

Dis-assembling Cowgill's Law: Greek ἄγυρις 'gathering' between dialectology and Indo-European reconstruction

The discovery of Cowgill's Law in Greek ($o > u$ in labial environments) and its more restricted formulation by Vine (1999) had, in the latter's words, «the highly desirable morphological consequence of eliminating altogether the problematic notion of an unconstrained 'alternate Schwundstufe', or irregular u -colored prop vowel treatments». However, several forms unaffected by Cowgill's Law are still assumed to reflect such irregular developments, and it would be desirable to find better explanations for them as well.

Among the most problematic examples is the family of ἄγυρις, 'gathering, assembly', ἄγυρμός, 'id.', ἀγύρτης 'collector → begging priest', whose relationship to ἀγείρω 'gather, assemble' (< * $h_2g\acute{e}r-$, no direct cognates) appears evident. Such forms are usually taken as 'Aeolic' continuants of zero-grade * $h_2g\acute{e}r-$. Since there are no reasons to regard all the ἀγυρ- forms as dialectal, and $r > ur$ in this environment is not well established for any dialect, the vocalism should preferably be explained in Common Greek terms. On the other hand, it hardly reflects an original o -grade, since there is no context for Cowgill's Law; a recent attempt (Hawkins 2013) to explain these forms by extending the law to the environment / $_ri$ proves unconvincing on phonetical and etymological grounds.

The unexplored possibility remains that an u -stem somehow underlies these forms. A close semantic and formal parallel to ἄγυρις is found in θάμυρις, 'assembly', part of a constellation of words all traceable back to an adj. *θαμός 'thick, packed, crowded' attested in the plural m. θαμέες and f. θαμειά (De Lamberterie 1990:664-675, Anttila 2000:44). A prehistorical adjective *ἀγύς is probably preserved in substantivised f.plur. ἀγυαί, 'streets', a morphological archaism akin, among others, to θαμειά itself (Lundquist 2017:23-60). I intend to discuss how ἄγυρις could be related to *ἀγύς in a similar way to θάμυρις : θαμός, and their further connection to ἀγείρω.

References

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