

A note on Lesbian ἰμβηρίς*

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The Lexicon of Hesychius is still of great importance as far as the exegesis of Classical texts is concerned, but the question of how far it can be considered a reliable source of dialectological data, and especially whether the glosses attest the real state of the vernacular spoken in the different regions of Greece, remains difficult to answer. The following article examines only one of its examples, namely the regional designation for the “eel”, as attributed to the inhabitants of the city of Methymna on Lesbos, cf. Hsch. I 621 ἰμβηρίς· ἔγχελυς. Μηθυμναῖοι. The article aims to cast some light on this obscure form, it focuses especially on the proposed etymological connection between the Lesbian form and Lith. *unguỹs* “eel”. The article discusses this problematic relation and concerns itself with the question of a possible alternative etymology for the Greek dialectal form under the assumption of tabooistic or folk-etymological influence.

In the course of research on the various dialects of Ancient Greek, the lexical system has not been studied in the same way as has been done with phonology and morphology. The same seems true of syntax. This situation, however, should not be considered an odd one. The

*The Lexicon of Hesychius has been quoted according to the edition of Latte, K. 1953-1966. Hesychii Alexandrini lexicon. 1-2 (A-O). Hauniae: Ejnar Munksgaard editore and Schmidt, M. (Ed.) 1861-1862. Hesychii Alexandrini Lexicon. 3-4 (P-W). Halle a.d.S.: Max Niemeyer. (repr. Amsterdam: Hakkert 1965). The Lesbian inscriptions follow the standard edition in IG XII, 2 = *Inscriptiones Graecae* Vol. XII, fasc. 2: *Inscriptiones Lesbi, Nesi, Tenedi*. Consilio et auctoritate Academiae Litterarum regiae Borussicae edidit W. Paton. Berolini: apud Georgum Reimerum 1899, their abbreviations and numbers correspond to Hodot 1990. The ancient authors have been quoted according to the electronic editions of TLG (Packard Humanities Institute), the abbreviations follow the model of *LSJ*.

majority of forms attested both in inscriptions and in the other sources can be interpreted as “normal” Greek words, which may differ in their phonetic shape or (less frequently) their morphological features. It seems clear, however, that research into the Greek dialectal lexicon could contribute much to the question of the contacts between various dialects, as well as to their external history. The dialectal lexicon of Greek offers many interesting forms which may be used in Indo-European reconstruction: etymology, morphology, etc. It seems, however, that the dialectal data, especially from glosses and ancient grammatical entries, should be treated with extreme caution, especially due to their mostly problematic provenance.¹ On the other hand, the glosses are still one of the most important sources of our knowledge of the dialectal lexical systems (of course after the epigraphical sources), as they are for sure a certain source of new material, being sometimes the unique attestations of single formations in Greek.²

¹The most extensive source of them is the Lexicon of Hesychius of Alexandria, dated to the 5th/6th cent. A.D., the oldest manuscript however stems from the 15th cent., Codex Marcianus Graecus 622. This Lexicon is based on earlier works, especially on a lexicon by Diogenianus from Heraklea “Παντοδαπῆ λέξις” (quoted by Hesychius under the name “Περιεργοπένητας”), which has not been preserved; among others the glosses by Aristarchus, Apion, Heliodorus, Kyrillus and the orthographical works by Herodianus were also used (cf. Latte 1953, XLII-XLVII). The Lexicon of Hesychius is of great importance as far as the exegesis of Classical texts is concerned, but the question of how far it can be considered a reliable source of dialectological data, and especially whether the glosses attest the real state of the vernacular spoken in the different regions of Greece, remains difficult to answer.

²The lexical material attested in the glosses in many cases does not fit the epigraphical evidence, as it is often quoted from literary works and it makes the use of the same method as in the case of inscriptions impossible. The most important thing is first of all to examine the direct source of the gloss, and to place it in the tradition of the literary genre. Also, the historical-comparative method and interdisciplinary analysis are needed to explain these forms (for proposed methodological approach to the glosses and dialectal vocabulary see García Ramón 1997, 521-552, and above all García Ramón 2004, 235–264. For Lesbian glosses and problems of Lesbian dialectal vocabulary in general s. Sowa 2006, 233-258.

Lesbian ἴμβηρις

In his Lexicon Hesychius quotes the regional name for the “eel”, and indicates its dialectal provenance from Methymna on Lesbos, cf. Hsch. I 621 ἴμβηρις· ἔγχελυς Μηθυμναῖοι, nom. sg. The form is not attested in any other grammatical or lexicographical sources, nor does it occur in Lesbian inscriptions or poetry.

