More on AKOMA*

In a note in the journal *Balkan Studies* (12 (1971), 141), Eric Hamp discussed the history of Modern Greek ἀχώμα 'still, yet'. The main thrust of his discussion was that the development of ἀμόνα 'anvil' < *ἀγμόνον < ἀμόνος ← ἀκμόνος shows that the expected development for the source of ἀχώμα, Ancient Greek ἀκημή 'still’ (< accusative of ἀκήμη ‘point, top’) should be *ἀμν(μ)ήν. Therefore, he concluded, the -μ in ἀχώμα must be a “reflexion of literacy, taken from the written language”.

While Prof. Hamp’s observations are characteristically insightful, I wish to point out a potential problem with his taking ἀμόνα to reflect the regular treatment of -μ- clusters in Modern Greek. Although the derivation of ἀμόνα, as sketched by Hamp, is clear enough, the details of the *ἀμμόνα(ον) > ἀμόνα stage are not. A direct phonetic change, with the weakly-articulated -γ- dropping out of the cluster, is certainly a plausible, even likely, development. However, there exists another form which may have influenced ἀμόνα and brought on its ultimate form through a change not of a purely phonetic nature.

The word ἀχόνη 'whetstone' (also neuter ἀχόνι in Modern Greek), from Ancient Greek ἀχός 'idem', is a rhyme-word with ἀμόνα, with the same stress contour, and more importantly, the same syllabic shape, namely three open (short) syllables. Moreover, it is in the same semantic sphere as ἀμόνα, both being connected with tool-use and tool-making. Thus it is conceivable that speakers of Greek altered the shape of *ἀγμόνα, with a closed (long) initial syllable, to ἀμόνα, so that it would more closely match its rhyming semantic “neighbor” in syllable structure. Thus the change from *ἀγμόνα to ἀμόνα may not have been, strictly speaking, a phonetic change.

In that case, then, we are left with a problem, since we do not know which of the two forms, ἀμόνα on the one hand or ἀχώμα on the other, represents the regular treatment of -μ- clusters. While ἀχώμα might have developed along the lines suggested by Hamp, a regular phonetic development of the -μ- cluster in ἀκημή to the -μ- sequence of ἀχώμα cannot at this point be ruled out altogether.

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