

## Greek χρόνος, its origin and cognates:

### An old etymological puzzle in Indo-European perspective

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The Ancient Greek word for time, χρόνος, is qualified by all etymological dictionaries as etymologically unclear (Chantraine 1968: 1277f.; Beekes 2010: 1651f.). None of the proposed connections (such as the comparison χρόνος ~ χόρτος ‘enclosure, court’, supposedly derived from Proto-Indo-European \*g<sup>h</sup>er- ‘seize, grasp’; thus, χρόνος ‘time’ is explained as ‘seizer; encompassing time-limit’) appears plausible (see Beekes 2010, *ibid.*; LIV 177).

I argue that this word can be satisfactorily explained on account of comparison with two other words in -όνο-ς, θρ-όνο-ς ‘seat, chair’ and κλ-όνο-ς ‘excitement, throng’ (thus, for instance, Porzig 1942: 346). Assuming that all these words contain the rare nominal suffix -όνο- (accordingly, θρ-όνο-ς is analyzed as a derivative of \*θερ- < PIE \*d<sup>h</sup>er- ‘fix, hold’ etc.), χρόνος can further be explained as a derivative of the verbal root contained in the present χρίώ ‘(be)smear, anoint’. This verb, which has no plausible etymology (Beekes (2010: 1651): “a convincing outer-Greek connection does not exist”), can readily be compared with some cognates in Indo-Iranian with very similar meaning, ‘(be)sprinkle, drip’. The Proto-Indo-European etymon that can underlie both Greek and Old Indo-Aryan formations is reconstructable as \*g<sup>(w)h</sup>er-, and χρίώ can be analyzed as a -je/o-present of this root. The nominal χρόνος can accordingly be explained as a nominal derivative of the root χρ-, thus meaning ‘(be)smearing, anointing’.

The origin of the meaning ‘time’ can be accounted for in the context of the common Indo-European metaphorical representation of time either as a wheel (cf. Ved. *kālā-* ‘time’, probably a derivative of the root \*k<sup>w</sup>el(H)- ‘move (around)’, the same root underlies Gr. κύκλος, Ved. *cakrá-* ‘wheel’, etc.; Old Church Slavonic *vrěmę* ‘time’ < \**uert-men-* ‘turning’), or as river, flow which anoints immovable objects. Of particular importance is the description of Time, deified as a primordial god, in one of the earliest cosmological texts of the Indo-European tradition, the Kālasūkta (Hymn to Time) of the Atharvaveda (c. 1000 BCE, Atharvaveda-Śaunakīya 19.53 = Atharvaveda-Paippalāda), in verse 2: *sá imá víśvā bhúvanānīy<sup>+</sup> añján<sup>+</sup> kālāḥ sá tīyate prathamó ní deváḥ* ‘anointing (i.e. flowing around) all these beings, it, *that* Time, speeds, the primordial god.’

The image of a river of time flowing *around* the world is not uncommon in Greek mythology, cf. Oceanus (Ωκεανός), an enormous river encircling the world, described by Homer as ἀπόρροος ‘flowing back into itself, circular’; and the river of oblivion Lethe (Λήθη).

Accordingly, χρόνος (originally meaning ‘anointing, flowing around’ or the like) can be explained as the stream or river of Time flowing around all beings and objects and thus receives a plausible Indo-European etymology.

#### REFERENCES

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