This Hesychian *hapax legomenon* still remains obscure. From a synchronic perspective, it would appear to have a word-formation parallel in the form λεβηρίς “skin or slough of serpent, (of beans) shell”, cf. Hsch. L 483 λεβηρίς· τὸ τοῦ ὄφειος γῆρας, ὃ ἀποδύεται τιwές δὲ ἄνδρα Λέβηριν γενέσθαι πτωχόν. οἱ δὲ τὸ λέπος τοῦ κυάμου;³ and it probably belongs to a group of feminina in -ις, which are mostly the names of animals, plants, armour and clothes derived from adjectives, e.g. νυκτερίς “bat” from νυκτερός “nightly, by night” (Risch 1974, 143f.; on the problem of the adjectives in -αρός, -ερός, -ηρός and -υρός see Risch, 1974, 69-73). According to Schwyzer λεβηρίς (*λεβεσ-ρ-) has to be connected with λοβός “lobe of the ear, of the liver, capsule or pod of leguminous plants” (LSJ) and would continue an unattested adjective *λεβηρός from *λεβος (to λοβός) in the same way as τριετηρίς “triennial festival” should be connected with τριετηρός “three years old” (Schwyzer 1914, 196). If this proposal is correct, we would have Lesb. ἴμβηρις which would continue an unattested Adj. *ιμβερος. The etymology, however, is still unclear.

De Saussure was the first to compare the form to the Lith. word *unguỹs* “eel”; and he also stated that there was no etymological correspondence between Lesb. ἴμβηρις and the widely attested Greek ἔγχελυς.⁴ According to de

³Cf. also Suda Λ 218: Λεβηρίς: τὸ γῆρας, ὃ ἀποδύεται ὁ ὄφεις. καὶ παροιμία· Τυφλότερος λεβηρίδος καὶ κινδάλου. ἔστι δὲ εἶδος ὀρνέου ἀσάρκου καὶ λεπτοῦ. ἄλλως δὲ γυμνότερος. καὶ ἕτερα παροιμία Γυμνότερος ὑπέρου καὶ λεβηρίδος. φασὶ γὰρ ὅτι Λεβηρίς πένης ἐγένετο ἐξ οὗ καὶ παροιμία μετ ἤχθη.

⁴“Wie viele Fischnamen dunkel, erinnert ἔγχελυς an andere Bezeichnungen des Aals: Lat. *anguilla* and damit verwandte balt. und slav.

Saussure, some other forms, like MHG. *unc*, *unkes* (and perhaps Lat. *anguis*, *anguilla*) would confirm the reconstruction with a non-aspirated labiovelar $*g^{w}$ (de Saussure 1889, 79), cf. Pokorny's reconstruction $*ang^{w(h)h}$ "Schlange, Wurm" (IEW 43ff.), $*eng^{w}$ in the etymological dictionaries of Frisk (GEW I 725) and Fraenkel (1965, 1163).

As is well known, the Indo-European languages possess many forms designating "snake", "water-snake" and "eel", which could have influenced one another, so one precise reconstruction cannot be made, even if the semantics are the same (cf. $*h_xVng^h el \sim *h_xVng^h ur$ in EIEC 529f.).⁵ For Schrijver Lat. "snake" and "eel" *anguis* and *anguilla* would reflect $*h_2(e)ng^{w}h-$. OHG. *unc* "snake", on the other hand, would rather reflect the zero grade $*h_2ng^{w}h-$; and Lith. *angis* "snake" would be considered as the example of a full grade $*h_2eng^{w}h$ or $*h_2ong^{w}h$. Many look-alikes could have different origins, as e.g. Gr. ὄφις, ἔχις, ἔγχελυς and ἰμβηρίς (Schrijver 1991, 44f.). Katz points to the fact that Latin *anguil(l)a*, Greek ἔγχελυς, Hitt. *illuyankas* seem to continue one single proto-form, i.e. a compound comprising the word for "snake" $*ang^{wh}$ - and $*(h_1)ell-$: $*(h_1)ēl$ the I.E. "eel"-word, which survived only in Germanic (Katz 1998, 318f.; 322; 328).

