A SHORT NOTE ON GREEK ϑηρ ‘BEAST’

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates a certain irregularity in the Greek sound changes, namely that associated with the Greek form ϑηρ ‘beast’, assumed to come from the sequence */ĝhṷ/ but treated exactly like the aspirated labiovelar. It is shown that the examples upon which this hypothesis was built are in themselves quite doubtful and even though more examples of this change can be found, they still remain insecure. The sound change is then neither confirmed nor falsified but certain phonetic details of its process are investigated.

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Abstract. This article investigates a certain irregularity in the Greek sound changes, namely that associated with the Greek form ᵃʰ母校 ‘beast’, assumed to come from the sequence */gʰu/ but treated exactly like the aspirated labiovelar. It is shown that the examples upon which this hypothesis was built are in themselves quite doubtful and even though more examples of this change can be found, they still remain insecure. The sound change is then neither confirmed nor falsified but certain phonetic details of its process are investigated.

1. The Greek form /tʰɛr/ < ᵃʰ母校> (gen. sg. /θɛρός/ < ᵃʰ母校ός>) ‘beast of prey’ (II. +) coming back to the PIE root */gʰᵉ₁r­/ has /tʰ/ in Anlaut in place of /kʰ/ <χ> as expected from the sound laws. The regular development is evidenced in such examples as (Sihler 1995: 158, Rix 1976: 84):
   Gk. /kʰɛn/ < χέν> ‘goose’ from PIE */gʰans­/, cf. Ved. haṃsā- Lith. żąsìs
   Gk. /kʰέδο/ < χέδος> ‘I pour’ from PIE */gʰe­y­/, cf. Lat. fundō, fūdī, Ved. juhóti
   Gk. /tɛkʰos/ < τε­κχος> ‘wall’ from PIE */dʰey­g­–/, cf. Osc. feihúss (acc.pl.), Lat. fingō ‘model’

2. Moreover, the other Indo-European languages present further evidence in favour of reconstructing the initial */gʰu/:
   a) Lith. žvėris, remade to the i-stem (Smoczyński 2007: 795)
   b) Lat. fērus (Carmen Arvale, Naevius +), thematicized adjective */gʰᵉᵊ-r­­-s/ with pretonic shortening in front of a resonant (Schrijver 1991: 343) and with -us preserved probably under the influence of fera f., n.pl. ‘wild animal’ (De Vaan 2008: 215, cf. Lat. uir ‘man’ < */qiH-ro/)
   c) OCS žvěři.

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3. Through this comparison we can safely reconstruct the PIE root */gʰer₁r/ (*/gʰer₁r/ after laryngeal-loss) and assume that we have an irregularity in the Greek reflex of the prehistoric form. Analogical explanation seems doubtful as there is no straightforward model connected to */tʰr/ < */θr/ where we could have regular */kh/ < */χ/. We have numerous similar forms in Greek like Attic */tʰríon/ < */θríon> ‘wild animal’ (formally a diminutive of */tʰr/ < */θr/), or the verb */tʰrióō/ < */θrióō> ‘I make into a wild beast’ but they all seem to be derived from the root noun */tʰr/ < */θr/> where we could have regular */kh/ < */χ/ in anlaut instead of the attested */tʰ/. LIV²: 182 reconstructs the verbal root */gʰer₁- ‘krumm gehen’ on the basis of the Vedic forms *hvárate ‘geht in Krümmungen’, *hválati ‘geht schief, strauchelt’ or YAv. *zbarəνt, *zbarəmna ‘krumm gehend’, following Schindler 1972: 37-8 in connecting Greek */tʰr/ < */θr/> to this root – ‘wildes Tier’ = ‘celui qui par nature va dans la position courbée’ < ‘krumm gehen’. However, the expected verbal basis is not found in Greek. In the past one possibility of explaining this irregularity of Greek phonetic development has been proposed, namely the treatment of the prehistoric sequence */gʰer₁/ as */gʰer₁/ = */gʰer₁r/ before a front vowel as in */thermós/ < */θermós> ‘warm’ < */gʰer₁r-mó/. However, this hypothesis was built only upon two examples, one of which is doubtful in itself (see 4. below), and thus should rather be omitted or at least expressed with due caution in works of pedagogical use where communis opinio is presented rather than disputable hypotheses.

4. The treatment of the sound in question as the aspirated labiovelar was mentioned as early as 1890 by Buck (with earlier works listed there).¹ Buck postulates that */kʰy/ becomes ππ, initial π before o-vowels, liquids and nasal, both vocalic and consonantal, but ττ, initial τ before e- and i-vowels and just as */gʰy/ “becomes φ before o-vowels, etc., but θ before e- and i-vowels, so would kʰy (Indo-Eur. gʰy) become φφ, initial φ, and θθ, initial θ respectively, and we have the explanation of δίππ” (Buck 1890: 214). This hypothesis, despite being based only upon a handful of examples (most of which are doubtful), is followed recently by Sihler 1995: 159-160² and Rix 1976: 93.³ They consider the development of the PIE dorsal followed by */y/ to be similar to the respective labiovelar, i.e. */gʰy/ = */gʰ/ > */pʰ/, */tʰ/, */kʰ/ and */kʰy/ = */kʰ/ > */p/, */t/, */k/ depending on the context with gemination when in Inlaut. The only other example mentioned in connection with this particular development (and as proof of gemination in Inlaut) is the Greek form */hippos/

¹ Most notably the opinion of Brugmann: “Aus *kʰy entstand ππ, das im anlaut zu π ver- einfacht wurde” (Brugmann 1886: 292).
² “PIE *kʰw and *gʰhv show a development in centum languages closely parallel to that of PIE *kʰv and *gʰw. But in G the two distinct sounds *kʰw give a double consonant medially, while the unitary *kʰv gives a single consonant” (Sihler 1995: 159).