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**The Etymology and Meaning of Greek Sapha "Completely, Cleanly"**

For *sapha* and *saphês*, glossed by LSJ as "clearly, plainly, assuredly" and as "clear, plain, distinct" respectively, neither Frisk nor Chantraine provides a definitive or preferred etymology. **Phonologically attractive, though, is a connection with *somphos* "spongy, porous", with the first alpha of *sapha* / *saphês* representing a vocalic nasal \*m.**

The semantic dimension of the proposed etymology is not initially encouraging &endash; and the situation may only seem to get worse if one brings in possible Germanic cognates, viz., English *swamp* and German *Schwamm* "sponge, mushroom". The first two nouns, though, which are associated with *somphos* in LSJ suggest a neat solution. The words are *spongia* "sponge" and *kisêris* "pumice", viz., porous substances used for cleaning. ***Saphês* can therefore originally have meant "sponged off, smoothed down, clean".** Especially in an adverb, the resulting meaning "clean, cleanly" could refer to completeness, as in the English idiom "I clean forgot" = "I completely forgot".

**The resulting meaning for *saphês* as "complete, sufficient, exact, clean" works well in numerous passages.** Of course, the newly suggested meaning is not really so different from "clear, etc." Often, though, a meaning "complete, etc." is both subtly different from and better than the more familiar translation as "clear".

At *Odyssey* 17.153, for example, Theoklymenos uses the negative combination *ou sapha* to contrast the account of Odysseus' whereabouts, just given by Telemachos in lines 138-147, with his (Theoklymenos') own knowledge. The information given in lines 138-147 was, however, plain enough: Proteus told Menelaos that Odysseus is still alive, but restrained by Kalypso and so unable to return home. The contrast in what Theoklymenos has to say is accordingly that his account is *more complete*: Odysseus is not only alive, but he is already present on Ithaca. Cf. Russo's observation in the commentary edited by Heubeck, which in fact implies such a meaning for *ou sapha*: "the contrast is between one whose knowledge is partial and limited [emphasis added] and one who is clairvoyant (the speaker)".

Tragedy likewise supports "complete" as the fundamental meaning of *saphês*. In Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannus*, for example, there are 15 instances of *saphês* and related forms. Some of these, as in lines 604 and 1065, are better nuanced as "complete", and there is no passage in which this area of meaning is inappropriate. In one or two, such as lines 390 and 439, it may initially seem problematic, but in these a meaning of *saph-* as "complete" turns out to provide an important new perspective from which to approach the text.

Philosophical texts (where one might expect an interest in the precise definition and/or use of terms) also support a meaning of *saphês* as "complete", with Aristotle, *De Anima*, 413a12 being an especially illuminating example.