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## THE LANGUAGE OF GODS AND THE USE OF FOREIGN WORDS WITH HOMER

One of the interesting problems in the studies of Homer's language is the language of gods, a notion encountered in his epic. According to the mythic tradition, Old Greeks believed that gods spoke a language different from that of ordinary mortals. Of course, people treated this language with special esteem and respect. Such an opinion is clearly expressed in Plato's *Cratylus*, where Socrates says: οἱ γὰρ θεοὶ καλοῦσιν πρὸς ὀρθότητα ἅπερ ἔστι φύσει ὀνόματα ("Gods must clearly be supposed to call things by their right and natural names").<sup>1</sup>

Thus, the language of gods or, in our terminology, the meta-language is a language spoken by gods. Homer was the first to make an attempt to translate words of the meta-language into Greek. There are two categories of words in his epic: first, derivatives that are translated and second, words that cannot be translated. As a rule, words in the language of gods have equivalents in the language of mortals in Homer's epic. However, there are two exceptions, which will be considered in more detail below.

There are not many words from the language of gods mentioned by Homer. It is possible to regard no more than seven or eight of them as

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<sup>1</sup> Bader G., *Die Emergenz des Namens, Hermeneutische Untersuchungen zur Theologie*, Tübingen 2006.  
[http://books.google.ge/books?id=MtesocD5JeEC&pg=PA129&lpg=PA129&dq=Dionymien&source=bl&ots=Krkd9onVz&sig=8bf08hlTWUxCuSK2HSz78kKKI8E&hl=ka&ei=OPfuTdnrMs\\_o-gaPk8z-Bw&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CBQQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=Dionymien&f=false](http://books.google.ge/books?id=MtesocD5JeEC&pg=PA129&lpg=PA129&dq=Dionymien&source=bl&ots=Krkd9onVz&sig=8bf08hlTWUxCuSK2HSz78kKKI8E&hl=ka&ei=OPfuTdnrMs_o-gaPk8z-Bw&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CBQQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=Dionymien&f=false)

such, but they belong to various spheres, denoting geographic, mythological, botanical, and other notions. For example, gods' name in their own language of one of the mythological Hecatonchires giants, specifically Διγαίων, is Βριάρεως (A, 403). Σκάμανδρος a river in Troy, was called Ξάνθος in the language of gods (Y, 74). The meaning of Πλαγκταί (M, 61), also a geographical name, is quite unclear. Βατίεια, a place name in Troy, is replaced with σήμα Μυρίνης (B, 813). There was a bird called κύμνιδις, which gods named χαλκίς (X, 291). A kind of magic grass was called μῶλυ (K, 305) in the language of gods, but the language ordinary people did not have a corresponding word at all. Divine blood is mentioned only as ἕχωρ (E, 340, 416), but *Iliad* usually refers to human blood as αἷμα.

Researchers have argued for a long time now about what Homer calls the language of gods. The first important thing to do is to establish whether these words are Homer's fiction or something that really existed. To clarify this issue it is necessary to look into the etymological studies of these words.

According to A. Heubeck, who studied in detail the language of gods with Homer, argues that the dionyms in the language of gods may be either ancient obsolete words linked to Indo-European stems or new poetic inventions.<sup>2</sup> However, below we will consider a couple of words and their etymologies and parallels that show that they may have existed historically or may represent altered versions of ancient words. What is most important for us, some of them may belong to the Pre-Greek world. At any rate, the words that Homer regards as belonging to the language of gods, must be a reflection of the words that existed in his time. Considering below the etymology of each of the words, we will see that most of them are linked to the Pre-Greek world and some bear signs of being connected with Kartvelian languages.

