

Ἡρώς and Ἡρᾶ

Of Men and Heroes in Greek and Indo-European

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Despite what one might call their "lexical salience" in Ancient Greek, the etymologies of *Ἡρώς* 'hero, demi-god, (in Homeric also) man' and *Ἡρᾶ*, the consort of Zeus, remain in an unsatisfactory state. What might be considered the traditional view, summarized by Frisk (1960), has the two words related to one another (as **hērou-* and **hērṵā-*) and related more distantly to the family represented by Latin *servāre* 'to watch over, protect' or Avestan *ha^urvaiti* 'protects.' The original meaning of the Greek words would, under this hypothesis, have been something like 'protector' and 'Protectress' (or possibly 'Protection') respectively. While the notion of protection would seem to be an important part of nineteenth and twentieth century conceptions of a hero, it is not clear that Homeric Greeks would have felt the same way. For them it would seem that the "stigmata" of a hero was his larger than life actions and forceful, even intemperate, character.¹⁾ If so, it would be surprising that 'protector' would have developed into 'hero.'

Frisk himself is at best lukewarm about the traditional explanation for *Ἡρώς* and finds it untenable on phonological grounds for *Ἡρᾶ*. As he points out, if the preform of the latter were **hērṵā*, we would expect to see traces of a digamma in the Mycenaean, Cypriote and Arcadian attestations (cf. the probable Mycenaean *E-ra*, the Cypriote dative singular *Ἐραι* and the Arcadian city *Ἐρα(ι)α*) and ***Ἡρη* (like *κόρη*) in Attic. The only evidence for a *-w-* is an Elean *Ἐρ-φαιῶιοι* 'the inhabitants of Heraia.' But this word is also read as *ευραιῶιο* (LSJ, Supplement, sv. *Ἡρᾶ*) and, if so, the only evidence for a digamma disappears completely.

¹⁾ Note Hesychius' summation whereby a hero is *δυνατός, ἰσχυρός, γενναῖος, σεμνός* ('strong, powerful/violent, noble, august') or the adjective *πελώριος* ('monstrous, prodigious, huge') that Homer can use of either gods or heroes.

In place of the traditional explanation of *Ἥρα* Frisk, somewhat diffidently, endorses a connection with the well-known Indo-European root **yēr-* 'year' and an original meaning 'Jahresgöttin' (following a suggestion of Schröder) or 'yearling' > 'heifer' > 'young woman' > 'goddess' (Van Windekens, 1958). Either proposal would be entirely acceptable on phonological and morphological grounds but is only just possible semantically. There is no evidence that Hera, or her analogs in other Indo-European groups, was particularly concerned with the yearly cycle nor was she thought of as a young woman.²⁾ Thus it would seem that none of the explanations offered so far for either of these two words is altogether satisfying and thus a new inquiry would not be out of place.

Let's begin an examination by looking at the surface morphology of *ἥρας*. *ἥρας* belongs to a very small group of Greek nouns that are formed with a derivative suffix *-ου-*. The only others in this group that appear to be inherited are *πάτρω* 'father's brother, uncle', *μήτρω* 'maternal uncle, relation on the mother's side', *δμῶ* 'slave.' In all cases we have *-ου-*, meaning 'someone pertaining to [X],' added directly to an athematic nominal stem.³⁾ In each case the last element before the *-ου-*, stem-formative or root as the case may be, is in the zero-grade. Thus, if *ἥρας* follows suit, it must reflect *hē-r-ou-*, with a root *hē-* (**s/yeE-*) and a stem-formative *-r-*.⁴⁾ The latter I take to be the same verbal noun forming formative seen in **Ae/on-r* 'spirit, élan vital.' **Ae/on-r* of course is an abstract noun derived from **Aen-* 'breathe.' It, in turn, underlies the hysterokinetic derivative (with the meaning 'characterized by X') **Anér-* 'one imbued with élan vital' > 'hero, man' whose meaning rather neatly parallels that of *ἥρας*.⁵⁾

²⁾ That one of her epithets was *βοῶπις* 'ox-eyed' (a description that could be used of any woman with large eyes) or that she was a protector of cows (Van Windekens, 1958: 310) hardly seems cogent evidence that her name was once 'Heifer' or the like.

