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"The Future of the Past": Historical and Comparative Linguistics as Partners of Philology

Abstract: Classical philology and historical linguistics are disciplines of the past, and in this sense, they are reflective and retrograde enterprises, as using the methodological experience of the present they seek to reconstruct and reconstitute a picture of the past. The study deals with methodological issues of confronting and understanding the past through its fragmentary attestation, providing illustrative examples that involve linguistic, philological and cultural testimonies and practices in reconstructing, analyzing and digesting the past with the eyes of modern man. Finally, it discusses one case study of sociohistorical and cultural reconstruction that applies the comparative method and aims at reconstructing the name-giving institution in ancient Indo-European societies.

Keywords: comparison, historical method, Indo-European languages, interdisciplinarity, linguistics, linguistics and philology, metaphor, name-giving in antiquity, poetic formula, reconstruction

1 Introductory remarks

My claim of the past in this brief intervention will be mainly from the vantage point of a historical linguist or, to use an old-fashioned term, of a 'comparative philologist'. This leads me to view things from the perspective of the remote past where the testimonies come few and piecemeal and often hypothetical, with philology, among several other disciplines of the past, lending a crucial helping hand. Calvert Watkins, a towering figure in historical and comparative linguistics, concludes a short note on the theme of philology by giving his definition of what philology is: "Philology", he says, "is the art of reading slowly", and then he hastens to explain that he does not claim full authorship of this definition, since as he says, this has a long history: he took it from his teacher, Roman Jakobson, who took it from his, and that one from his, in a line that goes back at least to Nietzsche if not even further back (see Watkins 1990, 25). This kind of metathesis or resignation from claiming full and authentic ownership of a statement is no stranger to the history of ideas, since one speaks of a chain of events and ideas, a cumulative effect of the past in general and the scholarship of the past in particular on the state of our knowledge

about this past in the present moment: what often seems like a leap in the advancement of knowledge is rather a long series of small steps, not infrequently unnoticed or unnoticeable mo(ve)ments in stasis.

The quest to know one's past has become modern man's obsession ever since his liberation from the fetters of absolutism and unquestioned dogmatic belief in the fate of things, and his passage to rationalism and rule-governed solutions took place, especially during the 19th century and the 'scientific' investigation of the whole of antiquity, a fact captured by Ankersmit in the following manner: "The discovery of the distance between the individual and sociohistorical reality made Western man aware of his past with an intensity hitherto unknown. The past became an enigma, and modern historiography was created to meet the challenge" (1994, 78). Historical linguistics has its own share in this development. Historical linguists, like prehistoric archaeologists and other specialists in 'paleosciences', are accustomed themselves to working with small fragments or traces thereof, often with only their imprints and shadowy presence, in making something of a whole and reconstructing past moments of the languages they study. Reconstruction is largely guesswork, i.e. detect, recognize, and weave together traces that the past has left behind in relic form, hence it is subjective and entirely the work of *under*standing and *inter*preting. Thus, much of what is stated is the 'under' and the 'inter' subject matter (both prefixes projected back to local adverbs, on which see more in section 2.1 below), and, as will be seen in a while, of another long list of 're-' actions.

As put by Zachary Sayre Schiffman in his book *The Birth of the Past* (p. 9), "Any study of the birth of the past must necessarily confront a basic methodological problem: where to begin?". To this statement one could add, two tail-like clauses such as the following: "where to stop" and "how to proceed", and this seems to be one of the crucial issues that we tasked ourselves to answer in the Academy of Athens meeting, among other issues. However, the terminal points, 'beginnings' and 'ends', as well as the 'processes' are fundamental methodological tools for any historical analysis, be that linguistic and philological, cultural or of any other kind: the first two relate to data, the last one to the method and interpretation. To be sure, one of these "other issues" is the nature of our confrontation with the past, an issue that may very well determine our overall stance towards the past and our utilization of this past in our lives today. One thing is certain, we have a fragmentary picture of the past as recovered through its traces here and there. Thus, our first (sweet or bitter) acknowledgment is that the past as we know it is a 'fragment', a fragment of a long repertoire of events, ideas, facts, and other things, which becomes "a meto-nymy of receding presence", as elegantly described by Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht 2003, 13, in perfect consonance with André Malraux's dictum that what are ruins today were no ruins at the time that generated them. They are, thus, subject to *metaphorizing*

(μεταφέρειν) in the literal and in the extended senses of the word as transposing, transferring and carrying across or to another plane, from the plane of the past to that of the present. This involves re-building the past by means of its fragments, renewing and reasserting it each time we come to terms with it. Otherwise, the past remains a foreign and unexplored or unexplorable land.

2 The past as fragment and its reading

From this perspective, our fragmentary knowledge of the past is based on the idea of an "ever emergent past", a picture of the past that we build continuously not only by means of material or other evidence but also by means of our understanding of the past each time we think of it or dare to approach it. In this sense, our idea of the past is subject to a long series of composite concepts with the prefix RE- concerning our envisioning and reflective thinking of this past, a kind of constant return to it or better attempt to return to it, e.g. re-constructing, re-making, re-constituting, re-stituting, re-creating, re-thinking, re-flecting, re-seeing and re-membering, re-covering, re-peat-ing, re-living, re-organizing and re-shuffling, and many more re-prefixed terms or actions, ultimately re-interpreting and re-ad(d)ing (spelled thus intentionally). The last notion of 'reading' as 're-ad(d)ing', in addition to its playful yet intentionally meaningful re-syllabification, is in a sense part or better the consummation of all reflective thinking, a 're-' action in the literal sense of the word, since it involves the collaborative effort of many recognizant and reflective acts and fields of knowledge in modern man's struggle to make sense of the past, which is nothing but a nostalgic or wishful romantic return to it, a revisiting or, since the past is somewhere and at some time inaccessible, a recalling of this past, a kind of *anaklesis* (ἀνάκλησις) of the past from its recesses by the living, i.e. an effort to call to memory and com-municate with the past. This 'anakletic' character of philology's object is an opera-tion in the realm of the procedures prefixed with "RE-" and all their ramifications referred to above.

　　Thus, bridging the past with the present involves, let us say, (i) the author's text (the past as was), (ii) the text available today as has come down to us, (iii) a metatext that is needed to understand the two texts,[1] i.e. the filling of the gap that separates the

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1 By 'text' we refer here literally to the availability of textual evidence but also to all types of other evidence (not written), such as remnants of material nature (archaeological sites and their con-structions), artistic representations (usually housed and preserved in museums and such places), cultural, mythological and other such information that help 'write' a narrative of the past by re-constructing it by means of the combined evidence available.

two texts (and here we have all the *re*-activities referred to above, especially in that of *re-ad(d)ing*), that involves the reading-through-interpretation and *qua* reconstruction), something like the context, and finally (iv) the personal stance, be that of the individual skilled and specialist researcher or the general interpreter as viewer of the past, or, as explained by Beard 2000, 6: "The questions raised by *Classics* are the questions raised by our distance from 'their' world, and at the same time by our closeness to it, and by its familiarity to us. In our museums, in our literature, languages, culture, and ways of thinking". In this process all sorts of deflection and reflection intervene so that what we get is a rough approximation of what the past was, or as said again by Beard 2006, 7: "Its aim [*viz.* of the Classics] is also to define and debate *our* relationship to that world". However, this process is in a sense what we call 'censorship', i.e. subjective interpretation by each one of us according to our intentions, aims, possibilities and capacities, intellectual faculties and otherwise.

