ORIGINS OF THE GREEK VERB

Situated at the crossroads of comparative philology, classics, and general historical linguistics, this study is the first ever attempt to outline in full the developments which led from the remotest recoverable stages of the Indo-European proto-language to the complex verbal system encountered in Homer and other early Greek texts. By combining the methods of comparative and internal reconstruction with a careful examination of large collections of primary data and insights gained from the study of language change and linguistic typology, Andreas Willi uncovers the deeper reasons behind many surface irregularities and offers a new understanding of how categories such as aspect, tense, and voice interact. Drawing upon evidence from all major branches of Indo-European, and providing exhaustive critical coverage of scholarly debate on the most controversial issues, this book will be an essential reference tool for anyone seeking orientation in this burgeoning but increasingly fragmented area of linguistic research.

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ORIGINS OF THE GREEK VERB

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For Jonas, Mirjam, and Lea
Contents

List of Figures ................................. page xix
List of Tables ................................. xxi
Preface ........................................ xxiii
Abbreviations and Conventions ........ xxvii

1 The Greek Verbal System ..................... 1
  1.1 Introduction ................................ 1
  1.1 Variety and Economy in the Verbal System of Ancient Greek .... 1
  1.2–1.6 Verbal Endings ......................... 2
    1.2 Overview ................................ 2
    1.3 Athematic Endings: Active .............. 3
    1.4 Athematic Endings: Middle ............ 5
    1.5 Thematic Endings: Active and Middle . 6
    1.6 Perfect Endings ......................... 8
  1.7–1.8 Modal Stem Markers ................... 9
    1.7 Subjunctive ................................ 9
    1.8 Optative ................................ 10
  1.9–1.13 ‘Tense’ Stems .......................... 12
    1.9 Overview ................................ 12
    1.10 Aorist Stems ............................ 13
    1.11 Present Stems ........................... 15
    1.12 Perfect Stems ............................ 19
    1.13 Future and Future Perfect Stems .... 20
  1.14–1.15 Non-finite Forms ..................... 21
    1.14 Participles and Verbal Adjectives .... 21
    1.15 Infinitives .............................. 22
  1.16–1.18 Approaching Prehistory ............. 23
    1.16 Comparative (External) Observations . 23
    1.17 The Anatolian Challenge ................ 24
    1.18 Systemic (Internal) Observations ..... 25
  1.19 Agenda .................................. 26
    1.19 Agenda .................................. 26

