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Autor: Dunkel, George E.

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On the short vowel in the name Ἡρακλῆς

By George E. Dunkel, Zürich

1. P. Kretschmer's classic study of the name Herakles, to which such standard works as Chantraine's *Dictionnaire étymologique*, Frisk's *Griechisches etymologisches Wörterbuch* and Schwyzer 1939:438 refer in lieu of discussion of their own, begins as follows: "In Altertum und Gegenwart ist die Erklärung des Namens Ἡρακλῆς aus Ἡρᾱ und -κλέης 'berühmt' die herrschende Auffassung gewesen. ... sie ist eminent wahrscheinlich, um nicht zu sagen: ganz sicher. Das einzige Bedenken gegen sie bildet die Kürze des α" (1917:121). After 80 years this concise assessment of the problem is still fully valid.

Although in hexameter the -κλ- invariably makes position, a difference in quantity is nonetheless demonstrated by the difference in vowel-quality between Ἡρῆ and Ἡρᾱ-κλέης within Ionic. And the second syllable frequently scans short in Pindar, Aristophanes and Euripides. Since Greek *ā*-stems are not normally shortened as first elements in stem-compounds¹, Kretschmer was neither the first nor the last to remark on the difficulty posed by the -ᾱ².

2. The usual treatment of *ā*-stems in composition is exemplified by the many compounds in νικη-, τιμη- and βουλη-. This type is generally presumed to be inherited, despite the fact that not a single instance of such a compound can with certainty be reconstructed.

But in Greek, *ā*-stems in composition are also commonly deformed by replacement of -*ā*- by the thematic vowel, as in Νικό-μαχος, Τιμό-θεος, ψυχοπομπός and even Ἡρό-δοτος (similarly in Latin *causi-dicus* and the like). Although this "compositional linking vowel" owes much of its productivity to metanalysis (i.e. morpheme-boundary shift followed by redistribution) of the-

* Works cited repeatedly:

K. Brugmann 1906: *Grundriss der vergleichenden Grammatik der idg. Sprachen*² II 1 (Strassburg).

W. Burkert 1979: *Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual* (Berkeley/Los Angeles).

W. Burkert 1985: *Greek Religion, Archaic and Classical*, tr. J. Raffan (Oxford).

A. Leukart 1994: *Die frühgriech. Nomina auf -tās und -ās* (Wien).

M. Peters 1989: *Sprachliche Studien zum Frühgriechischen* (Habil. Wien).

E. Schwyzer 1939: *Griechische Grammatik* I (München).

P. Kretschmer 1917: "Mythische Namen, 5. Herakles", *Glotta* 8, 121–129.

H. Zwicker 1913: "Herakles", Pauly-Wissowa *Real-Enzyklopädie* 8, 516–528.

1 These must be distinguished from combinations with case-forms such as δικασ-πόλος, Θηβαι-γενής, Vedic *gnās-pāti*-, Latin *aquaeductus* and the like.

2 H. Zwicker 1913:527; W. Burkert 1985:432 note 21.

matic stems, in origin this practice might also, at least in part, continue something very old: the replacement of a derived collective by its underlying basic form in a stem-compound. E.g. Mycenaean *ko-to-no-o-ko* seems to simply contain the derivational base to which *ko-to-na* is the collective³.

This harmonises with the observation that no specific compounds containing “*ā*-stems” as first elements are reconstructable for IE at all⁴, a fact which stands in remarkable contrast with the many clearly reconstructable first compound-members in **-i-*, **-u-*, **-r-*, **-n-*, and **-o-*⁵. This leads one to hypothesise that forms in **-eh₂-* were excluded as first elements because they were not yet stems but still case-forms – which were by definition illicit in a stem-compound⁶. To judge by Mycenaean *ko-to-no-o-ko* beside *ko-to-na*, e.g. Ἡρό-δοτος might be formed not on younger but in fact on older principles than Ἡρᾱ-κλῆς (for **Ἡρᾱ-κλέης*, as argued below). The compounds in νικη- τιμη- βουλη- and so on would then all be relatively banal analogies or date from the time when the “*ā*-stems” had developed into an independent inflectional class.

