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**PRE-INDO-EUROPEAN (OR 'MEDITERRANEAN')
V. PROTO-BOREAL. SOME THOUGHTS
ON PREHISTORIC LINGUISTIC RELATIONS**



The paper aims at updating and clarifying some aspects relevant to the analysis and classification of the so-called 'Mediterranean' or 'Pre-Indo-European' heritage of southeast Europe v. the Indo-European, Uralic and Altaic idioms, sometimes analyzed in the context of 'Nostratic' or 'Proto-Boreal' or 'Euro-Asiatic' idioms, a tendency, which seems to have been predominant in the linguistic studies of the last decades.

Keywords: Euro-Asiatic, Indo-European, Nostratic, Mediterranean, Neolithic Revolution, Proto-Boreal, Uralic.

Preliminary Considerations I: Pre-Indo-European ~ Mediterranean

One of the most interesting topics of the interwar period was connected to what was then labelled the 'Mediterranean' (hereafter Med.) or 'Pre-Indo-European' (hereafter Pre-IE) heritage of Europe. It mainly referred to the probable or possible heritage of classical languages, Greek and Latin, from the substratum languages spoken prior to the Indo-European expansion. We may even note a certain bias for what may be labeled today as 'Nostratic' or 'Nostratic-like' theories even in the second half of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century, e. g. Trombetti [61] or earlier, Delitzsch [19] – the latter might be considered a first attempt toward a cross-linguistic analysis of the IE and Semitic languages, even if, from our perspective, without a direct common heritage, the attempt of Delitzsch was soon forgotten. And again Trombetti, in two remarkable studies [62; 63], the latter study may be included in the perspective of what was then labeled 'Med.' or 'Pre-IE' proper: an attempt towards identifying a specific linguistic group of non-IE, specifically Pre-IE character, also labeled 'Mediterranean.'

I would quote, in alphabetical order, as I find difficult to suggest a hierarchical scale, studies like: Alessio [1; 2]; Battisti and his series of outstanding studies dedicated to the problem of Med. linguistic heritage [5; 6; 7; 8]; Bertoldi [9; 10]; Cocco [13], a very brief but most instructive study, relevant for the methodology common in those times; Devoto [20; 21] – the latter is an outstanding analysis for the level attained in



those times; Pieri [55]; the study was published in 1912!; Ribezzo [56; 57] – also relevant for the methodology applied. Beside these studies, all belonging to the Italian school of historical and comparative linguistics, we should not ignore other relevant studies, e. g. Mușu [37; 38], an author completely ignored abroad, and rarely quoted even in Romania; Skok [60], perhaps the best study dedicated to the analysis of the linguistic strata of southeast Europe (Pre-IE, IE, Roman, Medieval), even if limited to the area of the Adriatic islands along the Croatian coast; Rostaing [58; 59]. Both Skok and Rostaing dedicated an important part of their analyses to the Pre-IE heritage in place-names in the Adriatic area (Skok) and Provence (Rostaing). These two studies continue to be reference points in the field, both published in the same year, 1950.

To add here various other attempts in clarifying the role of the Pre-IE or Med. substratum. As an example, to note the constant use of the term *praeuropský* in Machek's etymological dictionary [36] – to date, there is no list of the words for which Machek uses the label *praeuropský*, which, in most cases at least, corresponds to what we may label Pre-IE ~ Med. Or, from an archaeological point of view, Odner [39] as a good example of a study in the field of archaeology.

The road to a more coherent analysis of the linguistic substratum, conventionally labelled 'Med.' or 'Pre-IE', has not been easy, and also the road to a clearer definition of Indo-European, Uralic [38] and Altaic linguistic groups, and their possible or probable relations, going farther east to Korean and Japanese. As our competence does not go so far, the purpose of this paper is to clarify the status of the Pre-IE or Med. substratum as opposed to other linguistic groups, analyzed or not in (or from) the 'Nostratic' or 'Nostratic-like' perspective. The list of linguists and archaeologists, who dedicated a considerable effort to clarifying these details is long. A brief summary of these studies may be found in some of our studies [41; 42; 43; 45; 46; 47; 48; 49; 50].