The first word is Σκάμανδρος usually considered with another word with identical meaning in the language of gods – Ξάνθος. A lot of well-known scientists have expressed their opinions on the pair. U. Wilamowitz believes that the name of the river was Barbaric and inconvenient, so some poets replaced it with a more convenient Greek name.<sup>3</sup> P. Kretschmer divides non-Greek “Scamandros” in the human language from “divine” “Xanthos”, presuming that the phoneme Ξ in the

<sup>2</sup> Heubeck A., *Die Homerische Göttersprache* 7 Würzburger Jahrbücher, für die Altertumswissenschaft, 4, 1949/50, 94.

<sup>3</sup> Wilamowitz U., *Die Ilias und Homer*, Berlin Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1916, 381, I.

word may be coming from sk- in Ξάνθος.<sup>4</sup> According to one opinion, the stem σκ- initially meant "yellow", which is precisely one of the meanings of the adjective ξάνθος. According to S. Bugge,<sup>5</sup> Ξάνθος means "lustrous" and stems from Phrygian and Armenian.

P. Kretschmer cites in detail the history of the river that has two names with Homer. In the times of Hittites, a city situated on the river was called Arina. This is how the place is referred to in Hittite texts and it is called Arna in Lycian. At the same time, it is noteworthy that initially, Arina could have been a river – the Xanthos river, where the city of Arina then stood, particularly as Arina also denoted "spring, pool, and water". During first contacts between Greece and Lycia and before the start of the Greek colonization in Homer's era, when close cultural relations developed, the adjective ξάνθος was used together with the Lycian-Phrygian name of the river Sibros as its Greek synonym and translation, which explained the name of the river. Ξάνθος developed later into an independent name.

Thus, there is no doubt that in Homer's time, the river already had a double (Lycian-Phrygian) name and it was after the river that the city was also called Ξάνθος, like in the case of Arina. A. Heubeck concludes that Xanthos as a name of the river was invented by Homer, who used the double Lycian name of Xanthos-Sibros as a source. Correspondingly, Xanthos is a Greek translation of Sibros and Σκάμανδρος corresponds to it in the human language.

It is noteworthy that the forms of *Scamandros* and *Xanthos* are regarded as being linked to each other. They are believed to be coming from a source in Asia Minor with a Hellenic ending, like in *Maiandros*, *Myriandros*, and others. According to H. Jacobsohn, *Myriandros* may comprise a 'theophoric' element – μανδρος.<sup>6</sup>

A. Heubeck gives examples of the Indo-European stems with initial s-. Many of the stems comprise s+guttural or guttural+s. For example, ξηρός (ξερός), σκηρός, σχηρός > χηρός, σκίφος, ξίφος and so forth. H. Jacobsohn notes that the initial 'sk' sounds in 'Scamandros' could have replaced some phoneme, which existed before, but it is still unclear, which phoneme it could have been.<sup>7</sup>

A. Heubeck believes that both Σκάμανδρος and Ξάνθος may have the same root. He thinks that Σκάμανδρος is definitely a Pre-Greek name, but

<sup>4</sup> Kretschmer P., *Glotta* 13, 1924, 266.

<sup>5</sup> Bugge S. *Lykische Studien*, I, 1897, 39.

<sup>6</sup> Jacobsohn H., *Deutsche Literaturzeitung*, Berlin 1912, 953.

<sup>7</sup> Jacobsohn H., *Hermes*, 45, 1910, 81.

obviously refrains from maintaining the same regarding Ξάνθος.<sup>8</sup> It is noteworthy that R. Beekes also describes Ξάνθος as being of unclear etymology, noting that it may be coming from Pre-Greek sources.<sup>9</sup> It is noteworthy that Ξάνθος can be found in Mycenaean sources in the form of *ka-sa-to*. According to one theory quoted by R. Beekes, it is linked to Greek ξουθός with one of the meanings denoting 'yellow' and is represented in Mycenaean as *-ko-so-u-to*. Homer mentions it in connection with the wings of Dioscuri (*Iliad*, 33, 13). According to yet another opinion, Latin *canus*- is derived precisely from 'Xanthos'.