3. Among the various explanations for the shortening seen in Ἡρακλῆς (and the far more common Ἡρά-κλειτος⁷) which have been proposed, the most influential has been P. Kretschmer’s parallelisation with personal names such as Ἀλκά-θοος (Homer; cf. Mycenaean *A-ka-to-wa*), Ἀλκα-θή (Plutarch) and Ἀλκα-μένης (Herodotus; cf. Mycenaean *A-ka-me-ne*), on the assumption that these all contain ἄλκη. But as has long been seen, these are not necessarily due to shortening at all; Ἀλκα- could just as well be the accusative of the root-noun⁸

3 So most recently A. Leukart 1994:315; on 93 fn. 160 he compares PY *Po-no-qa-ta* with πόρνᾱ. E. Risch less plausibly sees in *ko-to-no-o-ko* an analogically elided /ktoin-hokhos/, with a non-etymological double writing of *-o-*: *Res Mycenaee*, Colloquium Nürnberg 1981, ed. A. Heubeck (Göttingen 1983) 383–384. Myc. *a-ni-o-ko* and Homeric ἡνίοχος beside *a-ni-ja* are more likely due to simple haplology from the expected “*hānio-hok^ho-*” than to elision/hyphaeresis or to early contraction (which would presumably have led to **ἄνωχος*: for the “streng” vocalism see *Verba et Structurae*, Festschrift K. Strunk, ed. H. Hettrich et al., Innsbruck 1995, 3ff.).

4 As emerges implicitly from the discussion in K. Brugmann 1906:81 (on p. 82 he admits this only for adjectives). The contrast ἄκρᾱ πόλις – ἀκρόπολις and Νέᾱ πόλις – Νεοπολίτης (beside Νεαπολίτης) is generally seen as reflecting the post- and pre-gender state of affairs, respectively: J. Wackernagel, *Altindische Grammatik* II.1 (Göttingen 1905) 50; E. Risch, *MusHelv* 2 (1945) 22 = *Kl. Schr.* (Berlin/New York 1981) 119.

5 See my contribution to the forthcoming *Compositiones indogermanicae*, Gedenkschrift J. Schindler, ed. H. Eichner et al.

6 In the other direction point formations like ζυγη- and βαλανη-φόρος and Myc. *di-pte-ra-po-ro* (and *wastuwā-hokhos*: A. Leukart, *Flexion und Wortbildung*, V. Fachtagung, Regensburg 1973, ed. H. Rix, Wiesbaden 1975, 187) – or are these analogic like θανατη-φόρος?

7 Convincingly shown by P. Kretschmer 1917:125 to be a replacement of Herakles.

8 As in ποδάνιπτρον if this derives from a univerbated πόδα νίζω and not from a haplogised **ποδ-από-νιπτρον* (K. Brugmann 1906:102 fn. 1, cf. ἄποινα < **ἀπο-ποινα*; however on ἀπότισις and Vedic *āpaciti-* see K. Hoffmann, *Aufsätze zur Indoiranistik* III, Wiesbaden 1992, 788f.).

seen in the dative ἄλκι-ι⁹. And case-forms are common as first elements, see fn. 1 and compare Ἀλκί-θοος and Ἀλκι-μένης, as well as Ἀλκί-νοος and Ἀλκι-βιάδης¹⁰.

Since further material is scant¹¹, Kretschmer ultimately left the question of the origin of Ἀλκα- undecided; he nonetheless saw no reason to deviate from the already Alexandrian etymological *communis opinio*¹²: “sind diese Parallelen mit ἄ auch nicht zahlreich, so reichen sie doch hin zu beweisen, dass kein genügender Grund vorliegt, Ἡρᾱκλῆς von Ἡρᾱ loszureissen” (122). Though such a *nihil obstat* is certainly preferable to the usual *non liquet*, let us try to go further.

4. Other proposals which have been made since 1922 include the following:

4a. G. Sandsjoe suggested that the shortening might once actually have been regular in compounds, due to an inversion of Wackernagel’s principle of compositional lengthening. Since *-o- was according to this lengthened when standing between short syllables (as in Vedic *rathā-sáh-*), *-ā- might have been forced into this pattern as well, he suggested, remaining long only between short syllables, but otherwise being shortened. Analogy would have restored the length to most compounds¹³.