vii
## Contents

2 From Greek to Proto-Indo-European 28

2.1 Introduction 28

2.1 Competing Theories 28

2.2–2.7 The ‘Hoffmann–Strunk Model’ 28

2.2 Hoffmann’s Graeco-Aryan Premise 28

2.3 Root Formations and Root (A)telicity 29

2.4 Radical or Phrasal Telicity? 30

2.5 Characterised Stems and Aktionsarten 31

2.6 Strunk on the Genesis of Tense and Aspect 31

2.7 A Special Role for the s-Aorist? 34

2.8–2.12 Cowgill’s Model and ‘Proto-Indo-Hittite’ 35

2.8 Positioning Anatolian 35

2.9 Cowgill on the Hittite $h$-Conjugation 37

2.10 Cowgill’s ‘Nominal Verbs’ and PIE Aspect 40

2.11 Some Obstacles 42

2.12 Assessment 44

2.13–2.16 Early Aspect I: Jasanoﬀ on the ‘Proto-Middle’ 45

2.13 Jasanoﬀ against Cowgill 45

2.14 The ‘Proto-Middle’ 46

2.15 Jasanoﬀ’s ‘$h$-$e$-Conjugation’ 49

2.16 Reconstructive Aims and Ideologies 50

2.17–2.18 Early Aspect II: Kuryłowicz’s Framework 52

2.17 Telic Verbs and Aspectual Shifts 52

2.18 Shortcomings of Kuryłowicz’s Model 53

2.19 Conclusion 56

2.19 Conclusion 56

3 The Reduplicated Aorist 58

3.1–3.4 Searching for Early Perfectives 58

3.1 Introduction 58

3.2 Eliminating the s-Aorist 59

3.3 Eliminating the Thematic Aorist 60

3.4 The Reduplicated Aorist as the Earliest Perfective Type? 60

3.5–3.14 Greek Reduplicated Aorists: Data and Analysis 61

3.5 Arrangement of the Data Survey 61

3.6 General Observations 61

3.7 Greek Data 62

3.8 Root Structure 62

3.9 Thematic Stem Structure 78

3.10 Reduplication Vocalism and ‘Aritic’ Reduplication 79

3.11 Full ‘Aritic’ Reduplication Patterns (*HeC- Roots) 80

3.12 Full ‘Aritic’ Reduplication in the Perfect 82

3.13 Partial ‘Aritic’ Reduplication Patterns (*HGeC- Roots) 82

3.14 The Reduplicated Aorist as a Relic Category 84
Contents

3.15–3.22 The Reduplicated Aorist in Indo-Iranian 85
3.15 Inherited Reduplicated Aorists 85
3.16 Causative Reduplicated Aorists in Sanskrit 86
3.17 Leumann’s Theory 87
3.18 Inheritance and Innovation in the Causative Aorist 88
3.19 Non-causative Reduplicated Aorists in Sanskrit 90
3.20 Reduplicated Aorists and Pluperfects 91
3.21 Athematic Reduplicated Aorists? 92
3.22 Synopsis 93
3.23–3.25 Reduplicated Aorists in the West (Italic and Celtic)? 94
3.23 Problems of Identification 94
3.24 Theoretical Backing for a Formal Merger 95
3.25 Latin Long-Vowel Perfects 96
3.26–3.31 The Tocharian Reduplicated Preterite 97
3.26 Reduplicated and Long-Vocalic Causative Preterites 97
3.27 The Reduplication Vowel 99
3.28 Non-causative Cognate Formations? 100
3.29 Malzahn’s Theory 100
3.30 An Alternative Proposal 101
3.31 Implications 103
3.32–3.36 The Reduplicated Aorist in Proto-Indo-European 104
3.32 Distributional Arguments for an Archaism 104
3.33 Lexical Illustrations 105
3.34 Kuryłowicz’s ‘Fourth Law of Analogy’ 107
3.35 Scalar (Semantic) Transitivity 107
3.36 Facticity, High Transitivity, and the Reduplicated Aorist 109
3.37–3.42 Excursus on PIE Thematicity and Ablaut 110
3.37 The Reduplicated Aorist as a Thematic Category 110
3.38 Origins of the Thematic Vowel: Phonetics and Phonology 111
3.39 Secondary Thematisation and the Reduplicated Aorist 112
3.40 Reconsidering Long-Vowel Preterites and ‘Acrostatic’ Presents 113
3.41 Notes on PIE Ablaut 114
3.42 Operational Ablaut in the Reduplicated Aorist 116
3.43 Conclusion 116
3.43 Conclusion 116

4 The Reduplicated Present 118
4.1–4.7 Theoretical Considerations 118
4.1 Introduction 118
4.2 Reduplication and Iteration 119
4.3 Sources of Imperfectives 120
4.4 Plurality Types, Nominal and Verbal Aspect 121
4.5 PIE Reduplication from Verbal Collectives? 122
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>Perfective vs. Imperfective Reduplication: Stemmatic Models</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>Reduplicated Presents as Secondary Imperfectives?</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.8-4.14</td>
<td>Hittite Reduplicated Stems</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>Preliminary Remark</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>Classification of Hittite Reduplicated Verbs</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>Analysis of Group (i)</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>Analysis of Group (ii)</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>Formal Analysis of Group (iii)</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.13</td>
<td>Semantic Analysis of Group (iii)</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.14</td>
<td>Atelic Iteration and Bounding</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.15-4.17</td>
<td>Greek Reduplicated Presents</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.15</td>
<td>Reduplicated Presents without Suffix</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.16</td>
<td>Reduplicated Presents with Suffix <em>-je-lo-</em></td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>Presents with ‘Full’ Reduplication and Suffix <em>-je-lo-</em></td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.18-4.25</td>
<td>Formal Reconstruction</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.18</td>
<td>Overview</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.19</td>
<td>Problems of (A)thematicity</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.20</td>
<td>Thematic Primacy</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.21</td>
<td>Indo-Iranian Athemeatisation</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.22</td>
<td>Problems of Root Vocalism</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>Conflicting Analogies</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.24</td>
<td>Problems of Reduplication Vocalism</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>From e-Reduplication to i-Reduplication</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.26-4.33</td>
<td>Semantic Analysis: Vedic and Greek</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.26</td>
<td>Vendryes on the Thematic Reduplicated Presents</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.27</td>
<td>Reduplicated Presents in Vedic Polymorphic Systems</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.28</td>
<td>Polymorphic Reduplicated Presents and Verbal Voice</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.29</td>
<td>The Case of bibharti</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.30</td>
<td>Greek ξεινω/ξειχω, μενω/μεινω, νισωματ/νισωμαι</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.31</td>
<td>Greek Reduplicated Presents without Polymorphic Partners</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.32</td>
<td>Facticity and High Transitivity among Reduplicated Presents</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.33</td>
<td>Intermediate Summary</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.34-4.44</td>
<td>PIE Thematic Presents: Genesis and Distribution</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.34</td>
<td>PIE *CeC-o ‘Statives’</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.35</td>
<td>PIE *CeC-o as a Nominal Form</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.36</td>
<td>Watkins on the Thematic Root Presents</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.37</td>
<td>Phonological Adjustments</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.38</td>
<td>Morphological Adjustments</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.39</td>
<td>Hittite Correspondents to PIE Thematic Root Presents</td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.40</td>
<td>Hittite and PIE Reduplicated Presents</td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.41</td>
<td>A Semantic Query</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The contents of the book are as follows:

4.42 Schematic Summary 191
4.43 Inferior Alternatives to Watkins’s Model 192
4.44 Thematic Root Presents and the Middle Voice 193
4.45–4.48 Systemic Consequences I: The Subjunctive 196
4.45 Thematic vs. Athematic Root Presents 196
4.46 Thematic Indicatives to Subjunctives 197
4.47 Semantic Evolution of the Subjunctive 198
4.48 Long-Vowel Subjunctives 200
4.49–4.52 Systemic Consequences II: Reduplicated Presents 200
4.49 Thematic Presents and Athematic Root Aorists 200
4.50 Reduplicated Presents as Imperfective Gap-Fillers 202
4.51 Perfective and Imperfective Stem Selections 203
4.52 Root-Aorist Subjunctives and ‘New’ Reduplicated Presents 204
4.53 Conclusion 205
4.53 Conclusion 205

