες which is derived from Δρυάς, despite the fact it didn't seem certain. Nevertheless,

in our opinion, it is possible to consider the version that here we deal with a word referring us to special spirits whose cult and memory got lost in modern Greece, so their image completely assimilated with image of other «water» characters – nēraides. At the current stage of research we haven't managed yet to find either indisputable proofs, or refutations of this version and while the question put in the title, remains without the full answer, however we hope that it will be received during the further researches on modern Greek mythology.

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