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Correspondences of the Basic Words between Old Chinese and Proto-Indo-European¹

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Abstract In order to ascertain the genetic relationship between different languages, the comparison of "the basic words" between them has been an important component of Comparative Historical Linguistics. The 89 groups of correspondent words between Old Chinese and ancient Indo-European, which belong to M. Swadesh's "200 basic words", are listed in the paper. This evidence gives us a clue: there must have been an intimate relationship between Chinese and Indo-European in the prehistoric period.

Since Comparative and Historical Linguistics was born in the 19th century, comparing basic words between different languages to ascertain whether they share a number of cognates has been an important component in the study of the genetic relationships of different languages. Rask (1787-1832), the first great historical linguist who engaged in going back to the origin of Old Norse, had compared 400 words (352 lexical words, and 48 grammatical words) to ascertain the genetic relationship between Old Norse, Latin, and Greek in his famous thesis "Undersogelse om det gamle Nordiske eller Islandske Sprogs Oprindelse" ("Tracing the Origin of Old Norse or Icelandic").

As most of the formative factors in Sino-Tibetan languages have been worn away over the long course of time, the correspondences of basic words are more important than the correspondences of formatives in the study of genetic relationships of Sino-Tibetan languages. "It is based on the great amount of cognate roots in core vocabulary that we ascertain the genetic relationships of Sino-Tibetan languages." (Zheng zhang Shangfang 1995: p. 296) The primary method we use in the comparative study of Old Chinese and Proto-Indo-European is also to compare the roots of Old Chinese with those of archaic Indo-European languages.

The American scholar, Morris Swadesh, drew up the current list of basic words in 1952, which contains 200 words. To make the list suitable for more kinds of languages, Swadesh narrowed the words on his list further, resulting in an adjusted "List of 100 basic words." As the two lists of Swadesh were established on the basis of semantic principles, and the words on the lists generally represent concepts from life in remote antiquity, therefore, the lists have been used in the field of historical study of Sino-Tibetan languages extensively as well as in the field of historical study of other languages in the world.

Russian scholar Sergei Yakhontov adopted 32 words from Swadesh's list of basic words, and added three other words: 'salt', 'wind' and 'year' to form a list containing 35 basic words. S. Yakhontov thought that his list was suitable for more languages than was Swadesh's list.

It was with the 35 words that Sergei Starostin, another Russian scholar, compared the cognates among

¹ The paper is adapted from a part of the author's doctoral dissertation "Comparison of the Words between Old Chinese and Proto-Indo-European." The author presented about 700 corresponding words between OC and PIE to verify that there was an intimate relationship between OC and PIE during the prehistoric period in the dissertation, which is reserved in the Library of Sichuan University and will be published in the beginning of 2002.

Old Chinese, Proto-Tibeto-Burman, Proto-North-Caucasian, Proto-Yeniseian, Proto-Indo-European, and Proto-Austronesian so as to estimate the relationship between OC and other Proto-languages in the prehistoric period. In his comparison, the percentages of the cognates between OC and other groups of languages are: (Wang 1995)

	PTB	PNC	PY	PIE	PA
OC	74	43	34	23	14

We can see that the percentage of the cognates between OC and PIE is much lower than those between OC and PIB or PNC or PY. The percentage means that there are only less than 8 cognates between OC and PIE in terms of the list of 35 basic words of S. Yakhontov. That provides a significant basis for the argument that OC and PIE shared an estranged relationship in prehistoric times. But, with the development of study of the reconstructed forms of OC in recent years, and the extensive work that has been done in the comparative study of OC and PIE, the percentage of the cognates between OC and PIE will be changed, possibly even greatly. Bodman has said: By chance, there are both kinds of correspondent forms of OC and Tibetan in the cognates we have found; one of the causes is that we have made more studies of the two languages. (Bodman 1995: p. 51) In other words, the correspondent words between OC and PIE we have found are comparatively fewer than those between OC and Tibetan, and one of the likely causes is that we have not made equivalent studies of them as we have for OC and Tibetan.

