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The Fate of the Sigmatic Aorist in Tocharian

§1. Krause and Thomas write (1960: 247):

1. In den aktiven Formen tritt das *-s-* nur in der 3. Sg. auf, z.B. B Sg. 1 *prekwa*, 2 *prekasta* (mit Endung *-sta*), 3 *preksa*, Pl. 3 *prekar* [A *prakwā*, *prakāšt*, *prakās*, *prakār*]. Im Medium führt das Wtoch. das *-s-* durch das ganze Paradigma durch, z.B. *ersamai*, *-tai*, *-te*, *-nte*. Im Otoch. dagegen findet sich eine doppelte Flexion im Medium: Einerseits wird auch hier das *-s-* durchgeführt, z.B. *rise*, *risāte*, *risāt*, *risānt*; andererseits erscheinen *s-*lose Formen wie *tamāt*, *tamānt*; *nakāt*, *nakānt*; *pakāt*, *pakānt*; *lyokāt*, *lyokānt*; *tsakāt*, *tsakānt*. Nur bei Wz. *yām-* zeigen sich beide Bildungen: *yāmtse*, **yāmtsāte*, *yāmtsāt*, *yāmtsānt* neben *yāmwe*, *yāmtē* (nicht bezeugt in den übrigen Personen).

The only active paradigm with generalized *-s-* is 'gave': B *wsāwa*, *wsāsta*, *wasā* (*wsā-ne*), *wasam*, *wsare* (*wsār-ñi*), A *wsā*, *wās* (*wsā-ṃ*), *wsār*, part. *wawu* (cf. already Pedersen 1941: 186). We must look for an explanation of this distribution.

§2. As a rule, final obstruents are lost in Tocharian, so that the expected reflex of 3rd sg. **prēkst* (Vedic *áprāṣ* 'asked') is B **prek*, A **prak*, and the sigmatic ending must be analogical, cf. especially A *šāk* 'six' < **seks*, B *škas* with restoration of *-s* on the basis of the ordinal *škaste*. The phonetic loss of **s* accounts for the rise of an asigmatic paradigm on the basis of Proto-Tocharian 3rd sg. **prek*.

§3. If sigmatic and asigmatic forms existed side by side at some stage, the main question is: why was the sigmatic ending restored in the 3rd sg. form and ousted in the rest of the active paradigm? This question must be viewed in relation to the corresponding subjunctive. As Lane observed, there is a pattern: “*s*-present, athematic subjunctive originally only active; *e*-subjunctive, only middle, *s*-preterit” (1959: 165). If the asigmatic forms in the *s*-preterite arose from the phonetic loss of **s*, the root subjunctive is best derived from the sigmatic aorist injunctive, a derivation which moreover explains the absence of an *s*-subjunctive.

§4. This brings us to a reconsideration of the root vocalism. Elsewhere I have argued that the sigmatic aorist injunctive had lengthened grade in the 2nd and 3rd sg. forms and *e*-grade in the rest of the paradigm, and that this distribution is still reflected in the Vedic material, where lengthened grade was already generalized in the indicative (1987). Since apart from the palatalization **ē* in closed syllables merged with **o* while **e* plus resonant merged with the corresponding zero grade reflex in Proto-Tocharian (cf. Kortlandt 1988: 80), the root vocalism of the perfect and the sigmatic aorist merged outside the 1st sg. form, which was easily subject to analogical leveling. As a consequence, palatalization and its absence became associated with transitive versus intransitive paradigms (cf. Winter 1980).

§5. When the subjunctive and the preterite adopted the endings of the present and the perfect, respectively, the sigmatic ending served to disambiguate the 3rd sg. form **prek*. This presupposes the earlier coexistence of sigmatic and asigmatic paradigms. The sigmatic paradigm of AB *wās*- ‘gave’, also A *cas*-, B *tes*- ‘put’, and the asigmatic middle paradigm of A *nak*- ‘perished’, *pak*- ‘cooked’, *tsak*- ‘burned’ suggest a correlation between vocalic stems and sigmatic forms on the one hand, and between consonantal stems and asigmatic forms on the other. This is understandable if original **s* was lost in

interconsonantal position, as was the case in the verb stems in *-tk-* (cf. Melchert 1977).

§6. Thus, I propose the following scenario. The loss of word-final and interconsonantal *s yielded a mixed paradigm which gave rise to the root subjunctive on the one hand and to sigmatic and asigmatic preterites on the other. The generalized reflex of lengthened grade in the active preterite is strongly reminiscent of the Vedic aorist indicative. In Tocharian, it even spread to the middle paradigm, e.g. *A lyokät* ‘was illuminated’, *tamät* ‘was born’, *nakät*, *pakät*, *tsakät*, which point to **lēuksto*, etc. The initial palatalization was partly redistributed according to transitiveness. The original vowel alternation was largely eliminated.

§7. It will be clear from the foregoing that I strongly disagree with both Adams (1988) and Jasanoff (1988). While the latter’s rash comparison with Hittite does not account for the multifarious sigmatic formations which are attested in the Tocharian material, the former’s reliance on the initial palatalization for the identification of a preterite as an original aorist or perfect is at variance with the productive character of this feature. I think that it is hardly possible to identify an original perfect at all (cf. already Pedersen 1941: 183) because the root aorist adopted the endings of the perfect at an early stage. Apart from the endings and the reduplicated participle, the only clear trace of the perfect appears to be the mobile stress in suffixless preterites with an *o*-grade root vowel, as opposed to the fixed initial stress in the *s*-preterite.

§8. The *e*-subjunctive, like the *e*-present, appears to be ultimately based on the stative 3rd sg. form in **-o*, which was extended by the regular middle endings. The *s*-present is a thematically inflected sigmatic formation. It seems probable to me that it represents a thematicization of an original present in 1st sg. **-esmi*, 1st pl. **-smes* (cf. Pedersen 1921: 26). If this is correct, Tocharian has preserved an archaic feature in the correlation between *s*-present, root

subjunctive (sigmatic aorist injunctive), and *s*-preterit. The original vowel alternation in the suffix has left a trace in the present of AB *tā-* ‘put’, e.g. 3rd pl. A *tāseñc* < **dhH₁s-*, B *taseṃ* < **dhH₁es-*, with a different generalization in the two languages, both of which have *tās-* in the subjunctive and *täs-* in the middle preterite. This suggests that the athematic *s*-present was still preserved in Proto-Tocharian.

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