Lithuanian *ungurỹs* is generally considered to be related to the Slavic forms as Russ. *ugorb*, Czech *uhorř*, Pol. *węgorz* and probably continues the older state $*anguris$, as attested in OPruss. *angurgis* [anguris] "oel" (in *Elbing Vocabulary* 565; cf. Toporov 1975, 88). Lith. *ungurỹs* is allied to *angis* "serpent" (through an intermediary form $*ang-ur-$), the Prussian sequence of Proto-Baltic $*aNC-$ regularly developed in Eastern Lithuanian to *uNC-*; cf. OPruss. *dantis* "tooth" and ELith. *duntis* (Smoczyński 2000, 18). The Slavic $*ogorb$, Polish *węgorz* has a nasal vowel from $*anC$, and

Wörter, ohne daß man eine idg. Grundform aufstellen kann..." (Frisk GEW I 439f.). For the cultural context for an "eel" in Greek see Thompson 1947, 58ff..

⁵The name of an "eel" is according to the authors of EIEC "at least of the west and center of the IE world", it "cannot be shown to be of PIE status but has both a restricted linguistic and geographical range" (EIEC 529f.).

not from the **unC-* sequence then (Smoczyński 2001, 113). The Lithuanian form could be synchronically interpreted as containing the suffix *-urỹs* (< Proto-Baltic **-ur-iō-*, cf. *gomurỹs* “roof of an oven” < **g^weh₂m-ur-iō* to Arm. *kamourj* “bridge” with a question mark in Ritter 1996, 17) and in the light of Finn. *ankerias* “eel” (a Baltic loan-word in Finnish), could be reconstructed to the Proto-Baltic form **ang-ur-iā-s* (cf. also Finn. *nukero* ~ Lith. *nugarā*; Finn. *perkele* ~ Lith. *perkūnas*),⁶ and not to **angariās* or **angeriās* which in that case should develop with a sort of vocalic harmony or assimilation to attested OPruss. *anguris* (or Lith. *ungurỹs* as assumed in Otrębski 1955, 26; cf. Otrębski 1958 214ff.; **ang-ur-iā-s* in Smoczyński 2001, 113).

We have to ask: is there a real possibility of connecting the Lesbian gloss ἰμβήρις to Lith. *ungurỹs* < Proto-Baltic **anguriās* < **anguriō-*? It seems that neither form continues the same stem and that the differences apply to the phonology as well as to the word formation, cf.

Lith.	<i>ungurỹs</i>	Lesb.	ἰμβήρις
Proto-Baltic	<i>*anguriās</i>	Proto-Aeol.	<i>*i n g^we: r i s</i> <i>i n b e: r i s</i>

If we consider one reconstructed lexeme **ang^{wh}-* (see above) we cannot interpret the Lesbian form unless we assume an irregular phonetical development: **/ang^{wh}-/ > */eng^{wh}-/ > the loss of aspiration **eng^w-> *enb-> *emb-> imb-*, with the sound change */e/ > /i/ / _ [+ Nas]*, and an Aeolic treatment of the inherited labiovelar before a front vowel. Such a development would be quite unusual. The change of */e/* to */i/* in the context before nasal is, however, typical of the Arcadian dialect (*ω = εν*, *Ἰνναλιος*, *μινουσαι = μένουσαι*; cf. also part. suffix *-μινος* for *-μενος*, Schmitt 1977, 86), and is also sporadically attested in Cretan (in Axos and Eleutherna where it has been interpreted as an influence of Achaeon substratum, cf. *ἰν = ἐν*, also *ιςσ*, *ις* < **/ins/* < **/ens/*; Schmitt 1977, 51). Peters points to the fact that some examples of such a change may also be*

⁶For the problem of the Baltic loan-words in Finnish cf. also Thomsen 1890. esp. 105, 158; Ritter 1993, 152, 155.

found in the Lesbian dialect, where the inscriptional evidence from Mytilene yields the forms of the noun *αγιμων* (for *ἡγεμών*). This epigraphic evidence however is very late (Roman period) so there could be a doubt about the vernacular status of a form;⁷ cf. MYT 035, 3*βολλας και τω δαμω περι αυτω τουτω προς τοις αγ[ι]μονας οππως και αυτοις φανεραν ποημεν...*; MYT 160 b 2: Γ. *Καισαρι και Λ. Καισαρι αγιμοσι τας νεοτατος* (translation of Lat. *pricipes iuventutis*); MYT 148 a 4: Γ *αιω Καισαρι αγιμονι τας νεοτατο<ς>*, or ERE 015, 10: ... *εν δε προτανει Γαιω αισαρι τω παιδι τω Σεβαστ[ω α]γιμονι [τας νεοτατ]ος εβουθυτησε ...* (Peters 1986, 311³²). Peters challenges Hodot's hypothesis according to which the quoted examples with /i/, like *αγιμων*, should be considered as the result of the analogus influence from the interjections as *αγι*, *αγιτε* (Hodot 1990, 109; Peters 1988-90, 562).