2.1 On 'interpretation' and 'understanding'

The process of *interpretation* needs the 'inter' part, the intermediary to understand the object of inquiry in its etymological sense. This component may also define the methodological procedure and the technique that are applied in the interpretation of the past, namely *inter*-disciplinarity. According to one etymological analysis of the word from Latin *interpres, -tis*, i.e. Indo-European **enter* + root **per-/*por-* 'to come between, to cross' with a *t*-extension and syncope of the root vowel (i.e. **enter-per-t-*), with the compound meaning something like 'what comes in between, the intermediary or intermediator', what facilitates the dialog between our world with that of the ancients (as per Nussbaum referred to in EDL s.v.; differently elsewhere). This is an operation that is the prerequisite for elucidating what is hidden in the background (or the underground) as the basis of the meaning of the term *understanding*, lit. 'standing under' (see Old English *understandan* 'stand under or between, hence understand'). The adverb or preposition *under* is from IE **ṇdher* 'under, below', i.e. understanding is bringing to the surface and making intelligible what is hidden (lit. stands) underneath: two local adverbs/prepositions make here possible the topography of the past and the way of approaching it, namely *inter* and *under* in the (mental) activities of interpretation and understanding, the former as the prerequisite of the latter, the one a deductive process, the other the completed state of this deduction. The deductive operation is a kind of selective remembrance, i.e. choosing what to remember and count and what to forget and exclude from our consideration and construction of the past. This implies that interpretation involves selection, a writing-in and writing-off, i.e. the decision by the interpreter as to what to include and consider in the interpretation and what to exclude from it, exactly

what censorship does. As readers of the past, we become, or perhaps still better have or ought to become censors, in the etymological sense of the parent word of Latin *census* as separating by counting and calculating, it is in a way a κρίσις, an evaluation and judgment of sorts. We leave out of the picture of the past some part or parts, making thus interpretation a largely selective and intentional process.[2] In a sense, the past is what the past itself allows us to know about it, and at the same time what we are able to make of this past. Reading the past is largely filling gaps, an interactive operation, or, as normally referred to, 'healing scars' in the body of the evidence: in textual editions this is done by various conventions, for instance, brackets and dots of various shapes and other devices; in linguistic reconstructions by means of asterisked forms that stand for the hypothetical proto-form of a lexeme or grammatical category or some intermediate but unattested stage of the language or the grammatical category, e.g. the reconstructed proto-forms *k^welos/*k^wolos/ *k^w(V)k^wlos* for τέλος, πόλος and κύκλος, respectively (terms that express important concepts in Ancient Greek and Indo-European, all from root *k^wel-* 'turn, move in a circle'), or the reconstructed proto-form *$a\hat{g}\underbar{n}$-dhos* for ἀγαθός, 'the upholder of the good of the group (*αγα-)', be that the movable wealth of cattle (ἀγέλη) or the military group (ἄγημα, etc.), see also the items ἄγω, ἀγών, ἀγός, ἄξιος, perhaps even ἄγος 'religious awe, curse to be expiated', and a long list of derivatives, also seen in names like Ἀγαμέμνων (lit. 'he who thinks of the (military) group', within a heroic context of the time);[3] or by the addition of plastered portions for the missing parts in archaeological reconstructions, and so on and so forth in other paleosciences. One could say that in the western world (and not only in this) there is an obsession with the whole picture, even though one may have only little bits and pieces of the original state of the imagined whole: remnants are there to stimulate the creation of the whole by guessing its completeness. In this way, reconstruction as the guiding principle of the reception of the past has developed into an artistic enterprise and, ultimately, into a wholly different discipline in all fields that study the past.

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2 See also the idea of "intentional history" developed in the essays in Foxhall et al. 2010, i.e. the idea that history "is the projection in time of the elements of subjective, self-conscious self-categorization which construct the identity of a group as a group" (Foxhall/Luraghi 2010, 9), something that is no strange to people who try to develop the idea of "frameworks", i.e. "of 'fixed points' in the past [that] serve as a foundation of belief in the truth of the past for most societies" (p. 9).

3 For a detailed and exhaustive treatment of the etymology and the semantics of this word group in Ancient Greek and Indo-European, see Anttila 2000.

3 The part-to-whole relation

In dealing with the past, we seem to move within the purview of the relation of part to whole, just as when conducting an etymological investigation, trying to make out the whole by means of its parts that are available to us or the other way around, analyzing the whole (real or imagined) into its constituent parts and recomposing it by putting together these parts into their proper position. Between part and whole there is always a mysterious link, an attractive chain of emotions, imagination and reconstruction: one imagines the whole picture by means of a small fragment of it or by means of a partial vision of the whole picture. The whole is imagined, it is reconstructed, although the risk of misconstruction is ever present: there are possible defects or missing parts which are not visible, or even destroyed or misconstrued elements of the whole. Or, in other instances, the whole leads to a wrong or partially wrong picture of things. The real issue here is to place the whole-part association into a system of relations, or, in Ankersmit's phrasing, "[...] the really interesting contrast is [...] between the general statement and the historical narrative" (1994, 82), meaning that the historical facts amassed (i.e. the collected data) must be put into a system if they are to have some explanatory value. In language, this is very common, especially in reconstructions of older linguistic features, the task of historical and comparative linguists. This point can be clarified by cases of double or multiple attestation of the inscriptional text in ancient authors and in the inscription itself, as in the following illustrative example from Pausanias and the actual inscription from Olympia discovered in two fragments in 1876 and 1879, and which exhibits the original dialectal features (highlighted with bold characters in version (b) below; (c) is the original inscription as given by Jeffery 1990):

(a) (Paus. 5.24.3) – a dedication by the Lacedaemonians on the statue of Zeus:

> δέξο ἄναξ Κρονίδα Ζεῦ Ὀλύμπιε καλὸν ἄγαλμα ἰλάῳ θυμῷ τοῖς Λακεδαιμονίοις

(b) (IG V, 1, 1562; Olympia, Laconian alphabet; discovered in 1876 and 1879; c. 490 BC?):

> [ΔΕΞ]Ọ **F**ẠN[Α]Ξ ΚΡΟΝ[Ι]ΔΑ{Ι} **Δ**ΕΥ[4] ΟΛΥ**Ν**ΠΙ̣Ε ΚΑΛΟΝ ΑΓΑΛΜΑ
> **Η**Λ**ΕF**Ọ[Ι̣ ΘΥ]ΜΟΙ Τ̣ΟΙ<**Λ**> ΛΑΚΕΔΑΙΜΟΝΙỌ[ΙΣ]

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4 Unless the text is misread, and the correct reading is rather: ΚΡΟΝ[Ι]ΔΑ IEY with < I > being the grapheme for Z giving the name ZEY (as suggested by Richard Janko).

(c) Jeffery, *The Local Scripts*, Pl. 37, nr. 49 (c. 490 BC?):
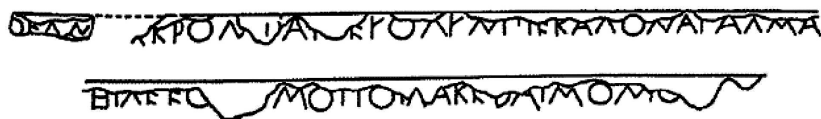
The version in (a) is the reproduction of the text as produced by Pausanias, making it 'smoother' by eliminating some 'strange' dialectal features. However, the second version of the text offers the full and actual state of the language of the time and the place it represents, reflecting the reading of the inscription given in (c). The inscription itself performs the task that the historical linguist would have to do, to reconstitute the old features of the language of the inscription and add them back to the text. In this case, we have a ready-made solution, but in most other cases this is not so, and we must do the corrective or reconstructive procedure, adding an element of plausibility to the reconstruction, which is usually quite different from the certainty that the inscription itself gives us.[5] This example illustrates the modus operandi in the reconstructive work, since the bridging of the gap between imagined and real corresponds to bridging the gap between what one imagines the past to have been like with the actual picture of the past, thus offering a rational solution to a mismatch between real and hypothetical. For a more complex case, see the discussion in section 4 below.