5 The Perfect 207
5.1–5.2 Introduction 207
5.1 Divergent Views on Perfect Reduplication 207
5.2 Reduplicated Roots or Reduplicated Stems? 209
5.3–5.9 Formal Prehistory of the Greek Perfect 210
5.3 Perfect, Middle, and ḫi-Conjugation Endings 210
5.4 Perfect Stems with Ablauting o-Grade 211
5.5 Non-ablauting o-Grade Perfect Stems 211
5.6 Perfect Stems to ‘HetC’ Roots 211
5.7 Long-Vowel Perfects 215
5.8 Further Developments and Results of the Perfect-Stem Survey 218
5.9 Middle Perfects 219
5.10–5.13 The Pluperfect 220
5.10 Pluperfects as Pivot Forms 220
5.11 PIE Pluperfects? 221
5.12 Early Active Pluperfects 222
5.13 Later Pluperfects 223
5.14–5.25 Semantics of the Perfect in Greek and Proto-Indo-European 225
5.14 Wackernagel’s Taxonomy 225
5.15 Chantraine’s Classification of Homeric Perfects 227
5.16 Reconsidering Wackernagel’s Taxonomy: ‘Continuous’ Perfects 228
5.17 Perfects of ‘Lasting Effect’ 231
5.18 The PIE Perfect as a ‘Nactostatic’ Category? 232
5.19 The Problem of Root (A)telicity 234
5.20 Intensive Perfects 236
xii

Contents

5.21 'Lexicalised Perfecto-Presents’ 237
5.22 Evolutionary Sequences 239
5.23 'Perfecto-Presents’ in the Evolutionary Sequence 242
5.24 A Slavic Comparandum 244
5.25 A Japanese Comparandum 245
5.26–5.33 A Form/Function Analysis of the PIE Perfect 246
5.26 Kuryłowicz’s Verbal Adjective 246
5.27 Cowgill’s Agentive Nominal 248
5.28 Accentual Matters 249
5.29 Reduplication and Perfect Semantics 250
5.30 *GIC-e Imperfectives I: PIE *wédje 252
5.31 *GIC-e Imperfectives II: Anatolian 252
5.32 *GIC-e Imperfectives III: Germanic and Baltic 254
5.33 Jasanoff’s ‘hje-Conjugation’ Root Presents Reconsidered 255
5.34–5.39 Related Formations I: *CoC-ejelo– ‘Iterative-Causatives’ 257
5.34 The Formal Type 257
5.35 Greek Evidence 259
5.36 Semantic Variation 259
5.37 Iteratives to Factitives? 264
5.38 Denominal Iteratives and Factitives 265
5.39 Relative Chronology 266
5.40–5.42 Related Formations II: Zero-Grade Statives 268
5.40 *CoC-e and *CIC-o 268
5.41 Agentivity and Accent 269
5.42 Zero-Grade Statives 270
5.43 Greek Evidence 273
5.44 Problems of Identification 273
5.45 PIE ‘CC-ejelo– Presents: Form 277
5.46 PIE ‘CC-ejelo– Presents: Function 277
5.47 Relative Chronology 279
5.48–5.50 The Constitution of a ‘Nominal-Verb’/Perfect Paradigm 280
5.48 Singular 280
5.49 Plural: Preliminary Observations 280
5.50 Plural: A Developmental Scenario 281
5.51 Conclusion 284
5.51 Conclusion 284
5.51 Conclusion 284

6 The Thematic Aorist 286
6.1 Introduction 286
6.1 Revisiting Kuryłowicz’s Aorist Chain 286
6.2–6.10 Theories on the Origin of the Thematic Aorist 287
6.2 Kuryłowicz: Another Shifted Imperfective 287
6.3 Distributional Counter-Indications 288
6.4 Cardona: A Thematised Root Aorist 289
6.5 Ablaut Inconsistencies in Indo-Iranian 290
6.6 Lack of Pivot Forms in Greek 293
6.7 Problems of Reconstructive Economy 294
6.8 The Evidence of *(h₁e-)u̯id-e-t 296
6.9 Root Aorists and Thematic Aorists as Synchronic Competitors? 296
6.10 Argumentative Agenda 298

6.11–6.22 The Fate of PIE Root Aorists in Greek 299
6.11 Fully Preserved Root Aorists to *CeH- Roots 299
6.12 κ-Aorists 299
6.13 Partially Preserved Root Aorists: Patterns of Innovation 304
6.14 Assessment 331
6.15 Aorists to *CeRH- Roots: Preliminary Remarks 332
6.16 Grouping the Data 333
6.17 Analysis of Group (i) 337
6.18 Analysis of Group (vii) 338
6.19 Inconsistencies with Roots in *h₁- and *h₂- 339
6.20 Inconsistencies with Roots in *h₂- 340
6.21 A New Scenario 342
6.22 Preferential Selections 343

6.23–6.27 The Thematic Aorist in the PIE Verbal System 345
6.23 A Functional Query 345
6.24 Reduplication and *h₁e-Prefixation 346
6.25 Reduplicated Aorists to Thematic Aorists 347
6.26 Implications for the Augment 348
6.27 Reduplication, Augmentation, and Laryngeal Loss 350

6.28–6.29 The Sanskrit Class VI (tudāti) Presents 351
6.28 Greek ‘tudāti’ Presents? 351
6.29 The Genesis of tudāti Presents 353