Preliminary Considerations II: Nostratic

As briefly noted above, most linguists have lately concentrated on the probable (or, at least, possible) relationship between the Indo-European group, on the one hand, and the other linguistic groups, mainly Uralic and Altaic, but going farther east towards Korean and Japanese. There are known or relatively known books, e. g. Collinder [14; 15]; Čop [16; 17] — which serves as a reference point in the history of Slovene linguistics, resuming and much improving the older analysis of Oštir [40], now outdated; Illič-Svityč [67], due to whom the term *Nostratic* became definitively consecrated; Andreev [65] and the complementary brief studies [3; 4], the author of the 'Proto-Boreal' theory, perhaps the most coherent; Greenberg [34; 35], the author of the Eurasiatic theory. We cannot ignore the very recent, ample introduction to the Nostratic theory of Bomhard [11], one of the most ambitious analyses of this type together with the Nostratic dictionary of Dolgopolsky [22]. And, of course, the database at <http://ehl.santafe.edu/main.html>. As an isolated attempt in Romania, to quote also Ungureanu [64] and our more modest attempt [52], its initial version was prepared as a contribution to the international congress of slavists in Ljubljana, August 2003. Its purpose was mainly targeted at placing the indigenous (Thracian) heritage of Romanian in a more coherent framework, from the perspective of both Pre-IE and IE heritage, in this case concentrating on identifying similarities with the 'Nostratic' or 'Proto-Boreal' groups.



Nostratic, Proto-Boreal or Eurasiatic are therefore labels for theories, which share very much in common, even if many details may differ, and various authors may have polemical attitudes. They generally attempt to identify and reconstruct an archaic, common and basic vocabulary of languages formerly considered independent. Most authors agree upon what seems to be a common denominator: the initial, archaic relationship of the Indo-European, Uralic and Altaic languages. From this common denominator, disagreements begin, e.g. Illič-Svityč adds Kartvelian and Dravidian; Andreev adds Korean and Japanese in his additional studies (which seems to have become a more and more accepted hypothesis, assuming that Korean and Japanese are 'newer', more eastern developments of a Tungus-Mančurian Altaic group); Greenberg, who adds other languages of northern Asia and even North America [34, mainly 179–181], for a summary of his view; Bomhard seems to have published the most comprehensive analysis of an immense linguistic area, see mainly [11: 256 ff.], where he analyzes the concept of 'Nostratic' v. 'Eurasiatic'.

Dolgopolsky and generally the Russian linguists involved in this field of investigation do not include Etruscan in their list of 'Nostratic' languages. It seems, therefore, that we must, until more solid evidence is invoked, analyze Etruscan as an isolated language. On the other hand, the data presented and analyzed in Bonfante [12], e.g. the initial stress accent (p. 68), the pronouns (p. 74) and the lack of gender proper might suggest a certain relationship with the Uralic family—this perhaps led some linguists to consider it a 'Nostratic' language. Also, some forms, like *neftś* < Lat. *nepos*, indicate an influence of the neighboring Latin language and/or other Italic IE languages. See also the ample polemical analysis of Dybo and Starostin v. Vovin [23].

It would be perhaps useful to note that the attempts towards a global analysis of world languages as deriving from one unique source may minimize cultural differences across history. The Nostratic theory or any similar theory may easily lead to underestimating differences in time. Bomhard [11], trying to include Etruscan in the Nostratic family and trying to consider it a kind of a Proto-Indo-European idiom (p. 275–284), suggests that, in fact, Etruscan is not so enigmatic as often stated. Not wishing to underestimate the extraordinary achievement of Bomhard, I would like to stress the basic idea that, even if we admit a unique origin of hominids and consequently a unique origin of world languages, any attempt to include Etruscan in the Nostratic family does not help us very much in deciphering this language, even if we admit a certain affinity with the Euro-Asiatic family. Otherwise put, even if the *Urverwandtschaft* of Indo-European, Uralic and Altaic (at least) is acceptable, this does not mean that we may easily equate one to another, and that their evolution was identical or similar.