In recent years, the author of this paper has been concentrating on the comparative study of OC and PIE, and has finished his doctoral dissertation, "Comparison of the Words between Old Chinese and Proto-Indo-European". The following paper is part of the dissertation: the correspondences of the basic words between OC and PIE, which belong to the lists of basic words proposed by M. Swadesh. We list the core 100 words in "Part I", and the remaining 100 words in "Part II". The words belonging to the S.Yakhontov's list of 35 basic words are marked with a shadow background at the front of the entries. Most of the correspondences of the basic words between OC and PIE are supported by the correspondences of cognate groups and homonymic groups between OC and PIE, which can be looked up in the author's book "Comparison of the Words between Old Chinese and Proto-Indo-European" for further explanation. The reader may make use of the index at the end of the every entry; the characters in the brackets represent the name of the OC rhyme group and the following numbers and letters represent the order of the character in the OC rhyme group.

Correspondences of Basic Words between OC and PIE

Part I

(Based on the 100 basic words proposed by M. Swadesh)

ITEM	OLD CHINESE	PROTO-INDO-EUROPEAN
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1. I 吾**egaa, *ŋaa² (I, nominative) : PIE*ego (I, single, nominative) (魚 Group 32A)³

² The form with *- represents the sound of Old Chinese. The OC forms of reconstruction in the paper follow Zhengzhang Shangfang's OC system. (Zhengzhang 1987,1999) The only change is that the final stops of the ending tone characters are written as *-p, *-t, *-k, and the falling-rising tone *-? . The forms with ** represent the forms of Proto-Chinese. For further explanation of the reconstructive system of Proto-Chinese, please refer to the Part III of "Comparison of the Words between Old Chinese and Proto-Indo-European".

³ The parentheses at the end of every entry, e.g. (魚 Group 32A), are the index of the correspondence in "Comparison of the

- 朕*dum (I, single, nominative) : Old Persian adam (I, single, nominative) (魚 Group 32B)
- 2.this 之**k(j)u, *kju (demonstrative pronoun and relative pronoun, this, that) : Latin qui (relative pronoun, this, that) (之 Group 8A)
是*gje? (demonstrative pronoun, this) : Latin haec (demonstrative pronoun, this, he) <*gh- (之 Group 9B)
- 3.that 其*gu (demonstrative pronoun, that, those) : Latin hic (demonstrative pronoun, this, he) <*gh- (之 Group 9A)
厥*kwot (relative pronoun, that, those) : Latin quod (relative pronoun, that) (之 Group 8B)
- 4.who 誰*gwjui (interrogative pronoun, who, what) : Latin quis (interrogative pronoun, who, what) (歌 Group 15E)
- 5.what 何*gaal (interrogative pronoun, what) : PIE root *kwa- (interrogative pronoun, who, what) (歌 Group 15A)
- 6.all 完*gwoon (whole, entire) : PIE root *kuan- (each, whole) (元 Group 9A)
*peens (everywhere) : Greek pan (each, whole) (元 Group 8A)
- 7.two 對*tuus (a pair, duet) : PIE *duwo (two) (侯 Group 14B)
- 8.long 長*laŋ (long) : Latin longus (long) (陽 Group 1A)
- 9.small 微*(s)muul (small) : Old Frisian smel (small) (微 Group 3A)
*mool (small) : (id.) (歌 Group 7A)
- 10.woman 婦*bur? (woman) : Latin puella (girl) (之 Group 13)
- 11.man 民*min (people, man) : Sanskrit manus Gothic manna (man) (真 Group 5A)
蠻*mraan (human) (refer to Li Yongshui 1983) : (id.) (真 Group 5B)
- 12.dog 狗*koo? (dog) : Irish cu (dog) (侯 Group 3A)
犬*keen? (dog) : Greek kuon (dog) (侯 Group 3B)
- 13.leaf 葉*lep (leaf) : Lithuanian lapas (leaf) (葉 Group 11A)
- 14.bark 箒*lep (piece of bamboo that is used to write on) : Latin liber (bark that is used to write on) (葉 Group 11B)
- 15.skin 皮*brel (peel; pelage) : Latin pelage (pelage), pellis (peel) (歌 Group 18)
- 16.fat 臄*biit (fat meat) : PIE root *pit- (fat, grease) (質 Group 1A)
- 17.egg 卵*k roo? (the egg of fish or bird) : Old Norse hrogn (the egg of fish) <*k- (元 Group 25)
- 18.horn 麕**kaar, *kraa (stag) : PIE root *ker- (horn, upper part of the head) (魚 Group 22)
甌*qhwon (horny spoon) : Gaelic corn (a drinking-horn) (元 Group 24)
- 19.head 甲*kraap (head) : Latin caput (head) (葉 Group 4A)
- 20.nose 自**sbirts, *sbis (nose) : Latin spiraculum (spiracle) (脂 Group 12A)
鈕*nuu? (object that looks like a nose) : Lithuanian nosis (nose) (幽 Group 4A)
衄*nuuk (nose bleeding) : Sanskrit nasa (nose) (幽 Group 4B)
- 21.mouth 吻**mund, *mun? (lips, mouth) : Gothic munths (mouth) (文 Group 1)
口**khoob, *khoo? (mouth) : Irish gob (mouth) (侯 Group 13)
- 22.foot 跗*bos (foot) : Greek pous (foot) (侯 Group 19B)
- 23.hand 專*pa (palm) : PIE root *pal- (palm) (魚 Group 4)
- 24.belley 仨**gwoom, *gwoon (paunch) : Old Frisian womme (for*ghom-) (belly or paunch) (冬 Group 2B)
- 25.breast 乳*no? (to nurse, breast) : PIE root *(s)nu- (to nurse) (侯 Group 12A)
- 26.bite 咬*ŋraau? (bite) : Old English gnagan (bite) (宵 Group 13)
- 27.see 督*hl'uuuk (look over) : Old English locian (to look) (覺 Group 3)

