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SHORTER NOTES

ΑΨΟΡΡΟΟΥ ΩΚΕΑΝΟΙΟ: A BABYLONIAN REMINISCENCE?

In his magisterial *East Face of Helicon*, Martin West has tentatively revived Germain's suggestion that *ἀψορρόου Ὠκεανοῖο* (*Il.* 18.399; *Od.* 20.65; *Theog.* 776) conceals a reference to the Babylonian deity Apsu: 'was this a reinterpretation of **Ἄψω̄, ῥόου Ὠκεανοῖο*, "of Apsu, the stream of Oceanus" (or the stream of the cosmic basin, or whatever)?'[1] His reasons are (1) '*ἄψ* should not become *ἀψο-* in a compound' and (2) the idea of Oceanus 'flowing back onto itself … does not correspond to Hesiod's conception of its flow (*Theog.* 791f.)'. This note will propose that the formation of *ἀψορρόου* is adequately explained within the dynamics of the Greek epic language, and that the idea behind it is not inconsistent with the epic depiction(s) of Oceanus. There is, therefore, no reason to invoke a Near Eastern source for, or background to, this expression.

On the first point, scholarship is divided over the derivation of *ἀψορρόου*. Some follow, or rather precede, West in claiming its composition directly from *ἄψ* and *ῥέω*,[2] but the more common position is that it was created from *ἄψορρος*, itself usually thought to derive from *ἄψ* and *ὄρρος* ('Arsch') and to mean 'zurückgehend' (Risch, Frisk) or 'zurück(kehrend)' (*LfrGE*).[3] I suggest that this occurred because *ἄψορρος*

* I would like to thank Bill Allan, Patrick Finglass and *CQ*'s anonymous reader for their help on this note; they are not responsible for the shortcomings in its argument.

[1] M. L. West, *The East Face of Helicon: West Asiatic Elements in Greek Poetry and Myth* (Oxford, 1997), 148, citing (n. 201) J. Germain, *Genèse de l'Odyssée* (Paris, 1954), 531–2. West draws some support from his preceding discussion of the 'sources' for the cosmogonic function of Oceanus and Tethys (*Il.* 14.201, 244–6), viz. Apsu and Tiamat in the *Enuma Elis*. Against this generally accepted derivation, D. Panchenko, '*Γένεσις πάντεσσι*: *Iliad* 14.201 and 14.246 reconsidered', *Hyperboreus* 1 (1994), 183–6, argues that 14.201 (*Ὠκεανόν τε θεῶν γένεσιν καὶ μητέρα Τηθύν*) refers not to the generation of the universe but only the fathering of the rivers, comparing 14.245–6 (*καὶ ἂν ποταμοῖο ῥέεθρα / Ὠκεανοῦ, ὅς περ γένεσις πάντεσσι τέτυκται*) and 21.195–7 (*οὐδὲ βαθυρρείταο μέγα σθένος Ὠκεανοῖο, / ἐξ οὗ περ πάντες ποταμοὶ καὶ πᾶσα θάλασσα / καὶ πᾶσαι κρῆναι καὶ φρείατα μακρὰ νάουσιν*). In his (to my mind persuasive) view, Oceanus is *θεῶν γένεσις* in the same sense that Zeus is *πατὴρ ἀνδρῶν τε θεῶν τε* (*Il.* 1.544 etc.) or Mt Ide *μητέρι μήλων* (*Il.* 8.47, 14.283, 15.151).

[2] F. Bechtel, *Lexilogus zu Homer* (Halle, 1914), s.vv. 79–80; E. Schwyzer, *Griechische Grammatik I: Lautlehre. Wortbildung. Flexion* (Munich, 1953), 632; K. Forbes, 'Medial intervocalic -ρσ-, -λσ- in Greek', *Glotta* 36 (1957), 235–72, at 265; E. Risch, *Wortbildung der homerischen Sprache* (Berlin, 1974[3]), §74 (b), 198.

[3] H. Frisk, *Griechisches etymologisches Wörterbuch* (Heidelberg, 1960–73), s. *ἄψορρος*, 204–5, and P. Chantraine, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque*, suppl. by A. Blanc, C. de Lamberterie and J-L. Perpillou (Paris, 1999), s. *ἄψ*, 152, both citing J. Wackernagel, *Sprachliche Untersuchungen zu Homer* (Göttingen, 1916), 1, n. 2, 226 and n. 1; Risch (n. 2), §66 (a), 176; *LfrGE* s. *ἄψορρος*, 1790. For earlier derivations and explanations, cf. F. Gisinger, 'Oceanus', *RE 34: Numen–Olympia* (Stuttgart, 1937), §5, 2313; also L. Pocock, 'Note on *ΑΨΟΡΡΟΟΥ ΩΚΕΑΝΟΙΟ*', *Hermes* 88 (1960), 371–4, and 'The nature of Ocean in the early epic', *PACA* 5

