

NAMELESS OR NEHALENNIA

By FRANK JENKINS, F.S.A.

A SMALL clay figurine found some years ago at Canterbury has for a long time provided an enigma in the identity of the personage which it represents.¹ Although the head is missing it is otherwise complete and depicts a matron seated on a throne or high-backed chair, holding a small dog in her arms. The type is well known in north-east Gaul, where numerous examples have been found. These figurines were mass-produced in moulds, two of which have come to light at Bertrich near Trier,² and it is from that region probably that the Canterbury example came, either as an object of trade or as a personal possession.

That figurines of this type had some religious significance is clear from their frequent occurrence on the sites of temples, particularly at Trier³ and in the surrounding countryside.⁴ For instance, in the temple-area at Trier a number of these figurines were found together by a small shrine, before the door of which stood a stone statue of a seated matron who holds a basket of fruits upon her lap and has a dog seated at her side.⁵ The presence of the same type of figurine in Roman graves further suggests that it served some ritual purpose.⁶ Curiously enough in spite of all this abundant material the name of the goddess has in no case been revealed. It is this lacuna in our knowledge that has stimulated the writer to search for any evidence which might shed light on the matron's identity. The results so far obtained form the subject matter of this essay.

An opinion was expressed many years ago, that the matron was intended to be the goddess Nehalennia.⁷ This theory was inspired by the fact that one of the clay figurines had been found in Holland, the homeland, so it seems, of the cult of that goddess. That, however, does not take us very far; what is needed is a critical examination of the whole

¹ F. Jenkins, *Archaeologia Cantiana*, LXV (1952), pp. 131 ff., pl. I.

² *Trierer Zeitschrift*, XVI, Taf. 3, Abb. 29 a and h.

³ S. Loeschke, *Der Tempelbezirk im Altbachtale zu Trier*, Heft I, Taf. 24, Nos. 12-13.

⁴ F. Hettner, *Drei Tempelbezirke im Trevererlande* (Trier, 1901), Taf. XIII, Nos. 62 and 63 from Gusenburg; *ibid.*, Taf. IX, 1-16 inclusive from Dhronnecken.

⁵ S. Loeschke, *Die Erforschung des Tempelbezirkes im Altbachtale zu Trier* (Berlin, 1928), Abb. 15.

⁶ J. Freudenburg, "Darstellungen der matres oder matronae in Thonfiguren aus Uelmen," in *Bonner Jahrbücher*, XVIII, S. 97, Taf. IV, Nos. 1 and 2.

⁷ A. Blanchet, *Étude sur les figurines de terre cuite de la Gaule romaine*, Supplément, *Mémoires de la société nationale des Antiquaires de France*, 6^e ser., Tome I (1890), p. 194. This figurine was found at Rhenen (Prov. Utrecht), Holland.

range of figurines depicting this matron and a comparison of them with the stone reliefs which bear the image of Nehalennia.

As a starting point in our inquiry we may turn to the stone reliefs for guidance. On thirteen of the monuments found at the site of Nehalennia's temple at Domburg in Holland,¹ the goddess is shown with a dog seated at her side as her faithful companion. This is a point of great importance, for, as we have seen, the same animal accompanies the enigmatic matron. Of equal interest is the fact that the animal, whether coupled with Nehalennia or with the matron, never displays a fearsome aspect. It is always shown in the same attitude of peaceful alertness. But there is one difference: the animal never appears at the matron's side. In all cases she holds it either in her arms or seated upon her lap. Nevertheless, this variation need not in any way affect the symbolism. The presence of the dog clearly indicates the chthonian connections of both deities, as also its basic function as a protector and companion of man. Furthermore, its constant appearance with both deities strongly suggests that it was either their main attribute or had an important place in their respective cults; even if the two goddesses were not actually identical.

Having now recognized in the dog a symbol common to both, we can proceed to search for other common attributes. The stone reliefs of Nehalennia are a useful source of information in this connection. We observe that the goddess has fruits of various kinds in a basket, on a dish, or in a cornucopia. Sometimes these fruits are held in the hands of the goddess, generally singly. An ear of corn and a pomegranate are the most usual combination. From this class of attributes it is clear that Nehalennia was a vegetation-goddess concerned with fertility and abundance of crops, and perhaps, by analogy, with the counterparts of those qualities in human beings.

