

Bonfante's Illyrian Horse

Robert Woodhouse
University of Queensland

The interesting and informative 'Editorial Remark' (*JIES* 24: 113) appended to Giuliano Bonfante's insightful attempt at revamping an Illyrian etymology of Gk. *ἵππος*¹ contains a point of interpretation which in my view is sufficiently questionable—not to say actually false—as to render the accompanying objections to the etymology largely invalid. This does not mean that I regard Bonfante's presentation of the etymology as completely beyond reproach.

1. According to the 'Remark', the proposed etymology 'implies that [the Greeks] would have gotten acquainted with the horse through Illyria.' This editorial claim is easily refuted by reference to any instance where a native item has been replaced, seemingly without need, by a borrowed synonym. A classic example is the adoption by English of the Norse word for "sister": OE *sw(e)o/u/ystor* assures us that the *concept* "sister" was not imported by the English from Scandinavia. Another example is Slavic *bog* 'god': while the anomalous phonology of the word vis-à-vis Winter's law indicates adoption from Iranian around the middle of the first millennium BC, it seems unlikely that the Slavs would have been completely without any concept of deity prior to that time.

Since, therefore, the proposed etymology in no way requires the supposition that the Greeks' first contact with the horse was by way of the Illyrians, the question of where the animal was domesticated is irrelevant, contrary to what is implied in the 'Remark'.

2. A pertinent criticism that emerges from these considerations concerns instead Bonfante's failure to discuss the possible fate of the 'original' Greek "horse" word. I would

¹The suggestion already occurs in Pokorny, *Idg. Et. Wb.*, 1: 302.

like to make a suggestion regarding this, as follows.

Conversion of the $*-k_1w-$ cluster of PIE $*ek_1wos$ to a labiovelar appears to be general in the centum dialects² and can certainly be assumed for Proto-Greek, but the gemination found in ἵππος is counterindicated if Bonfante's (*JIES* 24: 112) identification of (surely only the root of) Ἐπειος , Ἐπειοί with the assumed Greek prototype of the "horse" word can be maintained. The Proto-Greek "horse" word must therefore have been something like $*eqos$. The task then is to try to discover why the Greeks at a remote, pre-Mycenaean period chose to replace this with the $*hiqqos$ that is presumably attested in Myc. iqo .

Now, as is known, the change $*s > h-$ is also pre-Mycenaean and the beginnings (if not of psilosis, then at least) of ambivalence towards the phonemic status of aspiration seem already clearly apparent in the cavalier treatment accorded aspirates and the aspirate in the Linear B script.³ If chariot racing was already an established feature of Greek culture, as the Mycenaean tablets seem to suggest, is it not possible that the similarity of $*eqo/e-$ 'horse' and $*heqo/e-$ 'follow' (i.e. $*\text{'trail, come second or—worse still—last'}$) became sufficiently unfortunate in a horse-racing community—one can imagine the punning jibes—to encourage a preference for the Illyrians' $*hiqqos$?

²Cf. Lat. *equus*, Osc. *Ep-* (?), Gaul. *epo-*, Welsh. Corn. *ebol*, Goth. *aih a*, Toch. A *yuk, -es*, B *yakwe* (Pokorny *Idg. Et. Wb.*, 1: 301; for the Tocharian forms cf. A *puklä*, B *pikwala*, Krause/Thomas *Toch. Elb.*, 1: 65).

³A possible alternative view regarding the (pre-?) Mycenaean forebears of the aspirated stops of alphabetic Greek (cf. my 'Grassmann's law before consonant shift in Messapic and "Pelasgian"', *JIES* in press, fn. 4) does not of course affect this judgement vis-à-vis the all important spiritus asper.