However, this is only a small sample by way of illustration of what issues one faces when dealing with the past in general. A total picture of the past is simply and plainly impossible because it is absent as a present reality; it is a reality of some

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5 It was a happy development for the knowledge of the past the discovery of the oldest texts, first inscriptions and then whole narrative texts, those "bricks baked in Hell and written by the demons" (see Chiera 1957 [1933], 42), as said somewhere in the Quran for the old texts of Sumer written on clay tablets and baked in fire to last in time. Along with other testimonies of material nature, these tablets have served as the diaries of the human past, telling the story that modern man made of this past. As said by George G. Cameron in the preface to Chiera's book 1957, vi: "[…] the minor finds of archeology, could tell but half a tale without the inscriptions; that they and the texts on clay, stone, and parchment are mutually complementary; that the one interprets the other and is incomplete without the other". Coupled by finds of other fields of antiquity, the textual evidence has a narrative power that is the loudest of all as it speaks directly and clearly; all other evidence, no matter how important it is, remains supplementary to the philological and linguistic analysis of the textual material. For instance, we know of the Shield of Achilles from the detailed description of Homer (*Il.* 18.478–608), and not from any material finds of it; its later imagined recreations are based on the Homeric text regarding its structure and depictions.

other time and place different from ours. Perhaps, it is preferable this way: the past is a common property to us all, thus qualified by a multiplicity of sorts, but its reception is a personal matter; there are as many pasts as are individual eyes that gaze at it, minds to contemplate it, or individual moments that this past is dealt with — a "plurality of histories" one would say: another long series of notions and actions prefixed with πολυ- 'multi-, many-, much-', polymorphous, multileveled and multangular. As further put by Gumbrecht 2003, 22: "Whenever the tradition is made to speak to us, *something comes forth that was not there before.* This can be exemplified by any historical content. Whether it is a work of poetry or the knowledge of an important event, what gives itself in the tradition *will come into existence as something new each time,*" what we could call 'emergent past' or still better 'ever emergent past', or, as put by Schwindt (this volume), "[...] philology is the '*perpetuum mobile*' of forming traditions", capping this apophthegmatic phrase by adding in an explanatory guise the sentence, "The unrest is the best gift philology may give us" (see further Swenson 2013). The field of mythology provides a good parallel here: myths are (and stay) relevant to us today in so far as we re-interpret them and update them to today's concerns, i.e. in so far as they are remythologized. Roy Harris defines myth as "[...] a cultural fossil, a sedimented form of thinking that has gone unchallenged for so long that it has hardened into a kind of intellectual concrete" (2002, 1). Thus, old myths fill our lives today as "intellectual concrete", just as do so many other old things; tradition is powerful and having become "a sedimented form of thinking", the more we try to get disentangled from it the more immersed in it we seem to become. So is the past in general, be that myth, language, literature, history of ideas, art, all that we term 'past' (see also Robert 1881, Shapiro 1994). Therefore, as subjects at the present time, if we are the mediators (*interpreters*) between the past and the future, the past follows us, because it is with(in) us, an "ever present presence". We seem to be carriers of the past, or perhaps even its offspring, as we are also its creators by re-creating and re-generating it. However, as things stand, we are condemned to live with the past ever mingling it with and transforming it into the present. And this turns out to be what philologists have been always doing, translating the past into the present and projecting it onto the future. In this sense, perhaps this defines somehow the future of the past, i.e. its potential of keeping its translatability (thus also its transmissibility) to all presents imaginable, and this is no fast process but takes time, it takes patience, perseverance and endurance; it simply becomes renewable and re-knowable (i.e. re-interpreted), in perpetual flux and enrichment, it thus becomes eternal and somehow immortalized, with the fundamental processes for this being *interpretatio* and *translatio,* interpretation and

transference (cf. μεταφέρειν earlier) of the past onto the present.[6] This process (or pattern) of transference may look linear but in reality it follows a curvy course as is infiltrated by the modern sieve of understanding, giving in the end a new shape as is reinterpreted on each occasion and each period of time: things remain similar but not identical; they are transformed through history into new or renewed forms and functions (what is called by Harris the 'iterative transference model', p. 11). Harris further adds:

> As is indicated in the famous dictum attributed to Simonides of Ceos (that painting is mute poetry and poetry a speaking picture), it has long been assumed in the Western tradition that two apparently disparate forms of communicational enterprise — pictorial and verbal — go hand-in-glove: there is a deep level of collusion between them. But it is a *cultural collusion*, built up over many centuries by *social demands and practices*; not a correspondence automatically built into our brains, or the brains of our primitive ancestors. Nevertheless, so familiar has it become in Western thinking that *it now passes unnoticed* (or, which amounts to the same thing, is regarded as *'natural'*) (Harris 2002, 8–9; emphasis added).

The transference of the past to the present is a "cultural collusion" (a dynamic process of repeated becomings), stipulated by the "social demands and practices" over time (regenerated and reinterpreted), it thus "passes unnoticed" and ends up being "natural": this amounts to what *tradition* is.

And yet we should not forget that reading the past, thus philology, is the basic prerequisite of history and historical knowledge, therefore of tradition. History, then, in both its general sense and in its etymological conception as 'knowledge; inquiry', knowledge that comes to us from knowing and narrating (i.e. re-telling) the past, from becoming an ἵστωρ (a term cognate to ἱστορία and English *wisdom* or German *wissen*, all from root **woid-* 'know', cf. verb ϝοῖδα), thus 'one who knows; a wise man', in the original sense of the word as conceived by Homer or Hesiod and the early authors.[7] By the way, the connection of these concepts, i.e. of history and historical knowledge, is both a linguistic and an intellectual operation; it is linguistic because language and its knowledge reveals it open right in front of us in a telling way saying something about its 'inner spirit' (to use an anachronistic term of early linguistic practice of the 18th–19th centuries), i.e. its germinal sense, and its relation to reality and to things, i.e. its real reference, in what came to be known under the rubric "Words and Things" (Germ. *Wörter und Sachen*); it is also an intellectual

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6 However, together with Ankersmit, a clarification is in order: "Interpretation is not translation. The past is not a text that has to be *translated* into narrative historiography, it has to be *interpreted*" (1994, 33).

7 The term ἱστορία in the modern sense of history is first introduced by Herodotus, but the association of history with inquest is as old as the term itself.

operation, because it takes precisely the knowledge and ability to read the past as a *histor* and interpret it in its original context and its subsequent development as well as its relevance to modern man. This procedure is a holistic approach, what was captured by Boeckh's idea of *Encyklopädie*, where history becomes at the same time the *explanans* and the *explanandum*, both the means to interpret and explain things and the thing itself to be explained. Along with Turner, we can assure ourselves that, "Because philology's legacy survives in ways we build knowledge today, the excavation of the philological past becomes an effort at once of historical reconstruction and present-day self-understanding" (2014, xiii). And these are the tools of the language and its analysis.

On the other hand, etymology is a procedure that combines hermeneutics and history with linguistics, i.e. good philology and historical knowledge, two fundamental pillars of interpretation. Anttila puts this combinatory approach in the following way:

> The intimate connection between hermeneutics and history should be a truism, as well as the identity of history and philology. These are transitive notions, and thus also philology and semiotic are drawn together. In short, all four integrally engage concepts like *anamnesis, research, re-enactment, knowledge of what is known*, "imposition of order into chaos" [...]. Or this kind of semiosis is detective work, nicely emphasized by etymology (Anttila 2000, 10; emphasis added).