While compounds which seem to exemplify such an analogic shortening may be found in Aryan (Vedic *prtanā-śáh-*, *°háva-* but *amīva-hán-*, *úrṇa-mradas-*), languages where *o and *ā did not merge show that these are more likely due to the inherited exclusion of collectives in *-eh₂- from serving as compositional first elements (§ 2). Furthermore, we now know that “compositional lengthening” is originally due not to syllabic rhythm but rather to the effect of laryngeals over morpheme-boundaries¹⁴.

4b. M. Peters has proposed that the Greek compounds with -ᾱ- for *-ā- might have been formed on the stem as seen synchronically at the time when the ā-stem genitive was still -ᾱos (< *-eh₂-os)¹⁵. Ingeniously simple, on paper; but

9 Whereas ἄλκι could conceivably represent the dative of ἄλκη itself, if *-eh₂- is taken to ablaut hysterokinetically (i.e. *alk-eh₁ *alk-h₂-i like πα-τήρ πα-τῑ-ι), this is impossible for the accusative.

10 A. Leukart 1994:227 fn. 250. This material militates against the possibility that Ἀλκα- might continue the lost oblique stem *alk-η- of Homeric ἄλκαρ.

11 Kretschmer also cited Homeric θυρᾱ-ωρός, πυλᾱ-ωρός and Attic τιμωρός, but these reflect *-ā-ōros, metathesised from *-ā-horos (cf. Ionic τιμή-ορος). See E. Schwyzer 1939:438 and (differently) M. Peters, *Die Sprache* 34 (1988–1990) 530.

12 The antique etymologies are collected by H. Zwicker 1913:524ff.

13 *Die Adjektiva auf -αιος* (Diss. Uppsala 1918) 89–91.

14 As shown for the negative prefix by B. Forssman, *Untersuchungen zur Sprache Pindars* (Wiesbaden 1966) 145–149 and R. Beekes, *Development of the PIE Laryngeals in Greek* (The Hague/Paris 1969) 98–111.

15 *Untersuchungen zur Vertretung der idg. Laryngale im Griechischen* (Wien 1980) 174, 175 fn. 126.

why then did such formations never become the norm? For the Greeks, the *πτῶσις ὀρθή* remained basic.

4c. H. Zwicker 1913:527 suggested that an original *Ἡροκλέης became Ἡρακλέης with “Doric a for o” or else that o became α due to the influence of the cluster -κλ-. Neither of these ideas is even remotely acceptable today.

5. In passing, P. Kretschmer mentioned a completely different possible source for the short vowel, one which I believe in fact holds much more explanatory promise: the *ā*-stem vocatives in a short final vowel such as *νύμφα*, *δέσποτα* and *ἵπποτα*. That these are inherited is shown by the comparison with e.g. OCS *ženo*. Kretschmer repeated the usual view that these were ablaut-variants of the full-grade *-eh₂- seen in the other cases (cf. *ἀλκή* and *ἀλκί*). However, it is more likely that the short vowels are due to the loss of the final laryngeal before pause, as this assumption allows us to account for other types of short-vowel vocative, like Sanskrit *devi* and *vadhu*, as well¹⁶.

The only scholar to have taken the vocative idea seriously since then seems to be O. Szemerényi, who once suggested in passing that “the name represents a wish: Ἡρα, κλέος δοίης”¹⁷. The total mismatch between the name-bearer and the particular deity invoked (Hera is notoriously Herakles’ arch-enemy) has led to much speculation by historians of Greek religion¹⁸, but is for our purposes irrelevant: on the one hand, Greek naming-practice shows that the two elements of a compound name need not make particularly good semantic sense together or even represent syntactically close constituents¹⁹. On the other hand, the basic point of Kretschmer’s discussion was that the name Herakles was not invented specifically for the Master of Beasts, but was once a “typischer argivischer Personennamen” (1917:125), “den vor der Entwicklung der Herakles-sage wahrscheinlich viele Männer getragen haben” (1917:126), comparing the use of deliberately prosaic personal names for heroes like Jack the Giantkiller, der starke Hans etc. Much of the appeal of the video-game heroes the Mario Brothers rests on the tension between their remarkable powers and their banal name.

