

Latin *bardus* and *gurdus*

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Abstract: The origin of the Latin words *bardus* ‘stupid’ and *gurdus* ‘stupid’ is examined. It is shown that *bardus* cannot be borrowed from Etruscan, as previously claimed. It is probably a borrowing from Oscan and is cognate with forms like Greek βραδύς, Lithuanian *gurdūs* ‘slow’. While *gurdus* could be a loanword from some unknown language, it could also be the regular result in Latin of *g^word-o-, an o-stem adjective derived from the same root as the u-stem that lies behind *bardus*.

The Latin word *bardus* ‘stupid, dull’ is first attested in Plautus, and is also attested once in Caecilius, once in Cicero, and in glossators, otherwise being restricted to Christian authors (TLL s.v. 1. *bardus*). Its etymology remains obscure; Ernout & Meillet (1985: 66) follow Festus (Lindsay 1913: 31) in deriving it from Greek βραδύς ‘slow; dull, sluggish’, while Walde & Hofmann (1938–1954: 1.96) report three possibilities, all involving loan words from another language.¹ The latter authors’ preferred connection, following Nehring (1928: 117–27), is to an Etruscan root *par-, from which *bardus* and a number of other words are to be derived. However, the claim of an Etruscan origin is extremely shaky. According to Nehring, *par- is attested in the Roman family names *Barginna*, *Bargius*, *Bargonius*, *Parconius*, *Parcilius*. To this root are also to be attached the Latin words *bargus* (with a by-form *barcus*), *barginna*, *bargina*, *bargena* and *barcala*, all with a pejorative meaning and all very badly attested, primarily in glosses, *bārō* ‘simpleton, blockhead’ (also found spelt *uārō*),² and *bardus*.

¹ De Vaan (2008: 69) and NIL (196) refer back to Walde & Hofmann.

² The most common form in literary texts is *bārō*; *uārō* is found in Lucilius and manuscripts of Persius (TLL s.v. *bārō*). There was a tendency to spell /w/ as , which is known from the first century AD onwards (Adams 2013: 183–90); since the reverse spelling of /b/ with <u> is less common, though not unheard of, this would be a weak supposition in favour of *uārō* as the original spelling. But, in fact, there is other evidence which supports *bārō* as the original form. Both *Vārō* and *Bārō* are found inscriptionally as a cognomen, but in this case *Vārō* could be explained as an alternative version of the cognomen *Varrō* by the *littera*-rule, whereby sequences of *ā* plus sonorant are in synchronic variation with *ã* plus geminate sonorant

Apart from the names, whose Etruscan origin is taken as read by Nehring, the argument for this source for the other words is based on patterns of derivation between all these words, which are claimed to match Etruscan derivational processes,³ and on the supposed variation between *g* and *c* seen in *bargus* beside *barcus*, *barcala*. Even the existence and meaning of many of these words in Latin is somewhat doubtful and there is no direct evidence of such a root with the appropriate meaning in Etruscan. Breyer (1993: 241–44), despite including *bardus*, along with *bargus* etc., in the category of ‘probable or certain’ loanwords from Etruscan, accepts that for *bardus* itself there is no good evidence for an Etruscan connection. Moreover, since Etruscan did not have voiced stops, the presence of two voiced stops in *bardus* is a problem for an Etruscan origin. The /d/ might be explained as the result of a voiced (or at any rate lenis) allophone of /t/ in the middle of a word in Etruscan, which could be equated with Latin’s lenis (and voiced) /d/ (thus Rix 1995b: 77), or by allophonic voicing in Etruscan next to a sonorant, or between two vowels (Devine 1974: 146–7). But the use of Latin /b/ for Etruscan /p/ is much more difficult. According to Devine, who uses Latinised versions of Etruscan names as his data set, a voiced stop is found at the beginning only when next to a sonorant, or, in the case of the velar stop, when there is another velar stop in the following syllable which follows a sonorant.⁴ Consequently, two alternative explanations of the origin of

