

Lesson 2: Historical Phonology of Albanian

1. Preliminaries

1.1. Within the IE languages (Pic. 9), Alb. is closer to Greek (*rectius*: Greco-Phrygian) and Armenian, so-called “Balkan IE” (Klingenschmitt 1994:244-5; Matzinger 2012; Imberciadori 2025).

1.1.1. One morpho-semantic innovation common to Alb., Gk., and Arm.: thematization of the root aorist PIE $*k^u\acute{e}lh_1-$ / $*k^u\grave{h}_1-$ (root $*k^uelh_1-$ ‘turn oneself’), which developed the meaning ‘became, was’ (and became the suppletive aorist of ‘be’ in Alb. and Arm.).

➤ (Late-)PIE 3.pl. $*\acute{e}-k^u\grave{h}_1-ent \sim *\acute{e}-k^u\acute{h}_1-ent > *\acute{e}-k^u\acute{l}-ent >>$ (resegmentation) $*\acute{e}-k^u\acute{l}-nt \rightarrow$ new stem $*(\acute{e}-)k^u\acute{l}-o- >$

- i. OAlb. 3.sg. /kle/ (St.-Alb. *qe*) ‘was’ ($\sim$ pres. 3.sg. St.-Alb. *ështëë*)
- ii. Gk. 3.sg.mp. ἔπλετο ‘became, was, took place’ ($\sim$ pres. 1.sg.mp. πέλομαι)
- iii. Arm. 3.sg.mp. *etew* ‘became, was’ ($\sim$ pres. 1.sg. *em*).

1.1.2. One morphological innovation common to Alb. and Gk.: derivation of the secondary adj. $*\acute{g}^hu-s-l\acute{o}-$ ‘poured’ from the *s*-stem $*\acute{g}^h\acute{e}u-o/es-$ n. ‘(act of) pouring’ ($>$ Arm. *jew* ‘shape’).

- $*\acute{g}^hu-s-l\acute{o}-$ ‘poured’ $\rightarrow *g^hu-s-lo-$ ‘poured thing’ $>$ (O)Alb. *dyllë* n./m. ‘wax’.
- $*\acute{g}^hu-s-l\acute{o}-$ ‘poured’ $\rightarrow *g^hu-s-l\acute{o}-$ ‘poured thing’ $>$ Gk. χῶλος m. ‘juice’.

1.2. (Pre)historic phases of Alb. (Neri 2025:58 fn. 2).

1.2.1. Pre-Proto-Alb. (= Pre-PAlb.): from the break-up of PIE (ca. 3000 BCE?) to the earliest contacts with Lat. (ca. 2nd cent. BCE).

1.2.2. Proto-Alb. (= PAlb.): from the earliest contacts with Lat. to the dialectal split between Gheg and Tosk (ca. 1000 CE, cf. Janson 1986:210-1).

1.2.3. Old Albanian: 15th-18th cent. CE.

1.3. Alb. historical phonology: Demiraj (AE:41-67); Orel 2000:1-122; Matzinger 2006:47-92; Schumacher & Matzinger (VAA:205-276); de Vaan 2017.

➤ Most of the examples treated below are taken from VAA:205-276.

2. (Stressed) Vowels

2.1. PIE short vowels.

2.1.1. PIE **i, *u, *a* > Alb. *i, u, a*.

2.1.1.1. Alb. *i lig* ‘ill, bad’ < PIE **h₃lig-ó-*, cf. Gk. ὀλίγος ‘little, small, few’, Lith. *ligà* f. (4) ‘illness’, etc. (DPEWA s.v.).

2.1.1.2. Alb. *gjumë* m. ‘sleep’ < PIE **súp-n-o-*, cf. OCS *sŭnŭ* m. ‘sleep’, Toch.B **sanme* ‘id.’ and, possibly, Gk. ὕπνος m. ‘id.’ (DPEWA s.v.).