If we extend the debate to the linguistic-archaeological dialogue, then the discussion becomes more complex, but also more interesting and, beyond any doubt, more coherent. We cannot ignore the archaeological data and, also, the archaeologists should not ignore the linguistic data. At this point, I would remind the works of Marija Gimbutas, whose hypotheses were warmly accepted or furiously rejected several decades ago. Her major works were published in the 1970's and 1980's [24; 25; 26; 27; 28; 29; 30; 31; 32; 33], and had a tremendous impact on the scientific world, giving a solid impulse for deeper analyses of prehistory. Many archaeologists disagreed with Gimbutas, but even now it is still difficult to identify better, more coherent interpreta-



tions. Few linguists or archaeologists seem aware that Gimbutas's (mainly archaeological) perspective perfectly fits 'Nostratic' or 'Nostratic-like' theories. For example, Gimbutas's analysis goes hand in hand with Andreev's Proto-Boreal hypothesis [3; 4; 65]. Both Gimbutas and Andreev, seemingly using independent methods (archaeological, on one side; linguistic, on the other), reached similar conclusions, with the note that Gimbutas's view was larger: she attempted a global reconstruction, opposing 'Old Europe' (i.e. Neolithic and Chalcolithic Europe) to Kurgan or Indo-European groups of the North Pontic area. It is also the area envisaged by Andreev and other 'nostratists' as the Proto-Boreal homeland, i.e. the homeland of the IE, Uralic and Altaic groups, the latter with extensions towards Korea and Japan.

Of course, Andreev reconstruction may be debated or criticized. Nevertheless, some of his strong points cannot be ignored: the existence of a velar spirant (he preferred this term against laryngeal) in the Proto-Boreal proto-language (*Proto-Boreal* is Andreev's coined term); centum ~ satem dichotomy to be identified in the Uralic and, rare, in the Altaic groups (e.g. Finnic group, of centum character, v. Ugrian group, of satem character); a nucleus of identifiable 203 basic roots (the number may be, of course, subject to various discussions [3; 4; 65]).

At this point, I would also quote the attempts of Colin Renfrew, see his preface to Dolgopolsky [22: V ff.], another good example of an interdisciplinary dialogue between a linguist (Dolgopolsky) and an archaeologist (Renfrew). Such examples are rare.

Assembling Data

This paper started from defining the 'Mediterranean' or 'Pre-Indo-European' heritage of southeast Europe, and then briefly analyzed the Nostratic and some Nostratic-like hypotheses. To many linguists, data are still confusing and unconvincing. The first reference point is the Mesolithic and Early Neolithic 'revolution,' beginning around 8,000 B.C.E. in Anatolia, and then spreading west and east. The second reference point is the Mesolithic and early Neolithic of the North-Pontic–Uralic vast area, which must be postulated later, but perhaps not earlier than 5,000 B.C.E.

1. The emergence of a new, outstanding civilizational process in Anatolia, known as 'the Neolithic Revolution', dated around 8,000 B.C.E. This complex process included a gradual sedentary life, farming, domestication (goat, sheep, dog – probably in this order), pottery, development of archaeometallurgical skills [47; 51: 151–174], with gold and copper as the first processed metals. We do not know what language or languages were spoken by these people but – if accepting that the Pre-Indo-European linguistic relics of Greek and, to a lesser extent, Latin come from the idiom(s) spoken by those people who, starting in Anatolia, migrated east and west, then what we label 'Pre-IE' or 'Med.' elements in Greek and, perhaps, in Latin originated in this linguistic stratum.

Some similarities with the Pre-Semitic heritage, like the unexplained root UR- 'big, huge,' hence 'urban settlement,' as in Lat. *urbs* and Sumerian *UR* and *Uruk* would not indicate mere hazard. If similarities are found in the Pre-Semitic substratum, on the one hand, and Pre-IE substratum, on the other, we should not invoke hazard, there are arguments supporting the idea that people interfered in those remote times, and spread over vast areas.



We lack a conventional term for this linguistic group. Once, the author of this paper suggested 'Urbian group' and its speakers labeled *Urbians*, starting from the archaic root **UR-*, reconstructable from a series of place-names and elements of vocabulary, which seem to be of Pre-IE origin. Lat. *urbs* and Greek *Ouranos* must be the direct heirs of this root. The proposal did not seem to have any success, I have no knowledge that it was analyzed, commented and, from various reasons, criticized in order to be replaced by a better one. This is the main argument why I am inclined to maintain it as a possible generic solution when dealing with this linguistic group: the Urbian groups or the Urbians [43; 44; 45].