(Sen 2015: 42–78). Thus all instances of *Vārō*, like *Varrō*, could be derived from *uārus* ‘bow-legged’ (which is also a cognomen). Furthermore, I have carried out a search for the letter string <baro> on the Clauss-Slaby Databank (at <http://manfredclauss.de/gb/index.html>. Accessed 07/12/2016). I have found 13 inscriptions which include the cognomen *Bārō* or its derivative *Bārōnius*, all of which spell all (other) 36 instances of /w/ with <u>. And only one shows any other spellings which are characteristic of less educated writers, who might be more prone to use for /w/. Note also that one of these inscriptions dates from the first century BC, at which period texts showing for /w/ are otherwise lacking. I therefore conclude that *bārō* is not simply a spelling variant of *uārō*, but exists in its own right. The most likely explanation for *uārō* is that it is simply a late spelling variant of *bārō*, perhaps encouraged by the existence of the also pejorative *uārus* ‘bow-legged’ (alongside its derivative *Vārō*, *Varrō*, if the semantic connection with *uārus* was still felt). The etymology of *bārō* remains unknown.

³ Note the sceptical view of this method of identifying Etruscan loanwords taken by Rix (1995b: 73).

⁴ Bonfante (1995) takes a voiced stop as a sure sign that a word is not Etruscan. Apart from *bardus* (etc.), Breyer (1993: 526–7) includes two other examples of ‘probable or certain’ loanwords from Etruscan into Latin beginning with /b/. *Bacchānālia* ‘rites of Bacchus’, even if it was borrowed from Etruscan, was probably reformed on the basis of Greek Βάκχος, since the divine name *Bacchus* is a direct loan from Greek (Breyer 1993: 500 fn. 28). And the only evidence for an Etruscan origin of *bal-*

bardus, although ruled out by Walde & Hofmann, are much more likely to be correct. These are borrowing from Greek and borrowing from a Sabellic language.⁵

To take the Greek possibility first: a transfer into the *o*-stems in Latin from the *u*-stem βαδύς is plausible in such an early loan-word (Biville 1990–1995: 2.315–18), and, as Biville notes, many words in this semantic field are borrowed from Greek (*baceolus* ‘stupid’, *blennus* ‘drivelling’, *bliteus* ‘tasteless, worthless’, *mōrus* ‘foolish, silly’). On the other hand, while metathesised forms are occasionally found of the comparative (βαρδύτερος) and the superlative (βάρδιστος), these are, as noted by Walde & Hofmann, highly infrequent and thus unlikely to be the origin of the Latin form.⁶ It is just possible that the metathesis could have taken place in Latin itself, given *sorbeō* ‘drink, suck’ < **srob^h-eje/o-* (LIV 587), but there are few or no other examples of metathesis of *-Vr-* sequences, except where the vowel is **i*.⁷

The best solution is that *bardus* could be borrowed from a Sabellic language. The combination of Greek βαδύς and Balto-Slavic forms such as Lithuanian *gurdūs* ‘slow’, Old Church Slavonic *grъdbъ* ‘proud, haughty’ allow us to reconstruct **g^wrd-u-* (thus NIL 195–6). The change of **g^w* > *b* is regular in the Sabellic languages, and I agree with Untermann (2000: 530) that *-ar-* is at least one of the regular results of **r* in Oscan, as demonstrated by **kú]mparakineís** ‘of the assembly’ < **kom-pr̥k-i-h₃n-*, *comparascuster* ‘shall have been raised (of a matter)’ < **kom-pr̥k-ske/o-*.⁸ Moreover, unlike in Latin, where

teus ‘girdle, belt’ is a statement of the first century BC grammarian and polymath Varro (Breyer 1993: 429). On the problematic evaluation of the origin of Latin words by Breyer see Watmough (1997: 13–14) and Rix (1995b: 74). None of the words considered by Watmough, Rix, or Baudoux (1943. *Non vidi*; reported by Watmough 1997: 12) to be loanwords from Etruscan begin with a voiced stop in Latin.

⁵ Paschall (1939: 14) identifies “perhaps ... an accessory idea of sluggishness” in the meaning of *bardus*. This is a further argument in favour of borrowing either from Greek or Sabellic, since ‘slow’ seems to be the basic meaning of the preform **g^wrd-u-* of the Greek and Sabellic words I am about to discuss.

⁶ LSJ, s.v. βαδύς, gives one example of the comparative from Theocritus, and four examples of the superlative, two from the Iliad, one from Theocritus, and one from an author of the fourth century AD. A search of the TLG finds no further examples, other than in commentaries on Homer.

