

## 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 \*Ἀψῶ, ῥόου Ὠκεανοῖο, "of Apsu, the stream of Oceanus" (or the stream of the cosmic basin, or whatever)?'<sup>1</sup> 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,<sup>2</sup> 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*).<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>1</sup> 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 βαθυρρεῖται μέγα σθένος Ὠκεανοῖο, / ἐξ οὗ περ πάντες ποταμοὶ καὶ πᾶσα θάλασσα / καὶ πᾶσαι κρήναι καὶ φρεῖατα μακρὰ νόουσιν). In his (to my mind persuasive) view, Oceanus is θεῶν γένεσις in the same sense that Zeus is πατήρ ἀνδρῶν τε θεῶν τε (*Il.* 1.544 etc.) or Mt Ide μητέρα μῆλων (*Il.* 8.47, 14.283, 15.151).

<sup>2</sup> F. Bechtel, *Lexilogus zu Homer* (Halle, 1914), s.vv. 79–80; E. Schwyzler, *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<sup>3</sup>), §74 (b), 198.

<sup>3</sup> 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 ὨΚΕΑΝΟΙΟ', *Hermes* 88 (1960), 371–4, and 'The nature of Ocean in the early epic', *PACA* 5

was reinterpreted by epic poets as a contract (i.e. \**ἄψόρρους* < *ἄψόρροος*) belonging to the large group of -ρ(ρ)οος compounds (*ἀγάρροος*, *βαθύρροος*, *καλλίρροος*, *χειμάρροος*, *ὠκύρροος*). Early epic generally prefers the uncontracted forms of these words, with only *χειμάρροος* actually showing contraction: next to *χειμάρροος* (*Il.* 13.138), one finds *χειμάρροι* (*Il.* 4.452), *χειμάρρῳ* (*Il.* 5.88) and *χειμάρρους* (*Il.* 11.493). The two forms of *ἄψορρος* attested in epic are *ἄψορροι* and (adjectival / adverbial) *ἄψορρον*,<sup>4</sup> 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 *ἄψόρρουν*. 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 ἐξαυτίς ἀμειλίκτων ὑπὸ δεσμών*) before a vowel<sup>5</sup> and *Il.* 4.152 (*ἄψορρόν οἱ θυμὸς ἐνὶ στήθεσσι ἀγέρθῃ*) a 'lost' digamma.<sup>6</sup> 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 -ρροος compound.<sup>7</sup>

In other words, the commonly employed forms of *ἄψορρος* 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 *παλινόρρος* (invoked by Wackernagel but connected with Aristophanic *παλιμπυγηδόν*) is derived from *ὄρνυμι* (\*-ortyos > -orsos), which could also be applied to *ἄψορρος* > *ἄψορρος* by dissimilation (Wackernagel, 1, n. 2). Whatever its original derivation, *ἄψορρος* clearly means 'back(wards)' in Homeric epic.

<sup>4</sup> *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.

<sup>5</sup> 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, *βέλδς ἐχευευκές* (*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-mycénienes de la tradition épique', in J. P. Crielaard [ed.], *Homeric Questions* [Amsterdam, 1995], 1–96, at 78–9) by a linguistic development < \**hechepeuekés*. Indeed, all the Hesiodic examples of heavy final -ον + initial vowel can be similarly explained, usually as the result of a lost *F* (*Op.* 434 εἴ χ' ἔτερον ἄζαις, 477 πολιδὸν ἔαρ, 721 εἰ δὲ κακὸν εἴποις) but once of another sound (*Theog.* 91 θεὸν ὥς < \**γος*); 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 ἐξαυτίς* at *Theog.* 659.

<sup>6</sup> The treatment of *F* 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).

<sup>7</sup> Any early spelling would not differentiate -ον and -ουν / -οον, while the famous case of *καιροσέων* (*Od.* 7.107), which Bergk corrected to *καιρουσέων* (< \**καιροφσέων*), 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.

coming from a contract \*ἄφ'όρρου (cf. χειμάρρου), whence an uncontracted nominative \*ἄφ'όρρους (cf. χειμάρρους) and then genitive ἄφ'όρρου (βαθυρρῶν).<sup>8</sup> Given that contraction in the cluster -οφο- (-ρροφος) is a rare and recent development in Homeric diction,<sup>9</sup> ἄφ'όρρου is another example of the way in which early epic poets created inauthentic hyper-archaisms.<sup>10</sup> The resulting penthemimeral ἄφ'όρρου 'Ωκεανοῖο complemented the trochaic caesura formula βαθυρρῶν '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 εἰς ἅλα πίπτει (*Theog.* 791).<sup>11</sup> This is not at all inconsistent with his position, for which the epithet ἄφ'όρρου 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'.<sup>12</sup>

Therefore, there is little reason to posit the presence of Apsu in the early epic formula ἄφ'όρρου 'Ωκεανοῖο, or a Near Eastern source for the conception of Oceanus it reveals.<sup>13</sup>

Balliol College, Oxford

ADRIAN KELLY

Adrian.kelly@balliol.ox.ac.uk  
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<sup>8</sup> 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. ἄφ'όρρος 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 ἄφ'όρρος in the ordinary (non-contract) way, and / or listening to performances of those texts by rhapsodes.

<sup>9</sup> Chantraine (n. 5), §14, 30.

<sup>10</sup> For one example among many, Homeric ἄαπτος is formed by diectasis from ἄπτος, which actually comes from ἄεπτος < \*ἄφεπτος; 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.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. West (n. 5) on *Theog.* 791 (p. 374): 'as do all rivers of the upper world'.

<sup>12</sup> 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 θαλάσσης / δύνης ἀργυρέης εἰλυμένος εἰς 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).

<sup>13</sup> 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.