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### Basque and Iberian numerals. An insoluble problem?

Basque is the only language which survived all the successive Indo-Europeanisation waves in western Europe, including the last one, the Romanisation process. Its homeland is most probably to be located in the high basin of the Garonne River, where its ancestor Aquitanian is most abundantly attested in the Early Imperial period. On the other hand, Iberian, attested in the east of the Iberian Peninsula and southern France from the 5<sup>th</sup> c. to the 1<sup>st</sup> c. BC, didn't survive Romanisation and died out around the turn of the era.

Aquitanian/Basque and Iberian share some onomastic items, as well as phonetic, phonotactic and morphological features. Since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, these have been traditionally explained away by assuming a common language pool. However, Orduña (2005) and Ferrer i Jané (2009) came up with a revision of the problem. They independently noted that nearly all the numerals attested and allegedly interpretable as such in Iberian inscriptions are identical or extremely similar to the corresponding ones in Basque, that such a systematic set of correspondences can hardly be a coincidence, and that the only plausible explanation is that Aquitanian/Basque and Iberian are genetically related. This stands in contradiction with a number of internal reconstructions of Basque numerals that traditional Bascology has postulated, with varying degrees of reliability. Although the formal correspondences set up by these Iberianists cover all the numerals from 1 to 10 (except 9, not attested in Iberian), as well as 20, 30 (a vigesimal system is assumed, as in Basque), and complex numerals like 11, 12, 21 and 22, here let it suffice to give a brief sample of examples:

<u>numeral</u>	<u>Iberian</u>	<u>Basque</u>	<u>form reconstructed for Proto-Basque</u>
1	ban	bat	
3	irur	hirur	*her-ahur 'closed palm (of the hand)'
4	lau / laur	laur	*la-bur 'short (finger)'
5	bors / borste	bortz	*bor-tz 'rounded (= fist)'
7	sisbi	zazpi	*bor(t)zaz-bi 'two beyond five'
10	abar	hamar	*han-bor 'big fist'
20	orkei	hogei	*han-bor-gen-i 'added circle'
24	orkei-ke-laur	hogei-ta-lau	

Now, if we assume that the Iberian sequences are correctly interpreted (a not uncontroversial issue, as Gorrochategui 2021 has objected that at least some of them might well be anthroponyms), a number of questions are raised: what would the consequences be for the Basque-Iberian question? As numerals are very seldom borrowed (and systematic borrowing is not attested), would this set of correspondences demonstrate a genetic relationship between Basque and Iberian? In other words, can a systematic identity / resemblance between numerals alone prove a genetic relationship between two languages, or is it insufficient as long as it is not backed up by cognate relationships between pronouns, parallel features in

the core verbal morphology, etc.? If a genetic relationship is rejected but it is still accepted that the correspondences cannot be due to chance, what other possibility do we have? Is the borrowing of numerals typologically possible? To what extent? In brief, what are the rules of historical linguistics, and how should we apply them to such a case? The answer to these questions is far from straightforward, and thus, rather than a solution to the problem, the aim of this poster is to explore plausible explanations.

## Keywords

Aquitanian, Basque, Iberian, numerals, borrowing

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