When we examine the various attributes held by the matron of the clay figurines we find that they are, with but one exception, identical with those displayed by Nehalennia. Only the cornucopia in the case of the matron is missing. This may be significant; for it is a curious fact that where it is present on the Nehalennia reliefs, either as a decorative feature on the side panels or as an actual attribute of the goddess, the dog does not appear. What the connection was between the cornucopiae and the animal is a question which cannot at present be answered. Perhaps there was none. But of one thing we can be certain, and that is very obvious: if the dog did not appear with the matron as depicted in the clay figurines, then it would be impossible to distinguish her from all the other mother-goddesses who carry fruits as attributes. We must, then, accept the conclusion that the dog is the distinctive symbol of her cult.

¹ A. Hondius-Crone, *The Temple of Nehalennia at Domburg* (Amsterdam, 1955).

As we have already stated, the other attributes are identical in both cases. For instance, some of the figurines show the matron supporting a cluster of fruits which rests on her lap in front of the dog.¹ Others depict her holding a small bowl filled with fruits, towards which the dog seems to gaze with an air of expectancy.² A contrasting theme is that in which the matron holds an empty patera and the dog has its back turned towards it.³ The matron's close similarity to Nehalennia is apparent when she holds a fan-like object, which is almost certainly a sheaf of corn-ears, in one hand and a circular fruit, possibly a pomegranate, in the other.⁴

We have seen that, while there are certain differences in the manner in which these attributes are presented, the attributes themselves are definitely shared by Nehalennia and the matron. This suggests that they had closely similar, if not identical, functions. Furthermore, their membership of a circle of female deities displaying all the various manifestations of the universal mother-goddess, is proved by the nature of their attributes. This great divinity, the personification of mother-earth from whence all life springs and to which it at death returns, played an important role in the religion of the Romano-Gaulish peoples. The fact that they worshipped her under various forms and many titles suggests that there were regional variations of the theme, and in this connection a study of the iconography of the matron and of Nehalennia may be helpful.

The most obvious line of approach is to examine the hair styles and the dresses worn by both goddesses, for these might be expected to betray local fashions. Unfortunately, the garments worn by the matrons are in this respect disappointing. In every instance we find a long robe in full Roman style, similar to that worn by all the mother-goddesses who do not have the dog as a companion. There is no sign of any differentiation between region and region.

The head-dresses and coiffures of the matrons are extremely varied. Sometimes the hair is piled upon the head and so arranged that it resembles the large turban-like caps of the Rhineland *matronæ*, particularly the *Aufaniae*.⁵ At other times the matron wears a veil completely covering the back of the head,⁶ or, in place of this, a triple-pointed diadem,⁷ while the hair falls in long plaits over the shoulders. Other

¹ E.g. F. Hettner, *op. cit.*, Taf. XII, 35; also Landesmuseum Trier No. 99822.

² E.g. an unpublished example from the temple area at Trier now in the Landesmuseum Trier.

³ Landesmuseum Bonn No. U 249, provenance unknown.

⁴ F. Hettner, *op. cit.*, Taf. IX, 8.

⁵ H. Lehner, "Römische Steindenkmäler von der Bonner Münsterkirche," *Bonner Jahrbücher* 135, Taf. VIII, for a typical example of the reliefs of the *Aufaniae*.

⁶ F. Hettner, *op. cit.*, Taf. IX, 8.

⁷ *Ibid.*, Taf. IX, 15; Landesmuseum Trier No. ST 12128.

figures wear a simple fillet which encircles the head,¹ or a mural crown.² There are other figurines of the matron which show her without any kind of head-dress, the hair being pinned up and elaborately plaited,³ or allowed to fall naturally over the shoulders.⁴ But it would be extremely rash to try to detect in this wide variety in fashions distinctive local styles, for all these types of coiffure and head-dress have been found together in large numbers in the temple-areas at Trier and its surroundings. It is therefore safer to assume that the modellers of these figurines of the matron and her lap-dog provided a range of styles to cater for the individual fancies of the purchasers who wished to offer an image of their own goddess at their local shrines.

Having failed in our quest for evidence of strictly local forms of the matron, we must now turn to the appearance of Nehalennia. Her garments, we find, are very instructive. At times she wears a small cap which seems to be exclusively hers, as is also the short cape worn over her shoulders.⁵ These garments distinguish her clearly from all the other mother-goddesses, who are represented as quite differently apparelled. It would seem an almost certain inference that Nehalennia is attired in a fashion native to the Walcheren district. This distinctive costume of Nehalennia undoubtedly weakens the case for identifying the matron with her. But it would be foolish to reject this theory altogether before considering whether the geographical distribution of the clay figurines may have any useful bearing on our enquiry.

