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LITH. *sidābras*, OCS *srěbro*

Benveniste has recently stated (Le vocabulaire des institutions indo-européennes, I, Paris, 1969, 193): „*silubr* est un mot étranger, dont l'origine est impossible à élucider... Les formes baltiques ne sont pas homogènes: v. pr. *siraplis*, lit. *sidābras*, lett. *sidrabs*, en face de v. sl. *srěbro*. De l'une à l'autre de ces langues, les formes ne se correspondent pas. Les variations sont telles et si peu régulières qu'elles font supposer un emprunt commun, dont la source nous échappe“.

But we can surely bring some measure of phonetic rationalization into these forms. There is within all this variation a sufficient degree of differing dissimilations to make a determination, ironically, more possible than it might otherwise have been. In fact, this is an interesting case where disagreement leads our analysis to a degree of harmony.

First, Lith. *sidābras* and Latv. *sidrabs* are clearly related by a metathesis of the *r*. We choose **sid'abras* for East Baltic.

The Old Prussian form offers, a priori, two possibilities. Either *siraplis* is metathesized from a Germanic-like form (Goth. *silubr*), or else both represent independent dissimilations. The latter is to be preferred, since otherwise it would be hard to motivate the East Baltic development of *-d-*.

Therefore we must see three separate dissimilations. Germanic *silubr-* < **sirubr-*; OPruss. *siraplis*¹ < **sirabr-* (both of these with a dissimilation consisting in alteration of the liquid feature); East Baltic **sid'abras* < **sir'abras* (with dissimilation of the [continuant] feature). Thus we arrive in a natural way at a unitary Proto-Baltic form **sir'abra-*.

We see also that the Slavic **serbroN* has not dissimilated at all, contrary to the Germanic and Baltic. On the other hand, if **serbroN* is to come from **sirbroN* the borrowing must be significantly later than *črky* 'Kirche, church', since the **ir* would have been assimilated to native **er*, and not to **ir > r*. This puts the word

¹ Cf. the recent work of William Schmalstieg on the vagaries of Old Prussian orthography and on the need for circumspect and non-superficial interpretation, in connexion with the identification of *p* here as [b].

chronologically on a level with Serbian *Srem* < *Sirmium*. At the same time it helps in dating $k > c$ before front vowels.

As for the medial vowel, the Germanic *-u-* shows that we are in the presence of a secondary schwa; cf. *miluk* 'milk' and its cognates, which I have touched on in *Die Sprache* XV (1969) 63 and in an article appearing on *Pferd* in the number of the *Canadian Journal of Linguistics* dedicated to Martin Joos. The Baltic *-a-* shows this also, since original IE **a* was lost (*duktè*). It seems, however, that this vowel was not heard prominently enough or with the right timbre to find a representation in the Slavic forms. In fact, this is a reasonable result since by the time of this borrowing the lone non-high non-front vowel in Slavic may well have had the timbre of [ə], which would not well match [ə] or [ʌ]. The various chronologies dovetail well.

The source form would have been on the order of [sirəbr-]. It was probably borrowed by Germanic before the Christian era. Slavic probably borrowed it at an early date after the beginning of the Christian era. The time of the Baltic borrowing cannot be determined with precision.