It is not clear whether the Western European cultures (in the archaeological sense) of those prehistoric times were influenced by the 'Urbian' groups at an early age. Those people should have inherited the tradition of the Cantabrian area, i. e. of the groups who had created the outstanding paintings in the caves of southern France and northern Spain.

There still are difficult points, related to the place of Etruscan, Hatti and Basque in this complicated tableau. Disregarding whether we consider Etruscan strictly indigenous or, together with its speakers, migrated from the east, it is acceptable to consider it a Pre-IE relic, a continuant of the languages of the Neolithic revolution; Hatti [18] also seems related with and perhaps derived from Urbian, disregarding whether we admit Etruscan and / or Hatti as 'Nostratic' descendants or isolated, unexplained relics of the past. This view would be in agreement with the archaeological data, which suggest the Anatolian origin of the Neolithic revolution.

Basque puts more complicated problems. It does not seem related to the Urbian group as defined above. Shall it be accepted an heir of the Upper Paleolithic speakers? Or does it reflect a newer (from where?) migration? Its basic vocabulary does not seem related to what may be labeled 'Urbian', but this is an interim conclusion, more and deeper investigation is needed.

In this perspective, we may assert that the very probable, even certain heirs of the Urbian groups and languages of the Neolithic and Chalcolithic cultures were those, which influenced Greek, Thracian, Illyrian, perhaps also Latin and Hatti. The non-IE vocabulary of Greek surpasses 50 %, most of it may be labeled, without fear of error, as 'Pre-Hellenic' or 'Pre-IE', with some newer influences of the various languages spoken in the Mediterranean basin*.

2. Completely different cultural groups and, beyond a reasonable doubt, also different linguistically, were located in the North Pontic-Uralic area. They have been given much attention over the last decades. A certain relationship of the IE, Uralic and Altaic groups seems certain, with more or less important differences in the analyses made by various authors. It is not the purpose of this paper to clarify these disputes, and to offer specific solutions. Nevertheless I would note that, according to available data, we may be certain that these linguistic and cultural groups analyzed under vari-

* I draw attention on the peculiar use of 'Mediterranean' in some works of the Italian linguists quoted in the main text. In that context, 'Mediterranean' means, beyond any doubt, 'Pre-IE.' It may be paralleled with 'Baltic,' which has a pure geographical meaning, but also a linguistic, specific meaning: the Baltic languages, as a specific group of Balto-Slavic, in turn a branch of the IE satem group.



ous labels (mainly Nostratic, Proto-Boreal, Eurasiatic) do not seem to have any direct or remote connection with the groups labeled Urbian under #1.

From an archaeological point of view, they must have been different, as the cultural typology seems different. Linguistic analysis, as difficult as it may be, does not support an initial, archaic relationship. The contacts between the groups labeled 'Urbian' and those known as Indo-European, Uralic and Altaic may be identified after their migration toward the west, notably in the pottery of the Cucuteni-Tripilye culture, identified around the mid-3rd millennium B.C.E. These must have been the first Indo-Europeans, who moved west and, during that phase, did not cause major disruptions within the Cucuteni culture. Radical cultural changes begin to be attested around the end of the 3rd millennium B.C.E and the beginning of the 2nd millennium B.C.E. From now on, a rapid and tumultuous wave of changes occurred, leading to the emergence of the proto-historical groups of Europe.

The contact between two major and radically different cultural groups led to the new ethnic groups and languages known in history. It cannot be doubted that what is labeled 'substratum influence' in Greek reflects the survival of elements from those languages spoken by the *Urbians*, whose culture was subdued by the new comers, more aggressive and well equipped with weapons and using horse traction.

3. West-European cultural group(s) of the Neolithic and Chalcolithic period. We do not know what language(s) those people spoke, but it seems that it was, or they were, different from those spoken in the Urbian area (group #1 above) or in the North Pontic-Uralic area (group #2 above). We do not yet know whether the language(s) of the creators of the Cantabrian culture survived until Neolithic and proto-historic times.