A study of this distribution indicates at once that the majority of these figurines have been found along the two great fluvial trading-routes of north-east Gaul, namely the Rhine and the Mosel. Another fact which emerges is that their main incidence occurs at Trier and its environs, where there is a remarkable concentration of examples. From these facts we may reasonably infer that the cult spread along these rivers from some local centre. In what direction was the cult disseminated and where was this religious centre? At first glance Trier seems to be the obvious answer to our second question. But before we finally accept its claim a new argument may be considered, although it must be stressed that what follows is at best pure conjecture. Assuming for the purpose of our theory that the matron and Nehalennia were in fact the same deity, let us return to the latter's reliefs. An inscription found at Domburg informs us that it was set up by a sea-going merchant who traded in either chalk or pottery between Gaul and Britain.⁶ This maritime connection of Nehalennia is also confirmed by

¹ Landesmuseum Bonn, No. U 250, found Luxemburg.

² Landesmuseum Trier No. 99246.

³ E.g. as at Cologne Sammlung Niessen No. N 3182.

⁴ *Germania Romana*, V, Taf. II, 2; Landesmuseum Bonn No. 12914.

⁵ A. Hondius-Crone, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

⁶ *C.I.L.*, XIII, 8793.

the presence at her shrine of five altars which bear the figure of Neptune.¹ There can thus be no doubt that near Domburg was the assembly-point where river-borne craft from the great inland industrial centres fore-gathered before putting to sea. Here would be the headquarters of the ship-owners and merchants, who, ever mindful of divine providence, would erect a temple to the deity whom they believed to be concerned for their protection and general welfare. To her they dedicated votive reliefs and altars as tokens of their respect and gratitude. But these people were the wealthy; what of the humble members of the crews who manned their sea-going ships?

These crews were no doubt recruited from the industrial cities along the Rhine and Mosel, such as Trier and Cologne, and this may have a bearing on our problem. It is possible that these sailors, having come into close contact with the cult of Nehalennia through their employers, were attracted by it and decided to adopt the goddess as their own protectress. If this were so, it would be natural to suppose that, being unable to afford the expensive stone monuments and altars, they resorted to the poor man's substitutes, namely clay figurines: and that they created a market for cheap images of the deity—thankofferings for a safe return home. These they deposited in local shrines erected in her honour in their own towns. We could then explain the differences in type between the matron and Nehalennia reflecting social distinctions among the devotees of a single deity. The fine and elaborate stone reliefs are confined to the coast; and they may well depict the goddess in the strictly local fashion favoured by the wealthy traders who were domiciled in that area. Meanwhile the number of figurines definitely increases as we penetrate farther inland along the Rhine and Mosel valleys; is this the homeward path of her more humble worshippers? We know from two inscribed altars at Deutz² that the goddess was venerated in at least one place that was situated many miles away from Domburg. Might we not then expect to find other evidence of Nehalennia's cult along these rivers? In fact several reliefs and statues depicting seated matrons accompanied by dogs, may be such pieces of evidence. Although of stone they are all crude efforts as compared with the Domburg monuments. In respect of one from Cologne,³ doubt has been expressed whether the matron is really Nehalennia, on the grounds that she does not wear the latter's distinctive cape and is seated on a different type of chair.⁴ The same could be said of the other reliefs and statues from Bonn,⁵

¹ A. Hondius-Crone, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

² *C.I.L.*, XIII, 8498 and 8499 (both altars are now lost).

³ Fritz Fremersdorf, *Die Denkmäler des römischen Köln II*, Taf. 30.

⁴ A. Hondius-Crone, *op. cit.*, p. 117, Note No. 60.

⁵ H. Lehner, *op. cit.*, Taf. XXV, Statuette No. 59.

Dalheim¹ and Trier.² But in the present writer's opinion these variations are not significant by comparison with the fact that they have either one or more of Nehalennia's essential attributes. For instance there is the basket of fruits and the dog seated at the matron's side, or the animal alone upon her lap. Another shows the dog being fed from a bowl. The presence of these attributes makes it virtually certain that the goddess is Nehalennia; and this leads us back to the stone statue already mentioned of a similarly seated matron with fruit-basket and a dog from Trier, and to the clay figurines found at that matron's temple. If the statue is again Nehalennia's, the figurines must represent her likewise. There are eight other stone reliefs which have strong claims if our theory is correct, for they all come from Trier and it is of great interest that three were found close to the temple area. Again two stone statues from the Upper Seine region may claim to be the same deity although here it should be noted that, while the dog accompanies both figures, one has no other attributes and the other carries a cornucopia, an object which as we have seen, is not combined with the dog in any of the Domburg representations of Nehalennia.³