⁷ Metathesis seems to be more or less regular for **-ri-* sequences between a coronal or velar and a coronal in open syllables, e.g. **kritos* > *certus* (Meiser 1988: 80 and Weiss 2009: 123, 142).

⁸ The only Oscan evidence for *-or-* < **-r̥-* is *fortis* ‘more strongly’, but here the *o*-grade may be original; see Vine (2004: 374–6 and 2006: 154–6), and Zair (2017: 278–81). There are alternative approaches to explain the Oscan *-ar-* from **-r̥-* (García Castillero 2000: 183–5; LIV 476; de Vaan 2008: 445), none entirely satisfac-

original *u*-stems generally become *i*-stems (e.g. *tenuis* ‘thin’, *suāuis* ‘sweet’, *gravis* ‘heavy’), it is common for *u*-stems to be thematised in the Sabellic languages (Rix 1995a), as shown by Oscan **uruvú** ‘wide’ ← **h₁ur-u-* (cf. Greek εὐρύς), **bravús** ‘heavy’ ← **g^wrh₂-u-* (cf. Greek βαρύς). Furthermore, the sequence **-du-* probably becomes *-d-* in Oscan, so **barduos* would become **bardos* regularly (the only example seems to be **akkatus** ‘lawyers’ <**adkāto-* < **adokāto-*, probably borrowed from Latin *aduocatus*; for examples of the same change in Umbrian see Buck 1928: 67–8).⁹

The first appearance of *gurdus* is much later than that of *bardus*, in the first century AD grammarian Quintilian (*Inst.* 1.5.57), who states that *gurdus* means *stolidus*, i.e. ‘stupid’, and that he has heard that it comes from Hispania (and also that it is a word used by the common people, the *uulgus*). The word is translated ‘blockhead, dolt’ by the OLD, and ‘dolt, jolterhead, numbskull’ by Lewis & Short (1968). But as the citations in the TLL make clear, *gurdus* is an adjective, not a noun. The TLL notes only a few other instances of its use, primarily in the meaning ‘stupid’, but Servius (*Serv. auct. georg.* 2.301; Thilo 1887: 245) uses *gurdus* to gloss *retūsus* ‘not sharp, blunt’, and Lucifer Calaritanus (*Lucif. moriend.* 8 p. 301, 29; Diercks 1978: 283) uses *gurdior plumbo* ‘blunter than lead’ in reference to the point of a sword. Although the two usages in the sense ‘blunt’ are much later than Quintilian’s use of *gurdus* as ‘stupid’, they seem much more likely to retain the original meaning, with the metaphorical extension to ‘stupid’, i.e. not sharp, being secondary. This fits in with the semantics of the Romance evidence, where we find French *gourd* ‘stiff, numb’, Spanish *gordo* ‘thick, fat’ (Welsh *gwrdd* ‘brave; strong; handsome’ may be borrowed from *gurdus*, but the semantics are divergent).

According to de Vaan (2008: 27) *gurdus* also comes from the same preform **g^wrd-u-* as Greek βαδύς and Lithuanian *gurdūs*.¹⁰ It is easy to see how a meaning ‘slow’ could develop into ‘stupid’, as it did for *bardus*; on the face of it, from ‘slow’ to ‘blunt’, which seems to be the primary meaning of *gurdus*, is less plausible. But if we look at some of the synonyms of *gurdus* provided in ancient glossaries (Goetz 1965: 6.507 s.v. *gurdus*), we find a similar range of meanings. For instance,

tory. Even if one explains the vowel differently, initial *b-* < **g^w-* demonstrates a Sabellic origin.

⁹ The association of *bardus* with rustics and barbarians, noted by Paschall (1939: 14–15), may also be a reflection of its origin in Oscan.

