§1 In the Germanic languages there is limited but significant evidence for the occasional loss of the labial nasal in the Indo-European suffix -men-. This development is reminiscent of the situation in Indo-Iranian. In Die Nominalsuffixe (Altindische Grammatik II, 2), Wackernagel and Debrunner mention an interchange between mn- and n-stems in Sanskrit. According to them, this interchange reflects a Proto-Indo-European rule of mn becoming n: “So gehören die Instrumentale v. prathinā prepāhā mahānā [...] zu prathimān-premān- bhūnān- mahāmān- [...] und beruhen auf grundsprachlichem Wandel von mn zu n hinter labialem Anlaut [...]” (§ 609a.).

The evidence for the rule is not limited to Sanskrit. There are also cases from other languages that show loss of an m in original stems in -men or -mon. In all of these cases, the root contains a labial:

- PIE *bhudh-nó- ‘bottom’: Lat. fundus m., Ol bonn m., Skt. budhná- m. ‘bottom’. In view of Gr. πυθμή μ. ‘bottom’, the original suffix may have been *-mno- in the genitive (Lühr 2000: 301-302).

- Av. raoyna- ‘butter’. If it is related to Icel. rjómi m. ‘cream’ < *reugm(ın) and MHG rôme m. ‘id.’ < *(H)reug(ın)m-, raoyna- may derive from *(H)reugm(ın)n-. Pokorny (p. 873) reconstructs *reugm(ın)c-.

- PSlav. *věno n. ‘dowry’ (= SCR. vijeno n., Russ. véno n., cf. Hamp 1970), Gr. ἔνυα, ἔνυα n. pl. ‘dowry’, OFri. wettma m. ‘dowry’. The root seems to be *h1wed-. Frisk (1, 441-442) considers the possibility that the Greek and Slavic suffixes reflect *-mno- in view of the Germanic mn-suffix.

- PGm *bragna- ‘brain’. On the basis of the Germanic forms and Gr. βρέχμως m. ‘skull’, Hom. βρέχμα n. ‘id.’, Pokorny (p. 750) reconstructs *mreugb(m)n-.

The examples form a significant enough basis to assume that after roots with a labial, the cluster *-Cmn- was simplified to *-Cn-. The extant forms with retained m must consequently be due to the nomi
native, or other forms with full grade of the suffix. Especially in view of *bhudh-nó-, we can date back the cluster simplification to the proto-language with some confidence.

The age of the dissimilation rule is nonetheless irrelevant to what is at stake here: it appears that the loss of m can account for the problematic consonantal interchange m ~ p in the word for rime, and the t or tt in the word for bottom in Germanic. In these lexemes, the loss of m gave rise to a combination of a stop and following dental nasal, which ultimately resulted in an allomorphic geminate in Proto-Germanic.

§ 2 Proto-Germanic geminates were first referred to by Hermann Paul (1880: 133 fn.), and explained by Ferdinand Kluge in 1884. The process of Proto-Germanic gemination has remained a fundamental issue in Germanic and Indo-European linguistics ever since. Not only does the rise of geminates constitute an essential phonological demarcation line between Proto-Indo-European and Proto-Germanic, as PIE did not have long consonants, but it is also vital to any interpretation of the two other basic sound shifts, Grimm’s and Verner’s law, i.e. the lenition and voicing of PIE plain stops after unaccented syllables (cf. Kortlandt 1991).

In ‘Die germanische Consonantendehnung’ (1884), Kluge analyzed the Proto-Germanic geminates from an Indo-European perspective, and his analysis has now become the canonical view. Even though the bulk of the words containing a geminate do not have cognates outside Germanic, Kluge, as a true Neogrammarian, concluded that the Germanic long stops had arisen through regular sound change: many Proto-Germanic geminates can be associated with n-suffixes in other Indo-European languages, or otherwise with an attested or putative n-stem paradigm in Germanic. Kluge therefore proposed that all PIE stops merged into one and the same voiceless geminate when followed by an n-suffix.

- OE bucca m. ‘bock’ < *hukkan- < PIE *hŭgon ~ *hŭgnós to Arm. buc ‘lamb’, Av. bûza- ‘goat’.
- OE þaccian ‘to hit, touch’ < *þakkjan- < PIE *th₂g-n- to Lat. tangō ‘to touch’, Gr. τεταγών ‘taking’.
- OE liccian ‘to lick’ < *likkjan- < PIE *lĭgh-n- to Lat. lingō, Gr. λιγνεό ‘lick’.

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