- 觀*kwoos (to see) : PIE root *kou- (to look) (侯 Group 7)
- 28.die 殞*muut (die) : Latin mort- (die) (物 Group 1A)
- 29.kill 殺**skraas, *sraas (to kill with sword) : Old Norse skera (to cut, to pierce) (月 Group 8H)
 刺*sthek (to pierce, to kill) : PIE root *steig- (to pierce) (支 Group 10B)
- 30.walk 跋*boot (to go on foot) : Sanskrit padám (print of foot) (侯 Group 19C)
 之*kjuu (to go to) : PIE root *ghē- (to go) (之 Group 7)
- 31.come 降*grum (come down) : PIE root *gwem (come) (冬 Group 3)
- 32.say 諷**pums, *puŋ (read aloud) : Greek phēmi (I speak) (侵 Group 3A)
 讀**l'ook, dook (speak, tell) : Greek logia (sayings) (幽 Group 3C)
- 33.sun 日*nit (sun) : Latin nitēre (brilliant) (質 Group 3)
- 34.moon 望*maŋs (full moon) : Tokharian A mañ (moon), PIE root *men-⁴ (陽 Group 15A)
- 35.water 水**hwjuid, *hwjii? (river) : Greek hudōr (water) *<wed- (微 Group 7)
 河**akwaa, *gaa (Yellow River, river)⁵ : Latin aqua (water) (歌 2)
- 36.rain 零*reen (to rain) : Gothic rign (to rain) (耕 Group 1.B)
 灑*preu (to rain or snow heavily) : Latin pluere (to rain) (宵 Group 4.D)
- 37.earth 土**thaare, *thaa? (territory, soil) : Latin terra (earth, territory) (魚 Group 31.A)
- 38.smoke 黑**smuuuk, *hmuuuk (blackened by smoke) : PIE root *smeukh- (smoke sth.) (職 Group 2A)
- 39.fire 票*phleu (flare) : Latin flagra (flare) *<bhlag- (宵 Group 1.A)
 火**smuuld, *hmuul? (fire) : Gaelic smùid (smoke) (微 Group 2.B)
 焜**smuuld, *smul? (fire) : English smudge (a slow-burning fire) (微 Group 2.A)
- 40.ash 灰**smuuu, *hmuuu (soot) : English smutch (soot) (微 Group 2.D)
 煤**muuud, *muuu (soot) : Gaelic smuid (smoke) (微 Group 2.E)
- 41.burn 焚**burn, *bun (to burn) : Old Frisian burna (to burn) (文 Group 2.)
- 42.mountain 邊**pmen, *pen (distant and high mountain) : Latin mōns (high mountain)
 (元 Group 31.)
- 43.red 紅**gwoom, *gwoon (pink) : Latin uermiculus (bright red)⁶ (東 Group 2C)
 赫**skraak, *qhraak (scarlet) : Latin scarlātum (scarlet) (鐸 Group 17A)
 朱**kjo, *kjo (red) : English gore (blood that flows from a wound) (侯 Group 15A)
 緋*pu (scarlet cloth of silk) : Greek phoinos (blood red) (微 Group 6A)
- 44.green 綸*kruun (green ribbon) : Old English grēne (green) (文 Group 4)
- 45.white 白*braak (white, bright) : PIE root *bhrek- (to become white) (鐸 Group 14A)
- 46.black 涅**niik, *niit (black) : PIE root *neigh- (black) (質 Group 4)
 昧**muurs, *muuls (the dark before morning) : Old Frisian morgen (morning) IE root *mur-
 (物 Group 5A)
 晦**smuuurs, hmuuus (dark) : Greek mauros (dark) (之 Group 3)
- 47.night 夜**lark, laak (night) : Lithuanian darga (dark) (鐸 Group 10A)
 salt 鹽*sdaal (salt) : Latin sal, Greek hals, Sanskrit salila (salt)
 wind (refer to 39th item, Part II)
 year 歲*skots (the asterism "walking in the sky," year⁷) : Old Irish Scot (wanderers) (月 Group 9)