6. The vocative remains the simplest inner-Greek source of the short -α-, but the hypothesis must be formalised by specifying the environment in which the vocative was used. I assume that the first element really is the theonym

16 F. Kuiper, *Die Sprache* 7 (1961) 18; M. Mayrhofer, *Idg. Grammatik* I (Heidelberg 1986) 149; F. Lindeman, *Introduction to the laryngeal theory* (Oslo 1987) 64f.

17 *Gnomon* 93 (1971) 670f. = *Scripta Minora* III (Innsbruck 1987) 1588f.

18 For discussion and bibliography see W. Burkert 1979:78–98 and 1985:208–211 and the *Lexikon des frühgr. Epos* s.v.

19 The only practical constraint on the combinations between the inventories of first and second elements was that no repetition ensue: excluded were e.g. “Ἴππ-ἵππος, Κρατο-κράτης, Ὠκ-ώκης” and the like.

Ἡρῶ (rather than e.g. Ἡρᾶ, related to Hittite *warri-* “aid”). Whether this itself is inherited or due to a Greek folk-etymology of a Near Eastern theonym (Burkert 1979:82 with fn. 17) is for our purposes irrelevant.

Personal names and theonyms are often remade on the basis of their vocatives, which are particularly frequently used: “Die ausschlaggebende Rolle des Vokativs von Eigennamen, insbesondere von solchen der Götter, ist ohne weiteres begreiflich.”²⁰

Within Greek, Thessalian Ἀπλουν has been explained as a back-formation to its own vocative Ἀπλον, itself a syncopated allegro-form of the original vocative Ἀπελλων²¹ (cf. the original nominative Ἀπέλλων, as in Crete and elsewhere)²². Similarly, Ποσειδῶν, Ποτειδάων and so on continue a Proto-Greek **potei-dāhōm* which includes the old vocative of πόσις (Skr. *pāti-*, vocative *pāte*)²³. Among the sources of the Homeric agent-nouns in -τᾶ are frozen vocatives such as μητίετα Ζεῦ, as E. Risch has shown²⁴; on another occasion, he suggested that certain Mycenaean personal names such as *Di-du-me* might have developed out of frozen vocatives as well²⁵. And the accent retraction of πόνηρος (beside πονηρός) has also been traced back to the vocative usage (J. Wackernagel *Kl. Schr.* 1098).

Outside of Greek, the best known example of vocative-as-nominative is Latin *Iuppiter*, representing *Iūpiter* from **d̥ieu-Ø ph₂ter*, which may have replaced an earlier nominative *Diespiter*²⁶.

But there is much material for this phenomenon from Sanskrit as well: P. Thieme has presented numerous instances of accent-retraction (theonym *Váruṇa-* beside *dharúṇa-*, *vayúna-*) and vowel lengthening (theonyms *Vāsu-deva-*, *Nārāyaṇa-*) which go back to this factor²⁷.

In fact, it has long been suspected that the IE univerbations²⁸ of the type **déms-poti-* might owe their retracted accent – abnormal for determinative

20 Ernst Fraenkel, *Glotta* 35 (1956) 84. See in general J. Wackernagel, *Vorlesungen über Syntax* I (Basel 1926) 309f.

21 P. Kretschmer, *KZ* 38 (1905) 134, citing further generalised allegro-vocatives such as French *sire*, and *cousin*, Spanish *usted* (compare also Sanskrit *bhoḥ* < *bhagavaḥ* and Attic ὦ τᾶν). On allegro-forms see also E. Fraenkel, *loc. cit.* 83f.; M. Peters 1989:213.

22 On this see W. Burkert, *RhM* 118 (1975) 1–21; he in fact provoked this article by a question during a philological lunch in November 1996.

23 W. Burkert 1985:136, 402 fn. 2; M. Peters 1989:208 with fn. 59. A lone dissenter is A. Heubeck, *IgForsch* 64 (1959) 236–238 (locative **pnteῖ* “on the path”). We return to this name presently.

24 *Sprachgeschichte und Wortbedeutung*, Festschrift A. Debrunner (Bern 1954) 389ff. = *Kl. Schr.* (above n. 4) 332ff.

25 *Tractata Mycenaea*, Colloquium Ohrid 1985, ed. P. Ilievski et al. (Skopje 1987) 294.