History seems to be the all-pervading force, clarifying what otherwise remains vague or dark, an idea captured by Hans-Georg Gadamer in the emblematic dictum: "[...] what makes sense can be understood at sight, and what does not can be understood 'historically'" (2004, 182). This statement may be used as a general guide in our inquiry. Classical philology is not an introverted, inner-looking and static discipline, nor is it confined to the strict technical temporal borders in which we usually understand this discipline, the study of classical antiquity alone. Like languages, classical philology has its own rapprochements, prehistoric relatives, ancient siblings, and more recent descendants. Antecedents and descendants are historical concepts, that of siblings is a comparative notion and will be dealt with in the next section. For now, the historical dimension is our concern. It should, however, be noted that although the concept of origins is historical, it is often approached through comparison and is intertwined with the notion of cognacy, i.e. the genetic relation among languages.

This aspect of classical philology is (or should be) of special interest to philologists as is, by definition, to historical and comparative linguists or comparatists in general. There has been and still is a rich activity in this area, although there is always a danger of losing the measure and creating a loose frame where everything goes. It goes without saying that this perspective should be kept in check and not

allow a havoc (Anttila's "chaos", see above) to develop. With respect to this point, Michel Foucault emphasizes the role of history in humanities but at the same time hints at the dangers and the lurking pitfalls:

> History constitutes, therefore, for the human sciences, a favourable environment which is both privileged and dangerous. To each of the sciences of man it offers a *background*, which establishes it and provides it with a *fixed ground* and, as it were, a *homeland*; it determines the cultural area — the chronological and geographical boundaries — in which that branch of knowledge can be recognized as having validity; but it also surrounds the sciences of man with a frontier that limits them and destroys, from the outset, their claim to validity within the element of universality (Foucault 1966 [1970]: 405; emphasis added).

As will be seen next, the "background", the "fixed ground" and the "homeland" of classical philology are supplemented — perhaps more correctly, are defined and determined — in addition to history, also by comparison, foremost the comparison between genetically related linguistic (and perhaps philological) traditions.[8] In this way, one can trace the course (beginnings and procedures) as well as the spinning of the thread (the relations) that links the past with the present, even with the future, of classical philology. But this thread is full of knots, meeting points with the course of other traditions, some of which may be of genetic relation but also of typological nature, a major concern of debate and dispute in many quarters today, not only in philological studies.

As becomes clear here, knowledge of the past involves a kind of re-enactment, which of course is an issue of interpretation, and thus of application of the historical method. For historical linguistics in particular, this re-enactment identifies with the reconstruction of older — as a rule unattested — stages of the languages. Such a 're-enactive' and 're-constructive' process in language inevitably also has some implications to philological investigation, as the research perspective is expanded and receives a special power to penetrate the linguistic past more effectively. As stated in a characteristic way by Lass 1997, 24: "The past is not after all anything very special; it's simply a present that doesn't exist any more," or to remind ourselves of the famous dictum by Benedetto Croce, "all history is contemporary history." Lass goes further saying that one makes steps towards studying and interpreting the past by utilizing the state of things and the lessons of the present (what is captured under the so-called Uniformitarian Principle),[9] adding (1997, 24):

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8 As samples of this procedure, one could see works like Benveniste 1969/1973, Durante 1970 and 1976, Watkins 1995 with many predecessors, and in a wider philological and cultural context, West 2007; in a more formal(istic) approach, see Schmitt 1967, and Matasović 1996.

9 See, among others, Christy 1983, Morpurgo Davies 1998, 210 *et passim*.

> The apparently harmless *re-* of 'reconstruction' may be (benignly) disingenuous. The past's apparently peculiar ontological status allows us to encounter it only indirectly, through theoretical judgements about what we take to be its witnesses; and even some of these are themselves products of theoretical operations. A subject matter like this must be based on some kind of rational standards; if the past itself is unavailable, the only possible source for them is enabling argumentation based on projections from the present.

Carr 1987, 22 has this to say on this: "But a past act is dead, i.e. meaningless to the historian, unless he can understand the thought that lay behind it. Hence 'all history is the history of thought', and 'history is the re-enactment in the historian's mind of the thought whose history he is studying'. The reconstitution of the past in the historian's mind is dependent on empirical evidence. But it is not in itself an empirical process, and cannot consist in a mere recital of facts", and this requires on the part of the historian a good amount of *re-flective* thinking. Similarly, as stated by Ankersmit 1994, 84, we cannot really verify any statement about the past as the past no longer exists. What we can do instead is what we normally do, namely make inferences about the past and build constructions of it by means of the fragmented evidence that we have in our disposal today, or as put by Ankersmit himself, "[...] whether we see historical narrative as a conjunction of statements or as a whole, in neither case can we meaningfully speak of a correspondence between historical reality and historical narrative" (1994, 87), and again, he issues the warning that "showing (the past) and suggesting a proposal (as to how the past should be looked at) form a road to knowledge of the past and an indication of how to deal with it" (1994, 88), and still further, "Historical insight has no cognitive character but is essentially a proposal as to how the past should be looked at. *It is not knowledge but an organization of knowledge*" (p. 95; emphasis added). In other words, the 'reading' of the past is an attempt or a proposal about the past; this past is then the product of interpretation, the usage of all faculties available to man to understand it.

In his work *The future of science* (reference in Parry 1971, 2), the 19th-century French orientalist Ernest Renan asks the following important epistemological question with regard to the points discussed above: "How can we grasp the physiognomy and originality of primitive literatures, if we do not penetrate into the moral and intimate life of the nation, if we do not place ourselves on the same standpoint of humanity which it occupied, in order to see and to feel as it did; if we do not watch its life, or rather if we do not share its life, if only for a moment?" (1891, 273). The crucial point here is "watch its life" or better still "share its life", what historical work *qua* and *via* philology really does.

The study of the past is no simple matter; it rather is a complex issue, and we can superficially touch it here and only in so far as there is a direct relevance to the

topics to be discussed below.[10] When referring to the historical method and what is meant by historical knowledge, Collingwood states:

> Historical knowledge is the knowledge of what mind has done in the past, and at the same time it is the *redoing* of this, the *perpetuation of past acts in the present.* Its object is therefore not a mere object, something outside the mind which knows it; it is an activity of thought, which can be known only in so far as the knowing mind *re-enacts* it and knows itself as so doing. To the historian, the activities whose history he is studying are not spectacles to be watched, but *experiences to be lived through* in his own mind; they are objective, or known to him, only because they are also subjective, or activities of his own (Collingwood 1946, 218; emphasis added).

In plain words, 're-doing', 're-enactment' and 're-living' of the past, of "a-no-longer existing historical reality" (Ankersmit 1994, 85), delineate the historian's task, which is that he seeks to capture the spirit of a past event or a series of past events that are the subject of his investigation. Such a re-enactment of the past will make easier the interpretation of this event in an objective way. A little later Collingwood explains his thought saying that historical knowledge is "that special case of memory where the object of present thought is past thought, the gap between present and past being bridged not only by the power of present thought to think of the past, but also by the power of past thought to reawaken itself in the present" (1946, 294).

All these are complex and tantalizing issues that continue to feed heated debates among the specialists, philologists and historical linguists alike. Perhaps the following statement by the historical linguist Raimo Anttila points to the right direction as to how to tackle the matter. He says (1989, 385–386):

> One can grasp the concept of truths like the Pythagorean theorem or the comparative method, one can explain realities like thunder and lightning, but one must *understand* historical deeds and movements, personalities, and works of art. Conception, explanation, and understanding are important factors in historical study [...]. To understand means to be able to set oneself into the assumed circumstances and to see the (mental) relations of things [...]. We study history in order to make the present understandable through the past, but the past would be inaccessible to us, if we could not use our own experience to interpret the traces of past life and societies. In other words, *synchrony*, *diachrony*, and *syncrisis* are intimately connected, as in linguistics (emphasis added).

