This monograph, based on B.’s Oxford DPhil dissertation, seeks to answer the question of whether or not Greek provides evidence for the operation of Sievers’ Law in PIE and in the early stages of Greek itself. This sound law, whereby the glide y is realised as iy after VCC or V:C, was reconstructed for the proto-language primarily on the basis of the evidence from Indic and Germanic, but with support from Greek and with possible traces in other sub-branches.

The question is an ideal subject for a doctoral thesis, both in its restriction to Greek and in its wider relevance for the reconstruction of PIE. Within Greek, comparative adjectives do indeed seem to reflect an original alternation of -yos- and -iyos- which is customarily attributed to the effects of Sievers’ Law, yet other morphological categories such as the -ya feminines and -yô presents show little or no signs of such an alternation, and include many forms which clearly violate Sievers’ Law.

As such, the problem is instantly clear and deserving of further investigation, and B. makes an excellent job of exploring the issues involved. It has been suggested that Sievers’ Law also worked for the glide w, and possibly even for other resonants as well, but B. restricts his discussion to y. This makes sense given that y provides the best evidence for Sievers’ Law and is found in various common morphemes where we would expect alternations to occur, making it the most testable context for detecting Sievers alternations in Greek, but as discussed below is unfortunate when it comes to Lindeman’s Law (a possible sister to Sievers’ Law), where the best potential evidence comes from the other resonants.

After an introductory first chapter, Chapter 2 discusses the evidence in Gothic and Vedic, on which Sievers’ Law was originally based. From here on the focus shifts to Greek, with Chapter 3 on the issues involved and the relevant aspects of Greek historical phonology, Chapter 4 on the comparative -yos- / -iyos-, Chapter 5 on nouns and adjectives in -yos / -iyos, Chapters 6 and 7 on verbs in -yô (with a useful excursus on their semantics, and another on the Vedic verbs in -ya-), and finally Chapter 8 as a conclusion.

The discussion is admirably clear and well-structured. It follows the classic template of the doctoral thesis, in stating the intention of each chapter, working through the evidence and its implications, then summarising the results of the investigation. The final recapitulation of his findings at the beginning of Chapter 8 is equally well-structured, so that scholars without the time to read the entire work may simply skip to p. 377–9 and find a fine summary of the book in miniature.

In brief, he concludes that the comparatives do indeed appear to show a Sievers distribution, with -yos- after light syllables and -iyos- after heavy syllables, but with a secondary spread of the more transparent -iyos- (or -iôn, its eventual replacement) which obscures the originally complementary distribution. For nouns and adjectives in -yos / -iyos, he finds that the inherited forms appear to show a «distributional skew» whereby -iyos can occur in any environment, but -yos is only found after a light syllable. The only convincing exception is λοῦσσον ‘white’ inner pith of a fir tree’, which he suggests is the result of secondary devoicing. For the feminines in -ya and the verbs in -yô, he confirms that there are indeed no convincing traces of Sievers alternations. For the -yô verbs, B.’s survey of the Greek evidence reveals that most or all of the inherited formations would have
shown a light syllable in PIE; as such, he suggests that the -yô variant was generalised at an early date, and that Sievers’ Law had already ceased to operate when the apparent counterexamples arose. For the -ya feminines, he suggests that the reason for their apparent immunity to Sievers’ Law may also be chronological, namely that Sievers’ Law had ceased to operate in Greek before laryngeal breaking had taken place, while these sequences were still -ih-. Similarly, he suggests that Sievers’ Law was also earlier than Rix’s Law (#HRC- > #VRC-), while the relevant sequences were still #HRCyV-.

The occasional misprints do not create serious problems, but it is worth mentioning 
-HeH- and -HeH-ye/o- for -HeH-yeH-, -HeH-ye/o- (p. 230), -CHRC- for -CRHC- (p. 340), gyeH- for gyeH- (p. 121), Alcman for Alcaeus (p. 288) and Metasovic 2008 for Matasovic 2009 (p. 115 n79, missing from the bibliography). Among the Greek forms we find πλήνη for πλήνη (p. 194 n34), θραξ for τραξ (p. 261 n84), σκάλλω for σφάλλω (p. 272, p. 350), θόρραξ for θόρραξ (p. 324) and γάργαρα for γύργαρα (p. 326), all of which appear in the index in their misprinted forms. Two passages which would have been improved by further editing are p. 228–9, where the same form σδάγαντ- is discussed twice, and p. 361, where τέρω appears in a list of verbs without cognates outside Greek, but is then mentioned again in another group and compared to Alb. ὑπερρ. Lith. lecti.

Another minor point is B.’s frequent claim that a given Greek word has no etymology, when good candidates do exist: for example, ὡδίς (p. 317) seems plausibly related to ὀδύνη and thence to Hittite idālu- etc. For ἐγγύς (p. 167, 183) we can follow Pisani in comparing μεσσηγύς, πράσβυς, Lith. ἐμογύς and deriving it from *en-g- − u-s, as discussed by Lambert in his monograph on the u-stem adjectives (and also mentioned by Beeckes in his etymological dictionary). For γλώσσα see now Kroonen’s ‘Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Germanic’, Leiden 2013, p. 525 (*dlog−ib-, cognate with Gmc. *tulga-).

