Abstract. This article investigates a certain irregularity in the Greek sound changes, namely that associated with the Greek form ἰηρ 'beast', assumed to come from the sequence */gʰw/ 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 /tʰɛɾ/ <ἰηρ> (gen. sg. /θηρός/ <ἰηρός>) 'beast of prey' (II. +) coming back to the PIE root */gʰe₁r-/ has /tʰ/ in Anlaut in place of /kʰ/ as expected from the sound laws. The regular development is evidenced in such examples as (Sihler 1995: 158, Rix 1976: 84):

Gk. /kʰɛɾ/ <χήν> 'goose' from PIE */hans-/; cf. Ved. haṃsā- Lith. žąsìs
Gk. /kʰeːð/ <χέω> 'I pour' from PIE */gʰeɣ/-; cf. Lat. fundō, fūdī, Ved. juhóti
Gk. /tʰɛkʰos/ <τεχνός> 'wall' from PIE */dʰeyɣ-/-; cf. Osc. feihúss (acc.pl.), Lat. fingō 'model'

2. Moreover, the other Indo-European languages present further evidence in favour of reconstructing the initial */gʰw/:

a) Lith. žvēris, remade to the i-stem (Smoczyński 2007: 795)

b) Lat. ferus (Carmen Arvale, Naevius +), thematicized adjective */gʰęr-o-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 zvěří.

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3. Through this comparison we can safely reconstruct the PIE root */gʰ-gʰer/- (*/gʰ-gʰér/- 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 */tʰer/- <θήρ> where we could have regular */kh/- <χ> in anlaut instead of the attested /tʰ/ <θήρ>. We have numerous similar forms in Greek like Attic */tʰérion/- <θήριον> ‘wild animal’ (formally a diminutive of */tʰer/- <θήρ>) or the verb */tʰrióō/- <θηριόω> ‘I make into a wild beast’ but they all seem to be derived from the root noun */tʰer/- <θήρ> 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 */gʰ-h/ as */gʰ-h/> /ph/, /th/, /kh/ and */kʰ/- <θήρ> to the 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 */gʰ-h/ as */gʰ-h/, i.e. the aspirated labiovelar with its regular outcome in Greek, that is the dental /tʰ/ <θήρ> before a front vowel as in */tʰermós/- <θηριόσ> ‘warm’ < */gʰer-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 “*/kʰ becomes πκ, initial π before o-vowels, liquids and nasal, both vocalic and consonantal, but ττ, initial τ before e- and i-vowels” and just as */gʰ-“becomes φ before o-vowels, etc., but θ before e- and i-vowels, so would */kʰy/ (Indo-Eur. ḷḥy) become φφ, initial φ, and θθ, initial θ respectively, and we have the explanation of δῆρον (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: 159-160 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/ = */gʰh/ >/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 /híppos/
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<ἰππος> ‘horse’ from PIE */h₁ek-ʊ-o-ːs/. This form, in my opinion, is not clear in itself and should not be used in explaining other forms – the Greek /hi-/ in Anlaut still remains resistant to explanation alongside with the gemination of /pp/ (cf. NIL: 232). Besides, the form could also be connected to the PIE root */sek-ʊ-/ ‘to follow’ (Gk. /hépomai/ <ἐποµαῖος>, Lat. sequitur, Skt. sácatė) and not */h₁ek-u-/ ‘swiftness’ (cf. the adjectives: Gk. /ἐκσύς/ <ἐκσύς> and Skt. āśū ‘swift’) as usually assumed⁴ (see also De Vaan 2009 for a recent discussion and a new hypothesis).

