Short Article

Notes on Ancient Greek #o-

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The following notes on various Ancient Greek words with initial ò-, as discussed in Frisk 1963 (henceforth, *GEW*), clarify aspects of the development of this vowel in Greek.

GEW 352-3, s.v. ὀδών (Ion.) ‘tooth’ has a fine account of the Greek as far as it went at the time of publication of his work (1963). Beyond the Greek, as it turns out (especially for the Armenian, Latin, and ultimately Lithuanian), the total Indo-European history is far simpler, richer, and more instructive than it seemed then. At that time, only separate details were noted in isolation, e.g. “ablaut” without motivation. Thus Armenian *atamn*, an ancient participle, did not show secondary vocalization in the initial vowel, but together with Greek ὀδοντ- (see Hamp 1978) rather simply regular vocalization of initial pre-consonantal Schwundstufe *ʔ-, hence *ʔd-. This laryngeal (*ʔ) disappeared regularly in Indic, Lithuanian, German: *ʔdónt-, and Indic, Latin, Old Irish, English: *ʔdnt-’. Greek ωδός ‘toothless’ (*GEW*, p. 330) must be formed somewhat later, when *ʔe- would merge with *od-* < *odo- < *ʔdónt-, because ωδός means ‘zahn-los’ and not ‘ess-los’ or ‘aß-los’.

ὄνομα ‘name’ as a headword is justified by its presence but *GEW* should note that it is restored from derivatives. That is shown by the by-form ἔννομα, which has the regular o > υ between nasal and labial and thus no *ʔ- > o- assimilated to -o- in a following syllable. ὄνομα as discussed in *GEW* 396-7 is excellent except for two points. The Latin form (*nōmen*) does not equate to Indic *nāma* in length; rather, Indic must be explained by Brugmann’s Law (*o > ā / R_CV) and Latin must, by Warren Cowgill’s genius, by a cross with *gnōmen. Greek νόνημι ‘nameless’ can be later, with -ω- from ε-o- after

colouring of *ʔ, which is assured by Old Prussian *emmens* ‘name’;¹ Tosk Albanian *emër* ‘name’ must show e- via umlaut from *a < syllabic *ŋ.

These are different from ὀνειδος ‘reproach’ (GEW 394), Armenian *anici*, apparently with *ʃ^wn-, and ὄναρ ‘dream’ and Armenian *anurj*, Geg Albanian *âdërrë*, apparently from *ʃ^wonr(nā)-² and Armenian *ʃ^wnōr-jo-, or better the latter from earlier *ʃ^wnɾ+-jo-, or more exactly *ʃ^wnɾH_a+. The last fits with what I have proposed for Helleno-Armenian as seen in Greek ὕδωρ ‘water’ (see Hamp 1983–84, 1990).

Finally, regarding ὀβολο- ~ ὀδελο- ‘spit’, GEW (s.v.) has βελ- but ὀ- “unerk-lärt”. I compare Albanian *hell* ‘spit’ < *h₄og^we/olo- (> hag^(w)e-i/aka- > *hăt*- (cf. *qen* ‘dog’ < *cann*- and *qelq* ‘glass’ < *calice*-, both borrowed from Latin)), as well as *halë* ‘fishbone’ < *h₄og^we/o-l-n(o)-ā (where –ā is the collective suffix).³

References

- Frisk, Hjalmar. 1963. *Griechisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*. Heidelberg. [GEW]
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¹ Cf. Hamp 2008, on Gaulish *anman* ‘name’.

² Giving *ân(d)rinā > *ândrnā > *ād(ë)rrā, with North European *o > *a.

³ On *h₄o-, cf. ὀλισθαίνω ‘slide’.