2.1.1.3. Alb. *i athët* (<th> = [θ]) ‘sharp, sour’ < PIE **[h₂ak-u-to-]* ← **[h₂ek-u-to-]*, cf. Toch.B *akwatse* ‘sharp’, Lith. *ašutaĩ* pl.m. (3) ‘hairs of a horse’, OCS *osŭtŭ* m. ‘thistle’, Lat. *acūtus* ‘sharp’, etc. (DPEWA s.v.).

2.1.2. PIE **o* > Alb. *a*.

➤ Alb. *natë* f. ‘night’ < PIE **nók^h-t- / *nék^h-t-*, cf. Hitt. *nekuz* ‘during the night’, Lat. *nox, noctis* f. ‘night’, Gk. νύξ, νυκτός f. ‘id.’, Goth. *nahts* f. ‘id.’, etc. (DPEWA s.v.).

2.1.3. PIE **e* (complex development, cf. de Vaan 2004).

2.1.3.1. PIE **e* > PALb. **ε* > Alb. [jε] <je>.

➤ Alb. 3.sg. *pjek* ‘cooks’ < PIE **pék^h-e/o-*, cf. Ved. *pácati* ‘cooks’, Lat. *coquit* ‘id.’, etc. (DPEWA s.v.).

2.1.3.2. PIE **e* > PALb. **ε* > Alb. *e /CR_*.

➤ OAlb. /kle/ (St.-Alb. *qe*) ‘was’ < PIE **(é-)k^hle/o-* (§1.1.1 above).

2.2. (Late-)PIE / Pre-PAlb. long vowels.

➤ NB: (Late) PALb. underwent loss of distinctive vowel length.

2.2.1. (Late-)PIE **ī* > Alb. *i*.

➤ Alb. *sillë* ‘breakfast’ < PIE **k^hih₂-leh₂-*, cf. Goth. *hveila* f. ‘moment, time’, Lat. *quiēs* ‘calm’, etc. (DPEWA s.v.).

2.2.2. (Late-)PIE **ū* > Alb. *y* (in polysyllables, cf. Demiraj 1993).

➤ Alb. *dyllë* m. ‘wax’ < Pre-PAlb. **^hūla-* < PIE **^hu-s-lo-* ‘poured thing’ (§1.1.2).

2.2.2.1. But Alb. **ī* in monosyllables.

➤ Alb. *ta-ní* ‘now’ < PIE **nú*, cf. Ved. *nú* ‘now’, ON *nú* ‘id.’, Lat. *nū-per* ‘newly’, Gk. νῦν ‘id.’, etc. (DPEWA s.v.).

2.2.3. (Late-)PIE **ē, *ā* > Pre-PAlb. **ā* > PALb. **ɔ* > Alb. *o*.

2.2.3.1. Alb. *mo-s* ‘not’ (prohibitive negation) < PIE **meh₂*, or **mē*, cf. Gk. μή (prohibitive negation), Ved. *mā* (id.), Toch.AB *mā* (id.), etc. (Hackstein 2020).

2.2.3.2. Alb. *motër* f. ‘sister’ [!] < PIE **meh₂tér-* ‘mother’ or **meh₂tr-o/eh₂-* ‘having the (same) mother’, cf. Gk. μήτηρ f. ‘mother’, Ved. *mātár-* f. ‘id.’, Lat. *māter* f. ‘id.’, OHG *muoter* f. ‘id.’, OIr. *máthir* f. ‘id.’, etc. (di Giovine 2017; Majer 2020; DPEWA s.v.).

2.2.4. (Late-)PIE **ō* > PALb. **æ* > Alb. *e*.

- Alb. *derë* f. ‘door’ < PIE **d^huór-* (**d^huór-* / **d^huér-*), cf. Lat. *forēs* pl.f. ‘door’, Ved. *dvārā* du.f. ‘id.’, TB *twere* ‘id.’, etc. (DPEWA s.v.).

