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ON BREAKING

To the memory of Jórundur Hilmarsson

As H.F. Nielsen points out, for Old English 'it is fairly certain that breaking takes place prior to *i*-mutation,[1] which itself precedes back umlaut.[2] [...] On the other hand, OE breaking must be later than OE fronting of *a > æ*,[3] which is most likely to be an independent development' (1984:75, 80). This chronology suffices to show that the Old English breaking cannot be identified with the Scandinavian breaking. Moreover, the conditions of the two were quite different. Since the Old Frisian breaking 'took place only before *ht* and *hs*, and not before intervocalic *h*, such forms as *siucht* ("sees") show that it must have taken place later than *i*-mutation, for the *i* of the 3rd pers. sg. pres. indic. was not syncopated till after it had caused mutation' (Campbell 1939:105). Thus, we find similar, yet quite different developments in the three languages.

Nielsen quotes with approval Fourquet's view that in Old English 'les produits de la fracture des voyelles brèves sont venus occuper dans le système des brèves la même place que les diphtongues d'origine ancienne occupaient dans le système des longues' (1959:151), which is in accordance with Krupatkin's observation that 'every time the initial shifts in the field of the long vowels raised similar transformations in the field of the short vowels' (1970:63). This explains the fact that the 'fractured reflexes of *i* and *e* have *rounded* second elements in OE, in early OE *-u*', and possibly 'the second element of the broken reflex of *æ* was also *-u* at first' (Nielsen 1984:76). Thus, *io, eo, ea* were the short counterparts of *īo, ēo, ēa* from the time when these were still *u*-diphthongs. Nielsen can now explain the fact that the reflex of **a* is not broken in Old Frisian: 'Gmc. *au* was monophthongized to *ā* in OFris., and consequently there was no systematic pressure in terms of creating another short diphthong in the way that *iu* (*io*) was phonemicized as a short counterpart of Gmc.

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eu/iu' (1984:77-8). This leads me to reconsider the Scandinavian breaking against the same background.

As K.M. Nielsen has convincingly argued, 'the diphthong arisen by breaking was *ia* both before *a* and before *u'* in Scandinavian, and this diphthong 'is found on the stones of Sparlösa and Rök; by *u*-mutation it passes into *iǫ* in WN, as appears from scaldic rhymes and vowel harmony; at the further development into *ö* in Icelandic, *bǫrn* and *biǫrn* go together. In EN the development into *iǫ* only takes place with lost *u*, a stage which perhaps is expressed in *biaurn* in the runic inscriptions; *iǫ* is developed into *io*, which appears in the *biurn* of the runic inscriptions and in the *biorn* of the medieval MSS' (1961:40-41). The further development of *iǫ* in Old Icelandic *þiokkr* 'thick', *miólk* 'milk', Old Norwegian *þiukkr*, neuter *fiugur* 'four', Old Swedish *fiughur* is secondary.[4] Since **e* was the short counterpart of **ē₂* in North and West Germanic, we must look into the origin of the latter.

The origin of **ē₂* is the subject of a recent article by the regretted Tocharologist, Baltologist, Germanicist and Indo-Europeanist, Jörundur Hilmarsson (1991). With his characteristic care and acute sense of etymology, the author divides the instances of **ē₂* into seven groups: (1) **hē₂r*, (2) **mē₂da-*, (3) class VII preterits, (4) Latin loanwords, (5) **fē₂rō*, (6) **kē₂na-* and **lē₂ba-*, (7) Continental Germanic residue. For the present purpose, groups (4)-(7) can be regarded as a residue and will be left out of consideration. The same holds for **mē₂da-*, which does not occur in Scandinavian. For **hē₂r* we must start from a deictic particle **hi* 'here' (cf. Kortlandt 1983), which was extended by *-ar* from *þar* 'there', *jainar* 'yonder', *aljar* 'elsewhere'.[5] The regular lowering of **i* to *e* before *a* yielded OHG *hear* (Isidor), later *hiar*, *hier*.