³⁾ Schindler (1976: 352). We might note that the behavior of *-ου* is unlike that of *-ου-* which, as Schindler has shown, has an affinity for thematic stems.

⁴⁾ If we accepted the traditional derivation of **ser-ou-*, it would then be anomalous in two ways: (1) in not having a zero-grade before the **-ou-* and (2) in having **-ou-* added to a verbal root rather than a nominal one.

⁵⁾ This derivation of **Anér-*, which is surely correct, is developed by Kuiper (1951) and briefly reviewed below. The **Ae/onr* itself may survive. It is to be found, I think, in another Greek word well-known to etymologists, namely *ónar* (n.) 'dream,' with its extra-Greek cognates, Albanian *ëndër* (f.) [Gheg *ândër*] 'dream' (**onr-*), and Armenian *anurj* 'dream' (**a/onōryo-*). (The Armenian word

Because it seems likely to be both morphologically and semantically parallel in some fashion to ἥρωϛ, a review of the family of *Anér- will make a good starting point for our investigation of ἥρωϛ. The family of *Anér- is extensive, both within and without Greek. Among the relatives of Greek ἀνῆρ we have most noticeably* Armenian *ayr* (gen. *arṇ*) 'Mann, Mensch,' Sanskrit *nā* (*nár*-) 'Mann, Mensch, Hero,' Avestan *nā* (*nar*-) 'Mann, Mensch,' Albanian *njeri*⁶) 'Mann, Mensch,' Welsh *ner* 'hero,' Oscan *nerum* (gen. pl.) 'of men, chiefs,' Umbrian *nerf* (acc. pl.) 'principes, optimates,' and (later) Phrygian *anar* 'man.' A *-yo- derivative is seen in Sanskrit *nárya*- 'manly, human; strong; heroic,' Avestan *na'rya*- 'id.,' and further extended as an *n*-stem Latin *Neriō*, *-ēnis* 'War-goddess' (the wife of Mars). Clearly as all have supposed before, we see in this array the various reflexes of a Proto-Indo-European word, *Anér- meaning 'Mann, Mensch, Hero.'

Underlying Kuiper's etymology of ἀνῆρ are other cognate words that show meanings not directly related to 'man.' Thus we have, *inter alia*, old Irish *nert* and Welsh *nerth* 'force,' Old Irish *so-nirt* 'strong,' Sanskrit *nṛtyati* 'he dances,' *nṛtú*- 'dancing, gesticulating, active, lively,' *sūnára*- 'vital, young,' *sūnṛta*- 'joyful, vital' (= Old Irish *so*-

may well be from a holokinetic "collective" derivative, *Aénōr rather than *Aonr itself. For this type of derivative, see Schindler, 1975, and more recently Melchert, 1983, and Adams, 1985.) The semantic development, already completed in late Proto-Indo-European, would have been something like 'spirit' > 'revelation' > 'dream' or possibly 'spirit' > 'dream-spirit' > 'dream.'

The group of words represented by *ónar* is normally reconstructed with an initial *o- (Huld, 1983: 63, or Beekes, 1969: 46) but a PIE *Aónr (with root ablaut as in *wódz, Hittite *wadar* or English *water*, or *soḱr 'that which is cut off' to be seen in Hittite *sakar* 'excrement') would do equally well. Indeed, it will do better if Cretan *ávap* / *ávaiçov* 'dream' are not to be explained as the result of assimilation of *o* - *a* to *a* - *a*. (Beekes [1969: 46] apparently would derive the *a* from *-n-* in the end-stressed weak cases but that's not very likely here since the only forms actually attested in any form of Greek are the nominative-accusative singular - the strong cases par excellence.) The lack of initial *h*- in Albanian demands an *A₁ [x] here rather than *A₂ [h] (Hamp, 1965: 125-131). PIE *A₂ónr 'dream' and *A₂ónr 'spirit, élan vital' may have been semantically sundered already in Proto-Indo-European but it is also true that (in another ancient tradition) one of the fruits of (the) spirit was the dreaming of dreams and seeing visions (Joel 2.28). Thus a continuing conceptual connection of 'dream' and 'spirit' in Proto-Indo-European cannot be excluded.

