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Σιμόεις

Summary

Simóeis, *-entos* is Homeric name of a river in Troad, generally identified with the modern Dümrek Çayı, a tributary of Menderes, the ancient Skamander. Its etymology is since a long time disputed. The opinions divide with some linguists considering it a Greek derivative in *-went-* from the stem of the adjective *sîmós* ‘snub-, flat-nosed; bent upwards, up-hill, hollow’ (Pape & Benseler, Georgiev), while the others suspect it of a pre- or at least non-Greek origin (Sommer, Krahe, followed by Frisk and Chantraine). Greek provenance is recently claimed by Neumann, who derives it from the name of an unknown fish *sîmos* (lit. ‘flat-nose’?). At the first sight, Neumann’s etymology may seem plausible, but it is not free of some perplexities:

- The long *-i-* in *sîmós*, *sîmos* compared to the short vowel in the first syllable of *Simóeis* (metrical shortening?).
- If the name is Greek, it hardly may have arisen in the Troad before the recolonizing of Troy by the Aeolians c. 700 A.D., and it is a date at which our Iliad must have already existed, including all the mentions of Simoeis in it. One could argue that originally it might have been a conventional designation, in the epos, of an imaginary river, which only later has been transferred to a real watercourse. However, it is hard to imagine ‘(river) rich in flat-nosed fishes’ being a poetic description comparable to the so-called “divine” names in Homer, e.g. to *Xánthos* ‘Scamander’, lit. ‘yellow, golden’, as opposed to the “human”, i.e. conventional and non-Greek name of the same river *Skámandros*.
- There is a thousand year gap between the age of Homer, which approximately coincides with the last productivity of the archaic suffix *-eis*, *-entos*, and the time c. 200 A. D., when the fish-name *sîmos* is attested (Neumann admits a “Zufall der Überlieferung”).
- Curiously enough, *Simóeis* would be the only river name in *-eis* derived from a fish name.
- Dümrek being, according to Luce, little more than a local brook, much of which dries out in summer, one can doubt whether such a small and inconstant watercourse could be named after an inhabitant assigned by Athenaeus to the Nil fishes and by Oppianus to the sea fishes, which indicates a species of a considerable size.

As for the occurrence of the same river name *Simóeis* in three other parts of Greek world – an argument put forward by Neumann in favour of its Greek character– the watercourses in question would not have been named independently of that in Troad; a transfer under the influence of Homer seems more probable, which is almost sure in the case of Segesta in Sicily, where *Simóeis* is accompanied by a *Skámandros*, and probable for Vergil’s *falsus Simoeis* in Epirus as well as for the river in Cyprus, an area noted for the survival of Homeric and Mycenaean traditions.

For all these reasons Neumann’s etymology of *Simóeis* cannot be unreservedly accepted and a foreign origin of this hydronym remains in question. We assume underlying a Thracian river name derived with the same I.-E. suffix **-went-* as reflected in Greek *-eis*,

-entos from I.-E. word for 'winter, snow' *ǵhimo- regularly resulting in Thracian *zimo-*. The phonetic development ǵ(h) > z is well attested in Thracian and the derivatives in -w(e)nt- > -ynth- seem to have been not unfamiliar to it as well, cf., for instance, the cave name *Zérynthon*, presumably from I.-E. *ǵhwēr- 'wild animal'. Moreover, the whole formation *zimowent- has its exact counterpart in O.-Ind. Vedic *himávant-* 'snowy' (of mountains). Another parallel, both etymological and semantic, is provided by Greek compound **kheimá-rrhous* 'winter-flowing, swollen by rain and melted snow', of mountain streams, where the first element goes back to the same I.-E. basis *ǵh(e)im- 'winter, snow' and the meaning is in perfect accordance with the description of Dümrek Çayı cited above.

The archeologists date the arrival of the Thracians in the Troad latest in the twelfth century B.C., as a new, barbarian type of pottery suddenly appears in the second phase of Troy VIIb, whereas some linguists, such Gindin, believe that already the people of the precedent city Troy VIIa, which is generally connected with the Trojan War, were of Thracian stock, a claim based mainly on Thraco-Trojan onomastic parallels. The etymology proposed here may be added to this evidence.