

PIE ‘bird’ and ‘egg’ after Schindler

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In a celebrated article on the Proto-Indo-European words for ‘bird’ and ‘egg’, Schindler (1969) concluded that the Vedic word for ‘bird’ gave the best evidence for the Proto-Indo-European form. Although most of the paradigm suggested an *i*-stem (nom. sg. *vīh*, gen. sg. *véh*), the alternative nom. sg. *veh* could not be explained analogically. Therefore, Schindler reconstructed an acrostatic root noun nom. sg. **H₂uoi-s*, gen. sg. **H₂uej-s*.

However, this is difficult to reconcile with Lat. *avis*, Arm. *haw*, which both point to **H₂ey-i-*. Schindler assumed that these could come regularly by anaptyxis (**H₂uoi-s* > **H₂əuoi-s* > **əuoi-s*), but Schrijver (1991: 25-31) has shown that this cannot be correct for Latin, and the usual reflex of **Hu-* in Armenian is *g-* (Olsen 1999: 763).

Schindler’s reconstruction for ‘egg’ was **ō-H₂uj-o-* ‘that which is near the bird’ > Gk. *ᾠόν*, Lat. *ouum* etc. This is problematic both on semantic grounds (is an ‘egg’ well described as ‘near the bird’?) and because the preposition **ō* is found only in Ved., Av. *ā* ‘near, near to, towards’ (note that **o* in forms like Gk. *ὠκέλλω* ‘run ashore’ won’t give the required result: **o-H₂uj-o-* > **ōūjo-* > ^x*ōūjo-*). An alternative solution, which explains ‘egg’ as a *vṛddhi* derivation of ‘bird’, was dismissed by Schindler because it required a base **H₂oui-* (for a brief exposition of the problems with Schindler’s reconstruction see de Vaan 2008: 438, who

prefers *vṛddhi*). The difficulties involved in reconciling either of the proposed preforms of ‘egg’ with Sievers’ law will be discussed.

In the light of the Latin and Armenian evidence for **H₂eu-i-*, however, it is argued that an acrostatic *i*-stem with nom. sg. **H₂ou-i-*, gen. sg. **H₂eu-i-* should be reconstructed. This would provide the basis for the *vṛddhi* derivation found in **H₂ōu̯i-o-* ‘egg’.

The Vedic paradigm with nom. sg. *véḥ* can be explained in the light of the treatment of acrostatic *i*- and *u*-stems in Vedic. It should be noted that there was a tendency in the Indo-European languages to replace weak stems with *e*-grade (such as gen. sg. **H₂eu-i-s*) with the productive zero-grade found in other noun paradigms; *e*-grade was then transferred to the suffix or ending (Schindler 1972: 35-36; 1975: 7; Jasanoff 2003: 68-69). Although this happened in Indo-Iranian (e.g. Ved. *dáru* < **doru*, gen. sg. *dróḥ* < **dr-eu-s* ‘wood’), a further development was the creation of a single stem (e.g. Ved. *sánu*, gen. sg. *snóḥ*, *sánoh* ‘summit’). In the case of originally acrostatic *u*-stems, the stem of the strong cases was generalised. In *i*-stems, however, the weak stem was the basis for the generalisation (e.g. Ved. *áhiḥ* ‘snake’ < **H₁eg^{wh}i-* vs. Gk. ὄφις ‘snake’ < **H₁og^{wh}i-*). Therefore Ved. nom. sg. *véḥ* probably reflects the generalised weak grade **ue̯i-* < **H₂ue̯i-* ← **H₂eu-i-*.

It is concluded that **H₂ōu̯i-o-* ‘egg’ and **H₂eu-i-* ‘bird’ suggest that we should reconstruct an acrostatic *i*-stem **H₂ou-i-*, **H₂eu-i-* ‘bird’ for an early stage of Proto-Indo-European.

Homophony with **H₂ou-i-*, **H₂eu-i-* ‘sheep’ (Lat. *ouis*, Toch B. *ā_uw*; Kim 2000) led to generalisation of different stems in the daughter languages.

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