6.30 Conclusion 355
6.30 Conclusion 355

7 The Augment 357
7.1 Introduction 357
7.2 The Communis Opinio 357

7.2–7.10 The Augment in Homer 358
7.2 Wackernagel’s Position 358
7.3 Wortumfänge 359
7.4 Augmentation in Compound Verbs 361
7.5 Augmentation and Aorist Types 363
7.6 Augmentation and Iteratives in -σκε/ο- 365
7.7 ‘Drewitt’s Rule’ 366
7.8 Functional Tendencies 368
7.9 Histoire, discours, and the Augment 372
Contents

7.10 Bakker’s ‘Immediacy’ 374
7.11–7.14 Theories on the Origin of the Augment 376
7.11 The Handbook Doctrine 376
7.12 Watkins’s Sentence Connector 377
7.13 An Emphatic Particle? 378
7.14 Intermediate Summary 379
7.15–7.19 Homeric Augmentation and Perfectivity 381
7.15 Reassessing the Data 381
7.16 Unaugmented Modal Forms 384
7.17 Augmented and Perfective Imperfects 385
7.18 Homeric Illustrations 386
7.19 Typological Support 388
7.20–7.22 The Augment in Mycenaean 389
7.20 General Situation 389
7.21 Earlier Explanations 389
7.22 Implicational Neutrality 391
7.23–7.27 The Augment in Phrygian, Armenian, and Iranian 392
7.23 Phrygian 392
7.24 Armenian 392
7.25 Old Persian 394
7.26 Augmented Aorists in Avestan 394
7.27 Augmented Imperfects in Avestan 395
7.28–7.37 The Augment in Vedic 397
7.28 Functions of the Vedic Injunctive 397
7.29 Hoffmann on the Vedic Augment 399
7.30 Hoffmann’s ‘Memorative’ 400
7.31 The Injunctive Paradox 403
7.32 On (Re-)reading the Vedic Injunctive 404
7.33 Vedic Illustrations 405
7.34 Vedic and Early Greek Augmentation 410
7.35 The ‘Aoristic Drift’ 411
7.36 Counter-Evidence from the History of Sanskrit? 413
7.37 The ‘Aoristic Drift’ in Old Indic Diachrony 414
7.38 Conclusion 415
7.38 Conclusion 415
8 The s-Aorist 417
8.1 Introduction 417
8.1 A Mysterious Type 417
8.2–8.11 The Greek s-Aorist 418
8.2 The Creation of an Alphathematic Paradigm 418
8.3 Root Aorists to s-Aorists 421
8.4 s-Presents and s-Aorists 422
8.5 Root Presents and s-Aorists 425
Contents

8.6 Alternative Patterns 432
8.7 The s-Aorist and High Transitivity: Theoretical Considerations 435
8.8 Functional Differentiation among Aorist Types 436
8.9 Factive s-Aorists 437
8.10 Supporting Evidence 439
8.11 Reduplicated Aorists to s-Aorists 440

8.12–8.19 The Greek s-Future 441
8.12 The Aorist-Subjunctive Theory 444
8.13 The Desiderative Theory 443
8.14 Assessment 444
8.15 Greek Middle Futures as Support for the Desiderative Theory? 445
8.16 A Morphological Hypothesis 447
8.17 Data Check 449
8.18 Asigmatic Middle Futures: πῶμαι 450
8.19 βῆμαι and ἔδομαι 451

8.20–8.23 s-Aorists in Italic, Celtic, Slavic, and Baltic 452
8.20 Italic 452
8.21 Celtic 453
8.22 Slavic 457
8.23 Baltic 458

8.24–8.27 The s-Aorist in Indo-Iranian 459
8.24 Medial Primacy in the s-Aorist? 459
8.25 On Aorist-Stem Distribution 462
8.26 Secondary Developments 463
8.27 Independent s-Subjunctives 464

8.28–8.30 Tocharian s-Formations 466
8.28 s-Subjunctives and s-Presents: Overview 464
8.29 Diachronic Interpretation 465
8.30 s-Preterites 468

8.31–8.36 Hittite Comparanda 473
8.31 s-Endings: 3sg. 473
8.32 s-Endings: 2sg. 474
8.33 Root Presents to s-Enlarged Roots 475
8.34 Systemic Placement 476
8.35 The Semantics of s-Enlarged Roots 477
8.36 Hittite Fientives in -ešš- 478

8.37–8.45 Presents in *-skelo- 479
8.37 PIE *skelo- as a Composite Suffix 479
8.38 A Problem of Root Vocalism 480
8.39 k-Enlarged Roots, k-Presents, and Thematic Root Presents 480
8.40 Middle Presents in *skelo- 482
8.41 The Presents in *-skelo- as Secondary Imperfectives 483
Contents