26 K. Strunk, *Serta indogermanica*, Festschrift G. Neumann (Innsbruck 1982) 428ff. On Vulgar Latin *Romaniane vivat* etc. see T. Adamik in: *Latin vulgaire – latin tardif* (I), ed. J. Hermann (Tübingen 1987) 1–11.

27 P. Thieme, *MSS* 44 (1985) 239–258 = *Kleine Schriften* II (Stuttgart 1995) 1054–1073.

28 On the permeability of the border between univerbations and stem-compounds (due to first elements with morphosyntactically justified zero-endings) see the work cited in fn. 5.

compounds but regular in vocatives – to precisely this factor²⁹. That it was at work already in the proto-language is only to be expected in what is after all only another normal human language.

7. Latin *Iuppiter* and Greek Ζεῦ πάτερ, both from **diéu ph₂ter*, show not just a single but a double vocative – as is only to be expected of a univerted apposition.

Another such double vocative is in my opinion Ποσειδάων. This theonym began as a genitival syntagm **pótis dāhōm* (beside singular **pótis dās*, as shown by derivatives such as Ποσιδή-ϊος)³⁰. In direct address, the second element came over time to be “sympathetically vocativised” to match **pótei* in the first, even though it was originally a dependent genitive, not an appositional nominative. Thus arose, beside the nominative **pótis dāhōm* (whence South Greek Ποσι- and, analogically, Ποσει-), a vocative **pótei dāhōm* > Ποτειδάων.

Double-vocative syntagms such as these, I believe, provide a model for the formation of Ἡρακλήης.

8. Heracles was an ἀλεξίκακος, a savior from danger (especially animal-related), the first super-hero, whose name came to be used (especially by men)³¹ as an exclamation of surprise, anger, helplessness and disgust not only in Latin but in Greek as well. W. Burkert compares Italian *Madonna!* and continues: “questo aspetto non fa grande mitologia, ma è assai importante per la vita quotidiana”³². The vocative in uncontracted -εες is attested in Pindar *Nem.* 7.86, in Euripides *Herc. fur.* 175, and perhaps in Arkhilokhos’ τήνελλα ὦ καλλίνικε Olympic victory-song³³. All other attestations of the vocative show contraction to Ἡρακλεις as e.g. ca. 20 times in Aristophanes³⁴.

When phrases rather than single words serve as exclamations in modern languages, they may be interrupted for additional intensity, as in: “Jesus H. Christ!”, “Not bloody likely!”, “Far fucking out!”, and even, breaking up a single word, “Dyna-fucking-mite!”³⁵. Compare also the type “Get the hell out

29 O. Richter, *IgForsch* 9 (1898) 219f.; P. Thieme, *op. cit.* 246–248 = 1061–1063.

30 For the facultative plurality compare R̥gvedic *pāti-* with *rāyás / rayīnām, viśás / viśām, vājasaya / vājānām* etc. The original meaning of **dā-* is unimportant for our purposes.

31 Exclusively so in Latin (J. B. Hoffmann, *Lateinische Umgangssprache*, Heidelberg ²1936, 29f.); in Greek the situation is obscured by passages like Aristoph. *Frogs* 503 and Eur. *Herc. fur.* 491, in which the character Herakles is addressed by a woman.

32 In: *Héraclès*, ed. C. Bonnet et al. (Bruxelles/Roma 1992) 112.

33 At least as scanned by e.g. H. Diehl (fr. 120); differently M. West (fr. 324).

34 Some of these are of course bona fide vocatives (e.g. in Aristophanes *Frogs* (*passim*) and Euripides *Alc.* 517) rather than the emotional exclamation (as in e.g. *Acharn.* 284, *Clouds* 184).

35 H. L. Mencken, *The American Language* (New York ⁴1945) 315f. and Supplement I (New York 1945) 683 provides print attestations of e.g. *abso-goddam-lutely* and the like from the journalistic milieu (Joseph Pulitzer!) already in the thirties – the same hotbed of originality in *Wortbildung* which has more recently vouchsafed us *Gate-gate, palimony/galimony* and *Madonnathon*.

of here". The infixation of unexpected material into an otherwise predictable sequence of syllables iconically reproduces the deviation from the normal course of events which led to the exclamation.