It is not clear whether Basque is a modern expression of these archaic languages spoken in Western Europe, or they reflect a newer wave of peoples. None of the arguments invoked so far (related to the Berber language, Etruscan or Kartvelian group etc.) are convincing. An interim conclusion, to eventually be revised later, is that Basque may reflect an archaic indigenous linguistic group of the Iberian family, not excluding its identification as an indigenous Upper Paleolithic survival*.

Etruscan, again, has an unclear position. Obviously, it reflects some Italic borrowings (e. g. *neftś*), but this does not mean very much: languages always borrow, but their basic structure and a part of its vocabulary remain specific. English and Albanian are, basically, languages with a Romance vocabulary, but with Germanic and Neo-Thracian (or, most improbably, Neo-Illyrian) structure; Finnish and Estonian have an important number of borrowings from Iranian and Germanic, but this does not change their specific structure; not less Hungarian, which preserves a peculiar evolution, despite its Iranian, Altaic, Slavic and Romance loan words. Disregarding the ultimate view as to whether Etruscan is strictly indigenous or migrated or both, it remains an isolated, even 'enigmatic' language. One should note that it has some resemblance to the Urbian group (#1 above), and we cannot assume that an essential term of civilization like Latin *urbis*

* Of course, ALL the linguistic groups discussed in this paper and in other authors are, in fact, Upper Paleolithic survivals, because any language, disregarding its affinity, has a precursor. The discussions referring to Basque or Etruscan wish to clarify whether these languages reflect an indigenous evolution or a migrated group of speakers, or – of course – both. In many instances, many languages reflect both situations: an indigenous evolution and an influx of foreigners.



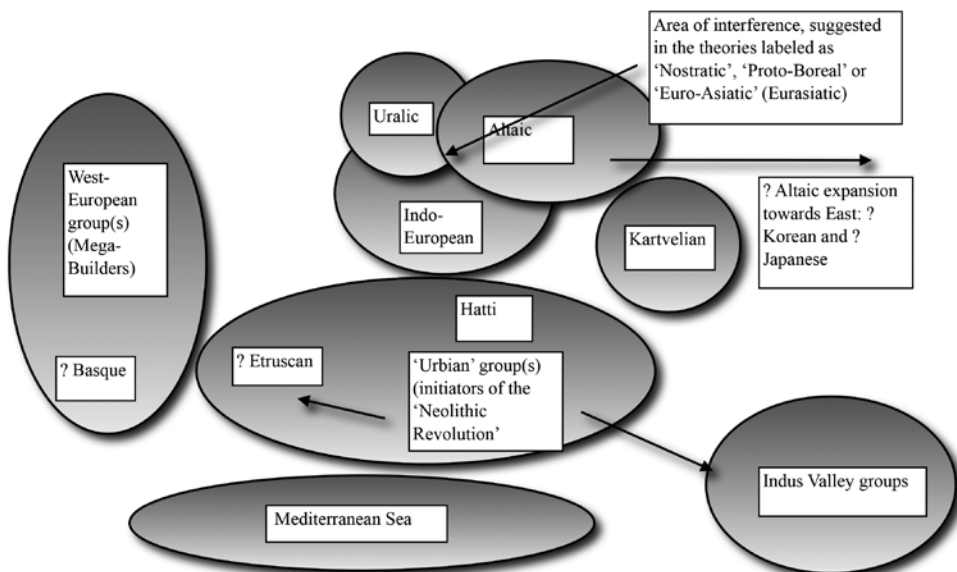
may have another origin than Etruscan, unless we admit more Pre-IE languages in the Italic peninsula down to proto-historic and historic times. According to the available data, Etruscan was the only Non-IE language, all the other are IE languages.