8.42 On the Aktionart Values of *-sk̑e/lo- 484
8.43 Greek Unreduplicated Presents in *-sk̑e/lo- 484
8.44 Greek Reduplicated Presents in *-sk̑e/lo- 485
8.45 Reduplicated Presents in *-sk̑e/lo- outside Greek 488
8.46–8.52 Ablaut in the PIE s-Aorist 489
8.46 Regular s-Aorist Vocalism in Greek and Indo-Iranian 489
8.47 Lengthened-Grade Evidence outside Indo-Iranian 490
8.48 The s-Aorist as an ‘Acrostatic’ Type? 491
8.49 Theories of ‘Aufstufung’ 494
8.50 ‘Acrostatic’ Presents vs. s-Aorists 495
8.51 Monosyllabic Lengthening? 496
8.52 Szemerényi’s Law and the s-Aorist 497
8.53–8.54 Whence the s-Aorist? 498
8.53 An Action Noun Turned Verbal? 498
8.54 An Agent Noun Turned Verbal? 500
8.55 Conclusion 501
8.55 Conclusion 501
9 From Proto-Indo-European to Pre-Proto-Indo-European 504
9.1–9.3 Introduction 504
9.1 Uhlenbeck’s Ergative Hypothesis 504
9.2 Chapter Outline 505
9.3 On Studying ‘Pre-Proto-Indo-European’ 506
9.4–9.11 Pre-PIE Nominal Ergativity after Uhlenbeck 506
9.4 Van Wijk on Genitives, Impersonal Verbs, and Pronouns 506
9.5 Pedersen on Ergative → Accusative Alignment Change 507
9.6 Vaillant on Nominal Gender and Directional *-m 508
9.7 Martinet on Markedness 509
9.8 Split Ergativity and the Animacy Hierarchy 510
9.9 Pre-PIE ‘Split Ergativity’ or ‘Split Accusativity’? 512
9.10 Shortcomings of the ‘Split-Accusative’ Hypothesis 513
9.11 Countering Animacy-Based Objections to the Ergative Theory 514
9.12–9.14 Early Views on Pre-PIE Ergativity and the Verb 515
9.12 Vaillant’s ‘Pseudo-Transitive Inflection’ 515
9.13 Critique 517
9.14 Pedersen’s Alternative 519
9.15–9.20 Pre-Proto-Indo-European as an ‘Active’ (‘Split-S’) Language? 520
9.15 Beginnings of the ‘Active Hypothesis’ 520
9.16 The Classical ‘Active Hypothesis’ 522
Contents

9.17 Assessment I: Minor Evidence §24
9.18 Assessment II: ‘Active’ vs. ‘Inactive’ Verbs? §27
9.19 ‘Split-S’ vs. ‘Fluid-S’ §30
9.20 The Emergence of Verbal Voice §31

9.21–9.25 Pathways for an Ergative → Accusative Alignment
Change
9.21 Extension of A Marking §33
9.22 Passives and Antipassives §33
9.23 Reanalysis of Antipassives §35
9.24 Pre-PIE Antipassives and Nominal Inflection §35
9.25 Pre-PIE Antipassives and Verbal Inflection §36

9.26–9.27 Ergativity and Tense/Aspect Categories §38
9.26 General Principles §38
9.27 Implications for (Pre-)Proto-Indo-European §39

9.28–9.31 Reconsidering the Origin of the s-Aorist §40
9.28 From Pronouns to Personal Endings §40
9.29 Zero-Endings and Full Endings in the 3sg. §42
9.30 Spreading 3sg. *-t and the Genesis of Suffixal *-s* §43
9.31 Assessment §44

9.32 Conclusion §44

10 From Pre-Proto-Indo-European back to Greek §47
10.1–10.2 Introduction §47
10.1 A Gap to be Filled §47
10.2 Chapter Outline §47
10.3–10.14 More on Verbal Endings §48
10.3 Singular Endings: Recapitulation §48
10.4 Remodelings of the h2-Series 1sg. and 2sg. §49
10.5 The 1pl. Endings §50
10.6 The 2pl. Endings §52
10.7 1pl./2pl. Endings: Summary §53
10.8 3pl. Endings: Preliminary Remarks §53
10.9 The Participial Connection §53
10.10 Anatolian and Pre-PIE Participial Orientation §54
10.11 From Participles to 3pl. Forms §56
10.12 Participles and ‘CéC-o’ Statives’ §58
10.13 Endings of the m-Series and h2-Series: General Summary §59
10.14 Composite Middle Endings §59

10.15–10.31 Categorial Histories §61
10.15 Introductory Remark §61
10.16 Root Aorists: Active §62
10.17 Root Aorists: Middle §63
Contents

10.18 Root Presents (Athematic): Active 564
10.19 Root Presents (Athematic): Middle 565
10.20 Reduplicated Aorists 567
10.21 Thematic Aorists and Zero-Graded Thematic Presents (túdáti) 568
10.22 s-Aorists 568
10.23 i-Presents 569
10.24 Thematic Root Presents: Active 569
10.25 Thematic Root Presents: Middle 573
10.26 Reduplicated Presents (Thematic) 574
10.27 Reduplicated Presents (Athematic) 575
10.28 Presents in *-skelo- 575
10.29 Excursus: Hittite Imperfectives in -šš 576
10.30 Perfects (and ‘Nominal Verbs’) 577
10.31 ‘Iterative-Causative’ Presents 578
10.32–10.39 Origin and Functions of the i-Present 579
10.32 Imperfectivising *-ielo- 579
10.33 The Basic Formal Type 580
10.34 i-Presents and (In)transitivity 581
10.35 The i-Presents as Pre-PIE Antipassives? 583
10.36 On Denominal i-Presents 586
10.37 Antipassives and Relativisation 586
10.38 Suffixal *-ielo- and Relative *ielo- 588
10.39 Paradigm Constitution 589
10.40–10.41 Alignment Change and PIE Aspectual Shifts 590
10.40 Building Blocks of the Pre-PIE Verbal System 590
10.41 New Perfectives through Alignment Change 591
10.42 Conclusion 593