As I have indicated elsewhere (1991), I think that **ē₂* in the class VII preterits of strong verbs represents **ea*, which was preserved in OHG *geang* 'went', *feang* 'seized', *feal* 'fell'. The model for the development of this formation was provided by the preterits **eauk* 'increased', **eaus* 'poured', **eaud* 'granted', **ear* 'ploughed', **ealþ*, 'grew old', **eaik* 'claimed', and especially **eaj* 'went'. The spread of **ea* as a preterit marker yielded **hleaup* 'leaped', **heald*, 'held', **heait* 'called', also **beauw* 'dwelt', **feāh* 'seized', **leǣt* 'let', plural **hleup-*,

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*held-, *heit-, *beuw-, *feng-, *let-, ON hlióp, helt, hét, bió, biogg-, fekk, fing-, lét, lit- (cf. Noreen 1970:338-340).

The identification of $*\bar{e}_2$ as *ea now explains the Scandinavian breaking of *e to $*\breve{e}\breve{a}$ in accordance with the considerations cited above. It is remarkable that there is no evidence for breaking before a front vowel in the following syllable, where the model *ea was lacking, and that breaking is less frequent in light than in heavy syllables. Even more strikingly, breaking was blocked by a preceding *w, e.g. verpa 'to throw', huelpr 'whelp', while the preterit sueip, pl. suip- 'swept' shows absence of *ea after *w, which is a natural restriction because the form contains a triphthong already. The broken vowel $*\breve{e}\breve{a}$ either developed into ja by 'coinciding in its onset with the non-syllabic allophone of /i/' (Steblin-Kamenskij 1957:91) or lost its diphthongal character and merged with the reflex of umlauted *a. The latter development may have been conditioned by the monophthongization of *ea to $\bar{e}$, which probably took place under the pressure of the rise of $\bar{æ}$ from umlauted $*\bar{a}$. It is probably no accident that *ea is best preserved in Old High German, where the umlaut of $*\bar{a}$ was late.

Analogical developments have rendered the original conditions of breaking opaque. The Old Icelandic paradigm of hialpa 'to help' closely follows that of falla 'to fall', reflecting the conditions of umlaut, not of breaking, e.g. 2nd pl. hialpeþ like falleþ < *-ed, *-aid. The purely phonological development is perhaps most faithfully preserved in the word for 'six', where the cardinal is not broken while the ordinal is in East Norse, cf. Swedish sex, sjätte, Danish seks, sjette, Latin sex, sextus.

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Notes

1. 'Cf. forms like OE *wierpþ* (< **wiorpiþ* < **wirpiþ*) and *nīehst* (< **nēahist* < **nǣhist*), which would have come out **wiopþ*, **weorpþ* and **nēahst* if the reverse relative chronology had been true'. Differently Collier (1987), who disregards the fact that the Old High German umlaut took place before preserved *i* but not before lost **i* and cannot therefore be identified with the Old English umlaut.
2. 'This is shown e.g. by *eosol*, whose diphthong is due to back mutation of *e* which again reflects an *i*-mutated *a*, cf. *eosol* (suffix substitution) < **esil* > **asiluz*'.
3. 'Thus OE *seah*, **neahti* (> *nieht*) and *healp* presuppose the intermediate stage *-æ-*, cf. Gmc. **sah*, **nahtiz* and **halp*'.
4. Cf. Benediktsson 1963:428-31 and 1982:38-41. On doublets such as *biarg*, *berg* 'rock' and *fiall*, *fell* 'mountain', cf. Hoff 1949:195-202. On Dyvik's theory (1978), see Benediktsson's review (1982:41-55).
5. This was already suggested by Mahlow (1879:163) and more recently by Meid (1971:94). Ringe's objection that we should expect **hir* instead of **hiar* (1984:140) is proved invalid by **hwar* 'where', ON *huar*, Lith. *kuȓ*.

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