

**Young and Hungry:
ἀκάκητα and the Gk. avatars of the IE Fire-god**

Laura Massetti

(Harvard Center for Hellenic Studies, Washington D.C. / University of Copenhagen)

lmassetti@chs.harvard.edu

Despite previous accounts of its origin and meaning (Hoffmann 1891, Risch 1954:395–6), the epithet ἀκάκητα, which exclusively applies to Hermes (Hom., Hes.) and Prometheus (Hes.), remains opaque (*GEW*, *DELG*, *EDG* s.v. ἀκάκητα). In this paper, I endeavor to explain both (a) the etymology and (b) the semantics of the form. Specifically, I propose that:

(a) ἀκάκητα is a compound with a deverbal second member (νεφεληρεγέτα-type, Leukart 1994:291), which ultimately reflects **sm-kḱk-*. The aspiration loss of the first compound member is due to the re-interpretation of ἀκάκητα as related to ἄκακος ‘guileless’ (e.g., Hsch. α 2234 L ἀκάκητα· ὁ μηδενὸς κακοῦ ἄξιος). The second compound member can be traced back to the Indo-European root **kenk-* ‘dry/burn (?)’, which underlies several terms for ‘hunger, hungry’, e.g., Goth. *hūhrus* ‘hunger’ (Schaffner 2001:499–501), Engl. *hunger*, as well as some words meaning ‘dry/burning’, e.g., κάγκανος ‘dry’ (Hom., Probert 2006:264–5). A putative proto-form **ἀκάκετα* may have been remodeled as ἀκάκητα in order to comply with the metrical requirements of the hexameter.

(b) ἀκάκητα originally meant ‘all-drying/burning’* or, maybe, ‘very hungry’, since hunger is traditionally associated with burning, e.g., αἶθοψ λιμός ‘burning hunger’ (Hes.). An epithet of this kind perfectly suits both Hermes and Prometheus, who share an association with fire, theft, and sacrifice, three components of fire-deities attested in at least two other Indo-European traditions, namely: Vedic and Old Norse, see, e.g., the collocations [ALL-EATING – FIRE]: Ved. *viśvādām ... agnīm* ‘all-eating Agni’ (RV 8.44.26bc), *Logi ... etit slátr allt* ‘Logi (: the wild fire) ate all the meat’ (*Gylfaginning* 46d), and [THIEF] – [FIRE]: Ved. *ná tāyúim gúhā cátantam* ‘hiding in secret, like a thief’ (: Agni, RV 1.65.1a); ON *húsbjófr* ‘the house-thief’ (: ‘fire’, *Ynglingatal* 20).

References

- DELG* = Chantraine, Pierre. 1968–1980. *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque: histoire des mots*. Paris: Klincksieck. [Nouvelle éd. avec un suppl. sous la direction de Alain Blanc, Charles de Lamberterie, Jean-Louis Perpillou, Jean, Taillardat, et Olivier Masson. 2009].
- EDG* = Beekes, Robert S.P. 2009 [2010]. *Etymological Dictionary of Greek*. Leiden / Boston: Brill.
- GEW* = Frisk, Hjalmar. 1960–1972. *Griechisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*. Heidelberg: Winter.
- Hoffmann, Otto. 1861. ἀκάκητα. *Beiträge zur Kunde der indogermanischen Sprachen* 17.328–9.
- Leukart, Alex. 1994. *Die frühgriechischen Nomina auf -tās und -ās. Untersuchungen zu ihrer Herkunft und Ausbreitung (unter Vergleich mit den Nomina auf -eús)*. Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften.
- Probert, Philomen. 2006. *Ancient Greek Accentuation: Synchrony Patterns, Frequency Effects, and Prehistory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Risch, Ernst. 1954. Der homerische Typus ἰπτότα Νέστωρ und μητίετα Ζεύς. In: Georges Redard (ed.): *Sprachgeschichte und Wortbedeutung: Festschrift Albert Debrunner gewidmet von Schülern, Freunden und Kollegen*, 389–97. Bern: Francke Verlag.
- Schaffner, Stefan. 2001. *Das Vernersche Gesetz und der innerparadigmatische grammatische Wechsel des urgermanischen im Nominalbereich*. Innsbruck: Institut für Sprachen und Literaturen der Universität Innsbruck.