

THE BIRD NAME *KASANDĒRION*:  
PROBLEMS OF SEMANTICS, ETYMOLOGY AND ATTRIBUTION

By

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ABSTRACT: The gloss *κασανδήριον · ικτίνοϛ* registered in the Hesychian glossary remains with no explanation. It was even suggested that the gloss is corrupt (Schmidt in his edition; Thompson 1936) and that it refers to a fish, not to a bird (Desfayes 1998: 41). The doubts should be abandoned, as *ικτίνοϛ* denotes ‘red kite, *Milvus milvus* L.’, the well known European bird of prey. The name appears to be a compound containing the element *-δήριον* (= Gk. *-θήριον*) as the second part, cf. the Greek bird names *κωνωπο-θήραϛ* (orig. ‘fly-catcher’), *λαγο-θήραϛ* or *λαγω-φόνοϛ* ‘a kind of hawk, *Hieraaetus fasciatus*’ (orig. ‘hunting / killing hares’), *νηπτο-κτόνοϛ* or *νηπτο-φόνοϛ* ‘hawk’ (orig. ‘killing ducks’), *περδικο-θήραϛ* ‘hawk’ (orig. ‘hunting partridges’), *φασσο-φόνοϛ* or *φασσο-φόντηϛ* ‘hawk’ (orig. ‘killing pigeons’). As the Palaeo-Macedonian language presents the close relationship with Ancient Greek and demonstrates the correspondence δ vs. θ (e.g. Mac. *δάνοϛ* ‘death’ vs. Gk. *θάνατοϛ* m. ‘id.’), it may be suggested that the gloss belonged to the vocabulary of the Ancient Macedonians. The first part of the compound *κασαν-* is compared with the IE. name for ‘hare’, *\*k̑ason-* m. (*n*-stem), cf. German *Hase*, English *hare* (< Gmc. *\*hāsan-* / *\*hazān-*). The original semantics ‘hare-hunter; hunting the hares’ fits very well with a bird of prey, cf. *λαγο-θήραϛ* or *λαγω-φόνοϛ* ‘a kind of hawk, *Hieraaetus fasciatus*’ (orig. ‘hunting / killing hares’), Sanskrit *śāśāda-* m. or *śāśa-ghnī-* ‘hawk-eagle, *Spizaetus cirrhatus* or *S. nipalensis*’ (orig. ‘eating / killing hares’), *śāśādana-* ‘a kind of falcon’, Marathi *sasāna-* ‘falcon’ (orig. ‘eating / killing hares’).

The Hesychian gloss *κασανδήριον · ικτίνοϛ* (Latte 1966: 420, κ-997) remains a *hapax* with no etymology and explanation. It is uncertain whether the gloss in question represents a bird-name or not. Also the original attribution of the gloss is doubtful. However, I believe that Hesychius of Alexandria, the well known lexicographer from 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> century AD, registered a correct, and not fictitious bird name. I intend to show that the doubts expressed by some researchers are too radical.

In his *Glossary of Greek Birds* Thompson (1936: 131) gives the following comment:

*Κασανδήριον · ικτίνοϛ*, Hesych. A very doubtful word; a suggested reading is *κάσων · θηρίον* (Schmidt).

After more than sixty years Desfayes (1998: 41) added his own doubts, indicating that *κασανδήριον* probably denotes a fish [*sic!*], not a bird. He refers