

The root of PIE **h₂ow-i-* ‘bird’
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I have previously argued that the Indo-European word for ‘bird’ was an acrostatic *i*-stem of the shape **h₂o/ew-i-* (Zair 2011). From the weak stem of this preform come Latin *avis* and Armenian *haw*. In Indo-Iranian a ‘semi-proterodynamic’ paradigm was formed, with strong **h₂ou-i-*, weak **h₂u-ei-* (cf. Vedic *dáru* ‘wood’ < **doru*, gen. sg. *dróh* < **dr-eu-s*), the allomorphy of which was resolved by equating it with an original proterodynamic *i*-stem to give Vedic *víh*, or by treating it as an acrostatic root noun with strong stem **h₂uoi-*, which gave the relic form *véh*. The *o*-grade forms of the stem, while not directly preserved as the word for ‘bird’ in any Indo-European language, were the basis for a *vřddhi* formation **h₂ouio-*, which gave forms like Greek *ᾠόν* ‘egg’. In my 2011 article I did not make any suggestions about the actual etymology of the word for ‘bird’, i.e. what Indo-European root it belongs to and how it came to mean ‘bird’.

I now argue that the root in question is **h₂eu-* ‘perceive (by eye or ear)’, from which are derived Hittite *a-ut-ti* ‘you see, look’, Vedic *uvé* ‘I see’, Old Church Slavonic *umъ* ‘mind’ and the adverbial formation(s) **h₂ou-is* and **h₂eu-is* which lie behind Vedic *āvíh* ‘apparently, noticeably’ and Greek *ἄτον* ‘I perceived’, Latin *audiō* ‘I heard’ respectively. LIV (243, 288) reconstructs two separate roots, with the Hittite and Vedic forms going back to **h₁eu-* ‘see’, and the Greek and Latin forms to **h₂ueis-* ‘hear’. But the formal evidence for the root **h₂ueis-* is very weak, and the semantic distinction between the meanings ‘see’ and ‘hear’ is not clear-cut. The reconstruction of the initial laryngeal as **h₂-* relies upon Kloekhorst’s (2006) claim that **h₂-* and **h₃-* fell together with **h₁-* in Anatolian before **o*. In fact, much of Kloekhorst’s evidence regarding **h₃-* is very problematic; e.g. Hittite *ārki* ‘mounts, covers’ probably comes from **h₁org^h*. But there are a handful of words which do seem to suggest that **h₂-* was lost before **o* (e.g. *āra* ‘right, properly’ < **h₂ór-ō*)

The key to this interpretation of the word for ‘bird’ is the preponderance of birds as the omens par excellence in many Indo-European cultures. An original patientive noun **h₂ou-i-* ‘that which is perceived, omen’ therefore underwent an early semantic shift to mean ‘bird’.

Kloekhorst, Alwin (2006). Initial laryngeals in Anatolian. *Historische Sprachforschung* 119, 77-108

LIV = Helmut Rix & Martin Kümmel (2001). *Lexikon der indogermanischen Verben*. Second edition. Wiesbaden: Dr. Ludwig Reichert

Zair, Nicholas (2011). PIE ‘bird’ and ‘egg’ after Schindler. *Münchener Studien zur Sprachwissenschaft* 65, 287-310