Epilogue 595

References 602
Index of Forms 677
General Index 705
Figures

1.1 The distribution of ‘tense’ stems in classical Greek  
2.1 The development of the PIE aspectual system according 
   to Hoffmann and Strunk  
2.2 The development of the PIE aspectual system according 
   to Kuryłowicz  
3.1 The reduplicated aorist as a marginalised perfective  
4.1 Theoretical models for the evolution of PIE reduplication 
   as a perfectivity marker  
4.2 The genesis of the thematic present  
4.3 The evolution of reduplicated and unreduplicated aorist 
   and present stems  
5.1 The development of the classical Greek active pluperfect 
   (3sg. and 1sg.)  
5.2 Semantic evolution of the PIE perfect with nactostatic 
   primacy  
5.3 Semantic evolution of the PIE perfect without nactostatic 
   primacy  
5.4 ‘Perfecto-presents’ in the evolution of the PIE perfect 
   (after Fig. 5.2)  
5.5 ‘Perfecto-presents’ in the evolution of the PIE perfect 
   (revised)  
5.6 A relative chronology of ‘nominal verbs’ and 
   *CoC-ēi̯o- verbs  
5.7 Formal relationships between PIE thematic presents, 
   ‘nominal verbs’, and ‘statives’  
5.8 A relative chronology of *CC-ēi̯o- and *CoC-ēi̯o- verbs  
6.1 Some Indo-European thematic aorist – root aorist pairs  
6.2 The development of aorists to *CeRH- roots: two scenarios  
6.3 Systemic relationships between reduplicated, thematic, 
   and root aorists  
6.4 The genesis of tudāti presents

xix
## List of Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>A model of the injunctive as a functionally recessive type</td>
<td>402</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>Old Indic verbal categories and the ‘aoristic drift’</td>
<td>415</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>Systemic relationships between reduplicated, thematic, root, and s-aorists</td>
<td>502</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>‘Accusative’ vs. ‘ergative’ alignment systems</td>
<td>505</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>PIE case endings and accusative vs. ergative alignment</td>
<td>505</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>Silverstein’s animacy hierarchy</td>
<td>511</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>Ergative → accusative alignment change and the animacy hierarchy</td>
<td>515</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>The emergence of verbal voice in Proto-Indo-European</td>
<td>532</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>Passive and antipassive transformations</td>
<td>534</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>Antipassive case marking and (Pre-)PIE ergative → accusative alignment change</td>
<td>537</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>A new model for the genesis of the s-aorist</td>
<td>545</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>A model for the early evolution of the m-conjugation</td>
<td>538</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>third-person endings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Origins of the Greek verb (master diagram)</td>
<td>600</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Tables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Greek reduplicated aorists</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Greek reduplicated presents without suffix</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 Greek reduplicated presents with suffix <em>-ετεο-</em></td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1 Early Greek ablauting o-grade perfects</td>
<td>212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2 Early Greek non-ablauting o-grade perfects</td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3 Greek perfect stems to *HeC-*roots</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4 Greek <em>CoC-ετεο-</em> ‘iterative-causatives’</td>
<td>260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5 Greek <em>Cc-ετεο-</em> ‘iteratives’</td>
<td>274</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1 Greek root aorists to *CeH-*roots</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2 Partially preserved root aorists in Greek</td>
<td>305</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.1 Thematic/athematic root present - s-aorist pairs in Greek</td>
<td>426</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.2 Thematic root present - non-sigmatic aorist pairs in Greek</td>
<td>433</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.3 Factive s-aorists in Greek</td>
<td>439</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.4 Greek reduplicated presents in <em>-sk̑e/o-</em></td>
<td>486</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

xxi
Preface

The wise man loves to learn, the fool to teach.

(A. P. Čexov, Notebook I, p. 125)

The intention of this book is not to teach. The wish to write it arose when I was teaching on the topics it deals with, and when I realised how often I could not wholeheartedly agree with some of the things I had to say in order to present my students with the state of the art in the field. However, I am not naïve (or conceited) enough to believe that I can do better than the great scholars whose opinions I found myself questioning. My first and foremost aim is therefore merely to set out where and why, in my view, their ideas call for discussion and improvement. If I then also offer a theory of how I think some improvement may be achieved, it is not because I believe to have found the holy grail, but because it would be too easy to criticise others without exposing one’s own views to the same kind of critical scrutiny. So what follows wants to be read, not as a handbook, but as a contribution to an open debate.

Even so, the study is not without ambitions. Whoever observes recent developments in Indo-European comparative linguistics will notice that there are two ever-increasing divides. The first is a divide between national or local ‘schools’, which have all but stopped to engage with one another; the second, a divide between ‘reconstructionists’ whose aim is to uncover even the most recondite formal minutiae of the Proto-Indo-European significant without spending much thought on the signifié, traditional ‘philologists’ who could not care less for that but rather concentrate on the historical evolution of individual languages that just happen to be Indo-European, and ‘typologists’ for whom the big picture of grammatical design and language change counts so much that unwieldy details have to be generously ignored. To be sure, the boundaries between these groups are
never hard and fast; but neither are efforts common really to listen and respond to their adherents on an equal footing. Such an effort will be made here, partly because there is often food for thought even in ideas one feels the urge to reject, and partly because others may welcome an intentionally wide-ranging coverage of diverse opinions as much as I would have welcomed it, had it been available when I set out to write this book. Unfortunately, though, so much has been and is being published that even such an inclusive approach will inevitably overlook some contributions, and not necessarily the least valuable ones; and not every one of those that are not overlooked can be engaged with in equal depth. For such omissions and inadequacies I apologise: as best I could and space permitted, I have sought to voice assent or dissent openly, not by inclusion or exclusion.