2.3. Diphthongs.

2.3.1. PIE **ai*, **oi* > Alb. *e*.

- Alb. *stheg* m. ‘path’ < PIE **stóig^h-o-*, cf. Gk. στοῖχος m. ‘row, line’, Goth. *staiga* f. ‘path’, etc. (DPEWA s.v.).

2.3.2. PIE **ei* > Alb. *i* (?).

- Alb. *dimër* (Gh. *dimën*) m. ‘winter’ < PIE **ǵ^heimen-o-* or **ǵ^himen-o-* ‘winterly, snowy’ ← **ǵ^héi-om-* / **ǵ^hi-m-* ‘winter, snow’ > YAv. *ziüā* m. ‘winter’, Gk. χιών, χιόνος f. ‘snow’, Lat. *hiems*, *hiemis* f. ‘winter; storm’, etc. (DPEWA s.v.).

2.3.3. PIE **eu*, **au*, **ou* > Alb. *a*.

2.3.3.1. OGH. /nândë/ (St.-Alb. *nëntë*) ‘9’ < Pre-PALb. **neuntā-* < PIE **h₁neun₂-teh₂-*, cf. Gk. ἐννέα ‘9’, Ved. *náva* ‘id.’, Lat. *novem* ‘id.’, etc. (Klingenschmitt 2022:93-5; DPEWA s.v.).

2.3.3.2. Alb. *ag* m. ‘dawn’ < PIE **[h₂aug-o-]* ← **[h₂eug-o-]*, cf. Gk. ἀύγῃ ‘light, rays (of the sun)’.

2.4. Further changes affecting vowels.

2.4.1. Umlaut processes.

2.4.1.1. E.g., PALb. **a* > **e* / *_C*i** (*i*-umlaut).

- Alb. *pleq* pl.m. ‘old (men)’ < PALb. **pleci* < **plaki* < PIE **p_lh₁kóǵ* ‘grey (ones)’, cf. sg.m. Alb. *plak* ‘old (man)’ and further Lith. *pilkas* (3) ‘grey’ (DPEWA s.v. *plak*).

2.4.2. Secondary vowel lengthening and diphthongization.

2.4.2.1. All PALb. vowels underwent lengthening before (certain) word-final resonants.

2.4.2.2. The PALb. mid-low vowels **ε* (< PIE **e*), **æ* (< PIE **ō*), and **ɔ* (< PIE **ē*, **ā*) also underwent diphthongization to **i̯ε* (> Alb. *ie*), **y̯æ* (> Alb. *ye*), and **u̯ɔ* (> OGH. /uo/ > Gh. *ue*, To. / St.-Alb. *ua*), respectively.

- Alb. *dyer* pl.f. ‘doors’ < PALb. **dyæ̃r* < **dā̃r* < **dæ̃r* < PIE nom.pl. **d^huōr-es* (§2.2.4 on sg. *derë*).

3. Consonants

3.1. PIE dorsal stops and the “*satem*” nature of Albanian.

3.1.1. In most environments, Alb. shows a *satem* behaviour, i.e., a double reflex of PIE dorsal stops.

3.1.1.1. Voiced series: PIE $*\hat{g}$ > Alb. *dh* ~ PIE $*g$ > Alb. *g* ~ PIE $*g^u$ > Alb. *g*.

➤ Alb. *dhëmb* m. ‘tooth’ < PIE $*\hat{g}omb^h-o-$, cf. Gk. γόμφος ‘nail’, Ved. *jámbha-* ‘tooth’, OCS *zqbu* m. ‘id.’, Toch.B *keme*, Toch.A *kam* ‘id.’, etc. (DPEWA s.v.).

➤ Alb. *ag* m. ‘dawn’ < PIE $*h_2eug-o-$ (§2.3.3.2).

