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A NOTE ON
GREEK *ὀμείχω* 'TO URINATE' AND *μοιχός* 'ADULTERER'*[)]

Abstract. This article investigates the problem of the etymological connection between the Greek word *ὀμείχω* 'to urinate' and the agent noun *μοιχός* 'adulterer', the semantics of which has often been termed improbable. It is pointed out that the connection might be made more probable when analyzing the Latin data: the verb *meiō, -ere* 'to urinate' and its meaning in the Latin texts, which is not always restricted to 'urinating' but is also used as an obscene word meaning 'to ejaculate'. We can then postulate that *μοιχός* was an agent noun of *ὀμείχω* in the meaning of 'to ejaculate' and this way as 'adulterer'.

1. Greek has a lexeme for 'to urinate' in the word ⟨ὀμείχω⟩ /oméékʰōō/ (attested as far as Hesiod, going back to PIE *$h_3meig^{\hat{}h}$-o-h_2, with cognates in Lat. *meiō* / later *mingō*, Skt. *méhati*, cf. LIV[2]: 303, LSJ: 1221), the agent noun of which is ⟨μοιχός⟩ /moikʰós/ but with somewhat surprising meaning 'adulterer'.

2. The semantic connection has not been termed completely clear, it has been only mentioned as a probable "vulgärer und verächtlicher Ausdruck" (so Frisk 1960: 250 after Wackernagel 1916: par. 225 A1) and an obscene word (cf. Beekes 2010: 962). Beekes mentions essentially two possibilities: "often analyzed as an agent noun of *ὀμείχω* 'to urinate' as a vulgar expression" (however, without specifying what vulgar expression is meant) or "(…) it may be thought that the semantic connection of adultery with urinating is not specific enough, and that the etymology must be abandoned" (Beekes 2010: ibidem).

3. I would like to show that the connection between urinating and adultery is very specific and cannot be taken as an argument against the etymological connection of those two words. Beside the quite obvious connection of the

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*[)] I would like to thank Prof. Marek Stachowski (Kraków) for drawing my attention to the probable semantic connection between Greek ⟨ὀμείχω⟩ /oméékʰōō/ 'to urinate' and ⟨μοιχός⟩ /moikʰós/ 'adulterer'. Without his suggestion I would not have been able to devise this hypothesis. Needless to add, I am solely responsible for any flaws and errors.

meaning of ⟨ὀμείχω⟩ /omḗkʰō/ with not only 'urinating' but also generally 'emitting fluid' and thus also 'ejaculating', we have some similar semantic developments in Latin and I think the key to the connection lies in the semantics found within the Latin material. If we examine the Latin cognate, the word *meiō*, *-ere*, we will find that it means 'to urinate' but also, as an obscene term, 'to ejaculate' (cf. TLL: 605, which gives its meaning as "semen emittere"). It is attested in this meaning in Horace (Sat. 2, 7, 52) and Martialis (11, 46, 2).[1]

4. It is thus easily imaginable that the Greek verb ⟨ὀμείχω⟩ /omḗkʰō/ meaning 'to urinate' could also mean 'to ejaculate' and from this meaning one could form a nomen agentis ⟨μοιχός⟩ /moikʰós/ meaning literally 'the one who ejaculates' > 'adulterer'.[2] It is surprising that Beekes in his new etymological dictionary of Greek (Beekes 2010) wishes to abandon this etymology due to the alleged lack of semantic connection between ⟨ὀμείχω⟩ /omḗkʰō/ and ⟨μοιχός⟩ /moikʰós/.[3]

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[1]   Note a similar suggestion by Ernout-Meillet: "Le sens de gr. *μοιχός* 'adultère' est isolé; (cf. pourtant l'emploi de *mingere*, *meiere* au sens de *futtuere* chez les satiriques)" (Ernout-Meillet 1951: 718) and Chantraine: "l'emploi d'un mot vulgaire tiré d'un verbe significant «pisser» pour designer l'adultère ne doit pas surprendre (…)" (Chantraine 1968: 709).

[2]   Note that the Greek term ⟨μοιχός⟩ /moikʰós/ has a very negative meaning.

[3]   This may also have to do with the fact that the members of the "Leiden school" of Indo-European linguistics have recently been trying to deny the existence of the "Saussure Effect" (cf. van Beek 2011, Pronk 2011), i.e. the loss of laryngeals in words with *o*-grade of the root (cf. Meier-Brugger 2003: 118-119), of which Greek ⟨μοιχός⟩ /moikʰós/ is one of the prime examples.

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LIV[2] = *Lexikon der indogermanischen Verben*. 2001. Ed. Helmut Rix et al. Wiesbaden: Dr. Ludwig Reichert Verlag.

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