Studies in Classical Linguistics in Honor of Philip Baldi

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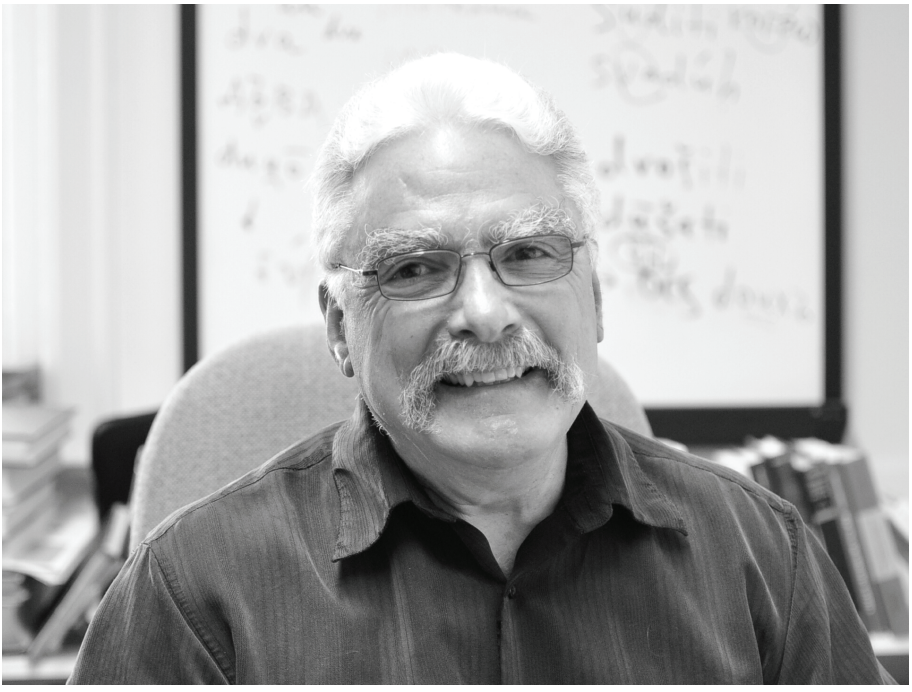

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Edited by

B. Richard Page and Aaron D. Rubin

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ON LATIN *(S)TRITAVUS*

Brian D. Joseph
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A rather remarkable passage occurs in an Old Latin comedy and, in a single line, enriches our knowledge of that part of the Latin lexicon that deals with terms for kin terms at various generational removes. Plautus's *Persa*, l. 57, reads as follows (where the glosses refer to 'fa(ther)', 'gr(and)fa(ther)', 'gr(eat)-gr(and)fa(ther)', and so on):

pater	*auos*	*proauos*	*abauos*	*atauos*	*tritauos*
'fa'	'grfa'	'grt-grfa'	'grt-grt-grfa'	'grt-grt-grt-grfa'	'grt-grt-grt-grt-grfa'

All of these terms from *proauos* on through *tritauos* also mean 'remote ancestor, forefather' (at unspecified generational distance).

There is much to be said about these forms, and they show a variety of formations that in some ways parallels the considerable diversity in such expressions seen across the Indo-European languages and which may well reflect different strategies in Proto-Indo-European for naming these kin relations. Without going into details here,[1] I simply note that the form to be focused on here, namely *tritauos*, seems to represent a numerically based formation,[2] and has parallels both in Greek (e.g., τρίπαππος 'ancestor in the 6th generation') and in Albanian (e.g., *tregjysh* 'great-grandfather', as in Newmark 1998 (and cf. Meyer 1891, where it is given as *treǵüš*, representing the same pronunciation evident in Newmark's standard orthography)).

The form *tritauos*, however, is of interest here not because of its parallels elsewhere in Indo-European but rather because there is a variant of it, attested in Paulus ex Festo, namely *strittauus*:

Strittauum antiqui dicebant pro tritauo (Paul. Fest. p 315M)

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[1] These Latin terms and their counterparts across the family and their possible prototypes in the parent language were discussed in Brown and Joseph (2006) and are to be treated more systematically in Brown and Joseph (forthcoming).

[2] Admittedly, this form must show some Hellenization, since the *trit-* part is a Greek borrowing (cf. Greek τρίτος); a totally Latin formation would presumably be **ter-auos*.

