

## THE ETYMOLOGY AND MEANING OF ὁμοίος

Some lexicographers still list ὁμοίος as an epic variant of ὁμοιος/ὁμοῖος. This is misleading and inaccurate. The early epic poets used ὁμοίος in a manner which leaves little doubt that they treated it as a distinct word and not as a mere variant of ὁμοῖος. Some of the already proposed meanings and etymologies for ὁμοίος have opened the path for a profitable inquiry into its meaning. Therefore, only part of what I have to say here can claim to have taken us a pace ahead in the solution of the problem.

In the Homeric epics and the Homeric Hymns ὁμοίος is a qualifying epithet for πόλεμος (*Il.* 13, 358 and 635; 15, 670; 18, 242; 21, 294; *Od.* 18, 264; 24, 543), νεῖκος (*Il.* 4, 444), γῆρας (*Il.* 4, 315; *H. Ven.* 244), θάνατος (*Od.* 3, 236). Most other adjectives qualifying these words in the same epic poems connote and denote something negative and undesirable: πόλεμος is κακός, δυσσηχής, στυγερός, πολύδακρυς, δήϊος etc.; γῆρας is λυγρόν, χαλεπόν, ὀλοῖον (*H. Ven.* 224); θάνατος is also κακός, δυσσηχής, etc. Thus the assumption has been made that, since the words qualified by ὁμοίος refer to things undesirable and since other adjectives qualifying these same words have also negative connotations, ὁμοίος must mean something not too distant from the other adjectives which qualify πόλεμος, νεῖκος, θάνατος, γῆρας. This line of thought was definitely followed by some of the ancients. The lexicographer Apollonios the Sophist (circa 100 A.D.) informs us that other lexicographers took ὁμοῖον πτολέμοιο to mean κακοῦ πτολέμοιο. He dismisses this interpretation as improbable because "Ὀμηρος γὰρ πᾶσι τὸ ὁμοῖος συμβαῖνον ὁμοῖον λέγει, ὡς καὶ τὸ γῆρας καὶ τὸν θάνατον<sup>1</sup>). As we shall see, Apollonius' instinct took him close to a better and more specific interpretation.

It is interesting that the ancient grammarians felt ὁμοίος to be a compound and tried to posit as its second component the root of ἵέναι (war and death *come* to all), οἷεσθαι (all have the same *opinion* about war and death), \*οἷω = φέρω (war and death *bring*

---

1) *Apollonii Sophistae Lexicon Homericum* (ed. Immanuel Bekker, 1967) s.v.

the same burden to all)<sup>2)</sup>. Of course, there is nothing to exclude the possibility that *ὁμοίος* is a compound. But if the first component is some form of *ὁμός* or *ὁμοῖος* what is the second one? Most modern etymologists have seen some root related to Sanskrit *amī-vā* (= hardship, plight, suffering) as the base for *ὁμοίος* and have proposed the steps *\*ὄμο-Fā* > *\*ὄμο-Fιος*, *\*ὄμοι-Fā* > *ὄμοιFιος*<sup>3)</sup>. The objections to this attractive hypothesis are obvious. The rough breathing of *ὁμοίος* is left unexplained and the *mi|moi* variation reflected in the proposed Sanskrit and Greek cognates creates a good deal of uneasiness. The hypothesis is not impossible but improbable. Chantraine has treated it with reserve<sup>4)</sup>. Prellwitz rejected both the derivation from *amīnā* and the consequent meaning: “Nicht, daß *θάνατος*, *γῆρας*, *πόλεμος*, *νεῖκος* verderblich sind, sondern, daß die beiden ersten alle Menschen in gleicher Weise treffen, die beiden letzten treffen können, ist der Sinn dieses Beiwortes”. His discussion of *Il.* 4, 315 is cogent and, as I hope to show, the meaning which he proposes not far from the one I have in mind. For the etymology he suggests *ὁμοίος* < *\*ὄμοFιος* “mit eigentümlicher metrischer Dehnung”. The root of the second member of the compound he sees reflected in several IE words basically meaning “track” or “to track, to hunt”: Lith. *veju, vyti* = to pursue, Skr. *pada-vīya*: track, L. *vīa*, Gr. *Fiώκω*, (*F*) *Iόλαος*, etc.<sup>5)</sup> I am less disturbed by the root *Fi-*, which is quite possible, than I am by the “peculiar metrical lengthening” which is such a convenient but hardly dependable *deus ex machina*. The proposed *\*ὄμοFιος* would, after the dropping of the digamma, appear as *ὄμοιος/ὄμοῖος* and, even if the -o- preceding the digamma were to be lengthened, it would become an -ω-. Further, the root *-Fi/Fi* reflected in Greek *Fiώκω*, (*F*) *Iόλαος* is of quite another provenience.

Now to my own conjecture. The morphological peculiarities of *ὁμοίος* extend no further than *γελοῖος* which is the only other word that resembles *ὁμοίος* not only because of its peculiar ending but also because it too seems like a variant of a word in -*οιος*, *γέλοιος/γελοῖος*. I think that *ὁμοίος* and *γελοῖος* are related to *ὄμοιος* and *γέλοιος*, but I also think that, unlike these two kindred words, they are compounds of which the first mem-

2) Stephanus, *TLG*, s.v.