It is noteworthy that W. Brandenstein links Ξάνθος to Etruscan *zamθic*. Although H. Frisk rejects the opinion<sup>10</sup> and R. Beekes also regards it as not very convincing, it should be taken into account that Etruscan *zamθi* 'gold' and *zamθic* 'golden' are indeed similar in meaning and can be linked to them also with their form.

At least one researcher believes that *Scamandros* and *Xanthos* are etymologically linked to each other, but the situation is quite different with Greek words αἷμα and ἵχωρ encountered with Homer. Of the two, αἷμα denotes blood of ordinary mortals and ἵχωρ blood of gods. It is believed that αἷμα replaced in the Greek language the word ἕαρ, which also denotes blood. According to one opinion, it is linked to ἵχωρ. Others link it also to Old Germanic *\*seim* (Proto-Indo-European root *\*-sei*) "honey of virgins" and Sanskrit *-is-* "renovation, restoration of forces". However, in this case, the etymology of ἵχωρ denoting "divine blood" is more interesting.

The word ἵχωρ denoting "blood, the liquid part of blood" has the form of ἵχω in acc. sing. with Homer and with Strabo it means "the blood of giants" According to P. Chantraine, the word has no identical morphological parallels and is presumably a foreign word.<sup>11</sup> Composed words like ἵχω(ρο)ρρορεω - "bleeding" and others are derived from it.

According to H. Güntert, the two words meaning "blood" were used as synonyms in Proto-Greek. One was ἵχωρ, which denoted the fluid part of blood, and the other was αἷμα denoting thicker blood. It is no surprise, that for Homer, gods should have had thinner blood than mortals. That is why it is possible that Homer used the word initially denoting thin blood

<sup>8</sup> Heubeck A., Op. cit., 99.

<sup>9</sup> Beekes R., *Etymological Dictionary of Greek*, Brill Academic Publishers 2010, 1033.

<sup>10</sup> Frisk H., *Griechisches etymologisches Wörterbuch* 1966, 333.

<sup>11</sup> Chantraine P., *Grammaire homérique*, Paris: C. Klincksieck 1942, 212.

for "divine blood".<sup>12</sup> It is interesting that we encounter ἵχωρ "thin blood" with authors of later period (Aristotle, Plato, and others). It is used particularly frequently as a scientific term, but has never been widespread in the colloquial language. It is unlikely that scientists could have managed to establish the meaning of ἵχωρ without any knowledge of Homer and the meaning of the word he used.

According to A. Heubeck's observation, it was the appropriate passage from *Iliad*, which could have made it clear that "divine blood" had special characteristics, that ἵχωρ was later introduced in medicine and biology to denote lymphatic fluid and similar notions. It is common knowledge that ἵχωρ was a borrowed word in Greek, coming from Hittite *išhar* (*ešhar*) "blood",<sup>13</sup> which is for its part linked to *Alat. aser* and Greek ἔαρ, εἶαρ "id". Taking into account the Hittite language, it can also be linked to Tocharian *ysar*.

As H. Güntert notes, ἵχωρ as well as another word from the language of gods alone – μῶλυ – is presumably an earlier form of a Greek word, which Homer knew from the religious language. In *Odyssey* (K 305), μῶλυ means "magic plant with unknown force" and does not have a corresponding word in the language of mortals. There is an opinion that this plant is completely from the sphere of fantasies and is linked to the Pre-Greek world. Güntert believes that it is the same as the Old Indian *mulam* "root".<sup>14</sup> However, A. Heubeck refers to P. Kretschmer, Walde-Pokorny, and H. Güntert, noting that the word is Greek and was formed from Inro-European *\*mulo/mo(u)lo*, which later developed into μῶλυζα "a sort of garlic" like κορυ > κόρυζα, κνυ > κνῦζα, which must be derived from the name of a plant – κόρυζα, and μῶλυζα was formed on the basis of the model. It is possible that μῶλυ found with Homer is an earlier form or was restored by the poet on the basis of μῶλυζα.<sup>15</sup> According to G. Neumann, μῶλυ was borrowed from Hittite-Luwian. Albeit various opinions have been expressed in connection with μῶλυ, the assumption that the word is of Pre-Greek origin sounds most convincing.

