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Irregular [u] in Greek

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One of the minor sound changes found in Ancient Greek involves the irregular appearance of an [u] in certain contexts, in forms in which a different vowel might be expected. This change is of interest because the result of the change and the context for the change recur in a similar sporadic change that took place much later on in the history of Greek, between Medieval and Modern Greek.

The relevant forms which show the Ancient Greek change include the following (cf. Schwyzler (1934: 296, 351-2), Thumb (1900)):

νόξ	'night'
ὄνοξ	'nail'
μύλη	'mill'
φύλλον	'leaf'
ἄγυρις	'gathering'
κόζλος	'wheel'

and others. The exact source of the [u] in these forms is often unclear, but the range of possibilities is fairly restricted. In the case of νόξ and ὄνοξ, the pre-form for Greek almost certainly had an \*o, i.e. \*nokʷt-s (cf. Lat. *nox*) and \*h<sub>3</sub>nogh- (cf. OHG *nagal*), respectively. In the case of μύλη, φύλλον, and ἄγυρις, the v plus sonorant could represent an older \*o plus sonorant group or it could be the result of an older syllabic sonorant, i.e. a zero-grade formation. Similarly, the v in κόζλος may represent an older \*e, i.e. \*kʷe-kʷl-o- (cf. Skt. *cakra-*), though this \*e is not certain.

The source-vowel in this sound change, then, is not always clear. However, the context for the change is quite clear - in each of the examples above and the others like them, the irregular [u] appears in the context /C—C, where one of the consonants is a labial or a velar, and the other consonant is a sonorant (r, l, m, n), or both are labial or velar.

As noted above, irregular [u]'s also occur in the passage from Medieval to Modern Greek. In this case, they arise from earlier [i]. Medieval Greek [i] had several sources, including earlier Greek ι, ει, and η<sup>1</sup>. All of these fell

<sup>1</sup> Ancient Greek v and οι also end up as [i] in Standard Modern Greek, and like the [i]'s noted here, have gone to [u] in some forms and in some dialects. Newton (1972: 19-25) however, in discussing this development in some detail, concludes that these [u]'s are best treated as being from an earlier front rounded vowel [ū]; that is, v/oi did not merge with η/ει/ι first and then go to [u] in certain contexts, but rather they developed to [ū] and then simply were backed to [u]. Also, it is not clear that this development involved the environment under dis-

together by the 9<sup>th</sup> century (possibly earlier) as [i], and in a few words and in some Modern dialectal forms, [u] is to be found from this earlier [i], for the most part in *exactly the same context* as the Ancient Greek irregular [u]'s, namely between velar or labial consonants and a sonorant, or between velars or labials<sup>2</sup>. Some of the better examples include:

ἦμην > ἦμουν 'I was'  
 κάβριος > κάβουρος 'crab'  
 μέσπιλον > μούσπουλον 'medlar' (with ου in first syllable by assimilation)  
 κινῶ > κουνῶ 'move'  
 λεῖμαξ 'meadow, garden' ~ λουμάκι 'young sprout, tall young man'  
 φημίζω > φουμίζω 'praise'  
 πριτά (= πρίν) > \*πριτά > μπουριτά 'before' (Chios, cf. Pernot (1931))

All of the above examples show this sound change in the velar/labial plus sonorant environment that was crucial for the Ancient Greek change noted above.

→ There are a few partial exceptions to this environment, in which there is only a velar/labial consonant or only a sonorant:

ζηλεύω > ζουλεύω 'be jealous'  
 σαρπία > σουπέα 'sepia, cuttle-fish'

← There are in addition a few complete exceptions, in which neither a velar/labial consonant nor a sonorant is involved, for example:

σησάμιον > σουσάμι 'sesame'

This, however, is not surprising, since these do represent irregular and sporadic treatments of [i]; besides, there are a few exceptions to the Ancient Greek context also.

This Medieval to Modern Greek sound change may have involved the direct rounding and backing of [i] to [u]. On the other hand, since there are dialects of Modern Greek (especially in the North) in which unstressed [i] is regularly deleted (cf. μύτ 'nose' for Standard Modern Greek μύτη), it is possible that the change in question was actually  $i \rightarrow \emptyset$ , with the  $u$  arising

cussion here - Newton (1972: 21) says, regarding [u] in the Old Athenian dialect of Modern Greek, that "there seems to be no obvious way of stating the conditions under which ancient  $v$  and  $\alpha$  went to [u]".

<sup>2</sup> That these constitute the main environment for the change is noted by Hatzidakis (1892: 104ff.), Thumb (1893: 104ff.), Beschewliew (1923), and others. In Hatzidakis (1892) and Hatzidakis (1912), large collections of examples of this change are to be found. Moutsos (1972), Moutsos (1976), and Newton (1972) allude to this change also. No one, however, to my knowledge, has noted the similarities between this change and the irregular [u]'s of Ancient Greek, an observation which is the main point of this note.

from an epenthetic vowel, in just those contexts noted above<sup>3</sup>. A piece of evidence in favor of this latter interpretation is the Cretan  $\varphi\omicron\upsilon\chi\alpha\rho\iota\sigma\tau\tilde{\omega}$  'thank you' (cf. Thumb (1964: 9)) for Standard Modern Greek  $(\varepsilon)\varphi\chi\alpha\rho\iota\sigma\tau\tilde{\omega}$  ([ $(\varepsilon)fk\alpha\rho\iota\sigma\tau\tilde{\omega}$ ]), where the  $u$  is from an epenthetic vowel which breaks up the initial labial-plus-velar cluster.

It should be noted that [u] also has arisen in Modern Greek from an earlier [o], and interestingly enough, the velar/labial context figured in this change as well, for example (cf. Thumb (1964: 8), Newton (1972: 24)):

$\kappa\omicron\pi\iota\omicron\nu > \kappa\omicron\upsilon\pi\iota$  'oar'

$\pi\omicron\lambda\tilde{\omega} > \pi\omicron\upsilon\lambda\tilde{\omega}$  'sell'

However, this change is in fact a regular development and not a sporadic one like the [i] to [u] change. Furthermore, there are dialects in which *all* unstressed [o]'s end up as [u], regardless of their surrounding environment, as, for example, in Northern Greek  $\tau\acute{\epsilon}\rho\alpha\tau\omicron\upsilon$  for Standard Modern Greek  $\chi\acute{\epsilon}\rho\alpha\tau\omicron$  'horn'.

Therefore, it seems that the [i] to [u] change more closely parallels the Ancient Greek development of irregular [u]'s. Both the Ancient Greek and the Modern Greek changes had the same result, namely [u], both were of the same sporadic nature, and both occurred in the same environment – they differ only in the vowels they affected. Thus the nature of the Ancient Greek irregular [u]'s is duplicated in almost every respect by the irregular [u]'s of Modern Greek.

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<sup>3</sup> Hatzidakis (1892: 109) and others following him give this as the likely explanation of the actual mechanics of this sound change.