We can only add that history and historical knowledge are not mere events in a line of development from past to the present, but a synthesis of all types of movement, synchronic pictures and diachronic maneuverings, leaps and slowdowns, direct but

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10 For a general survey, see the essays in *Encyclopédie de la Pléiade*, vol. A: *Histoire et ses méthodes*; see further Carr 1987 and Cannadine 2002.

mainly oblique and sideways movements: all these characterize the course of history and thus also of its interpretation. In a similar vein, Posner quite emphatically states that "[...] philology is the life-blood of historical linguistics. [...] as diachronic linguistics requires theoretical support from synchronic linguistics, synchronic study would itself be crippled without the insights provided by a historical perspective" (1990, 349). It is this historical perspective that becomes a common topos in our quest here, but with a comparative purview as well, two perspectives that are integral parts of both historical linguistics and classical philology.

To further strengthen this character of historical interpretation, we appeal to comparison as stated by Richard Martin who says: "What experimentation is to science, comparison should be to philology — a way to test hypotheses and produce new ones that account for more of the data, more economically" (2003, 119). However, what one compares and for what purpose matters, but the essence of the matter remains the same: Comparison may bring to philology another perspective and, who knows, perhaps new horizons. To this end Martin continues his argument by adding the claim that "In fact, a twenty-first-century philology without strong affiliations to social anthropology, folkloristics, and performance study is increasingly untenable and in danger of exhausting itself on hermetic quests into the endlessly intertextual" (ibid.).

The comparative approach should not be understood as a rejection or replacement of the method established in each of the disciplines of historical and comparative linguistics and philology; what is intended instead by our reference to it is to guide a confluence of various techniques into a common middle line and cast thus a "third intermediary glance" and another possibility of viewing the research subject(s) of historical linguistics and philology. We should let Calvert Watkins speak of this approach in his own characteristic manner (1995, 11):

> The Greek poet Pindar was a historical personage, who practiced his craft and earned his livelihood commemorating in song the accomplishments and virtues of other contemporary personages of a specific historical time and place, Greece and Sicily of the 5th century B.C. Pindar was a product of his own times. But it can only increase our awe before his genius to know that in some of his formulas and themes, some of his genres and subgenres, some of his training and his role in society, he was still part of a cultural tradition, verbally expressed, which reached back thousands of years. It can by the same token only enhance our wonder at Pindar's art to hear his elemental words of water, gold, and fire echoing and reverberating from Celtic ringforts to Indic ritual enclosures:
>
> ἄριστον μὲν ὕδωρ, ὁ δὲ χρυσὸς αἰθόμενον πῦρ
> ἅτε διαπρέπει νυκτὶ μεγάνορος ἔξοχα πλούτου
>
> (Pind. *Ol.* I.1–2).

> Best is water, but gold like burning fire
> by night shines out beyond all lordly wealth

The comparison of prehistoric languages implies comparison of prehistoric social conventions as well. The reconstruction of cultural features by means of lexical analysis is the province of linguistic paleontology, which together with etymology is the most composite type of reconstruction and for which one employs all available approaches and all related disciplines. We could define culture as a system of concepts, symbols, associations, acts and ways of behavior and attitudes of a group of people or of a society. All elements of this system have a close association with the language, not so much as a system of correspondences — which is rather difficult to prove and most likely not true — but as a communication system by means of its symbols. However, at least according to one school of thought, language is not merely the way the world is expressed linguistically but it is also a means of reorganizing this world through its symbolic system (see, among others, Humboldt, Sapir, Whorf and others and the idea of linguistic relativism).

As a communication system, language can be studied as an autonomous system with its own structure, function and development. Yet, it is also part of society and social evolution, and at the same time the mechanism expressing it by means of its system of symbols of communication (*signes de communication*; cf. Benveniste 1974, 91ff.). Thus, language is a functional part of the sociohistorical and cultural context of the society that operates with and reflected on these symbols. In this sense, the study of language is also a guide to social reality. The fundamental vehicle in this activity is the lexicon of the language and the establishment of its meaning in the course of time. As remarked by Palmer:

> In plotting the sense-range of words we register the contextual (i.e. collocational) distributions (this is their purely linguistic distribution) and their cultural distributions, that is the situations in which they are found to occur. In tracing the ramifications of meaning the linguist [...] will find himself compelled to take into account the whole range of human concerns [...]. Precisely because speech is embedded in the speaker's world, it is often possible to deduce from language information about historical contacts, social structure, religious beliefs and practices, folklore, techniques, and so on (Palmer 1972, 341).

In the spirit of these words, next we will consider one final example that highlights the comparative method and its merits in 'defining' the future of the past.

4 On the linguistics-and-philology partnership: name-giving in Indo-European

By way of exemplifying how this reconstructive work is conducted in language and its possible impact on social institutions and beliefs, lets us briefly discuss and summarize the procedure in one area, namely the name-giving act in ancient Indo-European societies, by appealing to linguistic and philological material.[11]

Throughout ancient Indo-European languages we have a peculiar usage of the lexical collocation 'fashion a name; put/place a name' in name-giving expressions, in what seems to be a lexical syntagma deriving from PIE *(H)nomṇ dhē-* which was used on special occasions at name-giving ceremonies and rituals.

Etymologically (and in some cases also semantically) equivalent expressions reflecting a common inheritance are found in many IE branches like Gk. ὄνομα τίθεσθαι (also verb ὀνοματοθετέω and noun ὀνοματοθεσία), Skt. *nā́ma dhā-* (cf. also the terms *nāmadhéya*, *nāmakaraṇa* 'name-making/-giving'), Hitt. *laman dai-* (with initial *l-* equaling *n-*), Lat. *nomen faciō* and *nomen in-dō*, and more similar expressions from other languages.

Below we give the philological documentation of the linguistic facts of this formulaic expression that seems to support the cultural interpretation that follows.

4.1 Indic

In the oldest text of the Indic branch, the RigVeda, we find the combination of the verb *dhā* 'put; make' with the word *nā́ma* 'name' in hymns whose context is clearly ritual or in invocations to various divinities. The formula *nā́ma dhā-* seems to occupy a central position in these contexts, sanctifying as it were the overall occasion or the event of placing the name, as in the following passages (translations of the Vedic excerpts are taken from Jamison/Brereton 2014; the relevant items are emphasized in bold characters):[12]

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11 For a more detailed discussion of this formulaic expression in name-giving contexts, see Giannakis 1997, 105–116; cf. also Ivanov 1981, 139ff. and Hahn 1969.
12 Other relevant passages from the RigVeda are: 1.155.3, 1.185.1, 9.75.2, 10.5.2, 10.71.1, and more can be found in other Indic texts.

RV 10.49.2ab

mā́ṃ **dhur** índaraṃ **nā́ma** devátā
diváś ca gmáś ca apā́ṃ ca jantávaḥ

Upon me they **conferred the name** Indra among the gods — the creatures
of heaven and earth and of the waters.

RV 1.6.4

ā́d áha svadhā́m ánu
púnar garbhatvám eriré
dádhānā nā́ma yajñíyam

Certainly, just after that they once again roused his embryonic state
[= kindled the fire] according to his nature,
acquiring for themselves a **name** worthy of the sacrifice.

RV 6.48.21cd

tveṣáṃ śávo **dadhire nā́ma** yajñíyam
marúto vṛtrahā́ṃ śávo

the Maruts **assume** his vibrant power, his sacrificial **name** — his
Vṛtra-smashing power.