The next two words with interesting etymology are κύμνιδις and its equivalent in the language of gods – χαλκίς. With Homer (X, 291), κύμνιδις denotes a bird of unknown origin. Aristophanes also uses the word. It was widespread in Greek in the form of κυβήναις (κύβινδις) that

<sup>12</sup> Heubeck A., Op. cit., 109-110.

<sup>13</sup> Friedrich J., Kurzgefaßtes hethitisches Wörterbuch, 1991, 33.

<sup>14</sup> Güntert H., Op. cit., 92.

<sup>15</sup> Heubeck A., Op. cit., 111.

was presumably borrowed by Latin, which has *cybindis*, *cibinnus* ('hawk'). The word was regarded as having the same meaning as *κικνω* ἰς (*κικνωος*) which gave rise to the tradition of regarding it as denoting 'owl'. R. Beekes believes that the word was borrowed from Anatolian or Pre-Greek, an opinion based first and foremost on the presence of the suffix *nd*.<sup>16</sup> Its equivalent in the language of gods – *χαλκίς* – comes from *χαλκός* ('ore', 'copper', 'bronze') and is regarded as a polysemantic word of unclear origin. It can be found in Mycenaean documents in the shape of *-ka-ko*, *ka-ke-u*, denoting, in addition, a kind of fish.

Both *Χαλκίς* and *κύμινδης* are used by Homer, as well as Aristophanes, as the name of a bird. Given the colour, it later denoted a plant and a kind of lizard. R. Beekes regards *χαλκίς* as a word extant in ancient Indo-European languages with the meaning of 'ore' and 'copper' and as linked to Latin *aes* 'copper' and Sanskrit *ayah*. R. Beekes notes that it is no accident that it is similar to words denoting 'purple' – *κόλλη*, *χάλλη*, *χάλλη*. Initially they could have been used to denote red metals. The word is also linked to Baltic-Slavic words denoting 'iron', for example, Lithuanian *geležis* and Russian *želézo*, a comparison, which R. Beekes deems unconvincing phonetically, but adds that they may be independent borrowings from common oriental sources. In this case, *χάλλη* could be the initial form, which is linked to a Hittite (Hattian, Hurrian) lexeme, which means 'iron' – *hapalki-apalki*.<sup>17</sup>

According to Homer, in the language of gods, *Αἰγαίω* was called *Βριάρεως* (A, 403). There is no doubt that *Αἰγαίω* is linked to the Aegean Sea and words related to it. In H. Güntert's opinion, the water demon bearing this name was later transformed into Poseidon, and some viewed him as Poseidon's son. In the appropriate passage with Homer, *Αἰγαίω* was closely linked to Thetis, the goddess of water, which is yet another proof that *Αἰγαίω* was linked to water.

It is noteworthy that its divine name is *Βριάρεως*, who is a giant with hundred hands in *Iliad*. As we know, the adjective *βριαρός* means 'powerful', which Hesiod used in the form of *Ὀβριάρεως* 'the one, who damages'. The word *βριαρός* is derived from the root *bri*, which R. Beekes believes was Pre-Greek.<sup>18</sup> It is also encountered in Mycenaean in the form of *pi-ra-ta-wo*. The word frequently makes part of composites. E. J. Furnée assumes that the root

<sup>16</sup> Beekes R., Op. cit., 802.

<sup>17</sup> Beekes R., Op. cit., 1611.

<sup>18</sup> Beekes R., Op. cit., 239.

found in βριαρός is also linked to βριμός 'hard, difficult', which is also Pre-Greek.<sup>19</sup> The word ἴβρις is derived from the same root.

It would be interesting to see, whether the words from the language of gods encountered with Homer that obviously comprise a Pre-Greek substrate correlate with the opinion developed by E. J. Furnée and R. Gordeziani on the connection between Pre-Greek components and Kartvelian and whether it is possible that some of the aforementioned words comprise Kartvelian components.

