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The pre-Roman elements of the Sardinian lexicon
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Conclusion

12 Conclusion

12.1 Summary

One of the questions addressed in this study is whether the assumption of a single pre-Roman language, besides Punic, can account for all of the non-inherited lexical material. I have found that there is no geographical patterning in the phonological features found in words of pre-Roman origin. We can, however, discern a near-complementary geographical distribution in the pre-Roman prefixes $*k(V)$ - and $*g(i)$ -, which have been argued in § 9.1.3 to be variants of one and the same pre-Roman morpheme (cf. also Swanenvleugel 2024). This prefix and other accepted pre-Roman morphemes exhibit an island-wide distribution. Pre-Roman Sardinian words, excluding punicisms with accepted cognates in other languages also occur across Sardinia. All of these findings constitute evidence supporting the hypothesis of a single language, or at least closely related language varieties, having existed all across Sardinia at the time of its romanization. This language coexisted with Punic. The coexistence of other languages with a smaller distribution cannot be ruled out.

The reality of many of the previously proposed phonological and morphological features attributed to a pre-Roman language in Sardinia cannot be confirmed based on the lexical material investigated in this study. This includes the pre-Roman vowel harmony proposed by Serra (1960; cf. § 8.4.2). The same goes for a number of putative pre-Roman suffixes (§ 9.2). What can be maintained is the pre-Roman phoneme $*g$, the existence of word-final consonants, and various morphemes, such as $*k(V)$ -/ $*g(i)$ -, $*Vr$, and $*(V)s$ -.

Based on the evaluation of the previously proposed extra-Sardinian comparanda, it is likely that some Sardinian words derive from a Punic substrate. This mirrors the long-lasting presence of a Punic speech community on Sardinia, which persisted for centuries after the Roman conquest of Sardinia. Previous hypotheses on a linguistic affiliation of pre-Roman Sardinian to either Berber or Basque cannot be maintained on the basis of the lexical evidence. The Sardinian-Berber correspondences are argued to be part of the Punic substrate. The few acceptable Sardinian-Basque correspondences do not point to language relatedness, but rather to independent contacts with a third pre-Roman language. The hypothesis of an affiliation between pre-Roman Sardinian and Etruscan is difficult to evaluate because of the scarce attestation of Etruscan. The positive evidence is

restricted to a single convincing Sardinian-Etruscan lexical correspondence, and two possible morphological correspondences.

The analysis of the distribution of accepted comparisons between non-inherited words in Sardinian and in other languages of the Mediterranean indicates an especially close connection between Sardinia, the Iberian Peninsula, and southern France. This is potential evidence that the pre-Roman Sardinian language was related to the ancient Iberian language. There is, moreover, a sizable number of lexical correspondences between Sardinia and the Italian peninsula. The overlap in lexical correspondences between Sardinia and the Iberian Peninsula, southern France, and Italy, is evidence that related pre-Indo-European speech varieties were spoken across the western Mediterranean region.

There is ample evidence for a scenario in which both a pre-Roman “Mediterranean” language and Punic were spoken natively in Sardinia at the time of the Roman conquest. The geographical overlap of pre-Roman Mediterranean words and Punic words shows that these languages were spoken side by side. However, the non-inherited lexicon does not provide much evidence on the sociolinguistic dynamics between these two languages. Likewise, it is impossible to establish based on the extant evidence whether or not either of these pre-Roman languages outlived the other.

12.2 Outlook

The linguistic substrate of Sardinia is far from fully clarified. Most of the details of the languages of pre-Roman Sardinia and their eventual extinction resulting from the romanization process may be forever lost to us. However, there are some avenues through which progress can be made, especially regarding our understanding of linguistic connections between pre-Roman Sardinia and other parts of the Mediterranean. First and foremost, a reappraisal of the non-inherited vocabulary of other language varieties in the western Mediterranean may help verify the reality of a western Mediterranean pre-Indo-European language or language family. Second, advances in our understanding of the Etruscan and Iberian languages should allow for better evaluation of a possible genetic relationship to the pre-Roman language of Sardinia. Finally, the interpretation of the linguistic findings presented here would significantly be furthered by comparison to insights from the fields of archeology and genetics.