¹⁰ Walde & Hofmann (1938–1954 1: 627) are sceptical, as they reconstruct **mrd-u-* for Greek βαδύς, but see Chantraine (1968–1980: 192).

hebēs, defined by the OLD as ‘having a dull edge or point, dull; lacking in energy, sluggish, inert; dull-witted, dense’ covers the same range of meanings as proposed for *gurdus*; similarly, *lentus* ‘pliant, soft, malleable; tough; slow, sluggish, leisurely; slow-witted’, and *brūtus* ‘heavy, inert; irrational’.¹¹ Although not attested in Latin, presumably it is the connection between slowness and heaviness which leads to the Spanish meaning ‘thick, fat’. Consequently, we need not worry too much about the semantics, and may accept that *gurdus* is another word derived from **g^wrd-u-*. But if this is the case, what language it comes from is unclear. If Quintilian was right to posit an origin from Spain, it should still be from an Indo-European language. It cannot be Celtiberian, since the result of **g^wrd-u-* ought to have been **bridu-*. A Lusitanian origin is impossible to refute, since our ignorance of the language is so great that we have no direct evidence for the reflex of either **g^w* or **r*, but it has no positive evidence in its favour.¹²

If Quintilian’s information is not reliable, two alternative possibilities arise. The first is that *gurdus* is a borrowing from some other language. A possible source would be Umbrian, where *gurdus* might come from **g^wrd-u-*, since the development of **r* to *-ur-* may be regular in that language (Zair 2017),¹³ thematisation of *u*-stems is presumably standard as in Oscan, and **-du-* would give *d* regularly. There is, however, one major difficulty, which is the development of initial *g*- < **g^w*-. Since **g^w* > *b* is attested in all the Sabellic languages, it is generally supposed to be a Proto-Sabellic sound law. However, since the development of **r* to *-ur-* is restricted to Umbrian (with Oscan giving *-ar-*), delabialisation of **g^w* before *u* would require **g^w* > *b* to have taken place independently in each of the individual Sabellic languages. This seems too great a supposition to accept purely for the sake of an Umbrian origin for *gurdus*.

The alternative possibility is that *gurdus* is a native Latin word. If this is the case, we would have to assume a sound change **g^wu-* > *gu-*,

¹¹ Other definitions include *ineptus* ‘having no sense of what is fitting, foolish silly’, *inutilis* ‘useless’, *stupidus* ‘physically dazed; foolish’, *stultus* ‘slow-witted, stupid’, and *obtusus* ‘blunt; obtuse’.

¹² However, a change of **g^w* > *b* is at least plausible, since Lusitanian **k^w* is often supposed to have given *p* in *puppīd* ‘whatever’ < **k^wod k^wid* and the name *Petranioi* < **k^wetr-*, derived from the word for ‘four’; if the name *Bouius* found in Latin inscriptions from Lusitania is in fact Lusitanian (rather than belonging to a different, Celtic, language) it is probably derived from **g^wou-* ‘ox’. For the details of what is known about Lusitanian see Wodtko (2010).

¹³ Found most clearly in the preverb *pur-* < **pr-* and in loanwords into Latin such as *turdus* ‘thrush’ < **trsd^ho-*.

for which there appears to be neither positive nor negative evidence; although in most contexts $*g^w$ normally becomes /w/ (e.g. *ueniō* ‘I come’ < $*g^w\eta\text{-}ie/o\text{-}$, *toruus* ‘grim’ < $*torg^w\text{-}o\text{-}$), it does become /gw/ after a nasal (e.g. *unguen* ‘fat, grease’ < $*h_3eng^w\text{-}en$). So this would provide a parallel for the possibility of a different reflex of $*g^w$ - depending on its environment. We would therefore assume delabialisation of $*g^w$ - word-initially before *u* to give *g*.¹⁴ However, the source of the (first) *u* in *gurdus* is problematic, as $*r$ generally gives *-or-* in Latin. I have argued that cases of unexpected *-urC-* for *-orC-* either go back to $*uorC\text{-}$,¹⁵ or are borrowings from Umbrian, in which, as mentioned above, $*r$ gave *-ur-* regularly. It is possible that $*g^w\text{-}orC\text{-}$ could share the same development as $*uorC\text{-}$, in which case *gurdus* might be regular from an *o*-grade version of the adjective $*g^w\text{-}ord\text{-}u\text{-}$.¹⁶ But none of the other languages show an *o*-grade, nor is this expected in a *u*-stem adjective.¹⁷ Furthermore, there is still the problem that *gurdus* is an *o*-stem, since *u*-stems normally become *i*-stems in Latin. And even if in this unique case the *u*-stem was thematised, the result ought to be $*guruus$, since non-initial $*\text{-}d\text{-}$ becomes $*u$ in Latin (e.g. *suāuis* < $*suād\text{-}u\text{-}$). As a result of all these problems, *gurdus*, if it comes from $*g^w\text{-}rd\text{-}u\text{-}$, cannot be a Latin word.