For example, according to one theory mentioned above, Etruscan *zamθi-* 'gold' is linked to *Xanthos*. R. Gordeziani considers this Etruscan word, which could mean both 'gold' and 'fibula' or 'jewellery' and 'decoration' in general. The inscription, where this word is found, is dated 7<sup>th</sup> century and is made on a golden fibula. The inscription reads as follows: "I am Arath Velavesna's gold (fibula, decoration) I was given by Mamurke Tursikina". Interestingly, the word has the form of *zamaθi* in this text, while *zamθi-* may be linked to Old Georgian *mzitev-/zitev-*, which denotes a property that should be given to someone. This word may also be linked with Persian *zatt* and Armenian *ozit*.<sup>20</sup>

R. Gordeziani<sup>21</sup> links ἴχωρ to the Kartvelian root *\*zixl* (Georgian *sisxl-*, Megrelian *zixsir-*, Laz *dixir/dincxir-*, Svan *zix-* 'blood'). In his opinion, the Greek word could have been derived from it in the following manner: Kartvelian *\*zixl-* > Pelasgian *\*sisxl-/sioxor-* > Greek ἴχωρ > ἴχωρ.

As regards μῶλυ, R. Gordeziani assumes that it is linked to Kartvelian *\*mol-* (Georgian *mol-*, Svan *muel-/melu-* 'grass, lawn').<sup>22</sup> Later, however, R. Gordeziani himself regarded it more convincing to link it to another Kartvelian root - *\*bol*, which can be found in all three Kartvelian languages: cf. Kartvelian *bol-k'o-*, *bol-ok'-*; Georgian *bol-kv-i* 'bulb', Megrelian *bul-ek'-i*, Laz *bul-ek'-i/bul-eč'-i*, Svan *bol-ek'* 'radish'.

M. Chukhua found a Nakh correspondence - *\*bon* - to the Kartvelian root. It also means "garlic". Ichkerian *bo* (pl. *bon-aš*), Ingush *bo* (pl. *bon-aš/ž*) "(mountain) garlic", Batsbi *bo* "garlic". The Nakh root is better preserved in the plural forms - *bon-*. The Kartvelian *\*bol-* and Nakh *\*bon-* show a

<sup>19</sup> Furnée E. J., Die wichtigsten konsonantischen Erscheinungen des Vorgriechischen, The Hague 1972, 168.

<sup>20</sup> Gordeziani R., Mediterranean-Kartvelian Relations. Etruscan. Final Comments, Tbilisi 2008, 306 (in Georgian).

<sup>21</sup> Gordeziani R., Proto-Greek and Kartvelian, 1985, 60 (in Georgian).

<sup>22</sup> Gordeziani R., Mediterranean-Kartvelian Relations, II, 2008, 235 (in Georgian).

regular correspondence and the semantic side is also comparable – "radish" and "garlic".<sup>23</sup>

As regards Βριάρεως, E. J. Furnée expressed the opinion that in case of Proto-Greek βρι- and βριαρός-, we have the root \**ph* with the added element *r*, which is found in Georgian proverbs *priad-* and *upro-* "more, very". Pelasgian probably had the root \**bri* and \**briar*.<sup>24</sup>

Given the aforementioned, we can assume that words from the language of gods found with Homer are often linked to the Pre-Greek world. Homer showed in his epic that people in his era believed that gods had their own language and he decided to use the words belonging to gods. Since the words were rarely used in the popular language in Homer's era, the poet could ascribe them to the language of gods.

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<sup>23</sup> Chukhua M., *Comparative Grammar of Ichkerian-Iberian Languages*, 2008, 288 (*in Georgian*).

<sup>24</sup> Furnée E. J., *Paläokartvelisch-pelasgische Einflüsse in den indogermanischen Sprachen*, Leiden 1986, 33.