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was reinterpreted by epic poets as a contract (i.e. *ἀψόρρουϛ < ἀψόρροοϛ) belonging to the large group of -ρ(ρ)οοϛ compounds (ἀγάρροοϛ, βαθύρροοϛ, καλλίρροοϛ, χειμάρροοϛ, ὠκύροοϛ). Early epic generally prefers the uncontracted forms of these words, with only χειμάρροοϛ actually showing contraction: next to χειμάρροοϛ (*Il.* 13.138), one finds χείμαρροι (*Il.* 4.452), χειμάρρωι (*Il.* 5.88) and χειμάρρουϛ (*Il.* 11.493). The two forms of ἄψορροϛ attested in epic are ἄψορροι and (adjectival / adverbial) ἄψορρον,[4] and whilst the former (*Il.* 3.313 = 24.330, 21.456; *HHAp.* 436; *HHHerm.* 505) could be interpreted as a contracted form (< -οοι), the latter at first sight cannot; it should be ἀψόρρουν. Yet the last syllable of ἄψορρον is always heavy in early epic poetry, usually because it is placed before a consonant (*Il.* 7.413, 12.74, 16.376, 21.382; *Od.* 9.282, 9.501, 10.558, 11.63), but at *Theog.* 659 (ἄψορρον ἐξαῦτιϛ ἀμειλίκτων ὑπὸ δεσμῶν) before a vowel[5] and *Il.* 4.152 (ἄψορρόν οἱ θυμὸϛ ἐνὶ στήθεσσιν ἀγέρθη) a 'lost' digamma.[6] These last two cases indicate that an epic poet could (and in the *Theogony* did) consider the last syllable of ἄψορρον as *naturally* heavy, and so prosodically equivalent to the contracted -ουν ending appropriate to a -ρροοϛ compound.[7]

In other words, the commonly employed forms of ἄψορροϛ were reinterpreted as

(1962), 1–17 (both repr. in id., *Odyssean Essays* (Oxford, 1965), 1–5, 64–90). Forbes (n. 2), 265–6, argues instead that παλίνορσοϛ (invoked by Wackernagel but connected with Aristophanic παλιμπυγηδόν) is derived from ὄρνυμι (*-*ortyos* > *-orsos*), which could also be applied to ἄψορσοϛ > ἄψορροϛ by dissimilation (Wackernagel, 1, n. 2). Whatever its original derivation, ἄψορροϛ clearly means 'back(wards)' in Homeric epic.

[4] *Il.* 3.313, 4.152, 7.413, 12.74, 16.376, 21.382, 21.456, 24.330; *Od.* 9.282, 9.501, 10.558, 11.63; *Theog.* 659; *HHAp.* 436; *HHHerm.* 505.

[5] Cf. M. L. West, *Hesiod: Theogony* (Oxford, 1966) ad loc. (pp. 345–6). Some MSS have inserted δ', presumably in order to 'solve' this problem, and most editorial attempts have sought to re-order the lines. One could of course point to other cases where final -ον is heavy before a following vowel (cf. M. L. West, *Greek Metre* [Oxford, 1982], 9, 16; also P. Chantraine, *Grammaire homérique, Tome I: Phonétique et morphologie* [Paris, 1958], §45 (d), 104–5; P. Maas, *Griechische Metrik* [Leipzig, 1961], § 128), and therefore ascribe *Theog.* 659 to a common metrical 'licence'. But consider, for example, βέλοϛ ἐχεπευκέϛ (*Il.* 1.51), which was once explained by the same kind of lengthening (D. Korzeniewski, *Griechische Metrik* [Darmstadt, 1968], 23), but now (C. J. Ruijgh, 'D'Homère aux origines proto-mycéniennes de la tradition épique', in J. P. Crielaard [ed.], *Homeric Questions* [Amsterdam, 1995], 1–96, at 78–9) by a linguistic development < *hεχεπευκέϛ. Indeed, all the Hesiodic examples of heavy final -ον + initial vowel can be similarly explained, usually as the result of a lost ϝ (*Op.* 434 εἴ χ' ἕτερον ἄξαιϛ, 477 πολιὸν ἔαρ, 721 εἰ δὲ κακὸν εἴποιϛ) but once of another sound (*Theog.* 91 θεὸν ὥϛ < *yos*); cf. Chantraine, *Grammaire*, chs. 10–12 *passim*; M. L. West, 'Homeric meter', in I. Morris and B. Powell (edd.), *A New Companion to Homer* (Leiden, 1997), 218–37, at 226–9. There is no such justification for ἄψορρον ἐξαῦτιϛ at *Theog.* 659.

[6] The treatment of ϝ is a matter of metrical and compositional utility—from a poet's perspective, enclitic οἱ may or may not have an effect on a preceding short vowel + consonant. For examples where it does not, cf. *Il.* 6.90, 6.101, 6.289, 10.232, 16.735, 20.282, 23.865, 24.53, 24.72 (also 11.339, generally emended to οὐδέ οἱ from papyri, though this reading could have been caused by a desire to avoid the apparent anomaly); cf. Chantraine (n. 5) §55, 147–8; also M. L. West, *Hesiod: Works and Days* (Oxford, 1978) on *Op.* 526 (p. 291) for cases in Hesiod and the *Hymns*; R. Janko, *Homer's Iliad: A Commentary Volume IV: Books 13–16* (Cambridge, 1992) on *Il.* 16.735 (p. 403).