It seems that the relation of the Latin, Baltic and Slavic forms to the Lesbian *ἴμβηρις* as being the continuation of hypothetical **eng^{wh}-* (**h₂eng^{wh}-*/*ang^{wh}-*) is especially from the phonetic point of view rather problematic.⁸ The same applies to Hom. *ἔγχελυς*, both for the phonetic and morphological reasons. There is, however, always a possibility that the form could be the result of tabooistic changes or folk-etymology.

A possible "candidate" for a derivational basis of *ἴμβηρις* would be a nasal present **ρίμβω* "anschirren, harness", "tighten a belt", "ζεύγνυμι" (Frisk GEW I 725f.) which is not directly attested and survived only in glosses, cf. Hsch. I 645f. aor. part. *ἴμβας· ζεύξας· Θετταλοί· Ἰμβιος· Ποσειδών ὁ ζύγιος*.⁹ According to García Ramón, we deal here with the root **ueib-* "turn, voltar (se)" in the shape of a nasal present **ῥι-n-b-o/e-* a thematic form of the

⁷In most cases the Lesbian inscriptions from the Roman Period seem to be artificially Aeolised, with the majority of the formulas and forms belonging to the *κωνή*, sometimes with dialectal endings or dialectal phonetic (orthographical) peculiarities added.

⁸Cf. also Mažiulis I 79.

⁹This epiclesis of Poseidon is attested for Thessaly, see García Ramón 1997, 538 for details.

original **ui-ne-b-* stem-;¹⁰ the nasalisation would then be secondary extended from the present formation to the aorist and all nominal derivatives (García Ramón 1997, 544). If ἴμβηρος was really formed in the same way as λεβηρίς then it should reflect the former adjective **ἴμβηρος* (< **ui-n-b-es-ro-*) in the meaning “turning one”.¹¹

¹⁰Cf. however the entry **ueip-* in LIV², 671 “in schwingende /zitternde Bewegung geraten” with parallels from other languages. The authors of LIV point to Germanic forms as e.g. Goth. *weiþan* “to crown“, *wipja* “crown“, which could be interpreted as reflexes of quasi IE. **/b/*. It seems that there are some more reflexes of quasi **ueib-* variant, cf. e.g. Lat. *uibrō*, *āre* “to move to and fro, flash” and *uibix*, *-icis* “weal” (cf. Pokorny 1959, 1131f., Ernout-Meillet 1959¹, 731f.). It seems that the PIE root-final consonant could really vary in voicing, cf. OInd. *kṣipāti* “to hurl“, *kṣiprá-* “quick, fast” and YAv. *xšuuibra-* “quick” from **k^(w)sueib^h/p-* (de Vaan 2008, 674), cf. similar example in PIE **ueng-* “sich krümmen” (LIV², 682) and **uenk-* in the same meaning (LIV², 683).

¹¹In principle the *-ro-* derivation from an *-s* stem is quite common in Indo-European, cf. Ved. *támisrā* “dark night” < **temHs-ro-* to *támas-* “dark” < **temH-os-*. The nasalisation of the presumed *s*-stem **uimbes-* is quite strange. It seems however that it really has been secondary extended from verbal formations to all nominal derivatives, cf. the existence of the form Ἰμβήριος Ποσειδῶν ὁ ζῆγιος which is also to be explained as originally *-io-* adjective to unattested **ζῆμβήριος*. The same secondary extension of nasalisation from verb to noun occurs also in Thessalian αγγρημί “take, seize” and an abstract noun αγγρησις, cf. e.g. IG IX, 2, 461b, 28: εδοξ[ε] του κοινου τας πολιοις [επαινεσαι] Λιουτα ετ τα προαγγρεσ [ι, ταν εχει και π]οτ ταν πολιν και πο[θ εκαστον]...; 504, 4: [... διοτι ανδρας καλος] εξαπεστελ[λεν και αξιος τας] εντοι αγγρησιος; LAR 517, 41: Θεμιστιοι τα υστερομειννια αγορανομεντος Αλεξιπποιοι, περ ιερουν, Αλεξιπποιοι λεξα[ν]τος εψαφιστει τα πολιτεια, οσσουν μεν εφαναγγρενθειν κινες τουν πεπολιτογραφειμενουν τος ταγος ε[γ]γρα[ψαν]τας εν λαυκουμα εσθεμεν αυτος εν του λιμενα ...; MD 347, 14 (= IGC 9, 1, 14): και το χουρον εμε[τρει]θει αφαναγγρειμεναν ταν οδουν και ταν ευοδουν or MD 337.40 (= BCH 59, 55, 2, 40): Λευκιον Νικασιαιον ετ τα αγγρησι τα ειχε ποτ ταν πολιν και δοθειμεν. One may also point to the existence of pairs as in Gr. θάμβος “Staunen, Verwunderung, amaze”, ἀθαμβής and verb θαμβέω “to be astonished at” opposite to τάφος, ὀταφής. In this particular case different forms have different chronology: in case of θάμβος and θαμβέω the *s*-stem is derivational basis for verbal form (cf. zero grade **d^hmb^h-* preserved in Aor. ἔταφον and regular ὀταφής, τάφος noun). According to Stüber in the period when the ablaut of the root was still preserved the *s*-stem **d^hemb^hos* > θέμβος also existed, which has undergone later the levelling to the zero-grade forms and has been reformed to the shape