Many of the difficulties could, however, be avoided if *gurdus* went back, not to $*g^w\text{-}rd\text{-}u\text{-}$ but to $*g^w\text{-}ord\text{-}o\text{-}$ (assuming that we accept that $*g^w\text{-}or\text{-}$ gives *gur-*, just as $*uor\text{-}$ gives *ur-*).¹⁸ The existence of two adjectives of similar semantics but featuring two different ablaut grades and derivational suffixes in Proto-Italic is not impossible: *o*- and *u*-stem adjectives are key members of the system of derivational relationships known as the ‘Caland system’, and the meaning ‘slow’ belongs in the ‘property concept’ class of adjectives – of which ‘speed’ is a fundamental subclass – which are characterised in Indo-European by showing Caland system alternations (Rau 2009: 77–109). An exact parallel would be $*m\text{-}rd\text{-}u\text{-}$ > Vedic *mṛdú-* ‘gentle, weak’,

¹⁴ Although it is not clear that word-initial $*k^w\text{-}$ supports such a change. If $*g^w\text{-}$ gave /g/ we might expect $*k^w\text{-}$ to give /k/, but there is a certain amount of evidence that $*k^w\text{-}$ was lost altogether in this position, as in *ubī* ‘where’ < $*k^w\text{-}ud^h\text{-}ei$ (but this sound change is disputed; Leumann 1977: 149–50; Weiss 2009: 78).

¹⁵ Examples are *uruum* ‘curved part of a plough, ploughbeam’ < $*uoru\text{-}o\text{-}$, *urgeō* ‘push, press, drive, urge’ < $*uorg\text{-}eje\text{-}$ or $*uorg^h\text{-}eje/o\text{-}$, and *urbs* ‘city’ < $*uorb^h(i)\text{-}$.

¹⁶ Zair (2017: 169–70 fn. 26) states that this rule does not apply when $*u$ is not word-initial, as shown by *sordēs* ‘dirt’ < $*suordēs$. But this root has a full-grade in $*a$, as shown by Latin *suāsum* ‘a dirt grey colour’ and *insuāsum* ‘the name of a yellowish colour’ < $*suard\text{-}to\text{-}$ (Weiss 2009: 182), so Gothic *swarts* ‘black’ may go back to $*suard\text{-}$, while *sordēs* reflects $*surd\text{-}$.

¹⁷ Although it is not completely impossible (Widmer 2004: 79–103).

¹⁸ I owe this idea to A. Willi (p. c.).

Latin *mollis* ‘soft’ (via **m̥l̥du-i-*) beside **mold-o-* > Old High German *malz* ‘gentle, mild’, Old Church Slavonic *mladъ* ‘young, fresh’ (NIL 482–5).¹⁹

In conclusion, *bardus* can be traced back ultimately to an Indo-European *u*-stem **g^wrd-u-* ‘slow’ otherwise attested in Greek and Balto-Slavic. Since *bardus* shows the regular Latin results of neither **g^w* or **r̥*, nor is an *i*-stem, which is the usual fate of original *u*-stems in Latin, it must be a loanword from some other language. Borrowing from Oscan is the most plausible analysis (although borrowing from Greek βραδύς cannot be entirely ruled out).

If exactly the same pre-form lies behind *gurdus*, that too must be a loan-word, but its origin remains obscure. If it was a language of Spain, as claimed by Quintilian, the only known language which is possible is Lusitanian, but there is no positive evidence in its favour. Alternatively, *gurdus* may come from a different derivation from the same root as *bardus*, in which case it could be the regular Latin result of **g^word-o-*.

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¹⁹ Another example, although with *e*-grade in the *o*-stem, is **d^hub-u-* > Lithuanian *dubius* ‘deep’ beside **d^heub-o-* > Gothic *diups* ‘deep’.

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