

Siebs' law and the tenues aspiratae at the onset of PIE roots: new evidence

Some common introductions to Indo-European linguistics do not mention (e.g. Fortson² 2005, Meier-Brügger 2003) or pay little attention (e.g. Beekes² 2011: 128; Mayrhofer 1986: 92 n.13) to the possibility that already in PIE times (at least *voreinzelsprachlich*) the onset of some roots might have been *s + voiceless aspirated stop* (i.e. **sk^h-*, *sp^h-*, *st^h-* etc.) caused by an assimilation process of voiced aspirated stops to an preceding /s/ (e.g. **sb^h-* > **sp^h-*), commonly referred to as **Siebs' law** (Collinge 1985: 155f.).

The importance of this change for the reconstruction of certain phonemes in the IE daughter languages has not been acknowledged yet. On the contrary, one can find statements such as Szemerényi's (⁴1990: 152): "Ebensowenig ist das Siebsche Gesetz haltbar. Der Wandel von *sbh-* zu *sph-* ist [...] frei erfunden".

With this talk I want to proof Szemerényi wrong and present new evidence that shows that it is absolutely necessary to reconstruct e.g. an onset **sp^h-* (at least for the pre-history of Indo-Iranian, Greek and Armenian).

One key example is the Armenian word *p^huš* (*o-st.*) 'thorn', that forms in my opinion an equation with Latin *fūcus* 'drone; hornet' and Old English *bēaw* 'gadfly'. All three words can be traced back to PIE *(s)*b^hoh₂k'-yó-* 'having a sting'. The Armenian word shows an additional **s-*. A root *(s)*b^heh₂k'* 'to sting' is confirmed by the corresponding root noun, that can be found in Greek (Dor.) *σφάξ*, (Att.) *σφήξ* 'wasp' < PIE *(s)*b^heh₂k'-s*.

This and other examples will let us establish e.g. the regular correspondence:

Arm. *p^h-*, Gr. *σφ-*, OInd. (s)*ph-*

Cognate words in other languages will show the usual outcome of PIE **sp-* (since **sp^h-* and **sp-* have fallen together there) or of **b^h-* (without *s*-[mobile]). The disputed (cf. Klingenschmitt 1982: 165f.) origin of Armenian *p^h-* becomes thus instantly clear and the assumption of pre-Greek origin of words like *σφήξ* (Beekes 2010: 1431) becomes void.

Selected bibliography:

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