

TELLUS ('earth')

The noun *tellūs -ūris* is known to have a unique shape; therefore any theory of its origin is hard pressed to find parallels. There are two principal problems, the geminate *ll* and the constant long *ū*; and there is one perfectly clear characterizing feature, the correlation of the meaning with the first syllable *tel-*.

When we recall the semantics of Skt. *pr̥thivī* 'earth' (: Greek πλατύς 'flat, broad', πλατεῖα 'street, flat of the hand', Πλάταια the place name, πλάτη 'oar blade', πλατᾶμών 'flat stone or beach', πλαθάνον, πλαθάνη 'platter', all from **pltH_a-*) and its gender, and the semantics and base of Old Irish *talam* 'earth'¹⁾, OCS *tbla* Slovene *tlà* (pl. tantum) 'ground', Armenian *t'at* 'district', *t'atar* 'ear-

1) See A. Bammesberger, *Études celtiques* 18, 1981, 117–9.

then²⁾, Skt. *talam* ‘plain, flat of the hand’, OPruss. *talus* ‘floor’, Latv. *tilēs* ‘floorboards of boat’, ONorse *pilja* OE *þel*, ‘plank’, it is clear that we will do well to derive the first syllable of *tellūs* (feminine) from **telH_a*- ‘support’ (:τληῖναι, imper. τληῖθι), which early embraced the semantics of a flat location upon which one stood or found oneself.

The presence of the matching gendered pair *Tellūs* (fem.) and *Tellūmō* (masc.) gives the strong impression that a single concept with a single base, susceptible however of more than one derivational formation, has been mythologically allotted by a sort of mitosis to both male and female. It is easy then to understand how the medial consonantism (and the vowel?) of *Tellūmō* could have been assimilated to that of *Tellūs*. I assume therefore that we have been misled in seeking complex or exterior sources for *Tellūmō*; we have simply **Telumō* < **telamon-* < **telH_a-mon-* = τελαμών (= πλαταμών in formation).

Likewise *meditullium* would have undergone contamination with *tellūs*, and must be the archaic formation, as Ernout and Meillet recognized, which we revise slightly as **medi-tol-ium*, with **telH_a*- in the *o*-grade.

This brings us back to *tellūs*. The only principled solution for both the geminate *ll* and the long *ū* is the assumption of an old compound which resulted in a situation that produced syncope. I therefore propose **tela-lous* gen. *tela-lous-os* > *-es*. The final element would be formed like *iūs iūris* (= Avestan *yaož-dā*), and must represent some ancient verbal noun. A possible cognate now offers itself in Hittite *luluwai-* ‘sustain’, *lulu* dat.-loc. *luluti* ‘state of thriving’; on these lexemes see now the Chicago Oriental Institute Hittite Dictionary, vol. 3,1 (1980). We would therefore have in origin a feminized compound adjective ‘support-sustaining’ *vel sim*. It is possible even that the second element, the verb base, was reduplicated³⁾ as in the Hittite forms, and then reduced by a Latin haplology⁴⁾. Thus, **telH_a* + *lulVus-* > **telalulVus-* > **telalous-* > **tellous-* > *tellūr-*.

Semantically in this compound it is possible that the final element was intended to replicate the semantics, in large part, of **telH_a*-. Thus the resulting compound would have the structure of a transformed cognate accusative construction. The feminine gender of course matches that of Skt. *prthivī*; the gender of *Tellūmō* was determined by that of the noun formation.

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2) I have shown elsewhere that the regular Armenian reflex for Brugmann’s long syllabic resonant, i. e. **RH*, is *aRa*, and hence *aṛa* and *ata*. For another example note *k’atak’* ‘city’, Annual of Armenian Linguistics 6, 1985, 52. For the present semantics note also *t’atēl* ‘bury’ (← ‘earth’).

3) See T. Burrow, The Sanskrit Language (1959=1955) 212–3 for such formations with final verbal element.

4) For my formulation of the regularity of the Latin haplology rule see Journal of Indo-European Studies 1, 1973, 218.