Having ventured thus far, we may perhaps mention at this point the gravestone of the Rhine shipper, Blussus, found near Mainz.⁴ Here we see him with his wife seated at his side with a small dog seated upon her lap. Is the animal in this instance only a well-loved household pet? Or could it be that the wealthy shipper's wife is represented in the guise of Nehalennia the protectress of men of his profession? Although the second possibility is not stressed, it is at least worthy of consideration.

It is now time to summarize the evidence set forth in this paper. Firstly we have established that the dog companion is a constant and significant symbol common to both the matron and Nehalennia. Secondly the other attributes of Nehalennia are, with the sole exception of the cornucopiæ, shared by the matron represented in the clay figurines. These facts strongly suggest that we are dealing in both cases with the same deity. If the above-mentioned statue from the Upper Seine is also Nehalennia, in spite of the unusual dog-cornucopiæ combination, it would seem to follow that the iconography of the goddess did not conform to rigid convention but was varied according to the taste or religious beliefs of individual worshippers. Can we, then, definitely identify the enigmatic figure of the matron nursing a lap-dog with the divine protectress of the Domburg mariners? Is she

¹ The Dalheim matron is now in the Musée de l'État, Luxemburg.

² Two examples from the Amphitheatre arena cellar now in Landesmuseum Trier, Nos. 09.3414 and 09.3415 respectively. Another was found in the Olewigerstrasse by the Fausenbung and is now in the Landesmuseum Trier, No. 23.31.

³ Georges Drioux, *Cultes indigènes des Lingons*, pp. 112-13, in which he describes two statues found at Poiseul-la-Grange.

⁴ *Mainzer Zeitschrift* XI (1916), S.90 ff., No. 45, with fig. in text.

Nehalennia, or must she remain nameless? The reader must decide whether the arguments here set out in favour of the first alternative are cogent.

The Geographical Distribution of the Clay Figurines of the Matron holding a lap-dog

- (1) Canterbury. *Archæologia Cantiana*, LXV (1952), pp. 131 ff., pl. I.
- (2) Rhenen, Utrecht, Holland. L. J. F. Janssen, *De Germaansche en Noordsche Monum. van het Museum von Leyden* (1840), p. 2, pl. 1, fig. 5.
- (3) Xanten. P. J. Steiner, "Das Trümmerfeld vor dem Clever Thore der Stadt, Xanten," in *Bonner Jahrbücher*, 88, p. 95.
- (4) Cologne. *Saalburg Jahrbüch*, IX, p. 10. This is one of a number in the Museum.
- (5) Bonn. *Bonner Jahrbücher*, 106, S.225. This is one of a number in the Museum.
- (6) Mayen (near Andernach). A. Blanchet, *Mémoires société nationale des Antiquaires de France*, LX (1901), p. 240.
- (7) Neuwied. *Bonner Jahrbücher*, 142, p. 323.
- (8) Marienfels. Wiesbaden Museum 5431. Lindenschmitt, *Die Alterthümer unserer heidnischen Vorzeit II*, text and *ibid.*, I, pl. VI.
- (9) Bingen. G. Behrens, *Katalogue West- und Sudddeutscher Altertumsammlungen IV*, Bingen, 1920, Taf. 21, No. 8.
- (10) Bingerbrück. G. Behrens, *ibid.*, Taf. 22, No. 12.
- (11) Zugmantel. A. Riese, *Festschrift zur Feier des 25 Jährigen Bestehens des Städtischen Museums in Frankfurt-am-Main* (1903), "Römische Terrakotten aus unser Umgegend im Historische Museum."
- (12) Saalburg. In Saalburg Museum (2 examples).
- (13) Heddernheim. A. Riese, *op. cit.*, Taf. III, 10, No. 3045.
- (14) Frankfurt-am-Main. *Ibid.*
- (15) Nied. In Höchst Museum.
- (16) Kastel. *Sammlung Dorow Katalogue*, 2nd Part, p. 27 and p. 50.
- (17) Strasburg. R. Mowat, *Mémoires de la société nationale des Antiquaires de France* (1879), p. 260.
- (18) Dhronneck. F. Hettner, *Drei Tempelbezirke im Trevererlande* (Trier, 1901), Taf. IX, 1-16 inclusive.
- (19) Gusenburg. F. Hettner, *ibid.*, Taf. XIII, Nos. 62 and 63.
- (20) Trier. S. Loeschcke, *Der Tempelbezirk im Altbachtale zu Trier*, Heft I, Taf. 24, Nos. 12 and 13. Many examples were found and only a few have been published.