For just this reason, both elements of the original stem-compound **Ἡρακλῆς* might have been put into the vocative; an emphatic double vocative *Ἡρᾶ κλεες* would have been supported by models such as *Ζεῦ πάτερ*, *Ποσειῶ δᾶον* and the like. This internal vocative had the effect of separating the compound back into two independent words; precisely this violent de-composition served to emphasize the unusual nature of the situation which provoked the exclamation to begin with.

To this emphatic (jocular?) double vocative would then have been back-formed the nominative *Ἡρακλῆς* with only the final element inflected, just as happened in the cases of *Iuppiter* and *Ἄπλουν*.

9. This proposal is supported by consideration of the accent. Whereas the usual Greek accentuation of possessive compounds with *s*-stems as second elements is shown by *δυσμενής* and *εὐγενής*³⁶, such formations are paroxytone when used as personal names, as in e.g. *Διομήδης*. Contrasts like *εὐρυσθενής* – *Εὐρυσθένης* and *ἄκλῆς* – *Ἡρακλῆς* are susceptible to various explanations³⁷.

In 1914 J. Wackernagel took the accentuation of personal names as an archaism comparable to the situation in Vedic (cf. *purudāṃsas*- = *πολυδήνης* and *sumānas*- but *εὐμενής*; *Gött. Nachr.* 1914 45f. = *Kl. Schr.* 1147f.) and the oxytonesis of compound adjectives as an innovation on the model of *ψεῦδος* : *ψευδής*, cf. Vedic *āpas*- (neuter) "work" but *apās*- (masculine) "active". However he abandoned this interpretation by 1930 (*Altindische Grammatik* III 280f.).

Another approach would be to invoke the principle of oppositional accent inherited from IE (cf. Vedic *āpas*- – *apās*- above; *divā* instrumental but *dīvā*-adverb, and so on) and still productive in Greek³⁸ to mark the change of part of speech (cf. paradigmatic *ἰδοῦ*, *ἄλλα* but particles *ἰδού*, *ἄλλά*; *ψεῦδος* : *ψευδής* etc. (Schwyzer 1939:380). In this way personal names would have been differentiated from normal adjectival usage.

My suggestion is to connect the recessive accentuation to the vocative usage:

36 Exceptions include the adjectives in *-ώδης*, *-ήρης*, *-ήκης*, and several other groups.

37 See in general Schwyzer 1939:252 and 514 fn. 1; E. Risch, *Wortbildung der homerischen Sprache* (Berlin 1974) 81.

38 Cf. also modern English augmentative *bigmother*, diminutive *mickeymouse* and the like.

	nominative	vocative	
i.	*Ἡρᾱκλής		a properly accented possessive stem-compound;
	↘		
ii.		Ἡρᾱκλεες	an emphatic double vocative with retracted accent;
	↙		
iii.	Ἡρᾱκλέης		a neo-nominative containing two traces of its back-formation: short alpha and retracted accent.

This pattern serves to explain the accentual type Διομήδης, Εὐρυσθένης as well, compare also γλαυκός – Γλαῦκος (from Γλαῦκε); but in Ἡρακλέης we have an additional clue as to the exact procedure (vocative, not oppositive retraction) in the precious -ᾱ-.

Two further “vulgar” neo-vocatives were formed as well: Ἡρακλες (inscriptional only), with allegro syncope³⁹ and further accent retraction (both also in vocative Πόσειδον, Aristoph. *Frogs* 664); and *Ἡρακλε, the presumable source of Lat. *hercle*, built either directly to Ἡρακλες on the principle “vocative = nominative minus -s”⁴⁰ (cf. the Doric vocative Ποτειδᾶ) or to a thematic hypocoristic Kurzform *Ἡρακλος⁴¹.

39 Cf. e.g. βέλτιστε beside Vedic *bála-* “strength”.

40 So E. Schwyzer 1939:580 fn. 4.

41 Cf. Πάτροκλος, voc. Πάτροκλε, beside Πατροκλῆς, voc. Πατρόκλεις; W. Schulze, *Kl. Schr.* (Göttingen 1933) 311. The further shortenings in the oblique cases of the second element (genitive *-κλεος > Attic -κλεους, Homeric -κληος > Hdt. -κλεος) need not detain us here. I thank M. Meier-Brügger for useful discussion.