⁶) The *-í* is a relatively late morphological addition. The *njer* most often given in etymological dictionaries is the older, unextended, form found only in isolated dialects such as that Arbanasi in Dalmatia (see Huld, 1983: 100-101).

nirt-), *nymanas-* 'keenspirited,' Yidgha *nar-* (in compounds) 'strong, great' (Mayrhofer, 1963: 149), Lithuanian *nirtù-* (= Sanskrit *nṛtú-*) 'quick to anger, irascible; obstinate,' and *niṛsti* (**nirt-s-*, see Fraenkel, 1962: 504–505) 'to get angry,' *narsù-* (**nart-s-u-*) 'courageous, gallant,⁷⁾ or *noras* '(good) will, desire.' Parachi *nar-* 'be capable' is probably a denominate verb rather than an underlying verb stem as Mayrhofer suggests but it certainly belongs here also.⁸⁾

In Greek itself we have *-ηνωρ*, particularly in *εὐήνωρ* 'possessing vital strength,' (\cong Skt. *sūnára-*) and *ἀνήνωρ* 'deprived of vital strength,' and a second member of a series of proper names: *Ἀγαπήνωρ*, *Ἀντήνωρ*, *Ἐλεφήνωρ*, etc. (Kuiper, 1951). Matching Lithuanian *nōras* we have the Hesychian *ωροεῖ* = *ἐνεργεῖ*, though the loss of any trace of the original laryngeal is difficult.

More recently we have Anatolian data supporting Kuiper's assumption, i.e. Hittite **innara-* 'force, strength, vitality' (cf. Luvian *annari-*) underlying such derivatives as *innarahh-* 'make strong, strengthen,' *innarawant-* 'strong, forceful, vigorous' *innarawatar* 'strength, force, vigor' (for these and other derivatives, see Puhvel, 1984: 366–373). We may with Melchert (1984: 103–104) derive all of these from a Proto-Anatolian **ennara-* from PIE **enAnoro-* 'having strength inside.'⁹⁾

One should note that the original meaning of **Anér-*, 'one imbued with élan vital,' matches rather nicely the Greek view of a hero – and *ἀνῆρ* is by no means isolated in the Indo-European world. Derivations with semantics like that seen in **Anér-* from **Ae/onr̥* seem to be frequent sources for words denoting 'hero' in Indo-European societies. Besides **Anér-* we have **wīró-* [: Latin *vir*, Sanskrit *vīrá-*, etc.] which Pokorny (1959: 1177–1178, also, e.g. Ernout and Meillet, 1967: 739 and Mayrhofer, 1976, III: 238–239) suggests is a derivative of **weyH-* seen in Latin *vīs*. (f.) 'power, strength' (acc. sg. *vim*, but pl. *vīrēs* 'physical forces, male sexual organs'), Greek *ἰς* 'strength, force (of persons),' or Sanskrit *váyas-* (n.) 'energy,

⁷⁾ To these derivatives with *-t-* we should add Khotanese *nade* ~ *naḍaun-* (**nṛtāvan-*) 'man, person, hero' (Mayrhofer, 1963: 149, and Bailey, 1979: 172), which is *nrt-* plus an "agentive" suffix *-āvan-*.

⁸⁾ So too does the Iranian *nar-* 'swell' (< **be in-spired*) outlined by Bailey (1979: 174–175). It too is probably denominative.