➤ Alb. *gur* m. ‘stone’ < PIE $*g^hrh_2-i-$ ‘heavy thing’, cf. Ved. *giri-* m. ‘mountain’, Gk. βαρύς ‘heavy’, Lat. *gravis* ‘id.’, etc. (Neri 2022).

3.1.1.2. Voiced aspirate series: PIE $*\hat{g}^h$ > Alb. *d-* / *-dh-* ~ PIE $*g^h$ > Alb. *g* ~ PIE $*g^{uh}$ > Alb. *g*.

➤ Alb. *dorë* ‘hand’ < PIE $*\hat{g}^hesr-$, cf. Hitt. *keššar* c./n. ‘hand’, Gk. χεῖρ, χεῖρός f. ‘hand’, Toch.B *šar*, Toch.A *tsar* m. ‘id.’, etc. (DPEWA s.v.; Neri 2013).

➤ Alb. *gardh* m. ‘enclosure’ < PIE $*g^hord^h-o-$, cf. Lith. *gařdas* m. (4) ‘enclosure’, OCS *gradŭ* m. ‘city’, Goth. *gards* m. ‘house’, etc. (DPEWA s.v.).

➤ Alb. *n-groh* ‘heat, warm up’ < PIE $*g^{uh}r-eh_2-ske/o-$ ‘become warm’, cf. PIE $*g^{uh}er-$ ‘become warm’ (DPEWA s.v.).

3.1.2. But before front vowels (i.e., / $_e, i$), labiovelars show an outcome different than that of plain velars—**threefold reflex** the PIE dorsal stops.

3.1.2.1. Palatal velars (voiceless series): Alb. *i athët* ‘sharp, sour’ < PIE $*h_2ek-u-to-$ (§2.1.1.3).

3.1.2.2. Plain velars (voiceless series): Alb. *kop-sht* m. ‘garden’ < PIE $*kéh_2p-o-$, cf. Gk. κήπος (Dor. κάπος) m. ‘garden’ (DPEWA s.v.; Schumacher 2025).

3.1.2.3. Labiovelars (voiceless series): Alb. *pesë* ‘5’ < PIE $*pénk^he$, cf. Ved. *pāñca* ‘5’, Gk. πέντε ‘id.’, etc. (Klingenschmitt 2022:80-3; DPEWA s.v.).

3.1.3. This early palatalization of labiovelars must be kept distinct from a much later round of palatalization, which affected PALb. $*k$ (< PIE $*k$ or $*k^u$ if not before / $_e, i$) and PALb. $*g$ (< PIE $*g^{(h)}$ and $*g^{u(h)}$ if not before / $_e, i$) and yielded $*c$ and $*j$, respectively.

➤ Alb. *pleq* pl.m. ‘old (men)’ < PALb. $*pleci$ < $*plaki$ < PIE $*pl^hkóχ$ ‘grey (ones)’ (§2.4.1.1).

➤ Alb. pl. *gjel-a* ‘cocks’ (sg. *gjel* m.) << $*gjel$ < $*jelli$ < $*galli$ ← Lat. *gallus* ‘cock’ (DPEWA s.v.).

3.2. PIE fricatives.

3.2.1. PIE $*s$.

3.2.1.1. Word-initially before a vowel, PIE *s underwent voicing and palatalization to yield Alb. [j] <gj>.

- Alb. *gjak* m. ‘blood’ < PIE **sok^u-ó-*, cf. Gk. ὀπός m. ‘juice’, Lith. *sakaĩ* pl.m. (4) ‘resin’, OCS *sokŭ* m. ‘juice, sap’, Toch.B *sekwe*, Toch.A *saku* ‘pus’, etc. (DPEWA s.v.).

3.2.1.2. Word-internally before a front vowel, PIE *s was palatalized to Alb. [ʃ] <sh>.

- Alb. *vesh* ‘wear’ < PIE **ṷos-éje/o-*, cf. Hitt. *waššezzi* ‘wears’, Ved. *vāsáyati* ‘id.’, Goth. *wasjan* ‘wear’, OE *werian* ‘id.’, etc. (DPEWA s.v.).