3) For the scholars who hold this view see Frisk, *Etym. Wört. s.v.*

4) P. Chantraine, *Gram. bomér.* I, 168.

5) W. Prellwitz, *Glotta* 16 (1928) p. 155.

ber is identical to the base of *ὄμοιος* and *γέλοιος*. Let us concern ourselves with *ὄμοιος* for a moment. *Ὀμοῖος* is definitely a derivative of *ὄμός* which has a good Indo-European etymology (IE *\*somos*; cf. Skr. *samab* etc.). *Ὀμοῖος* is most likely derived from *\*somoī + γο + s*, that is, from the locative case + adjectival suffix + ending, with disappearance of intervocalic *y*<sup>6</sup>). Indeed a pattern emerges, if we look at certain words which eventually came to be adverbs of place with mainly pronominal derivatives:

ποῦ	ποῖ	ποῖος
*ἄλλοῦ	*ἄλλοῖ	ἄλλοῖος
οὔ	οῖ	οῖος
ὄμοῦ	*ὄμοῖ	ὄμοῖος

The derivation of *ὄμοιος* < Loc. *ὄμοί + γο + s* is by no means impossible, but the extra *i* and the unusual hiatus in the sequence *ui* in *ὄμοῖος* make *\*ὄμοιφιος* and not *\*ὄμοφιος* its very probable parent form. The first part of the compound is the adverbial locative of *ὄμός* and the second part contains the well-known root *Fi/Fi* (cf. *\*Fίς*, *\*Fίεμαι*, *\*Fιωή*, L. *vis* etc.)<sup>7</sup>). The proposed steps are *\*ὄμοι + Fi + γο + s* > *ὄμοῖος* with disappearance of intervocalic *yod* and digamma. *\*Ὀμοιφιος* and its descendant *ὄμοῖος* would be dependent compounds not substantially different from such compounds as *ὄδοιπóρος*, *Πυλοιγενής* (cf. also *θηβαιγενής* and perhaps *Τηλέγονος*, *τηλεκλυτός*, etc.). The etymological meaning of *ὄμοῖος* then is "forcing to the same place" or perhaps even "forcing to the same predicament or lot". The only other word in Greek which seems to have the same morphological characteristics, *γελοῖος*, would have a similar derivation: *γελοι + Fi + γο + s* > *γελοῖος*. It may be objected that whereas the locative ending *-οι-* is possible for *ὄμοῖος* / *ὄμοῖος* but not for *γελοῖος* / *γελοῖος* where the substantive is *γέλως*. Yet there is a perfectly legitimate Aeolic form *γέλος* and the pair *γέλως* / *γέλος* corresponds to *ἔρωσ* / *ἔρος*. *Γελοῖος* may have originally been an Aeolic compound with the etymological meaning "forcing to laughter", "moving to laughter". *Γελοῖος* must be derived from *γελοι + γο + s*. That the meaning of these two words should eventually become identical is understandable. The fluctuation of accent in the pairs *ὄμοιος* / *ὄμοῖος*, *γέλοιος* / *γελοῖος* should present

6) See C.D. Buck, *Comparative Grammar of Greek and Latin*, p. 318 (457); also Chantraine *op. cit.* I, 167.

7) See my article in *AJPb.* 89 (1968) pp. 77-82.

no problems especially on account of properispomena in *-οῖος* derived from oxytone nouns in *ώ/οῦς* (*αἰδῶ* > *αἰδοῖος*, *ἡώ* > *ἡοῖος* etc.).

Hesiod *Op.* 182: *οὐδὲ πατὴρ παιδεσσιν ὁμοίος οὐδέ τι παῖδες*, where the accepted interpretation is that during the Age of Iron “neither the father will resemble the children nor the children (the father)”, is an aberrant case in which *ὁμοίος* is treated as a synonym of *ὁμοῖος*. There is a possibility that the near-homonymy of the two words and the presence of an identifiable *ὁμοι-* in both led Hesiod to violate a distinction which Homer observes strictly. Few speakers of English distinguish *continuous* from *continual* and some Germans use *empfindlich* for *empfindsam* and vice versa. It is understandable that, once the misuse crept into the works of as major a writer as Hesiod, the path was wide open. Thus in Bion VI, 17/18 (*OCT* 11, 17/18):

*εἶαρι πάντα κύει, πάντ' εἶαρος ἀδέα βλαστεῖ,  
χὰ νύξ ἀνθρώποισιν ἴσα καὶ ὁμοίος ἄως.*

*ὁμοίος* is treated as a metrically convenient and semasiologically undifferentiated variant of *ὁμοῖος*.

In conclusion, the aberrant cases in Hesiod and Bion should not mislead us into mistaking the identity and origin of *ὁμοίος*. When people ceased to comprehend the significance of the second member of the compound, they treated it as a mere and occasionally convenient extension of the first. The etymological meaning of *ὁμοίος* < \**ὁμοίϜιος* is applicable throughout Homer and restores to such expressions as *ὁμοίος πόλεμος* or *γῆρας* or *θάνατος* their pristine force. The idea that war, old age and death are inexorable evils which come upon us all and drive us to the same helpless position is by no means new. For a translation of *ὁμοίος* in Homer we must search for a word similar to German *gleichmachend*. In English I suggest “levelling” and welcome better substitutes.

University of California

Apostolos N. Athanassakis