

# Armenian *mukn*

## Orðið Mukn úr Armenia

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The word for *mouse* in Armenian is *mukn*. Comparing *mukn* with the same word in other IE languages shows that the *-k* in Armenian is unoriginal, eg. ON. *mús*, OHG. *mūs*, Lat. *mūs* and Old Indic *mūḥ*. There is no need for a reconstruction with a laryngeal sound for PIE – that is *\*muH<sub>s</sub>*. The loss of the laryngeal should yield lengthening of the vowel in eg. ON, and is to be seen as *-k* in Armenian.

How is the *-k* then to be explained?

According to Lindeman (1987:98) the origin of *-kn* in *mukn* is to be found in the word for *fish*. Lindeman's reconstruction for the Armenian word for fish – that is *jukn* – is from the root *\*ǵuk* > pre. Arm. *ʒhukh* – , whence by dissimilation of *\*ʒh ...kh* – to *ʒhuk* - > Old Armenian *jukn*, gen. sg. *jukan* (*n*-inflection).

The same word is found in Lithuanian *žùkmistras* 'Fishmeister', *žùkparnis* 'Fish-haar', Opruss. (acc. pl.) *suckans* 'Fish'.

In order to reconstruct the Armenian and the Baltic words Lindeman uses the PIE root *\*ǵuk* -.

Other languages do not show any stop in the word for fish. Pokorny reconstruct the root as *\*ǵou̯*. It is seen in Greek *ikhthūs* 'Fish'. We therefore need two PIE roots *\*ǵuk* - and *\*ǵu* - (*ou̯* and *u* is a matter of ablaut). However, making use of language typology, it is – in my opinion – possible to

reconstruct the root behind *jukn* as *\*ǵu* -. The stop originates in a hiat: *\*ǵu-V* > *\*ǵuw-V* > *\*ǵuχ-V* > *\*ǵuk* -. This kind of development is not unusual and can be seen in other languages as well. They typically develop a stop after vowels that are [+high] ... (Petersen H. P. 1993). See below for examples.

As the stop is in both Armenian and the Baltic branch of PIE it might go back to the protolanguage. There are, however, other examples in Lithuanian and Latvian which might suggest a special development to a stop in some words. It is as a soundchange did start but never managed to spread to the whole vocabulary. The words in question are Lith. *áuksas* – Lat. *auris*, Lith. *tūksantis* ~ Faroese *túsund*. Examples from Latvian (Selsvegen) are *jūks* 'you' ~ Goth. *jus*; *brūkte* 'bread' < *\*bhreu* -. In the dialect of Selsau we find examples such as *oukss* 'ear' Lat. *auris* < *\*ausis* (Endzelin 1922:174).

What is of importance here is the development of the stop after a [+high] vowel. The same is seen in other languages, eg. Faroese *rógva* 'row' < (*ǰæg.va* < *ǰǰg.va* < *ǰǰγ.va* < *\*ǰǰw.wa* < *\*ǰǰu.wa* ON. *róa*) and – (Robbins 1966:581-586) – Maru *yuk* 'bone' compared with Burm. *yôu*. A stop is also seen in Danish dialects in North- and West-Jutland, where ON. *mús* becomes

*mug<sup>w</sup>s* 'mouse'. (Many languages and dialects show such development. The examples above are sufficient for illustrating my point).

Before trying to explain Armenian *mukn*, it will be useful to see the explanation offered by Gamkrelidze and Ivanov (1995:98). They suggest that there has been a neutralization which yielded a shift of **-uk<sup>h</sup>** to **-us** in Armenian. Further they say: »there must be some systemic connection between that shift and the fact that we also find the reverse process, where *\*us* yields *uk* ». The words in question are *mukn* 'mouse' and *jukn* 'fish'.

This explanation is rather unconvincing.

As mentioned I do not think that there is any evidence of a laryngeal in the word for *mouse* in IE. The old paradigm might have been *mūs* in nom., sg. and *mus-* in the oblique cases. Mayrhofer M. (1963:668). Frisk H. (1970:276) explains the long /ū/ as: »Die Idg. Vokallänge ist mit der Einsilbigkeit in Verbindung gesetzt worden«. There is, however, a possibility of loss of an *-s* morpheme in nom. sg. causing compensatory lengthening: *\*mus+s* > *\*mūs*.

Armenian *mukn* is best explained as a glide insertion after a vowel that is [+high]. There is no need for reconstruction with a laryngeal. We have seen evidence from other languages above, which confirm this. The development was (maybe) *\*muss* > *mūs* > *muws* > *muχs* > *muks* -> (to the *n* declination) *mukn*. The best parallel is in the word for *mouse* in the Danish dialect of West- and North-Jutland *mug<sup>w</sup>s* (< Old Danish *mūs*) versus Armenian *mukn*. In both cases the vowel in front of the stop in-

sertion is [+high], and there is evidence from other languages, which confirms the glide insertion resulting in a stop after [+high] vowels.

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