[7] Any early spelling would not differentiate -ον and -ουν / -οον, while the famous case of καιροσέων (*Od.* 7.107), which Bergk corrected to καιρουσσέων (<*καιροϝεσσάων), suggests that the MSS' -ο- (for -ου-) in ἄψορρον may not reflect an original pronunciation; cf. Janko (n. 6), 34. On such confusions in general, cf. Chantraine (n. 5), ch. 1, esp. §1–2, 5–8; §19, 44–8; also next note.

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coming from a contract *ἀψόρρουϛ (cf. χειμάρρουϛ), whence an uncontracted nominative *ἀψόρροοϛ (cf. χειμάρροοϛ) and then genitive ἀψορρόου (βαθυρρόου).[8] Given that contraction in the cluster -οϝο- (-ρροϝοϛ) is a rare and recent development in Homeric diction,[9] ἀψορρόου is another example of the way in which early epic poets created inauthentic hyper-archaisms.[10] The resulting penthemimeral ἀψορρόου ’Ωκεανοῖο complemented the trochaic caesura formula βαθυρρόου ’Ωκεανοῖο (*Il.* 7.422, 14.311; *Od.* 11.13, 19.434) by helping to complete Oceanus’ formula system in the genitive case, a system particularly required for the genealogical context most appropriate to him.

West’s second point can be dealt with more quickly. The epic depiction of Oceanus as a geographical feature is admittedly imprecise, but Homer and Hesiod share the basic conception that Oceanus surrounds the known world (*Il.* 18.607–8; *Theog.* 790–1) and flows into it through the streams and rivers to which he has given birth (*Il.* 21.194–7; *Theog.* 337–70). His connection with the sea is represented genealogically by his marriage to Tethys (*Il.* 14.201–2; *Theog.* 337–70) but geographically by the fact that, as the origin of all rivers, he εἰϛ ἅλα πίπτει (*Theog.* 791).[11] This is not at all inconsistent with his position, for which the epithet ἀψορρόου is perfectly appropriate, since it describes Oceanus as the earth-encircling river which, apart from all its out-courses, coils around the world as it does the shield of Achilles, and so simply keeps on ‘flowing back onto itself’.[12]

Therefore, there is little reason to posit the presence of Apsu in the early epic formula ἀψορρόου ’Ωκεανοῖο, or a Near Eastern source for the conception of Oceanus it reveals.[13]

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[8] The process need not have occurred in these actual stages, for the fact that the poets only used the genitive form suggests a particular need for a formula in this case; cf. below. ἄψορροϛ does not appear again until the Attic tragedians ([Aesch.] *PV* 1021; Soph. *Trach.* 902, *Ant.* 386, *Aj.* 369, *OT* 431, *El.* 53, 1430), who were using written texts of Homer and Hesiod, with an established orthography treating ἄψορροϛ in the ordinary (non-contract) way, and / or listening to performances of those texts by rhapsodes.

[9] Chantraine (n. 5), §14, 30.

[10] For one example among many, Homeric ἄαπτοϛ is formed by diectasis from ἆπτοϛ, which actually comes from ἄεπτοϛ < *ἄϝεπτοϛ; cf. *LfrGE* s.v. 3; also R. Janko, *Homer, Hesiod and the Homeric Hymns* (Cambridge, 1982), 76–9 (and index, s. ‘false archaism’) for discussion of this common phenomenon.

[11] Cf. West (n. 5) on *Theog.* 791 (p. 374): ‘as do all rivers of the upper world’.

[12] Cf. R. B. Rutherford, *Homer: Odyssey XIX and XX* (Cambridge, 1992), 211 on *Od.* 20.65: ‘because [Oceanus] has no greater sea into which to send its waters, it must “flow back” into itself’. The phrasing of *Theog.* 789–91 (δεκάτη δ’ ἐπὶ μοῖρα δέδασται· / ἐννέα μὲν περὶ γῆν καὶ εὐρέα νῶτα θαλάσσηϛ / δίνηις ἀργυρέηις εἰλιγμένοϛ εἰϛ ἅλα πίπτει) actually suggests a differentiation between Oceanus’ ‘original’ waters and their outflows; cf. West (n. 5) on *Theog.* 789 (p. 374): ‘and one part in ten is allotted to it’ (sc. Styx).

[13] This is not to argue that the Greek conception of Oceanus was unconnected to other Mediterranean civilizations (A. Lesky, *Thalatta: der Weg der Griechen zum Meer* [Vienna, 1947], 58–87, esp. 64–5; Germain [n. 1], 529–32; West [n. 5], 201, on *Theog.* 133; Janko [n. 6], 180–2, on *Il.* 14.200–7), but the process of cultural interaction is too long and complex to be described in terms of simple source derivation; cf., similarly, G. Most, ‘Hesiod’s myth of the five (or three or four) races’, *PCPhS* 43 (1997), 104–27, and J. Haubold, ‘Greek epic: a Near Eastern genre?’, *PCPhS* 48 (2002), 1–19.

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