

THE OLD NORSE I-UMLAUT

1. Timothy Reid has reviewed the problem of ON *gestr* 'guest' vs. *staðr* 'place' in this journal (1990). Since his explanation is, to my mind, no more satisfactory than previous solutions, I venture to present my own view here. Reid's treatment relieves me of the duty to discuss the earlier literature in any detail (cf. also Steblin-Kamenskij 1959 and especially Bibire 1975 for an assessment of previous work).

2. As far as I can see, the problem has essentially been solved by Axel Kock (1888, 1892). The main objection which has been raised against his explanation is that it is unclear why **iR* should cause umlaut in a preceding short syllable while **i* did not do so. This objection has been countered by Seip, who pointed out that when **i* was synocopated after a long syllable, it may have been reduced to **ə* after a short syllable unless it was followed by **R*, which was 'en palatallyd' and 'kunde endog palatalisere foregående vokal' (1919:88). This eliminates Kock's umlautless period: 'Vi får én omlydsperiode, som begynner med omlyd virket av synkopert vokal og fortsetter med omlyd virket av bevart vokal'.

3. The problem which remains is: why did the earlier umlaut affect long syllables only? In my view, the key to the solution of this problem is 'Kock's failure to distinguish between vowel-length and syllable-length' (Bibire 1975:201). While **i* 'was lost after long root-syllables earlier than after short ones (and evidence for this seems to be irrefutable)' (Steblin-Kamenskij 1959:109), it is reasonable to assume that the umlaut affected long vowels and diphthongs earlier

than short vowels. The prominent place which the word *gestr*, which has a short vowel in a long syllable, has occupied in the discussion from Kock (1888) till Reid (1990) may have prevented scholars from confronting the problem in an adequate way.

4. Thus, I arrive at the following reconstruction of *glópr* 'crime', *gestr*, and *staðr* after the earlier syncope:

sg. N	<i>glópr</i>	<i>gastR</i>	<i>staðr</i>
G	<i>glópaR</i>	<i>gastaR</i>	<i>staðaR</i>
D	<i>glóþ</i>	<i>gast</i>	<i>staðə</i>
A	<i>glóþ</i>	<i>gast</i>	<i>staðə</i>
pl. N	<i>glóþiR</i>	<i>gastiR</i>	<i>staðiR</i>
G	<i>glóþa</i>	<i>gasta</i>	<i>staða</i>
D	<i>glóþimR</i>	<i>gastimR</i>	<i>staðimR</i>
A	<i>glóþi</i>	<i>gasti</i>	<i>staði</i>

At this stage, the forms **glópaR*, **glóþa*, **glóþimR* were replaced by *glóþs*, *glóþa*, **glóþumR* on the analogy of the *a*-stems. When umlaut was phonemicized in short vowels, the umlauted root vowel of the plural forms **gestiR* and *gesti* spread to *gestumR* (Stentoft stone, 7th century), which already shows an analogical ending, and eventually to the singular, which had the regular endings of the long stem paradigm. The analogical ending of gen. sg. *gests* suffices to show that the word *gestr* cannot be used as a representative example of an *i*-stem paradigm.

5. If the theory advanced here is correct, we expect lack of umlaut in *i*-stems with a short vowel in a long syllable, and this is indeed what we find, e.g. *burðr* 'birth', *fundr* 'meeting', *kostr* 'choice', *skurðr* 'cut', *stulðr* 'theft', *sultr* 'hunger', *þrótt* < **þruhti*- 'strength', **þurðr* 'diminution' (Noreen 1970:267), also *urðr* 'fate' and the feminines. There is an umlauted root vowel in *feldr* 'cloak' and *gestr*, possibly in

brestr 'crash' (*u*-stem?), *dyttr* 'din', *pyttr* 'pit' (loanword?), *skellr* 'clash', and in a number of plural names (cf. Noreen 1970:266-7). Thus, it appears that short vowels were not umlauted by syncopated **i* but only by **j*, **iR*, **R*, palatalized *k/g*, and retained *i* (cf. Bibire 1975:189 and *passim*).

6. This raises a problem in connection with the development of the *ja*-stems. Since short root vowels were regularly umlauted in this category, the **j* must have been preserved when short vowels were lost in the endings. I therefore reconstruct **harīR*, **vađī* beside the *a*-stems **harmR*, **barn* and **dagəR*, **bakə* for *herr* 'army', *veđ* 'pledge', *harmr* 'grief', *barn* 'child', *dagr* 'day', *bak* 'back' at the stage after the earlier syncope. Whether one considers **ī* to be a reduced vowel or a syllabic consonant is only a matter of taste. For *bekkr* 'bench; brook' I reconstruct **bakkīR*, acc. sg. **bakkī* because this type behaves in the same way as the short *ja*-stems.

7. The difference between *gestr* and *staðr* has a parallel in the weak preterits of *fella* 'to fell' and *velja* 'to choose', viz. 1st sg. *felda* vs. *valða*. The different suffix can be explained by the assumption that intervocalic **d* became a fricative between the earlier and the later syncope (cf. Kortlandt 1988:4). As in the case of *gestr*, I assume that the umlaut in *felda* was introduced on the analogy of the long vowel stems, e.g. *dōmda* 'I judged'. There is unmistakable evidence for such analogical influence in the case of *selda* 'I sold' (OSw. *salde*), where the suffix *-d-* shows that the form 'schon in urnordischer Zeit zweisilbig gewesen ist und zusammenstoßendes *ld* gehabt hat' (Kock 1894:452, cf. OE *sealde*), similarly *bygða* 'I lent' (OE *bohte*), cf. also *keypta* 'I bought' (inf. *kaupa*), and the later analogy in *lykta* 'I shut' (beside original *lukða*), *sekta* 'I sentenced', and *setta* 'I set' (OSw. *satte*), where the sequence **-tð-* may have yielded *-tt-* immediately after the later syncope, cf. Runic *satido* 'I set' (Rö stone, A.D. 400), *sAte* 'he set' (Gummarp stone, 7th century).

8. Up to now I have assumed that the phonemicization of umlaut in long vowels can be identified with the earlier syncope. There is no reason why this should be so. It is actually much more probable that unstressed short vowels were reduced after long and short syllables alike when unstressed long vowels were shortened. This vowel reduction must have preceded the earlier syncope but cannot have preceded the rise of umlaut in long vowels. Thus, we arrive at the following relative chronology:

- (1) Umlaut of long vowels.
- (2) Reduction of unstressed vowels.
- (3) Syncope after long syllables.
- (4) Umlaut of short vowels.
- (5) Syncope after short syllables.

The gemination of velars before *j can be dated to stage (2) if it is viewed as a compensation for the reduction of the following syllable, e.g. *bakjaR > *bakkjəR > *bakkɪR > *bekkɪR > bekkR 'brook'.

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