Based on this attestation and its labeling as something said by "*antiqui*", it might well be supposed that *strittauum* is a legitimate older form. However, antiquarians like Paulus were notoriously loose in their labeling of forms, so it is not clear what "*antiqui*" means here. In fact, there are reasons to doubt the authenticity of *strittauum*. While the *-itt-* presumably stands here for *-īt-*, the initial *s-* has given some scholars pause: Ernout and Meillet (1939: s.v.), for instance, say it is perhaps merely a miscopying for *tritavus* from the Plautine *Persa* passage, a view which has some plausibility when one notes that *atauos* with a final *-s* immediately precedes *tritauos*.

Nonetheless, I would like to propose that this by-form with *stri-* was real, based on a form that can be taken to be related to it, occurring in a language that borrowed heavily from Latin. That language is Albanian, and in Albanian one finds a prefix *stër-*, which Newmark (1998: 785) glosses "(with kinship terms) great-" and exemplifies with "*stër-gjysh* 'great-grandfather', *stër-gjyshe* 'great-grandmother', *stër-nip* 'great-grandson; great-nephew', *stër-mbes* 'great-granddaughter' ". While this prefix has other uses,[3] the generational displacement use is particularly relevant here.

The Albanian form has a clear initial *s-*, which, interestingly, in earlier sources (Meyer 1891) is given as *sh-*. This earlier form is important, since it means that from a phonological standpoint, there is nothing that stands in the way of assuming that Albanian *shtër-* is a borrowing from Latin. In particular, *sht* is the expected outcome for *st* in a borrowed form from Latin, cf. *gusht* 'August' from Latin *augustus*. What would the source form in Latin be? I submit that it is exactly the disputed *stri-*, the meaning and use of which in a generational displacement kin term match up perfectly with the Albanian.

If this Albanian prefix is connected, it would mean that *strittavus* is a real form and the initial *s-* need not be explained away as a copyist's error. The initial *s-* could be an accretion onto *tri(t)-* via a phonetic, not a graphic, resegmentation, a possibility which gains in plausibility if the string of kin terms in the *Persa* passage represents some sort of ditty or counting verse that children might have learned, like "Soldier, sailor, tinker, tailor, rich man, poor man, beggar man, thief".

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[3] In particular, *stër-* can be used in the expression of "semantic enlargement or excess", in stated in Newmark (1998: s.v.). These uses, and their relation to the kinship usage in Albanian and other languages (and cf. also the parallel Romanian prefix *stră-*), are discussed in Joseph (2009).

There are a few further points to be made regarding the initial *s-* in both the Latin form and Albanian. First, although Meyer (1891) derives the Albanian form as loan from Latin *extra*, there is no evidence that *extra* was used in Latin for terms referring to generational distance, though it did admittedly have the "overabundance" meaning that Newmark refers to as occurring in other functions of *stër-*. I am inclined to see *extra* involved to be sure, but rather in a different way: the shift within recent Albanian history from *sht-* to *st-* in this prefix can be taken to reflect later (secondary) influence from Italian *stra-*, which is the outcome in Italian of Latin *extra*.[4] Second, Meyer (1891) gives a variant of *katrɛ́güš* 'great-great-grandfather' with an extra initial *s-*: *skatraǵüš*, from his source "Ro." (= Rossi da Montalto 's work on "Epirotico" (1866)); while it is unclear what the *s-* is doing there and what its source is, it might well be the case that it too is connected with the extra *s-* of *strittavus* and the *s-* of the Albanian *s(h)tër-*, further suggesting that *strittavus* should not be ignored in a discussion of *stër-*. Moreover, the extra *s-* in numerical prefixes may have a wider distribution in the Balkans, as Greek dialectally has *stripodo* beside the more usual (and etymologically more accurate) *tripodo* 'tripod'. Conceivably, too, there could even have been a true Latin **s-ter-auos* (as opposed to Hellenized *s-tri-*) alongside *s-tri(-tt)-*.

While there is much of a speculative nature in the etymological suggestion advanced here, its plausibility cannot be denied. Moreover, it has the interesting methodological consequence of confirming a detail in a source language through a borrowing in another language, much as borrowings from Germanic into Finnish confirm the existence of final syllables that were lost by our earliest attested Germanic languages.

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[4] Eric Hamp (p.c., 2007) has suggested that *sht* > *st* may be a simple dissimilation from ***sh****tërgjy****sh***.

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