3.2.2. PIE laryngeals.

3.2.2.1. PIE **h_x* > Alb. *a* /C_C (“vocalization”) in initial syllable, otherwise is lost without traces.

- Alb. *shtat* m. ‘body, shape’ < PIE **sth₂-tó-*, cf. Ved. *sthitá-* ‘standing, solid’, Gk. στατός ‘standing’, Lat. *status* ‘id.’, etc.

3.2.2.2. PIE **h_x* > Alb. *a* /#_RC (Rix’s Law).

- Alb. *ar-í* m. ‘bear’ ← **ar* << **ar* < PIE **h₂rtko-*, cf. Hitt. *hartagga-* c. ‘bear (?)’, Ved. *ṛkṣa-* m. ‘bear’, Gk. ἄρκτος m. ‘id.’, Arm. *arj* m. ‘id.’, Lat. *ursus* m. ‘id.’, etc. (DPEWA s.v.).

3.2.2.3. Less certain is the evidence for PIE **h_x* > Palb. **V* /#_RV (Demiraj 1994).

- Alb. *lig* ‘bad, ill’ ~ Gk. ὀλίγος ‘little, small’ < PIE **h₃lig-ó-* (DPEWA s.v., §2.1.1.1).
- Alb. *rrjedh* ‘flow’ ~ Gk. Ἀρέθουσα (name of a spring) ← PIE **h₂red^h-* (Schaffner 2010/11).
- But Alb. *rijep* (~ *rrjep*) ‘tear’ ~ Gk. ἐρέπτομαι ‘feed on, eat’ ← PIE **h₂rep-* (DPEWA s.v.).

3.2.2.4. As for PIE **CL_hh_xC*, it is important to distinguish between **CL_hh_xT* (where *T* = obstruent) and **CL_hh_xR* (where *R* = resonant).

3.2.2.4.1. PIE **CL_hh_xT* > Pre-Palb. **CLaT*.

- OAlb. /i glatë/ (St.-Alb. *i gjatë*) ‘long’ < PIE **dl_h-tó-*, cf. Ved. *dīrghá-* ‘long’, OCS *dlŭgŭ* ‘id.’, Gk. δολιχός ‘id.’, Hitt. *daluki-* ‘id.’, etc. (DPEWA s.v.).

3.2.2.4.2. PIE **CL_hh_xR* > Pre-Palb. **CaLR*.

- Alb. *i parë* ‘first’ < PIE **pr_hh₂-uó-*, cf. Ved. *púrva-* ‘first’, OCS *prŭvŭ* ‘id.’, Toch.B *parwe** ‘id.’, etc. (DPEWA s.v.).

3.2.2.5. Differently, PIE **CL_hh_xV* > Pre-Palb. **CuLV*.

- Alb. *gur* m. ‘stone’ < PIE **g^urh₂-i-* ‘the heavy one’ (§3.1.1.1).

3.3. PIE liquids.

3.3.1. Intervocalic position.

3.3.1.1. PIE **l* > Palb. **l* > Alb. [ɫ] <ll>.

- Alb. *sjell* ‘bring; turn oneself’ < PALb. **t^{sj}éla/i-* < PIE **k^uélh_i-e/o-* ‘turn’, cf. Ved. *cáрати* ‘moves, goes’, Gk. *πέλομαι* ‘become, take place’, Lat. *colō* ‘cultivate, dwell’, etc. (DPEWA s.v.).

3.3.1.2. PIE **r* > PALb. **r* > Alb. [ɾ] <r>.

- Alb. *fier* m. ‘fern’ < PALb. **fēryh* < PIE **(s)pérh_x-o-*, cf. OHG *farn* m. ‘fern’, OE *fearn* m. ‘id.’, etc. (DPEWA s.v.).