5. If we look further for evidence of the development dorsal + /µ/ in Greek we will find several forms in Greek dialects other than Attic and Homeric. Firstly, there is a form /ph₂r/ <φήρ>, attested in Hesychius as aeolic, which would show the regular reflex of the labiovelar before a front vowel in this dialect (i.e. a labial, cf. Ionic (Homeric) -/θ'estos/ <θ'εστος>, Aeol. (Boeotian) -/pʰ'ės'tos/ <ϝ'εστος> from */gʰ'eddʰ/, Lejeune 1972: 83). Additional forms like /ph₂res/ <Φῆρες> (aeol. in Homer), Thessalian <πεφειράκοντες> also exist. This would confirm the hypothesis that the initial sequence of */gʰu-/ was treated like a labiovelar. Secondly, there are forms like Boeotian <τα πάµατα> which are supposedly preserving PIE */kʰu-/ as /pp/ with the gemination similar to /hippos/ <ἰππος> (Buck 1955: 65, 127). But the problem here lies in the interpretation of the Boeotian orthography and it is not certain if the sound underlying the sign /pp/ should also be a geminate. LIv² goes even further and reconstructs the root */kʰuːh-/ ‘erwerben’ (only attested in Greek but not Ionic-Attic) using the Boeotian form to prove that the reconstructed root consisted of two phonemes */k/ and */µ/ rather than a simple labiovelar */kµ/ (LIv²: 375). Lanszweert has tried to find similar patterns in Greek compounds with /pa-/ from */kµ/ (from the root */k(u)ʊmohn-/ ‘dog’) like /páρµoς/ <πάρµος> ‘Papyrusstaude’ (‘Hundsweizen’) and /párnops/ <πάρνοψ> ‘Heuschrecke’ (Lanszweert 1994: 83ff.) but these examples seem doubtful (for one thing, they are attested late in Teophrast, cf. NIL: 438). Because of its high complexity and requirement of the use of the insecure dialectal material, I will leave the subject of the development of */kµ/ sequence in Greek aside for now and concentrate on the */gʰu/ sequence only. I intend to treat the problem of */kµ/ elsewhere.

6. There is one additional form which could prove the theory of the treatment of the */gʰu/ sequence in Greek like the labiovelar right. Namely, the Greek form /tʰɛlɡdô/ <θελγῶ> ‘charm, beguile’ (Od. +) which is usually connected with Lithuanian žvelgti, žvelgiu ‘look, glance’ from the proto-form */gʰu̯elg-/ (cf. Smoczyński 2007: 795). But LIv² reconstructs */g⁰hɬelg⁰h-/> and treats the corresponding Greek form as “semantisch unsicher und wegen Winters Gesetz lautlich problematisch” (LIv²: 170).

⁴ I owe this remark to Wojciech Sowa (Kraków) p.c.
7. As we have seen, there are more forms to be mentioned in connection with this irregularity of the Greek sound development than initially thought of but all of them present us with difficulties. However, if the above hypothesis is correct that at least */gʰy/ is treated like the aspirated labiovelar and changes to /th/ before front vowels, let us investigate the phonetic probability of such a change. Kuhlmann 2003: 13, while discussing Aeolic historical phonology, writes: “Vergleichbar ist die Entwicklung von idg. *gʰyēr über urgr. *kʰēr zu lesb. φήρ ‘wildes Tier’”. We can inquire whether the sequence */gʰy/ really merged with the labiovelar yielding the same result in Greek. Keeping in mind the relative chronology of sound changes we should assume that the prehistoric biphonematic */gʰy/ sequence first lost its palatal element (the merger of palatals and pure velars in centum languages) and gave */gʰw/. Then, a typically Greek sound change occurred – the devoicing of the PIE voiced aspirates – changing */gʰy/ into Proto-Greek */kʰw/. After that, the glide */y/ degraded from being an independent phoneme into the appendix of the preceding */kʰ/ sound and created the sequence */kʰw/ which in all probability was treated exactly like the Proto-Greek */kʰw/, e.g. in /termos/ <*θermeːs> ‘warm’ < */kʰer- móː/ < */gʰer- móː/5. For a parallel development consider also the Greek form /kʰēō/ <χέω> ‘I pour’ from PIE */g'hē-o-h₂/ showing the same development only with loss of the glide in intervocalic position, i.e. PIE */g'hē-o-h₂/ > */kʰē-o/ (palatals-velars merger) > */kʰē-o/ (devoicing of voiced aspirates) > /kʰēō/ (loss of the glide).

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Bibliography


5 Consider the fact that the voiced aspirated labiovelar was devoiced, just like the ordinary voiced aspirate, despite having the secondary labialised co-articulation alongside with the aspiration.
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