RV 1.103.4

tád ūcúṣe mā́nuṣemā́ yugā́ni
kīrténiyam maghávā nā́ma bíbhrat
upaprayán dasyuhátyāya vajrī́
yád dha sūnúḥ śrávase **nā́ma dadhé**

This is for him who is accustomed to it. Bearing the name "bounteous," a
name to be celebrated through these human generations,
the mace-bearer was advancing to smash the Dasyus when he **took for
himself the name** "son (of strength)" for fame.

In a different genre of Indic literature, the *Gṛhyasūtras* (various rules for domestic
rites), we find a description of a name-giving ritual whereby the collocation *nā́ma
dhā-* is used for giving the name to the newborn. In fact, the very name of this ritual,
nāmadheya 'name-placing' or 'name-making', is a combination of *nā́ma* and a nom-
inal derivative of the root **dheh₁-* (Indic *dhā-)*. The underlying idea is that a name

is 'fashioned' for the newborn and then 'placed' upon it as its most distinctive feature. Note, for instance, RV 10.71.1ab, *bṛ́haspate prathamáṃ vācó ágraṃ/yát praírata nāmadhéyaṃ dádhānāḥ* 'O Bṛhaspati, (this was) the first beginning of Speech: when they [= the seers] came forth, giving names'. Besides *nāmadhéya*, in Sanskrit, also the terms *nāmakaraṇa* (from *náma* and *kṛ* 'make') and *náma dā-* 'name-giving' are used. The distinction between these terms is not always clear, but they all seem to be old. This ceremony preserves an important feature of the name-giving ritual, the placing of the child on the knees of the father (e.g., *Kauś. CS.* 58.14ff.). Placing the child on the knees of the father may also explain, in addition to other features of the ritual, the use of specifically the verb *dhā-* with its two meanings, 'make' and 'place'. We will return to this point later.

4.2 Greek

Ancient Greek provides equally strong evidence, ranging from the earliest attestation of the literary language to Hellenistic and koine times. We will limit the discussion to only a few examples. First, let us look at the following passage from Homer's *Odyssey* 19.401–404:

> τόν ῥά οἱ Εὐρύκλεια φίλοις ἐπὶ γούνασι **θῆκε**
> παυομένῳ δόρποιο, ἔπος τ' ἔφατ' ἔκ τ' ὀνόμαζεν:
> "Αὐτόλυκ', αὐτὸς νῦν **ὄνομ'** εὕρεο ὅττι κε **θῆαι**
> παιδὸς παιδὶ φίλῳ"

> And, as he finished his evening meal, Eurukleia **laid** him
> upon his very knees, and spoke him a word and named him:
> "Autolukos, now find yourself that **name you will bestow**
> on your own child's dear child". (tr. R. Lattimore)

For our purposes, this passage is doubly interesting: not only does it attest the lexical combination ὄνομα ... θῆαι (the verb is from the root **deh₁-*), but it also makes reference to the practice of placing the child on the father's (here it is the grandfather's) knees in the context of offering him his name. In the same context, a few lines later (l. 406), Autolykos answers by saying, γαμβρὸς ἐμὸς θυγάτηρ τε, **τίθεσθ' ὄνομ'** ὅττι κεν εἴπω 'my son-in-law and daughter, give him the name I tell you', where again the formula τίθεσθε ὄνομα is used. Similarly in *Od.* 18.5, Ἀρναῖος δ' **ὄνομ**' ἔσκε: τὸ γὰρ **θέτο** πότνια μήτηρ ἐκ γενετῆς 'he had the name Arnaios, for thus the lady his mother called him from birth'. Cf. also *Od.* 8.554.

As amply explained by Hahn (1969), this formula is not restricted to naming a child only, but its application extends to naming other objects, a city for instance,

as in Aristoph. *Birds* 809–810, πρῶτον **ὄνομα** τῇ πόλει/**τίθεσθαί** τι μέγα καὶ κλεινόν 'first give the city a name, big and famous'. A few lines later (l. 814) we read again, Σπάρτην ὄνομα καλῶμεν **αὐτήν** 'shall we call it Sparta?', where a different expression, 'to call by a name', of the same type as Latin *urbem Romam nomen nominant* 'they call the city Rome by name' is used (cf. also ὀνομάζω, ὀνομαίνω, etc. used in similar ways but without the heavy semantic and cultural load that the specific formula carries). But again in the next line of the same passage we have a switch back to the formula under consideration: Σπάρτην γὰρ ἂν **θείμην** ἐγὼ τῇμῇ πόλει '(the name) Sparta I would give to my city' (with the noun ὄνομα understood), and yet in line 817, τί δῆτ' **ὄνομ' αὐτῇ θησόμεσθ(α)** 'what name then shall we put on it?', the full formula is used.

The same formula is also used in the New Testament, e.g. Mark 3.16, καὶ **ἐπέθηκεν** τῷ Σίμωνι **ὄνομα** Πέτρον, with a Latin translation, ***imposuit*** Simoni ***nomen** Petrus,* and a Gothic rendering, *jah **gasatida** Seimona **namo** Paitrus* 'and he gave (lit. put) Simon the name Peter'. In Mark 3.17 the same combination of words is used and with similar renderings in Latin and Gothic. The Latin and Gothic renderings contain semantic, not etymological, equivalents of the Greek verb ἐπέθηκεν: *imposuit* in Latin, and *gasatida* (from *satjan* 'set') in Gothic.

4.3 Hittite

The evidence from the Anatolian branch is provided by Hittite and is interesting in two respects: first, in preserving the old phraseology of the Indo-European formula, and second, in hinting at a possible institution or ritual of name-giving. In KUB 24.8 iii 7 we read: *nuššiššan šanizzi **lām-an** ^{LU}HUL-lu **daiš*** 'and he gave him the fitting name Bad' (CHD s.v. *lāman*). In Hittite the word *lāman* 'name' is the derivative of PIE **(H)nomn̥* with *l-* for *n-* by dissimilation, and *daiš* is the preterite of *dai-,* from PIE **dheh₁-.* In the same document (l. 13) we read: *nuššikan NÍG.SI.**SÁ**-an **ŠUM-an** **daiš*** 'and he gave him the name Just', where *ŠUM-an = lāman.* In the *Song of Ullikumi* (KUB 33.93 iii 14) we find instead another verb, *pai-* 'give', in a periphrastic combination with *daiš.* The text reads as follows: *nu šanezzi **ŠUM-an** [TUR-li(?) p]e-eš-ki-u-wa-an **daiš*** 'and he (viz. Kumarbi) undertook to bestow [on the child] a fitting name' (CHD s.v. *lāman).* Earlier in this passage, we find a good description of the process of the name-giving ceremony. In translation the text runs as follows (the Hittite text of Ullikummi is m. A III 11–12, after Güterbock 1952, 152ff.):

> And the Fate-Goddesses and [Mother-Goddesses the child lifted (or: took)], [and] on Kumarbi's knees they placed him. Kumarbi over this son to rejoice began, and to fondle him he began, and [his] dear name (or: the dear name [to the child]) to give he began.

Although there are parallel texts in other non-Indo-European traditions of the area (such as Hurrian myths describing similar events, but also in the *Genesis* and elsewhere), judging from the comparative evidence of other Indo-European languages an Indo-European practice is very likely.

4.4 Latin

In Latin there are two verbs, both etymologically originating in the root *$dheh_1$-,* which combine with the word *nomen* in name-giving contexts. These are the verbs *faciō* and (*in-*)*dō.* In addition to the examples from the New Testament mentioned earlier, there is plenty of textual evidence of such collocations from various sources. Hahn 1969, 117–118, 124 cites a number of passages which clearly point to the inherited character of *nomen facere* or *nomen indere*, as the following excerpts:

Plautus *Men.* 77:

> *iuventus **nomen fēcit** Peniculo mihi*

> the young men **made** (for) me the **name** Peniculo.