3.3.2. Preconsonantal position.

3.3.2.1. PIE **ln* / **lġ^(h)* > PALb. **ll* > Alb. [l] <l>.

- Alb. *valë* f. ‘wave’ < PALb. **ualla* < PIE **uol-neh₂-*, cf. OCS *vlŭna* f. ‘wave’, OHG *wella* f. ‘id.’, etc. (DPEWA s.v.).
- Alb. *mjel* ‘to milk’ < PALb. **mélla/i-* < PIE **h₂mélġ-e/o-*, cf. Gk. *ἀμέλω* ‘to milk’, OHG *melkan* ‘id.’, etc. (DPEWA s.v.).

3.3.2.2. PIE **rn* > PALb. **rr* > Alb. [r] <rr>

- Alb. *merr* ‘takes’ < PALb. **márra/i-* ← pref. **me* + PIE **h₂r-néu-* / **h₂r-nu-*, cf. Gk. *ἄρνημαι* ‘gain’, Arm. *aṙnowm* ‘take’, etc. (DPEWA s.v.).

3.3.3. After PALb. underwent consonantal degemination (Balkan feature), the original oppositions **/ll/* ~ **/l/* and **/rr/* ~ **/r/* were restructured as */l/* ~ */ɫ/* (<l> ~ <ll>) and */r/* ~ */ɾ/* (<rr> ~ <r>), respectively.

- Push chain shift.

3.4. PIE syllabic resonants.

3.4.1. Syllabic liquids: PIE **CLC* > (O)Alb. *CLiC*.

- Alb. *dritë* f. ‘light’ < PIE **dr̥k-téh₂-*, cf. Ved. *dr̥ṣṭá-* ‘seen’, OE *torht* ‘clear’, etc. (DPEWA s.v.).

3.4.2. Syllabic nasals: PIE **CNC* > Alb. *CaC*.

- Alb. *mat* m. ‘bank, shore’ (also hydro- and choronym) < PIE **m̥n-ti-* ← **món-ti-* / **m̥n-téj-*, cf. Lat. *mōns*, *montis* m. ‘mountain’, YAv. *maiti-* m. ‘protrudent rock’, etc. (DPEWA s.v.).

3.4.3. But PIE **uRC* > Pre-PALb. **u^huRC* > (O)Alb. *uRC* (*R* = liquid and nasal).

- OAlb. */u^hlk/* (St.-Alb. *ujk*) m. ‘wolf’ < PIE **u^hl̥k^u-o-*, cf. Ved. *vṛka-* m. ‘wolf’, Lith. *vilkas* m. (4) ‘id.’, Goth. *wulfs* m. ‘id.’, etc. (DPEWA s.v.).

3.5. PIE glides.

3.5.1. Word-initial position.

3.5.1.1. PIE **j* > Alb. [j] <gj> (like PIE **s*, §3.2.1.1).

- Alb. *n-gjesh²* ‘gird’ (≠ *n-gjesh¹* ‘knead’) < PIE **iéh₃s-e/o-*, cf. OLith. *júosti* ‘girds’, OCS *po-jasati* ‘gird’, Gk. ζώννυμι ‘id.’, etc. (DPEWA s.v.)

3.5.1.2. PIE **u* > Alb. *v*.

- Alb. *valë* f. ‘wave’ < PIE **uol-neh₂-* (§3.3.2.1).

3.5.2. Word-internal position, intervocalically: loss.

- Alb. *tre* ‘3’ < PIE **tréies*, cf. Ved. *tráyas* ‘3’, Gk. τρεῖς ‘id.’, Lat. *trēs* ‘id.’, etc. (Klingenschmitt 2022:49-52; DPEWA s.v.).
- Alb. *i thellë* ‘deep’ < Pre-PAlb. **cáuila-* < PIE **kóu_h-i-lo-*, cf. Gk. κοῖλος ‘deep’ (DPEWA s.v.; Imberciadori 2025:120-1).