If this proposal is right, it would be another name of an animal in Greek expressing the action it performs.

Even more interestingly, such a proposal could also be supported by Lithuanian, where the dialectal name of an eel formed on the basis of folk etymology is attested: *vingurỹs/viņguris* or even *viņguras* (cf. LKŽ XIX 466f.) instead of *ungurỹs* to the secondary present formations as e.g. *vingti*, *vingiūoti* “to turn”; one may quote also the Latin *serpens* “snake” which obviously was named after its characteristic movements, cf. **serp-* “kriechen, schleichen” (LIV², 536).

The entry in Hesychius` Lexicon yields the form ἰμβηρις, with the comment that it was used by the inhabitants of Methymna on Lesbos. This may really point to the vernacular status of ἰμβηρις in the light of a fact that Hesychius uses the adjective Aeolic, or expressions like “in Aeolic” Αἰολεῖς to indicate mostly glosses coming from literary sources: Epic or Lyric, while the label: Λέσβιοι seems to apply to actual dialect spoken on Lesbos. In this case a dialect, or sociolect of one Lesbian town is indicated, but it is impossible to indicate Hesychius direct source (though it seems that it does not come from Diogenianus). The possibility of work of a literary nature can not be excluded either, cf. the use of ἔγχελυς “eel” in Homer Φ 203 ἐγγέλυες τε καὶ ἰχθύες and in Archilochus Fr. 189: πολλὰς δὲ τυφλὰς ἐγγέλυσας ἐδέξω, where it occurs in the metaphorical meaning “blind eels” - “penises”.¹² We cannot

θάμβος, which finally became a basis for the denominative verb θαμβέω (Stüber 2002, 48). For the problem of Greek *s*-stems see also Meissner 2006.

¹²“You received many blind eels”, cf. also Ath. Deipn. 7,53, 21 -54, 3f.: ἔγχελυς, ἥ φύσει ἐστὶν ἀπύρημος μόνος ἰχθύς ... Ὀμήρου δὲ εἰπόντος «τεῖρουσι» ἐγγέλυες τε καὶ ἰχθύες ἄκολούθος ἐποίησε καὶ Ἀρχιλόχος (fr. 189): πολλὰς δὲ τυφλὰς ἐγγέλυσας ἐδέξω. The same metaphor is apparently to be found also in Lat. *natrix* “watersnake, penis”, cf. Lucil. II, 69 *si natibus natrixem impressit crassam et capitatam* “if he put the head of a fat snake between the buttocks” (Krenkel 1970, 130). In Greek obscene language of Comedy the similar reference has been made, cf. Ar. Ecc. 909f. *κάπτι τῆς κλίνης ὄφιν προσελκύσαι* || *βουλομένη φιλήσαι* “may You find a snake in Your bed” which is the curse directed at a young girl by her older rival, and the meaning of a “snake” in this particular case is “a

state precisely whether the form was in use also in other parts of Lesbos, e.g. in Mytilene, nor can we say anything about the chronology of ἵμβηρος, though the form of the suffix seems to be already influenced by κοινή (**ἵμβερο-expected?).

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limp phallus” Henderson 1975, 127. For the connection between “blindness” and “eels”, as well as “eels” and “illicit sex” and the function of “eel” in the Indo-European mythological and poetic tradition see Katz 2005, 259-296.

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