Men. 1126:

> *Menaechmo **nomen** est **factum** tibi*

> the **name** M. was **made** for you.

Virgil *Georg.* 1.137–38:

> *navita tum stellis numeros et **nomina fēcit** Pleiadas*

> and then the sailor **gave** the stars their number and **name**, Pleiades.

In the next example from Plautus (*Capt.* 69) the verb *indō* is used instead:

> *iuventus **nomen indidit*** (perf. tense) *Scorto mihi*

> the young men **put** upon me the **name** Scorto.

4.5 Germanic

In the Germanic branch we have not etymological but semantic equivalents reflecting this formula. We saw earlier the rendering in Gothic of the passage from the New Testament. In Old English the rendering is done by means of the verb *gesette* with *noma* in the N version, while the W version for Mark 3.16 has the verb *nemde* 'named' in lieu of the formula, but for 3.17 the combination *naman onsette* is used instead. Both *gesette* and *onsette* derive from the verb *sattan* 'set, place'. The other verb which is used in a few cases in combination with 'name' is *scyppan* 'make, fashion' (cf. Mod. Eng. *shape*), as in *Beow.* 78, **scop** him Heort **naman** 'he made/fashioned him the name Heort'. Here again the reference is to a name-giving context, and these examples constitute good evidence for the survival in Germanic of the old poetic formula **(H)nomṇ dheh₁-*.

4.6 Celtic

Although the presence of an etymological equivalent in Celtic is not certain, semantically equivalent expressions are quite common. In Welsh we have the verbs *dodi* and *rodi,* in Cornish the verb *ry,* and in Breton *ober* and the participle *gret,* as in the following examples: For Welsh: *Pwyll* 620, *Gwri Wallt Euryn a dodyssom ni arnaw ef* 'Gwri Golden-Hair is the name that we gave him'; *BDe.* 3.5, *a Dauyd a rodet yn enw arnaw* 'and David was given to him as a name'. For Cornish: *O* 135, *y rofhynwyn the'n pushes* 'I give names to the fishes'. For Breton: *Patrice* 568, *pe hano eta Autro a vo gret anezan?* 'what name, Sir, shall be given to him?'. See also Hahn 1969, 202.[13]

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13 Reconstruction can be conducted not only on the basis of etymological cognates but also by means of semantic equivalents, and the material discussed in this section is a good case in point. As has been stressed by other scholars (e.g. Campanile 1993, Watkins 1995, and others), the lexical means may change or may be partly or wholly replaced by synonyms, but the core of the meaning and the function remains the same. In such cases, the comparative method allows a certain degree of flexibility in its operation, and the comparison can be made on the level of *thematics* rather than on strictly morphophonological or lexical, i.e. etymological grounds. Regarding old formulas and their significance for reconstruction of poetic language, Watkins has this to say 1994, 690: "Cognate formulas, like cognate cultural institutions, may but need not be accompanied by cognate linguistic expression. Lexical substitution and cultural change in the course of millennia may leave only the semantic feature of the original expression present. Put very simply, we have the preservation of the *signifié* (and its associated cultural nexus), but a renewal of the *signifiant*. But this must not mask the fundamental fact of the preservation of an inherited unitary formulaic and thematic 'deep structure'," and completes his understanding of the formula by saying that "*theme* is the deep structure of formula" (1995, 17).

In archaic societies the name was considered an essential part of its carrier, in a way the person identifies with his name.[14] Giving a name to a child was and still is an act of creation. In many cultures one is not considered a 'full person' until one has a name to identify with, whereas in many traditions there is also the belief that the nameless child is vulnerable to many evils, and so by providing the newborn with a name one frees the child from evil and danger.[15] We certainly know how much they valued fame and reputation, much of which is inherited along the family line and is reflected in the name the individual carries, evidenced by expressions like Gk. ὀνομακλυτός, Skt. *náma śrútyam*, or Old Irish *animgnaid* (see *DIL s.v.*), Toch. A *ñom-klyu* and B *ñem-kälywe*, all meaning 'of famous name; renowned', or by the traditional formula κλέ(ϝ)ος ἄφθιτον from Greek and *ákṣiti śrávas* from Sanskrit, 'everlasting fame'.[16]

An important step in the process of naming the child is the holding of the child by the father (or some other close kin, particularly a male member of the family) and placing it in his knees, an act also reflected in the language of the lexical collocation we have been discussing. The use of the verb **dhē-*, which in this context is a prime example of a performative speech act, may refer to the three stages of the name-giving process: first, making a fitting name for the child (one meaning of the verb, cf. Eng. *do* or Lat. *faciō*), second, placing the child on the knees of the father (cf. Gk. ἐπὶ γούνασι θῆκε 'placed on the knees' seen earlier), and finally, giving the name (e.g. ὄνομα ... θῆαι 'you shall bestow a name', and other combinations seen above).

In at least Greek, Hittite, and Sanskrit texts we have some reference to this custom.[17] Terms like Lat. *sublatio*, Greek ἀναιρέω, Old Irish *glūn-daltae, lit.* 'child of knees', and Old Norse *knésetja* 'placing on the knees' also testify to the same fact, especially with regards to the process of adoption. In the Roman tradition, the *pater-familias* can reject or acknowledge paternity by raising the child up to his knees, whereby the child becomes *genuīnus*, i.e., part of the family (a word play, perhaps also (folk) etymological allusion, between *genus* 'birth' and *genu* 'knee'!). In addition to any legal consequences (i.e. adoption of the child), there is a significant symbolism in the act of placing the child on the father's knees, especially with respect to the process of legitimation and giving it a name.

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14 See also Gonda 1970, 7ff.

15 See, for instance, the belief in ancient India seen in *ŚB* 6.1.3.9 (after Gonda 1970, 35): "One should give a name to the boy who is born, for thereby one frees him from evil"; also 6.1.3.20: "To Agni (the great place for the ritual fire) when built up one gives a name; thereby one keeps away evil from him (it)".

16 See Schmitt 1967, 55ff. and 60ff., and especially 91ff.

17 Especially for Hittite, see also Hoffner 1968, 198–203.

4.7 The significance of the knees

One may ask why the knee acquired such an important function. We are not sure of all the reasons and details, but the knee was considered by many peoples as the center of strength, vitality, and generative power, seen in examples like the following from the *Iliad* 4.313–314:

> ὦ γέρον, εἴθ᾽, ὡς θυμὸς ἐνὶ στήθεσσι φίλοισιν,
> ὥς τοι γούναθ᾽ ἕποιτο, βίη δέ τοι ἔμπεδος εἴη

> Aged sir, if only, as your spirit is in your bosom,
> so might your knees be also, and the strength stay steady within you,

or 19.352–354:

> ἡ δ᾽ Ἀχιλλῆϊ
> νέκταρ ἐνὶ στήθεσσι καὶ ἀμβροσίην ἐρατεινήν
> στάξ᾽, ἵνα μή μιν λιμὸς ἀτερπὴς γούναθ᾽ ἵκοιτο

> She dropped the delicate ambrosia and the nectar inside the breast of
> Achilles softly, so no sad weakness of hunger would come on his knees.

The same can be said of numerous other passages, especially of the epics: knees are part of the qualities of the epic heroes as they offer one of the most needed properties, speedy feet (e.g. ὠκύπους 'swift-footed', often said of the epitome of the epic hero Achilles, but also of horses, etc.). The knee was also thought to be the seat of paternity, life and generative power. In this respect it is interesting to note an etymological association frequently made by some Indo-Europeanists between the words for 'knee', *gonu,* and 'produce, give birth', *genh₁-,* also seen in Latin between the words *genu* 'knee' and *genus* 'birth' referred to above. Such associations may belong to the stock of folk-etymology, but for the study of social institutions this does not really matter.

