① Bernat Filistino, "Mathematical Hermeneutics of the Imperfect Tense in Extinct Hypothetical Indo-European languages" NFEG 25 (2000): 45-71

Simplifying matters further, consider the following hypothetical passage from the Old Pisidian epic poem *Sid-varonayash Ashanaga*, usually called *The Worms of the Goddess Ashanaga*, which appears to be a kind of grammatical pun or tongue-twister: *Fo-vak in-te mush-harashabash-shum te in vak-fo.*[8] The imperfect verb phrase, so typical of Pisidian lyric, leaps out at even the most illiterate reader like a bit of burnt granola. *Mush-harashabash* forms the core of this particular sentence, and indeed, the entire epic, as both M. Evans and Tess Haberdasher have recently argued.[9] *Mush*, meaning "mouse" or perhaps "moose" or possibly even "saltwater" (let the scholar beware: such lexical imprecision is common in entirely reconstructed languages), can easily be distinguished from the verb, whose infinitive, *harasha-re*, means alternatively "to horseshoe," "to harass unrelentingly" or "to create a harpy (out of oneself)."[10] The imperfect here, as indicated by the *-abash* ending, gives the *mush*'s action a sense of timelessness, and such unending, repetitive action perfectly befits the assumed liturgical/religious contexts of the epic.[11] Can one even begin to appreciate the ability of saltwater to make a harpy of itself? Like the Loch Ness Monster, the ancient Pisidian knack for wit, long acknowledged in the works of Strabo, Diodorus Siculus and others, clearly shines through even these fraught conjugations of imaginary verbs.[12]

↓ NOTES ↓

[8] Although there have been many popular translations of this poem, now widely available online, there has only been one scholarly translation (in French) of *Sid-varonayash Ashanaga*, since most of the Old Pisidian words were "invented" by Augustus De Rondé, the seventeenth-century editor. This landmark work, by Francois Levert, was entitled *Les livres anciens des Pisidiens imaginaires* (Paris: Du Pont, 1898). Some, such as Martin Jetpak, have seen the poem's nonsensical and utterly unintelligible three-part division as a possible influence on the framing of the U.S. Constitution, as several founding fathers were known to be in possession of earlier translations of the *Sid-varonayash Ashanaga*. See Jetpak's "The Lost Pisidian Origins of the American Republican System," *Nebraska Local History Journal* 14 (1992): 12-28.

[9] M. Evans, *Sharky Octopus and Silkworm Sandbag Hedgehog: Approaches to Creative Aggregation* (Baltimore: Seven Sages Press, 1994); Tessy Haberdasher, "0111010001011110010101: Overcoming Binary Thinking through Numerological Meditation" *Journal of Neo-Babylonian Computer Studies* 2 (1998): 1-11.

[10] Levert, *Les livres anciens*, pp. xx-xxvi.

[11] This, as Dolores Festchrift has recently argued, is based on the interpretation of the enclitic *–shum*, which probably has a mysterious votive or ritual meaning. Festschrift, *Seeing Mystery in the Unknown: Twelve Easy Steps* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

[12] Cf. Divine Revelation.

The genre of mnemonic chants for the Latin conjugation of the imperfect, ever the help of schoolboys and girls in the early part of this century, seems to contain yet another surprise, pointing to the inestimable supernatural power of the imperfect. For the imperfect has always been more than a mere tense: it approaches a philosophy of life and provides a means for the diligent student of the occult to tap into the ineffable forces that govern reality. Consider the following chant of imperfect endings for regular Latin verbs written at Versailles in 1789 by Abbé C.L. Consigny shortly after participating in the Tennis Court Oath, and subsequently made famous by Napoleon upon his elevation as First Consul in 1799 (sung to the tune of *Te Secutus Miles*):

* *Bam bas bat bamus batis bant,*
Bam bas bat bamus batis bant;
Bam bas bat bamus batis bant.[43]

This simple chant, of course, was not only a French Revolutionary *aide-de-memoire*. It may surprise some that several more recent authors in the English language, including H.P. Lovecraft, Hunter S. Thompson and even J.K. Rowling, have secretly employed this chant in their own writings to great effect.[44] But perhaps the most noteworthy use was by U.S. Senator Beauregard H. Minivann (D-LA) who chanted the poem for nearly 20 hours straight during his filibuster of the Arnford-Plattson agreement of 1884.[45] According to a graphic rendering of the event splashed on the side of a barn nearly forty years later, Sen. Minivann's words took physical form as spinning, flaming skulls, and although Congressional records are silent on the matter, this *imperfectus* chant seems to have swayed one or two Senators' votes.

[43] Hermes Katsopolis, *Sing Your Children to Sleep With Ancient Verb Endings* (Montreal: Chez Gare, 1993), p. 277.

[44] It is a little known fact that if one opens Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, the sixth book of the much-loved series, to p. 199 and incants this poem, the book itself will burst (or perhaps more accurately, "was bursting") into flame of unknown provenance. See Esper Swarsky's study "New Uses for Modern Pop Fiction: Sue Grafton, J.K. Rowling and James Patterson," in *Conducting Alchemy with Mass Market Trade Paperbacks*, ed. Maria Sanderson, pp. 119-54 (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2010). Mrs. Fairchild, our own neighbor downstairs, assures readers that this phenomenon happens with other books in the series as well.