If, then, the scope of the undertaking is avowedly Indo-Europeanist, why entitle it ‘Origins of the Greek Verb’? That there is more emphasis on origins than on what is specifically Greek will quickly become clear to the reader. Although I have tried to be understandable also to those who have so far spent more time thinking about Greek than about Indo-European, I have had to assume some basic familiarity with many notions and concepts of historical grammar and comparative linguistics. But the choice of title is not of course meaningless, and it connects with what has just been said about my ambitions for this book. One further trend that is discernible in recent Indo-European studies is the shift of attention away from those branches of Indo-European which dominated the discussion in the earlier days of the discipline’s history, notably Greek and Indo-Iranian. Though taking a long while to assert itself, this shift was essentially triggered by the discovery of Hittite and, to a lesser extent, Tocharian some one hundred years ago; but although Hittite and Tocharian still play a major role in current reassessments of fundamental parts of Indo-European grammar, their new status as ‘mainstream’ branches has also promoted a greater equilibrium in the study of other members of the family. Given the relative neglect from which all the ‘non-core’ branches had suffered under the previous regime, such a corrective was overdue. And yet, the pendulum may have swung too much to the other side – and perhaps especially where Greek is concerned. Thanks to its combination of a uniquely rich morphosyntactic system with an early, long, and varied attested history, no one will ever question the relevance of Greek for Indo-European linguistics. But precisely because Greek offers so much material for linguistic enquiry,
its study has somewhat detached itself from research with a comparative focus. As a result, there seems to be even less interaction than in other domains of Indo-European between ‘reconstructionists’ and ‘philologists’ in the narrow sense, to the detriment of both sides. This gap too can hopefully be narrowed, if not bridged, by the present attempt to re-establish Greek at the heart of the agenda, and to demonstrate afresh how much of crucial importance is missed if the understandable fascination for hitherto less explored subjects makes Indo-Europeanists forget what one of their most informative ‘old’ sources has to tell. In this spirit, the Greek verbal system is here used as an anchor point and primary explanandum, from which we set out and to which we return. But (re)assigning Greek the leading solo part it has not had for a while must not mean that other soloists will not be heard as well. Ultimately, it is only in harmony with these, and the orchestra as a whole, that Greek will be allowed to perform.

Orchestral, too, has been the support I have had in various forms while writing this book. My deepest gratitude I owe to the Leverhulme Trust, for awarding me a Major Research Fellowship that freed me from virtually all teaching and administrative duties during three blissful years of uninterrupted research: I know of no other funding body that fosters research in the humanities in an equally generous, unintrusive, and therefore fruitful manner. During this period of leave, Peter Barber covered for my absence, and did this so well that my return could have been a real loss for the students had he not continued to be with us in another role. Meanwhile, little regret will have been felt by my other philological colleagues at Oxford, Philomen Probert and Wolfgang de Melo, when I finally took over again some of the additional burdens they had to shoulder for far too long.

For invaluable advice I am grateful to Alessandro Vatri and John Penney: to the former because he made up for my ignorance in statistical matters by testing all the relevant data for their significance; to the latter not only because his unsurpassably clear lectures and lecture handouts first introduced me to the Indo-European verb many years ago, but because he also kindly read and gave much-needed feedback on several sections in which Tocharian issues are dealt with – as he put it, “what an intractable language Tocharian is!” Less directly, but no less profoundly, my thinking on all that is presented below is also indebted to Anna Morpurgo Davies, whose death overshadowed the last year of work on it. Even if the outcome is unlike anything she would have promoted, she never failed to encourage
Preface

everyone to ‘think for themselves’, no matter what the great and good had said. Without that encouragement, I would hardly have dared even to start.

On several occasions, I had the opportunity to air my ideas by attending conferences or giving lectures at home and abroad. So many discussions and casual conversations at such events have shaped and refined them that I would be sure to forget someone if I began to enumerate all those who (often unwittingly) helped me along. I must however single out David Langslow, Brent Vine, and Rudolf Wachter who put enough trust in my plans to write in support of my application to the Leverhulme Trust; John Lowe who – together with many other colleagues and students – eventually sat through an entire seminar series devoted to these ‘Origins’ and who, during that time, more than once pinpointed areas where what I thought was final was clearly not; the reviewers for Cambridge University Press who suggested further improvements at an even later stage; and finally, Michael Sharp, Marianna Prizio, Lisa Sinclair, and Kate Moreau without whose guidance the manuscript could never have turned into the book I had always hoped it would one day become.

Never before have I spent so many sleepless nights over a research project as this time, not rarely did I feel overwhelmed by the self-imposed task. If such periods did not last forever, it is because my family knew how to cure them: Helen by laughingly asking if I had discovered yet another etymology, Jonas, Mirjam, and Lea by reminding me that almost every aspect of life is more important than the life of aspect.
Abbreviations and Conventions

Authors and Texts
Greek authors and texts are abbreviated according to the Oxford Classical Dictionary (3rd edn., Oxford 1996).

AV Atharva Veda (Ved.)
DB Dareios inscription, Bīsūtūn (OPers.)
RV Rig Veda (Ṛg Veda) (Ved.)
V Vidēvēdād (Av.)
Y Yasna (Av.)
Yt Yait (Av.)

