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Could Greek and Italic share a same Indo-European substratum?

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Greek and Italic have developed from their common Proto-Indo-European (PIE) ancestor in distinct ways, resulting in two languages that exhibit very different features, in particular regarding phonology and Wortbildung. Moreover, the Greek lexicon has long been recognised for its huge proportion of non-inherited words, among which it is difficult to draw a clear distinction between substrata and loan words. Several of the languages that contributed to shaping the Greek lexicon are Indo-European. Among the Indo-European contributors to the non-inherited Greek lexicon, we tentatively identify a language that shares phonetic and morphological features with substratic elements attested in Italics, and possibly articulatory properties of Latin itself. We shall review five phonetic features of this language: (i) voiceless reflexes of PIE voiced aspirated stops; (ii) the anticipation of nasals resembling *lex-unda* in Latin but generalised to labial stops, such that VCnV > VnGV with lenition of the consonant; (iii) a velarised /h/ (viz. l pinguis) which can trigger an anaptyctic -ō- or -ã-; (iv) apparent voice alternations that follow similar patterns to the Verner law in Germanic; (v) the metathesis of -r-, such that CVrC > CrVC. Our study also unveils morphological peculiarities of this language: (a) the frequent use of elsewhere poorly attested labial morphs, leading to nouns of the form *CóC-Po- and adjectives of the form *CóC-Pó-; (b) the frequent use of a prefix *egʰ-s- (cf. Lat. ex-, Gr. ἕξ-) reflected as a simple *s-; (c) the frequent occurrence of action nouns built with the well-known *CóC-no- pattern.

(i) The connection between non-inherited Lat. rūtillus ‘red’ and the etymology Rūtīlī ‘Rutulians’ is consensual, as is their derivation from PIE *h₁rudʰ-ro- ‘red’ > Com. It. *rūtīlō- ‘id.’ (Szemerényi, 1991:670). Inherited counterparts are Lat. rūbēr ‘red’ (< Com. It. *rubrō-) and Gr. ἐρυθρός ‘red’. As we shall see, this non-inherited correspondence PIE *dʰ ~ Lat. t reflects a substratic treatment of all voiced aspirated consonants as voiceless consonants.

(ii) The case for PIE *h₂ > *p is illustrated by Gr. πυνθαξ [m.] ‘bottom of a jar’ reflecting *pundō- ‘bottom’ (< PIE *bʰudʰ-nó- ‘bottom’. More interestingly, this word is the result of a treatment akin to lexunda in Latin (Meiser, 1998:121), i.e. *(–)n- > Lat. -nd- (with voicing; T = *t, *d or *dʰ). The inherited Latin reflex of PIE *bʰudʰ-nó-, namely fundus ‘bottom’, provides a parallel for a derivation of the form PIE *bʰudʰ-nó- > *put-nó- > *pundō-, hence Gr. πυνθαξ. Contrarily to the lexunda, this treatment applies in our substratum language to any stop, as illustrated by Gr. τύμβος ‘tomb’ from a substratic *túmbo- < PIE *dʰubʰ-nó- m. ‘depth’, derived from PIE *dʰubʰ-nó- ‘deep’ based on the same PIE root *dʰembʰ- as above. A cognate of this substratic *túmbo- would be Gaul. *dubno- ‘underworld’ attested in compounds such as the PN Latin Fundo-rix.

(iii) Several non-inherited Greek words seem to contain anaptyctic vowels -ō- or -ã-, especially next to an l. It could reflect a velarised articulation /h/ when the l is the first consonant in a consonant cluster, as is precisely the case in Latin. Let us consider for example σκόλυος [m.] ‘pointed pole, palisade, prickle’ < *skółap- < *skółp- < PIE *(s)köl-p- < *(s)kol(h)j-p- (with ‘Saussure-effect’) from a PIE root *(s)kelh₂- ‘to chop (wood)’¹ (Rix et al. 2001:322) and with a known although poorly attested labial morph.² Σκόλυος can be related to the Hesychian glosses σκόλυον- θρανίον ‘bench’ and σκόλυουσα- κολύουσα, κολυόουσα ‘cut short, mutilate’ < *skółap- < PIE *(s)köl-p-.

(iv) Gr. κολυός ‘mutilated’ is formally and semantically close to this series. We assume a substratum form *(s)kol(h)boς < PIE *(s)kol(p)-o- < *(s)kol(hj)-p-ō-. It exhibits two striking differences with previous forms: the labial morph is voiced and the stress is word-final. We interpret it as the outcome of a Verner-like treatment, i.e. a lenition of all voiceless stops in pre-tonic positions.³ Also Gr. χαλύθη [f.] ‘hut, cabin’ (var. καλυθός, κολύθος [m.]), which is difficult to separate from PIE *kél- ‘to cover’ (cf. Lat. oc-cūl-ērē ‘hide’ < PIE *kél-e/o-), points to a substratic adjective *kolebó- ‘covered’ < PIE *k₁l₁b₁-o- ‘id.’ that exhibits this Verner-like effect. Next to this adjective existed a feminine PIE substantive *k₁l₁b₁-eh₂, ‘covering’ reflected in our substratum language, with a fortition in post-tonic position, as *kaxóppa (maybe *kaxóp'á). It has been borrowed in Proto-Romance as