⁴ A part of ending 'n' of PIE roots are able to be compared with *-ŋ of Old Chinese.

⁵ 河*gaa 'Yellow river' may etymologically be connected with the meaning 'abundant water'.

⁶ Latin initial 'u' is compared with PIE *w-(*gw-).

⁷ In Old Chinese, Jupiter (the star) was named 歲*skots, because it traveled in the sky to measure time with its passage. The original meaning is compatible with "wanderers", which is the original meaning of "Scot" – any member of Gaelic tribes of Northern Ireland that migrated to Scotland in the 5th century.

Correspondences of Basic Words between OC and PIE

Part II

(Based on the 200 basic words proposed by M. Swadesh)

- | ITEM | OLD CHINESE | PROTO-INDO-EUROPEAN |
|------|--|---|
| 1. | back 北*puuuk (back) | : Old Norse bak, Old High German bach (back) (職 Group 1) |
| 2. | blow 飄*bleu (whirlwind, blow) | : Old Frisian blā, Old English blāwan (blow) (宵藥 Group 3A) |
| 3. | breathe 息*spuuk (to breathe) | : Greek psūkhein (to breathe) (職 Group 3A) (cf. entry 33 'think' and the explanation) |
| 4. | cut 割**kaart, *kaat (to cut)
害**gaars, *gaas (to hurt with knife) | : PIE root *ker-, Hittite karss- (to cut off) (月 Group 8A)
: (id., 8B) |
| 5. | day 晝*tos (day) | : Latin dies (day) (支 Group 1B) |
| 6. | dig 瀆*dook (artificial ditch) | : English duk (pp. of dig, to dig a ditch) (屋 Group 2A) |
| 7. | dust 塵*muul (dust) | : Middle Dutch and Middle English mul (dust) (歌 Group 3G) |
| 8. | father 父**bate, *ba? (father) | : PIE *pāter (father) (魚 Group 12A) |
| 9. | fear 怖*phaas (to panic) | : Latin *palpitāre (to be frightened and restless) (魚 Group 5) |
| 10. | fight 鬥*toos (fight between two men) | : Latin duellum (duel) (侯 Group 14A) |
| 11. | float 漂*phleu (to overflow) | : PIE root *bhleu- (to flow abundantly) (宵 Group 4A) |
| 12. | flow 浮*bluu (to float) | : Sanskrit *plu (to swim, to float), Greek *pleō- (I sail) (宵 Group 4B) |
| 13. | flower 葩*phraa (flower)
蓓*plas (to bloom) | : Latin root flōr- (a flower) <*bhl- (魚 Group 8A)
: Latin flōs (flower), Celtic *bhla- (魚 Group 8C) |
| 14. | grass 芥*kraas, kəi- (grass) | : Gothic gras (grass) (月 Group 7B) |
| 15. | beat 𠵹**peeke, *pee? (to pash)
支*pook (to strike)
伐*bat (to beat) | : Middle English passchen (to pash) (支 Group 6A)
: PIE root *pug- (to strike), Latin pugil (pug, boxer) (屋 Group 12)
: Old English bēatan, Old Norse bauta (to beat) <*baud- (月 Group 1A) |
| 16. | hold--take 叔**hluk, *hljuk (to pick up)