The observation that it is hard to find reflexes of CyV- in Germanic is interesting, but the suggestion that the relevant roots were somehow avoided (p. 22) is probably a red herring; while little evidence there suggests that the glide was simply lost (e.g. *kauma- ‘jaw’, *gōm- ‘winter’, *hēwia- ‘hue’ and possibly also *sauna- ‘seam’). B.’s citation of the alternative acc.sg. Ποσειδόν (p. 149) in the context of n-stems being remodelled as n-stems is puzzling, since it is clearly secondary: the original form seems to be a univerbation involving a genitive plural. Also, the idea that there was a «general intolerance of paradigmatic variations in semivowel syllabicity in Greek» (p. 90) is not really true while the intervocalic glides were still present there were many such alternations, as in *treyes *trisí, *doru *dorwos, *eunus *eurewos and the highly productive *-eus *-émos. Nor is it strictly true that the root *gaw- is only found in Greek (p. 354), since we also have Latin gandeō gāvās.

When it comes to B.’s discussion of the exceptions to the normal patterns, we can quibble that while λωσσων is treated at length, ἱδίο ‘sweat’ is relegated to a footnote which merely mentions that Tucker and Rix discussed the word, without explaining their conclusions. It would also have been worth discussing the possible evidence for Aeolic κλαίω ‘weep, wail’, even if this may prove to be as much a red herring as ἱδίο.

Although B. provides a full discussion of the Sanskrit and Vedic evidence, the focus is primarily on Greek, so the more extensive literature on Sievers’ Law in the other two languages is given less priority. Equally, he is not primarily concerned with finding a phonological justification for Sievers’ Law in the proto-language: as Keydana has noted (BMCR 2014,09,17), he barely mentions Byrd’s publications on this issue. However, B. does make one extremely interesting observation about Sievers’ Law as a phonological rule: namely, that it is difficult to find good parallels in other language families (p. 45). This seems to be true: while broadly comparable overlength-avoiding rules such as Osthoff’s Law do indeed have comparanda outside Indo-European (for example in Hausa), my admittedly cursory search found no exact parallels for Siever’s Law. Languages that show CCyV > CCyV and CCwV > CCwV generally also show CCCV > CCwCV, so that we are effectively dealing with a mere colouring of schwa. Is it possible that PIE was the same, and that the schwas were lost (or never became phonemic) while the glides survived? Of course, may turn out to be a perfect analogue for Sievers’ Law in the highlands of
A phenomenon with far better cross-linguistic parallels is devoicalisation (i.e. glide formation), which B. covers well. However, it would have been worth mentioning Sowa’s idea (in: Emerita 77, 2009) that ζά for διά is not borrowed into epic from Aeolic but vice-versa. If Sowa is right, it is conceivable that this could be connected with Mycenaean, which as B. rightly points out (p. 99–100) seems to show more devoicalisation than other dialects (if these are not merely spelling rules), for example in ke-∅ a-∅, ka-∅, su-∅, e-ωω-re-∅, ra-pi-ti-∅, and perhaps even across an aspirate (as in ζά < διά < *diha) in we-∅ re-∅, if this is from *huhaleys as some have proposed.

As mentioned above, the evidence from the Greek comparatives leads B. to endorse Sievers’ Law as a PIE rule. However, he is far more sceptical of Lindeman’s Law, which states that CRV- is realised as CRV̥- in monosyllables. On p. 57–63, B. presents an excursus on Lindeman’s Law and Skt. dyāus / diyaus, which is essentially a summary of his contribution to the festschrift for John Penney (Probert and Willi eds., ‘Laws and Rules in Indo-European’, Oxford 2012). He notes that forms such as diyaus are generally restricted to formulaic contexts and to certain positions in the line, and argues that the link with monosyllabicity could be a red herring. It is certainly true that the effects of formulae can create distributions which may well be ‘accidental’: a good parallel is ἵς, ἱς / ὴ, ἱς, ἵν in Homer. However, the evidence from other IE languages seems to support the monosyllabicity criterion, so it is not enough merely to cast doubt on the Vedic evidence. B. makes a good job of demolishing the alleged evidence for Lindeman variants for CyV- in Greek, but his restriction to y means that he does not have to discuss examples such as δῶς : δῶ scrub and κύρι : κρήδεμνον. Of course, there are many Greek monosyllables which show no traces of Lindeman’s Law (e.g. δῆ, χρῆ), but as with Sievers’ Law, it seems significant that the few traces which survive are consistently restricted to the expected contexts.

To sum up, B. makes a fine job of investigating exactly what the Greek evidence can and cannot tell us about Sievers’ Law. If anything, he errs on the side of caution: any potential problem with the evidence is enough to remove it from the dossier. Another consequence of this methodological scrupulousness is that many questions are left unanswered, and several discussions end with a list of the various possible factors that could be involved. Nevertheless, B.’s book is a valuable contribution to the field, and will be a standard work on the shelves of those interested in Greek historical phonology.

Cambridge

O. B. Simkin


Il libro di Stephen E. Kidd (d’ora in poi K.) affronta con interessante e innovativo approccio il tema della presenza, all’interno dei testi comici greci, di una vasta gamma di forme di «nonsense», e del delicato equilibrio tra queste e le parti che appaiono invece portatrici di contenuto ‘serio’. L’immagine del ‘nonsenso’ che ne emerge non è quella di una componente accessoria giocosa, ma di un vero e proprio un terreno d’elezione della commedia, che pone tra i suoi obiettivi l’esplorazione, non priva di rischi, del ‘linguaggio non significativo’. K. ritiene di aver individuato così una strada che porta a superare la contrapposizione fra chi guarda alla commedia come puro gioco («the Gomme camp»), come viene défini-