

Hesiod's Poetic Intent in Measuring the Sea

This paper seeks to examine Hesiod's statement in the *Works and Days* that δείξω δὴ τοι μέτρα πολυφλοίσβοιο θαλάσσης ("I will show you the measure of the loud-roaring sea," *Op.* 648), with a particular focus on the phrase πολυφλοίσβοιο θαλάσσης. Often translated as "the loud-roaring sea," this phrase, particularly here in its Hesiodic context, is more nuanced than this sound-based translation would allow. This paper will discuss the phrase in the context of scholarship on oral-traditional composition and the semantics of Archaic Greek poetry. In drawing on Homer and later uses of phrase, I will locate it in a framework of traditional meaning and poetic language. This paper will argue that the implications of the phrase make it particularly powerful within Hesiod's *Nautilia*, such that it reinforces Hesiod's self-conscious presentation as a skilled poet and composer (Nagy, Rosen).

I will first undertake an examination of the linguistic evidence. The etymological history of the word πολυφλοίσβος is uncertain. Pierre Chantraine suggests that it derives from the verb φλέω, a "rarely attested form" meaning to swell, to grow, to abound, to be full, and even to babble. To complement a view of the πολυφλοίσβοιο sea that incorporates these implications, I will look to Eric Havelock's discussion of how the original use of some archaic Greek epithets "reveals a way of experiencing the world (rather than thinking about it) which is specific to preliterate Greece. One can say that this world tends to be perceived kinetically, as things-in-motion, rather than objects possessed of determinate properties." (Havelock, 84). Alongside Albert B. Lord's discussion of the "traditionally intuitive meaning" (Lord, 65) of formulaic speech, I thus suggest that the phrase πολυφλοίσβοιο θαλάσσης here refers not just to the "sea," but to a much more nuanced, active, and emotionally loaded entity.

This interpretation is reinforced by the use of the phrase in Homer and later Greek poetry. Homer's use of the phrase makes for a particularly interesting comparandum, as, for example, when he describes how the priest Chryses, "walked silently along the banks of the loud-roaring sea" (*Il.* 1.34). It is not hard to imagine Chryses, lost in desperation, a lonely figure overwhelmed by the sound and scale of the sea. Here and elsewhere, the use of the phrase in Homer points to human emotive experience reflected by and seen alongside the realities of nature (for example, at *Odyssey* 13.219-221). Later, Archilochus' use of the phrase to evoke a connection between cries of mourning and the loudness of the sea points to the continuity, and perhaps the further development, of the phrase's specifically emotional impact (Fr. 9, Campbell; for analysis, see Heirman, 170).

The context of Hesiod's use of the epithet further reinforces the idea of experience and active understanding. Gregory Nagy and Ralph Rosen have argued for a self-conscious comment on the nature of poetic composition in Hesiod's *Works and Days*. According to Rosen, "the *Nautilia*, while it offers some basic practical advice about the dangers of seafaring, simultaneously functions as a declarative program about poetry. Specifically, Hesiod contrasts his inability to compose (or lack of experience in composing) poetry on a Homeric scale with his qualifications for composing his poem of the "earth," *Works and Days*" (Rosen, 100). Drawing on these discussions, I argue that the phrase *πολυφλοίσβοιο θαλάσσης*, a morphologically archaic and thus distinctive formula, contributes to Hesiod's commentary on his own poetic skill. It stands as a notable formulaic block with active, poetic implications – it is not only metrically dominant but compositionally impactful.

Hesiod's use of the phrase *πολυφλοίσβοιο θαλάσσης* thus contributes to a nuanced reading of line 648. He collocates the sensory experiences of the sounds of roaring waves and of

a poet's song, which has the power to make a man, τις καὶ πένθος ἔχων νεοκηδέι θυμῷ ("even one having sorrow in his freshly grieving heart," *Theog.*98) forget his pain. The phrase and its history therefore make an important and heretofore unconsidered contribution to Hesiod's work.

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