5 Pragmatics and the metaphorical context

We should emphasize here an important parameter in the reconstructive operation which relates to the pragmatic aspects of the use of a certain lexical collocation that seems to underlie an element of cultural history. Pragmatics is a crucial criterion in that it functions as a check that measures the degree of realism of the reconstructions. This criterion involves the matching of formal with material elements, i.e. the

linguistic evidence is matched by evidence from related disciplines, such as philology, history, archaeology, ethnology, myth, etc., in other words the interdisciplinarity of the procedure takes first position once again. A reconstruction must fit the historical and cultural *realia* of the specific cultures compared, as elegantly put by Matasović 1996, 92:[18]

> Comparative (genetic) pragmatics can be thought of as a discipline that explores how the relations between author, text, and society are realized in linguistic communities that use genetically related languages. The results of such research can then be used to reconstruct these relations for the PIE linguistic community. In such a way, comparative pragmatics stands in between comparative linguistics and the comparative theory of culture, because it synthesizes and relates the results of both of these disciplines.

However, much of linguistic expression and function is metaphorical, i.e., the meaning comes not in a straight and direct way but often follows oblique paths in its realization through metaphors. Metaphors are cultural artifacts, that is, they deal not so much with language as a system of forms and rules as with the social function of language as a means of communication with clear reference and anchorage to place, time, cultural and situational context. Thus, the interpretation of metaphors is only possible through the knowledge of the wider sociohistorical and cultural context which generates and feeds the specific metaphors each time.

Metaphor is an inherent feature of human language, but it is in poetic language where it is fully exploited. It is the way of putting together form and meaning that makes the connotative function possible, i.e. the metaphorical usage of language. It is worth quoting here a passage from Wellek/Warren with regards to this relation. They say:

> Instead of dichotomizing 'form-content', we should think of matter and then of 'form', that which aesthetically organizes its 'matter'. In a successful work of art, the materials are completely assimilated into the form: what was 'world' has become 'language'. The 'materials' of a literary work of art are, on one level, words, on another level, human behaviour experience, and on another, human ideas and attitudes. [...] in a successful poem or novel they are pulled into polyphonic relations by the dynamics of *aesthetic purpose* (1956, 241).

In this passage, there is reference to an important feature of poetic language, the "aesthetic purpose", which in a way creates the conditions and the demand for a harmonious agreement between material (i.e., the world at large and our knowledge or perception of it), form and meaning. It is precisely such an aesthetic purpose which, in a multitude of ways, mechanisms and means, disturbs the norms and the

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18 See also Campanile 1974, 253–254.

established rules in the organization of language and builds its marked types, like metaphors, which are part of poetic language. The lexical collocation that we examined by way of illustrating the workings of the comparative method is precisely such a linguistic expression, and for the gleaning of its meaning there is no simple one-to-one or linear approach. Instead, the triptych *synchrony*, *diachrony*, and *syncrisis* seems to be the sole path of 'reading' its denotative value together with all its connotations: aesthetics is fully ingrained in this procedure, as is in all interpretation of the past, an idea best exemplified in works of art other than texts, e.g. sculptures, paintings, architectural structures, or even myth, and other representational works.

What we did here is primarily a sociohistorical linguistic and cultural reconstruction, that is trying to recreate the *background* or the context that supports an old institution, but the implication may also concern us today in the sense that we realize how deeply rooted in the tradition certain things still are. The important point to be made with this example is that philology and historical linguistics combined into a method of analyzing and interpreting a fragment of old poetic language, also reconstructing a fragment of cultural history, ultimately an old institution. This may not be irrelevant to modern humanity in that these things live on in modern societies regardless of whether one notices them, or they remain unnoticed: they simply underlie individual or collective behaviors, attitudes, deeply ingrained in our social context beliefs, and ultimately religious or cultural institutions that still define and determine our lives today.

6 Concluding note

Classical philology and historical linguistics are disciplines of the past. In this sense, they are reflective and retrograde enterprises, as using the methodological experience of the present they seek to reconstruct, in an abductive and deductive manner, and reconstitute a picture of the past. Here a number of crucial methodological issues are raised concerning the historian's attitude towards the subject of his research such as how to make the data selection, the trustworthiness of the sources, the hierarchy of the available evidence or filling existing gaps in it, how the present relates to the past, how far can the interdisciplinary approach reach, how realistic or plausible are the reconstructions and how can the historian safeguard against all sorts of dangers and overgeneralizations, and many more similar issues. All these questions concern the core of historical research and largely determine the method applied and consequently the results obtained; they are ultimately questions of all disciplines that study the past, wholly or individually for the entire

Alterthumswissenschaft. This has always been like that. Now the issue is how to keep this τέχνη alive and strong and to expand it into new territories and meet new challenges, or, to use Ordine's wording, to (re)assert "the usefulness of the useless", i.e. "[...] the idea of the usefulness of those forms of knowledge whose essential value is wholly free of any utilitarian end" (quoted from the English translation 2017, 1). One's reply to this challenge is also the measure of one's vision and contribution to its future. One would say that this future is both its past, its present and its future combined: retention and innovation are two key terms that come to mind as a possible solution. The former keeps the long tradition and the rich heritage alive; the latter transfuses new and fresh blood into this tradition. The two can lead to something that looks like the old but is also different from it. And as 'fashion' seems to sweep the path of the new, and new trends, shifts and drifts appear, also by way of rebaptizing and revamping programs of study and curricula or even institutions, learned societies and other such organizations that deal with the past (e.g. Society for Classical Studies for the up to a few years ago American Philological Association (established in 1869), or Historische Sprachforschung/Historical Linguistics for previous (since 1852) Zeitschrift für Vergleichende Sprachforschung, etc.), the future of philology may also involve some renaming! Normally, such changes come as the result of shifting or changing attitudes, if not of paradigms (in Kuhn's sense or, in fact, we have instead of 'canon-replacement' a 'canon-appropriation', on which see Finkelberg, this volume), in the way the scholarly community views the field, and this is precisely what happened in the above two cases. It is not clear whether the study of the classical world is undergoing a "pre-paradigm period" and therefore is in a transitional phase into something new or it is simply a momentary 'crisis' or 'turn'. In Kuhn's sense again, a pre-paradigm period is "[...] regularly marked by frequent and deep debates over legitimate methods, problems, and standards of solution" (1962, 47–48): the future will show what direction things go and mainly what characteristics the future of the past will choose to be identified with.

In concluding, it would be fitting to have 'the word come out of the horse's mouth'; thus, we will have Friedrich Nietzsche utter the closing statement and answer the question often posed in the opening paragraph of this study. In his book *The Dawn: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality* (§ 5) he says, among other things:

> "[...] Philology is now more desirable than ever before; thus it is the highest attraction and incitement in an age of 'work': that is, of haste, of unseemly and immoderate hurry-skurry, which is so eager to 'get things done' at once [....] Philology itself, perhaps, will not so hurriedly 'get things done.' It teaches how to read well, that is, slowly, profoundly, attentively, prudently, with inner thoughts, with the mental doors ajar, with delicate fingers and eyes".

After 140 years separating our time from Nietzsche's statement (in 1881), his words are equally valid today as were then: Philology is reading slowly and should stay that, but "with the mental doors ajar".

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Abbreviations

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DIL = *Dictionary of the Irish Language*, Dublin 1983.
EDL = *Etymological Dictionary of Latin and the Other Italic Languages*, by M. de Vaan. Leiden/Boston, 2008.

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