4. The problem of the Hatti language, a Non-IE, specifically a Pre-IE, language of the Anatolian region is clear enough. It is logical to assume a Pre-IE language spread before the arrival of the Indo-Europeans; this is in full accordance with the archaeological discoveries that suggest the development of wonderful, sophisticated cultural groups, ultimately the initiators of the 'Neolithic revolution'. It would be illogical to assume that those people abruptly disappeared after the arrival of the Indo-Europeans. They must have survived in a way or another, just like the groups of southeast Europe that were probably related to them, those whose Pre-IE language is reflected in Greek and Latin, but also in the Thracian and Illyrian relics, place and river names of an obviously archaic origin.

5. The Indus Valley civilizations also raised essential problems. According to older and recent discoveries, they reflect relations with both more western cultural groups, which would be in accordance with the archaeological discoveries referring to the 'Neolithic revolution'; and also with the Dravidian groups. Our competence does not allow to go further, but I would wish to quote the outstanding studies of Asko Parpola [53; 54]. The suggested similarities between the Indus Valley symbolism, on the one hand, and the Anatolian and Southeast European symbolism, on the other, are not, or should not be, strange, they simply reflect the logical, and archaeologically documented, movements toward the west and east. This led to a similar heritage over a large area, from southeast Europe through Anatolia and Sumer to the Indus Valley. This also explain some striking similarities of the Pre-IE and Pre-Semitic heritage.

The following scheme tries to suggest a spatial projection of the problems discussed.

A tentative scheme of the linguistic groups discussed in this paper





Final Considerations

The analysis of the Pre-IE ~ Med. heritage seems to have faded in the 1950's, with isolated attempts later. Most linguists seemed tempted by the Euro-Asiatic space, with its vast cultural and linguistic developments in prehistory. Nevertheless, in order to have a more coherent view of the possible relations between these linguistic groups, we must resume the analysis of the Pre-IE heritage.

Was there contact among these groups before the great migratory process of the late Chalcolithic and the early Bronze Age? Or later? How did the first Indo-European groups interfere with existing cultures when they moved west and met the Cucuteni people? Were there other, earlier or later, contacts?

According to interim estimations, there may be some common features of the Urbian group(s), on the one hand, and the Uralic and / or the Indo-European groups, on the other. As an example, the agglutinative structure of Uralic and Etruscan*, as it seems in the latter case, might indicate initial contacts. Of course, this is just an incomplete analysis. Our view on such complex issues may vary, influenced by the data we may identify.

On the other hand, before attempting such old, possible relations, we should—I think—make deeper analyses on these cultural and linguistic groups. Otherwise put, before attempting to reconstruct a possible unique language of the Euro-Asiatic space, which may be possible, we should first try to have clearer contours of those groups.

Also, one of the most attractive hypotheses refers to the possible (perhaps even probable) relationship between the Neolithic and Chalcolithic groups of Anatolia and southeast Europe, on the one hand, and the Indus Valley civilizations and, perhaps, the intermediate cultural groups between India and the Anatolian area. Is the Dravidian group an expression of the Indus Valley symbolism? Possibly, just this symbolism has similarities with southeast European symbolism of the period starting circa 6,500 B.C.E. and 3,500 B.C.E. Did this occur haphazardly? I would be inclined to dismiss the hypothesis of random similarities. But, of course, this may be a wrong approach. If these similarities are NOT the result of pure chance, problems begin to become more and more interesting, and all the more complicated.

Further investigations are called to clarify the unknown details, and to bring forth additional problems to debate.

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* I exchanged some messages on this issue with Larissa Bonfante and, for a brief period, with his father Giuliano Bonfante, authors of reference books both in the field of Etruscan studies, Indo-European and southeast European problems, including Romanian. Bonfante's *Studi romeni* still remains an unsurpassed analysis in the field.



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**Доиндоевропейский («средиземноморский») и протобореальный.
К вопросу о доисторических языковых отношениях**

Целью данной статьи является актуализация и уточнение некоторых аспектов, существенных при анализе и классификации так называемого «средиземноморского» или «доиндоевропейского» наследия Южной Европы по отношению к индоевропейским, уральским и алтайским языкам, которые иногда исследуются с точки зрения «ностратических», «протобореальных» или «евроазиатских» языков. Данный подход является доминирующим в лингвистических исследованиях последних десятилетий.

Ключевые слова: евроазиатский, индоевропейский, ностратический, средиземноморский, неолитическая революция, протобореальный, уральский.

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