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- (21) Maar-bei-Trier. *Westdeutsche Zeitschrift*, XIII (1894), Taf. 10, 1.
Found in a grave.
- (22) Hochscheid (Kreis Bernkastell). W. Dehn, *Germania*, 25 (1941),
S.104 ff., Taf. 16, 10. Found at a temple dedicated to Apollo
and Sirona.
- (23) Bertrich. *Trierer Zeitschrift*, XVI, Taf. 3, Abb. 29a and 29h.
Both are moulds.
- (24) Uelmen (Kreis Kochem). *Bonner Jahrbücher*, XVIII (1852),
p. 97, pl. 4, figs. 1 and 2. The site was a Roman cemetery.
- (25) Horperath. *Bonner Jahrbücher*, 143/144, p. 398, Taf. 73, Abb. 1.
This example was found in a small square chapel.
- (26) Brachtendorf (Kreis Mayen) Landesmuseum Bonn No. 33228.
From site of a temple ("Hinter Cella II").
- (27) Wallendorf-am-Birgelbach, Luxemburg.
- (28) Contern? Luxemburg. Now in Musée de l'État, Luxemburg.
- (29) Between Alttrier and Hersberg, Luxemburg.
- (30) Alttrier. *Bonner Jahrbücher*, CXVI, S.216.
- (31) Dalheim. Musée de l'État, Luxemburg.
- (32) Luxemburg. Landesmuseum Bonn No. U 250.
- (33) Arlon (near). Now in Arlon Museum several examples.
- (34) Juslenville (Spa). Musée archéologique de Liege, two examples
according to Blanchet, *Étude sur les figurines de terre cuite de la
Gaule romaine, Supplément, Mémoires de la société nationale des
antiquaires de France*, 6^e series, LX (1901), p. 240.
- (35) Géroment. F. Liénard, *Archéologie de la Meuse*, tome II, p. 84,
pl. XIX, figs. 1 and 2.
- (36) Boulogne-sur-Mer. Boulogne Museum No. 1170.
- (37) Salzburg. F. Loewi, *Archaeologisch-Epigraphische Mittheilungen
aus Oesterreich*, V (1881), p. 184. The identification of the
animal is doubtful as it is said to represent a lion.
- (38) Allier. E. Tudot, *Collection de figurines en argile oeuvres premières
de l'art gaulois, avec les noms des céramistes qui les ont exécutées*,
(Paris, 1850), p. 35, fig. LI. An unusual type.
- (39) Nijmegen, Holland. 2 examples now in Rijksmuseum G. M.
Kam, Nijmegen.

Addenda to List of Stone Statuettes of the Seated Matron with Dog

While this essay was in the press, the author had the opportunity of examining a further five fragmentary examples now in the Landesmuseum in Trier. These are, one unnumbered specimen and Inv. Nos. G 21, C 88, ST 13895, and 96.16 respectively. All are unpublished and, although the exact find-spots are unrecorded, it is certain that they were found at Trier.

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Professor Toynbee kindly drew the author's attention to another unpublished example from Windisch (Vindonissa), Switzerland. For information and photographs he is indebted to Dr. Rudolf Fellmann of Brugg Museum, where the statuette is now preserved.

Acknowledgments

The author is greatly indebted to Professor J. M. C. Toynbee who has very kindly read the typescript of this paper. Her many valuable suggestions are incorporated in this the final draft. To the Leverhulme Trustees special thanks must be given, for it is entirely due to a Leverhulme Scholarship that the writer was enabled to visit the region in which the figurines are most prolific, and in consequence to complete his studies. To Mr. Ronald Jessup, F.S.A., the writer is most indebted, not only for acting as his sponsor in an application for the Scholarship, but also for many kind encouragements which extend over a period of some years.

A number of museums are mentioned in this paper, but it would take up too much space to list in detail all the people who have assisted in the work. In consequence the author in mentioning them, intends his thanks to be recorded. To Dr. Erich Gose of the Rheinische Landesmuseum, Trier, a special word of thanks is due for many kindnesses, and especially for providing the writer with every facility for studying and handling the many figurines which he has in his charge.