CHAPTER FIVE

APOLLO AND MARS ONE HUNDRED YEARS AFTER ROSCHER

Without exaggeration and oversimplification little progress is made in most fields of humanistic investigation.

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Apollo and Mars do not seem to have much in common, especially not if we consider their iconographic representations: the first is pictured as a youthful, beardless, naked or lightly clad kouros, armed, if at all, with bow and arrow. The second is represented as an adult, heavily armed warrior. This contrast in appearance seems to indicate essential differences in nature and function as well. It may therefore seem surprising that, more than a century ago, W. H. Roscher, undertook to show that Apollo and Mars were, essentially and originally, one and the same god. In the preface to his monograph ‘Apollo and Mars’¹, which appeared in 1873, he expressed his regret that, after a promising beginning in the early 19th century (with names like Welcker, K. O. Müller, Creuzer and Preller), the study of mythology had reached an impasse. The cause of this decline, he believed, was a lack of method, and the way to break out of this impasse was to follow the lead of a science which was characterized by a refined methodical approach: comparative linguistics. If Indo-European languages could be traced back to one primeval language, why should not the same principle apply to gods? Laudatory references to A. Kuhn and above all Max Muller² lead to a predictable outcome: both gods appeared to be representations of

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¹ Roscher 1873, I. The main thesis of this monograph emerges again with sometimes identical phrasing in the articles of his Mythologisches Lexikon: Apollon (RML I,1 [1884-6] 422-49); Mars (RML II,2 [1897] 2385-483).

² On Muller see above p.20 n.8; on Kuhn see: P. Schmitt, Der Briefwechsel zwischen Jacob Grimm und Adalbert Kuhn, in: Brüder Grimm Gedenken vol. VI (Marburg 1986) 135-207.
the sun\textsuperscript{3}. In accordance with this thesis a number of common qualities were explained as solar functions.

1. Comparing two gods: Roscher and after

First of all the names and epithets indicate a solar nature: 'Apollo' itself is not transparent, but Phoibos, Lukeios, Aigletes and the epithet of Mars, Loucetius or Leucetius, are significant. 'Mars' itself, so Roscher maintained, means 'gleaming', 'radiant'. The sun traverses the course of the year, as do Mars and Apollo. The first month of the year is sacred to them. Mars is connected with the first day of the year, Apollo with the days of the new and the full moon of every month. Moreover, the twelve priests of Mars, the Salii, represent the twelve months. The majority of their feasts fall in the warm season. Their arrival or birth takes place in spring. Mythico-ritual elements suggest a struggle between winter and summer, the old and the new year. During the summer the gods display an ambiguous nature: they are both benevolent and frightening. Indeed, the sun's warmth promotes fertility and makes the crops grow, but, on the other hand, heat may cause fever, epidemics, mildew and bad harvests. Then, the wrath of the gods must be expiated by lustral rites, for instance by the expulsion of a \textit{pharmakos} and the Roman ritual of \textit{lustratio}.

The oracular qualities, of course most in evidence for Apollo, are directly connected with the solar nature: during its course, the sun sees and hears everything\textsuperscript{4}. The musical aspects are derived from these oracular functions. Mars, of course, is not a particularly musical god, but in military skill he easily outstrips Apollo. All the same, the Greek god has martial traits as well: his names Boedromios, Boethoos, his cry \textit{eleleu}, and song, the Paean, and last but not least, his bow and arrows testify to this. This again is a solar function, since in mythology the sun is represented as a youthful warrior who triumphs over such mythical opponents as dragons and monsters. The arrows are the victorious rays of the sun.

\textsuperscript{3} In the case of Apollo, Roscher 1873, 16, could refer to predecessors (Welcker, Preller, Schwenk, Gerhard) so that the solar nature of Apollo "als eine gegenwärtig allgemein feststehende Annahme bezeichnet werden darf."

\textsuperscript{4} The oracular qualities vindicated for Mars bring Roscher into difficulties. He gives only one testimonium (Dion. Hal. 1, 14) of a—very dubious—Mars oracle. The spontaneous movements of the \textit{ancilia} or \textit{hastae Martis} have no specific significance in this context. See for recent speculations on oracular functions in the Mars-sphere: Palmer 1974, 92 ff. and 112 ff.