¹ This root is duplicated in the LIV² (Rix et al., 2001) as *kelhl₂- ‘chop wood’ (p. 350) and *skelH- ‘id.’ (p. 553).
² On the same root, cf. Lat. (inherited) scalpō ‘scratch, carve’ < Com. It. *skáláp-e/o- < PIE *sk₂l₂p₂-e/o-.
³ According to Pokorny (1959:926), Com. Gmc. *yalbʰ- ‘half’ (> Go. halbs, ON halfr) reflects, with the standard Verner effect, a Pre-Proto-Gmc. *kolpʰ- ‘cut (into two pieces)’ < PIE *(s)kol(hj)-p-ō-, which we pose as an indirect source for Gr. κολυός.
*kālāppa ~ *kālāfīa, reflected by Provençal caloufo ‘nut hull’ and Old Occit. caloupe ‘*nutshell; boat’, hence Fr. (diaI.) chaloupe ‘nutshell; boat hull’. A protorcinetic PIE adjective *kēl-u-s (Nom), *kēl-e-μ-s (Gen), *kēl-u-hi (Instr) ‘hidden, covered (vel. sim.)’ could produce, via a decausativ eCVI-like construction based on the instrumental, a PIE form *kēl-u-hi,bh(μ)-ō- ‘being covered’. Substantivisation via barytonesis would then lead to a substratic *kālāppo- ~ *kālāfício- ‘covering’ that could be the source of Gr. χέλιδος [secondary n.] ‘fruit shell, eggshell’. This shows that we are dealing with a centum language, as PIE *k is reflected by a substratic *k.

Other examples of this Verner-like treatment can be found in words derived from PIE root *dēubh- ~ ‘sink in(to), go deep’ (Kümml, 2014, s.v.). We analyse Lat. Tībris, -is [m.] ‘the river Tiber’ < Com. It. *Tābris as reflecting PIE *dēubh-ri- ‘ravine’ (Szemerényi, 1991:675-681). Another example is non-inherited Lat. tābus4 (and Proto-Romance *tāfus) < Com. It. *tūfō- ~ ‘underground pipe (for conducting water)’ (Meyer-Lübke, 1935:746) from a substratic *tāppo- ~ *tāfō- ‘id.’.

(v) Another phenomenon typical of our substratic language is the metathesis of -r-, such that CVrC becomes CrVC. For example, we explain the Gr. στρέψω ‘twist’ (“Pre-Greek” according to Beekes, 2010:1413) as related to the PIE root *terk₂- ‘turn oneself’ (Rix et al. 2001:635)5 inherited as Lat. torquēō ‘turn, twist’ from a PIE causative stem *tork₂-ē-j-e-o-. Apart from the metathesis of the -r-, this form exhibits a spurious s- which can hardly be accounted for as an s-mobile. It could be a reflex of a preverb *s- (< *es < *eks- < PIE *eɡs-), with a treatment which parallels Vulgar Latin developments (cf. It. scorrere ‘flow’ < Lat. ex-currere ‘run’). We therefore posit a Post-PIE form *eks-terk₂-ē-j-e-o- > *(e)strēk₂-ē-o- borrowed as Com. Gr. *στρεχ-’ō > Gr. στρέφω. The Verner-like forition of *k₂- as *χ₂ > *φ rather than *χ > *π is the same as in Gr. χέλιδος explained above. A lenited counterpart is found in Gr. στρεθδος ‘turned, twisted’ < Com. Gr. *στρεγ-’-l-< -l- > Post-PIE *eks-terk₂-el-< -l-. The extended lex-unda seen in point (ii) also explains Gr. στρομμός ‘spinning-top (Σ 413); whirlwind’, which reflects a substratum form *(e)strōng-’-o- < *(e)strōk₂-n- following the PIE *(e)strōg-’-n- pattern. Note that the labialav is warranted by non-inherited Gr. στρογγύλος ‘round, spherical’, which we analyse as a reflex of Com. Gr. *στρογγ-’-v-λ-< -l- ‘id.’ (with paraoxytones due to Wheeler’s law), derived in Com. Gr. (or in the substrate) from the same thematic stem *(e)strōng-’-o-.

We have uncovered a consistent system of phonetic and morphological common points between one of the IE layers in the non-inherited Greek lexicon and substratic words and influences in Latin and Romance.6 We conclude with the widespread PIE word *gōrd-’-o- ‘fence, enclosure’ which acquired the meaning ‘town’ for example in OCS grādo ‘town’ (cf. also the Phryg. city name Górdion). With the well-known characterising suffix *-on-, we would expect a development *gōrd-’dôn > *kórtôn (cf. point (i)) > *krōtôn (cf. point (v)), which correctly matches the name of the town Κόρτον ‘Crotone’ located in Calabria, Southern Italy. Based on this formal, semantic and geographic match, we suggest the lack of definitive evidence, we suggest the name “Crotonian” for the IE substratic language reconstructed here.

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4 Lat. tābus and Proto-Romance *tābus ~ *tāfus < Com. It. *tāfō- (Meyer-Lübke, 1935:746) reflecting a source word *tuPo- derived from zero-grade PIE *dēubh-’-o- [m.] ‘ravine’ from PIE *dēubh-’-o- ‘deep.’ This PIE formation would have been inherited as Com. It. *tāfō- and would appear as Lat. *tāfūs.

5 It is generally accepted that Gr. στρέψω is akin to the Myc. Gr. ku-su-to-ro-qa ‘global sum’, probably for *ξυν-στροχ-’ (cf. Gr. συστροφή ‘density, condensation, gathering, group’). Therefore, an etymology for Gr. στρέψω based on the PIE root *trep- ‘turn’ is unlikely, as are ad hoc reconstructions of the form PIE *streβ-’ or *streγδ-. (pace Rix et al., 2001:603 and Kümml 2001, 2014).

6 On the Italic side, it corresponds to Szemerényi’s “Siculo-Ausonian” substrate.