

A Note on Early Greek ^{*}/y/

By A. NOCENTINI, Florence

In *Glotta* 54 (1976) 1–11 W.F. Wyatt opens again the debate about the double development of initial ^{*}/y/ in ancient Greek, criticizing the arguments exposed in my paper (*AGI* 57 [1972] 24–43). He revises his proposals made in *Glotta* 46 (1968) 229–237, but confirms his startpoint: explanations must be given in linguistic (i.e. phonological) terms and, consequently, proper contextual rules must be expressed. But results disappoint such a good purpose. In order to explain ten words (ζειαί, (φυσί)ζοος, ζέω, ζώνη, ζώννυμι, ζωστός, ζυγόν, ζεύγος, ζεύνυμι, ζύμη) Wyatt, in his former arrangement, fixed two contextual rules, which left five exceptions aside:

- 1) ^{*}/y/ → ζ|_|/u/
- 2) ^{*}/y/ → ζ|_|/Vh/

So 1) is fulfilled by ζυγόν and ζύμη, but not by ζεύγος and ζεύνυμι; likewise 2) is fulfilled by ζέω, ζώνη, ζώννυμι, but not by ζωστός, while ζειαί and (φυσί)ζοος escape both 1) and 2). Of course all these exceptions were explained like analogical forms. It is a fortune that Wyatt has abandoned the rule 1), because it was due to a rough mistake, that is the pronunciation [hyu] of initial /u/; such a form is only a graphic joke without any phonetic and/or phonemic ground.

In the latter arrangement, under M. Lejeune's suggestions, 1) is turned into

- 1') ^{*}/y/ → ζ|_|/eu/

which assures an economical progress, reducing the number of exceptions: forms like ζειαί, (φυσί)ζοος, ζεύγος, ζεύνυμι, become regular, while ζυγόν undergoes the mysterious power of analogy. But the rule 1') has no more phonological motivation and therefore is a statement *ad hoc*. I do not foresee a better success for the rule 2): according to it we would expect ^{*}ζίημι and not ίημι from ^{*}/jihēmi/ with initial /j/ preserved through dissimilation. About Wyatt's rules it would be enough to say that the former is tauto-

logical and the latter contradictory, but let us add some general remark to avoid the endless and useless fitting of phonological clock-works.

First: as M. Lejeune has already pointed out (*REA* 71 [1969] 380), if we regard $*/y/- > \zeta-$ as a residual change of $*/y/- > /h/-$, this latter must be earlier, but Mycenaean data suggest the opposite. Second: if we assume that $*/y/ > /h/$ is the general non-conditioned change, the result of dissimilation (Grassmann's law) would be the loss of first aspirated and not the maintaining of $*/y/-$; in the above quoted instance $*/jijēmi/$ would give $*/hihēmi/$ and finally $*īημ$. Third: there is no evidence for the assumption that internal $/s/$ before nasal undergoes the same change as initial and intervocalic $/s/$. Between $*/VsN/$ and $/VN/$ or $/VNN/$ an intermediate stage $*/VhN/$ is generally admitted, but it is neither evident nor necessary; thus a change like $*/yōsn/-$ into ζών-η, ζώνν-νμ is clear enough and needs no further explanation, according to the principle of simplicity.

Finally I come back to the startpoint. I reject the distinction between linguistic and non-linguistic explanations; I know only two ranges of facts, the ones having a linguistic relevance, the others having not. A purely phonological argument, in itself, is only more abstract, but not more pertinent; as for the interaction between phonological and sociological phenomena, any good manual of sociolinguistics can afford a satisfactory documentation. In my paper I have tried to prove that the two different developments of initial $*/y/$ belong to two different phonological subsets. The experience of historical languages shows us that the so-called double tradition depends on social stratification (social is used here in its widest meaning) and therefore a sociolinguistic explanation is not exceptional, but obvious. It is clear in this case that we have no historical data about the early stages of Greek and are exposed to the hazard of an inductive argument; but there is no good reason to think that Greek is a monolithic language: even the Mycenaean documents show the tracks of an earlier differentiation and Mycenaean is considered a *koiné* by many scholars. At any rate the label 'rural', I have applied to the lexical items with initial ζ-, is only a shy and not compelling proposal and with it I wish only to point out a scope for the search: when historical data are lacking, language itself becomes a source of history.