⁹⁾ The loss of *-H-* between resonants is paralleled, *inter alia*, by *hul(a)na* 'wol' from **AulAno-*. Puhvel comes to a similar semantic conclusion but his phonology and morphology are less acceptable. He takes *innara-* to reflect **Eenr̥* + *-o-* and assumes the Greek *a-* to reflect a vocalized **E-*.

vigor, vigorous age, youth' (further cognates, Pokorny, 1959: 1123–1124).¹⁰) The original adjectival force of PIE **wīró-* is preserved in Tocharian A *wir* 'young, youthful, fresh.'¹¹)

The kind of semantic development we have seen in some detail with **Anér-* and *wīró-* can also be seen in the connection of **Aoyu* (n.) 'life, age' (Sanskrit *āyu*, Gothic *aiws*, Greek *αἰών*, etc.) and **(A)yu-Een-* 'characterized by life' > 'youth, young man' (Avestan *y[a]van-* 'young man (especially a young hero),' Sanskrit *yuvan-*, Latin *iuvenis*, etc.). The semantics of the underlying noun are not exactly equivalent in all these cases, but a certain commonality of meaning is certainly discernable. An abstract noun meaning 'life, energy, strength' or the like gives rise to a derived adjective 'characterized by X' which may also mean 'young' and which, in turn, can be nominalized as 'one characterized by X' or 'young man, hero.'¹²) Restricted to a particular branch of Indo-European, but again showing the same kind of semantics are the cases of Indic *śak-* 'be able' with its derivative *śakrá-* 'powerful, mighty' (an epithet of Indra) or Old Norse *erla-* 'brave man, warrior, leader, chief' beside *era* 'anger.' No doubt the examples could be multiplied, but the generality of this process in ancient Indo-European cultures is beyond question. Thus it is a priori likely that the pre-Greek **s/yeE-r-ou-* originally meant '(one) characterized by strength, vitality, capability' or the like.

That the verbal root is **yeE-* rather than **seE-* seems assured by what I take to be Ἡρώς's two unrecognized Greek cognates. First it appears that we have a zero-grade of **y(e)E-r-* in the Laconian word *εἰρήν-/ιρήν-* (*īren-/*) 'Lacedaemonian youth aged between thirteen and nineteen' (LSJ Supplement). There are a number of derivatives attested also: *μελλεῖρήν* 'one about to be an *εἰρήν*' and its derivative *μελλειρονεΐα*, and *τριτίρην* 'third year *εἰρήν* (i.e. fifteen

¹⁰) The relationship of Sanskrit *váyas-* and *vīrá-* would be much like that obtaining between *damśas-* (**dénse/os-*) 'wonderful deed' and *dasrá-* (**dṛśró-*) 'doing wonderful deeds.'

¹¹) Perhaps the heretofore mysterious (see Huld, 1982: 108–109) Albanian *ri* (fem. *re*) 'young, new' is from an earlier **wriyo-/ā-*, a metathesis of **wīro/g-*.

¹²) It is worthwhile remembering in this context that many ancient Indo-European societies put a high premium on youth and youthful vigor. Such an attitude is well known in among Homeric and Classic Greeks but the Greeks were not alone. As Kuiper points out (1951: 16), the ancient Iranians believed that a man reached the acme of his vital strength at fifteen. If there were no old-age or death one would remain as 15-year old (Yasna 9.5). This particular cultural fact also accounts for such etymological equations as Tocharian A *wir* and Sanskrit *vīrá-*.

year-old)' (Buck, 1955: 272; meanings from LSJ Supplement). *Εἶρην* would represent in Indo-European terms an **iEr-en-* and would also mean 'one characterized by **y(e)Er*.'¹³)

Secondly this root I think is to be found in Greek *ἥβη* 'youthful prime, strength and vigor of youth.' As has long been known, *ἥβη* is matched exactly by Lithuanian *jėgà* 'strength, vigor, force.' The Greek and Lithuanian words reflect a PIE *yēgʷā* or, given our analysis of *hērōs* **yeE-gʷaA-*.¹⁴)

