

This paper addresses the etymology of obscure Homeric adjective ἄατος (epithet of the waters of the Styx at Ξ 271; also attested at φ 91, χ 5, Ap.Rh. 2, 77 and as a *u.l.* at 1,803). This paper will show that traditional connection with ἄτη explains neither form (ἀα- for ἀνα-) nor meaning. The prosodic structure of *aaāton* (Ξ 271) / *aaatos* does not support this connection either (cf. ἀνάτα with ἄ-ἄ), and metrical lengthening is not an attractive explanation in this context. Other etymologies that have been suggested are equally unsatisfactory.

This paper argues that ἄατος is related to the Indo-European word for ‘sun’ and goes back to a proto-form **ah₂uato-* < **h₂seh₂uhto-*: the juncture ἀάατον Στυγὸς ὕδωρ (Ξ 271) can now be understood as ‘the sunless water of the Styx’. It can be assumed that in the post-Homeric period this epithet underwent a formal renewal and is indirectly continued by ἀνάλιος / ἀνήλιος of the tragic poetry (e.g. ἀνάλιον χέρσον A. Th. 859).

The poetic status of reconstructed **h₂seh₂uhto-* in Indo-European is confirmed by the existence of similar formations derived from the word for ‘sun’ in archaic Indo-Iranian texts. This paper first discusses Vedic *asúrta-* (ἄπ. λεγ. at RV X, 82, 4c): *asúrtam rájas-* is the Vedic term for the Underworld, exactly matching the description of the Underworld river Styx as ἄατος (*rájas-* = Ἐρεβός). Secondly, Younger Avestan *xʷarəta-*, the standing epithet of *xʷarənah-*, can be traced back to a reconstruction **h₂s(h₂)uel-to-* and interpreted as ‘not lit by sun’, which is exactly true of *xʷarənah-*, concealed in the waters of the sea *Voʷrukašəm* (Yt. 19, 51-59). Lastly, no less significant is another Younger Avestan epithet *xʷanuuant-* ‘sunny’ (as if from IE **s(h₂)uēn-uent-*), that is associated with the heavenly waters (Y. 16, 7) and with one’s immortal life: *xʷahe gaiiehe xʷanuuatō aməšahe* (Y. 9, 1; Yt. 8, 11). Thus, in a number of Indo-European traditions there is a close association between the sun, waters, and immortality.

This study of several obscure and archaic epithets from three Indo-European poetic traditions makes it possible to suggest a new interpretation of a difficult Homeric word and reveals a further aspect of Indo-European poetics.