Dialects and Languages
Aeol. Aeolic (Greek)
Alb. Albanian
Anat. Anatolian
Arc. Arcadian (Greek)
Arm. Armenian
Av. Avestan
Boeot. Boeotian (Greek)
CLuw. Cuneiform Luwian
CSl. Church Slavonic
Cypr. Cyprian (Greek)
Dor. Doric (Greek)
Engl. English
Finn. Finnish
Fr. French
Gaul. Gaulish
Germ. German
Goth. Gothic
xxviii List of Abbreviations and Conventions

Gr. Greek
Hitt. Hittite
HLuw. Hieroglyphic Luwian
Hom. Homeric (Greek)
IE Indo-European
It. Italian
Lac. Laconian (Greek)
Lat. Latin
Lesb. Lesbian (Greek)
Lith. Lithuanian
Luw. Luwian
MidPers. Middle Persian
Mod. Gr. Modern Greek
MW Middle Welsh
Myc. Mycenaean (Greek)
OAv. Old Avestan
OCS Old Church Slavonic
OE Old English
OHG Old High German
OHitt. Old Hittite
OIr. Old Irish
OLat. Old Latin
OLith. Old Lithuanian
ON Old Norse
OPers. Old Persian
OPhryg. Old Phrygian
OPr. Old Prussian
PGmc Proto-Germanic
PGr. Proto-Greek
PIE Proto-Indo-European
PIIr. Proto-Indo-Iranian
Russ. Russian
Skt. Sanskrit
Span. Spanish
Toch. Tocharian
Umbr. Umbrian
Ved. Vedic (Sanskrit)
YAv. Young Avestan
**List of Abbreviations and Conventions**

**Grammatical Notation and Terminology**

In reconstructed forms, \(C\) stands for any consonant, \(V\) for any vowel, \(H\) for any laryngeal, \(I\) for any semivowel (\(i, u\)), \(R\) for any resonant (\(l, m, n, r\)), \(L\) for any liquid (\(l, r\)), and \(N\) for any nasal (\(m, n\)). \(T\) is the cover symbol for any stop, \(D\) for any voiced stop, and \(K\) for any voiceless tectal stop.

In structural formulae, \(-CeC-\) and \(-CoC-\) represent \(e\)-graded and \(o\)-graded roots, \(-CC-\) zero-graded roots, and \(-C\hat{e}C-\) roots with lengthened \(\hat{e}\)-grade (even when more than one consonant precedes/follows the syllable nucleus).

Asterisks (*) indicate reconstructed forms, obeli (†) forms that are set up for argumentative purposes, but whose (pre)historical reality is denied.

- **A** logical subject in a transitive clause
- abl. ablative
- abs. absolutive
- acc. accusative
- act. active
- aor. aorist
- coll. collective
- dat. dative
- dir. directional
- du. dual
- erg. ergative
- fem. feminine
- fut. future
- gen. genitive
- impf. imperfect
- ind. indicative
- inj. injunctive
- instr. instrumental
- intr. intransitive
- ipfv. imperfective
- ipv. imperative
- loc. locative
- masc. masculine
- med. middle (medium)
- nom. nominative
- NP noun phrase
- ntr. neuter

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List of Abbreviations and Conventions

O logical direct object in a transitive clause
obl. oblique
opt. optative
pass. passive
perf. perfect
pfv. perfective
pl. plural
plupf. pluperfect
pres. present
pret. preterite
pron. pronoun
ptcpl. participle
rel. relative
S subject in an intransitive clause
sg. singular
subj. subjunctive
tr. transitive
VP verb phrase

Journals

AGI Archivio Glottologico Italiano
BSL Bulletin de la Société de Linguistique de Paris
BSOAS Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies
HS Historische Sprachforschung
HSCP Harvard Studies in Classical Philology
IF Indogermanische Forschungen
IIJ Indo-Iranian Journal
IJDLLR International Journal of Diachronic Linguistics and Linguistic Reconstruction
IL Incontri Linguistici
JAOS Journal of the American Oriental Society
JIES Journal of Indo-European Studies
MSL Mémoires de la Société de Linguistique de Paris
MSS Münchener Studien zur Sprachwissenschaft
NAWG Nachrichten von der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen, Phil.-hist. Klasse
NGWG Nachrichten von der Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen, Phil.-hist. Klasse
NTS Norsk Tidsskrift for Sprogvidenskap
List of Abbreviations and Conventions

RANL  Rendiconti dell’Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, Classe di Scienze Morali, Storiche e Filologiche
REA  Revue des Études Anciennes
REArm  Revue des Études Arméniennes
REIE  Revue des Études Indo-Européennes
RIL  Rendiconti dell’Istituto Lombardo, Classe di Lettere e Scienze Morali
RPh  Revue de Philologie
SbAWW  Sitzungsberichte der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften Wien, Phil.-hist. Klasse
SbPAW  Sitzungsberichte der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Phil.-hist. Klasse
SCO  Studi Classici e Orientali
SMEA  Studi Micenei ed Egeo-Anatolici
Sprache  Die Sprache: Zeitschrift für Sprachwissenschaft
SSL  Studi e Saggi Linguistici
TAPhA  Transactions of the America Philological Association
TIES  Tocharian and Indo-European Studies
TPhS  Transactions of the Philological Society
VJ  Voprosy Jazykoznanija
ZAssyr  Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und vorderasiatische Archaologie
ZDMG  Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft
ZVS  Zeitschrift für Vergleichende Sprachforschung

Translations

Modern secondary literature in languages other than English is quoted in translation. While double quotation marks are used for literal quotations, such translations are enclosed in single quotation marks or, where set off typographically from the surrounding text, labelled by the addition of ‘(translated)’ to the source reference.