Now, given our analysis of *ἥρως* and *εἶρην*, it is possible to suggest a new etymology for *Ἥρα*. A feminine derivative of **yeE-r-* as 'Strength' or 'Vitality' would seem to be much more likely semantically than 'Protectress' or 'Jahresgöttin.' It would also bring Hera into a close semantic relationship with her daughter Hebe, 'Youth.' Semantic parallels for this analysis for Hera are fairly common. We might note, for instance, the Epic Sanscrit designations for Indra's wife, *Śacī-* and *Śakti-*, both of which as common nouns mean 'power, energy, help' from *śaknoti* 'is able.' Closer in time and space is Latin *Neriō*, the wife of Mars (from **Anér-*) or, better yet, *Jūnō* (from **(A)yu-Een-*). Indeed we have a threefold semantic comparison, Greek (*Ἥβη* : *Ἥρα*) : *ἥρως* / *εἶρην* as Latin (*Juventās*¹⁵) : *Jūnō*) : *juvenēs* 'men, particularly between the ages of 20 and 40' (Ernout-Meillet, 1967: 331).

The verbal root **yeE-*, underlying *ἥρως*, *Ἥρα*, etc., itself may be seen in Tocharian A *ya-* (PIE **yē-*, earlier **yeE-*) which forms part of the present tense formations of the suppletively conjugated verb 'to do, make' and possibly in Hittite *ye/ya-* 'do, make' and its iterative *išš(a)-* (from **iE-s-*).¹⁶) Likewise we may see it in Sanskrit *yātú-* (m.) 'sorcery, witchcraft' and Avestan *yātu-* (m.) 'ibid.' with the same evolution of meaning from 'deed' to 'magic' seen in Rumanian *fapt* 'deed, witchcraft,' Old Norse *gærningar* 'deeds, acts; magical acts,

¹³) For the definitizing function of the *n*-stem one should see Hoffmann (1955) and compare Latin *Neriō*. Frisk, after reviewing various proposals, hazards no etymology for *εἶρην*.

¹⁴) The same two stem-formatives, **-r-* and **-gʷo/ā-* are to be seen added to the verbal stem **t(e)um-* 'swell.' One should note Greek *túmbos* 'tomb,' Sanskrit *tunga-* 'hillock,' Middle Irish *tomm* 'tomb, mound,' all from PIE **tum-gʷo-*, and Latin *tūber* (n.) 'swelling, hump' and *tumor* (m.) 'swelling, protuberance' from PIE **teumr* and *t(e)umōr* respectively (for the Latin, see Adams, 1985).

¹⁵) Probably in origin a calque on Greek *Ἥβη*.

¹⁶) See Watkins, 1969: 71, and Melchert, 1984: 14 ff. Otherwise, Puhvel, 1984: 335-347.

witchcraft' (from *gərva* 'to do, make') or Sanskrit *kṛtyā*- 'deed, act; magic, witchcraft' (Buck, 1949: 1495–1496).

From a PIE **yeE-* 'to do' would come a verbal noun *yeE-r* 'deed,' from which might come adjectival derivatives meaning 'doing deeds, potent, capable, etc.' (compare Sanskrit *śakrá-* from *śak-*). Agent nouns would mean 'characterized by capability, etc.' or, as in Greek, 'hero.'¹⁷)

In sum we have here in Greek ἥρωϑ and ἥρᾱ two morphologically and semantically regular derivatives from a PIE **yeE-* (n.) 'deed, act,' an abstract noun derived from **yeE-* 'do' seen in Tocharian A and Hittite, as well as in Indo-Iranian. This etymology has the advantage over its predecessors both morphologically and particularly semantically. The Greek words can now be seen as the regular outgrowth of an important Indo-European cultural emphasis on youthful vitality. This cultural perspective had lost some of its power in the classical Greek polis but had still been very much alive in the heroic age.

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¹⁷) Perhaps this PIE **yeE-* 'to do' is ultimately related to **yeE-* 'to throw' by the same process of semantic change we see in Germanic (English) *do* and Latin *facere* from PIE **dheE-* 'put.' The change would be from **put* (by throwing/setting) to 'do, make.' If so, the semantic differentiation of 'to throw' and 'to do' would seem to have occurred already in Proto-Indo-European.

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