

“What goes around comes around:

Tocharian preterites with stem-final palatalization and the TA productive imperfect”

Ronald I. Kim

An important subset of Tocharian Class I preterites is characterized by palatalization of the final stem consonant, e.g. TB *klyauša*, TA *klyoṣ* ‘heard’, TB *laṃṣāte*, TA *wleṣāt* ‘performed, accomplished’. This type, which is associated with Class II subjunctives (and presents), has received much attention in recent years, but none of the existing hypotheses satisfactorily accounts for their distribution and formal peculiarities, above all the absence of vowel weakening in TA pl. *klyoṣār* ‘they heard’, *wleṣāt*, etc. and the *-py-* of TB *campya* ‘was able’. Based on these facts, I argue that preterites of the *klyauša* type must reflect Proto-Tocharian preforms containing the sequence **-əya-*, and that a similar origin underlies preterites such as *kälypiyawa* ‘I stole’, *lalyīya* ‘worked hard, exerted him/herself’ as well as Class IV and V preterites. These forms go back to the inherited PIE optative in **-ih₁-* > **-əy-*, which was extended with the productive preterite marker **-a-* in pre-PT, thereby differentiating e.g. **kl^yewṣ-əy* ‘was hearing, would hear’ from **kl^yewṣ-əya* ‘heard’. A later, post-PT round of “alphaization” is responsible for the TA productive imperfect in *-ā-*, which for verbs with identical present and subjunctive stems (“present-subjunctives”) thus became distinct from the optative, but largely fell together with the preterite. Several phonological issues raised by this model are discussed, as well as the wider implications for the prehistory of thematic inflection in Tocharian and IE. In particular, all finite inflectional forms of (original) thematic presents may be derived from just four PIE sources, namely the present, imperfect, imperative, and optative.