[45] In terms of the history of grammatical filibusters in the US Senate, this feat has only been exceeded by Strom Thurmond's 24-hour recitation of all of the forms of the medio-passive conjugation in the ancient Hittite language. Thurmond's notorious filibuster, now known among politicos as the "Hahari-tati-tari-wastati Waste of Time," was against the 1957 Civil Rights Act. See Henri Wittmann, "A note on the linguistic form of Hittite sheep" *Revue*

② Talia H. Beeftallow, "Bam Bam goes to Bat: The Life and Afterlife of the Latin Imperfectus Chants," Lexikon 109 (2014): 298-322.

(3) Moira Paracelsus, "Alcuin's Quid tempus amor est and the Abuse of Frankincense at Charlemagne's Court," in S. Michael Metacom and Barbara Serendipitous, eds. The Invention of Television in the Middle Ages: Cultural Studies in Pre-Modern Telecommunications, pp. 217-45 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015)

Another approach seems to be suggested in Alcuin's famous treatise, *Quid tempus amor est?*.[22] For one, the Carolingian cleric seems to have gotten himself into a theological and grammatical conundrum: what tense should the devout scholar use to describe Christ's actions while on earth? While Christ's deeds were obviously "perfect", were they in fact grammatically *perfect*, meaning "completed in the past," or were they *imperfect*, meaning "incomplete"? [23] Alcuin, much like his contemporaries Hincmar of Reims and Hrabanus Maurus, placed an emphasis on the special profundities of the imperfect tense in Latin. The imperfect, he observes, was unlike all other tenses. It was obviously a past tense, covering actions performed previously, yet he recognizes that, the imperfect alone might break the confines of its grammatical bounds since it also demarcated continuing and habitual action.[24] Could the imperfect be a "present" tense in the sense that Christ's actions, like Christ himself, lived on despite being "completed"? Could the imperfect even have the capacity to continue into the future in some way, at least until the Second Coming?[25] Alcuin clearly thinks so – he regularly places Christ's actions and injunctions to his followers in the imperfect tense. "The imperfect tense," he argues, "at least as used to describe the crucifixion and resurrection, is in many ways the only true tense, since the blood that Christ shed centuries ago is indeed still flowing and will undoubtedly continue for all penitent men until He returns. Then and only then will His deeds be completed."[26]

[22] All quotes are from Richard Simmons' excellent translation found in his compilation *Sweating to the Carolingian Theologians, Vol. I* (Southampton: Simon and Schuster, 1995).

[23] This point was first referenced in a probing and as yet unanswered question in an episode of *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire*, hosted by Regis Philbin, in February, 2002. The contestant, 29-year old Anthony Del Duca from Piscataway, NJ, lost out on $32,000 when Regis asked him "How many Arals were in the Aral Sea before it evaporated?" Del Duca's last lifeline (the Phone-a-Friend option) failed him miserably, and Del Duca himself remained silent for about ten minutes before leaving the set entirely. In a practical sense, this obtuse question launched my own dissertation on the matter.

[24] This is similar to Prof. Michael Gareth Tyson's stunning demonstration of the gravitational power of the prepositional phrase in a vacuum. See his landmark paper "In the Belly of the Beast: Regarding Ongoing Experimentation on *Of, In,* and *For* at the Laboratory of the Department of Creative Philology of the University of San Diego during the Month of August in the Summer of 2012," *Prepositions and the Prepositional Phrase in the Postcolonial World: New Frontiers in Research* 89 (2014): 1089-93. *

[25] Alcuin of course discounted the Felician objection to all of these assumptions, which was that each act of Christ, identified as an *iota*, was a single perfect universe unto itself. These iotas floated around the terrestrial plane and were believed to carry prayers from the faithful to the heavens, and could even perform miracles on their own. Both the objection and its author Felix of Cappadocia were found to be heretical at the Second Council of East Constantinople in 723. See the long-lost studies by Dr. Spear Aggressively, "Unhappy Felix: A Forgotten Detail in the Felician Heresy of 723," *Felician Studies* 46 (2002): 91-103; and "Double Felix: Replication of Felician Heretical Thought in Byzantine Treatises after East Constantinople II," *Felician Studies* 49 (2005): 33-60.

[26] Simmons, *Sweating to the Carolingian Theologians*, p. 255.

(4) B. Filistino's Translation:

I have translated the oft-excerpted "Imperfect Stanza" of the *Sidvaronayash Ashanaga*:

Moist rocks [...] were cascading [down] the mountainside of *Ushu*-mountain,
Because a solitary (or saleable/sellable?) goat/god (?) was marching/mashing/molting [along] the *Ushu*-ridge.
Seven *kilpu*-trees (tricks or even "trays" in an ironic sense) were swaying in the [gentle] [...]autumn breeze (or possibly "breeches"),
Ashanaga's [people/followers/attendants?] were chasing after empty cocoons...