拈*neem (to pick with two fingers) | : PIE root *dak-, Proto Germanic root *tak-,
Old English *tacan (to take) (覺 Group 1)
: Old Norse nema (to take away) (談 Group 1A) |
| 17. | dirty 浼*muul? (to dirty) | : Sanskrit *mala- (filth, dirt), PIE root *mel- (dirt, dark) (微 Group 5) |
| 18. | how 胡*gwaa, 惡*qwaa (how) | : Latin *quare (why) (歌 Group 14C) |
| 19. | lack 澤*l'raak, *draak (lake) | : Latin lacus, Proto Germanic root *lagu- (lake) (鐸 Group 7) |
| 20. | laugh 媚*mrils (to be glad)
啞**glau, *lau (laugh) | : PIE root *mei- (to smile) (脂 Group 1A)
: PIE root *klak-, Proto Germanic root *hlach- (laugh) (宵 Group 9) |
| 21. | mother 母**muuud, muu? (mother) | : Greek mētēr (mother), PIE root *mat- (之 Group 1) |
| 22. | near 昵**nik, *nit (near) | : Old English nēah (near) (脂 Group 7B) |
| 23. | river (cf. Part I, Entry 35) | |
| 24. | sea 海**smuuure, *hmuu? (sea) | : PIE *mori (sea) (之 Group 2) |
| 25. | sew 縫*boŋ (to sew)
刺*stheks (sew, embroider) | : Sanskrit bandhati (he binds), English bound (pp. to tie together, to fasten together) (東 Group 10)
: English stitch (stitch), Old High German sticchan (embroider) (支 Group 10B) |
| 26. | sharp 刺*stheks (thorn in tree, to pierce) | : PIE root *stig- (to stab), Greek stigma (mark by) (支 Group 10AB) |

27. short 殺*skraas (to cut down, to shorten) : Old English skerta (to shorten, to reduce), scort (short) (月 Group 8A)
28. sky 天**thim, *thin (sky⁸) : Sanskrit diām, Latin diem, Greek Zen (for*den) (sky)
霄**skau, *sau (clouds, sky) : Middle English skie, Old Norse sky (cloud, sky)
Cf. cognate: 宵**skau (night) : Old Norse skuggi (shadow) (宵 Group 10)
29. squeeze 迮*straak (to press, to extract) : PIE root *streg-, *strag- (to press tight, to contract) (鐸 Group 6A)
30. stab--pierce 刺**sthegs, *sthes / *sthek (to pierce) : PIE root *stig- (to stab, thorn) (支 Group 10B)
31. stick 杖**l'ang (a kind of long weapon, stick) : Greek lonkhe (a lance) (陽 Group 1C)
枹*buu (drumstick) : Old Norse bauta (to beat with a stick), PIE root *baud- (月 Group C)
32. suck 歃*sreep (to suck, to sip) : Old English supan, Old Frisian supa (to sip) (屋 Group 11A)
歃*srook (to sip) : PIE root *suk-, Lithuanian sukt, Old English sucān (to sip) (屋 Group 10A)
33. think 思**psug, sug (to think)⁹ : Greek psukhe (mind, breathe) (職 Group 3B)
謀**muud, *muu (mediate, think) : Latin meditar (mediate) (之 Group 6)
34. turn 還**wool, *fiwroon (to turn) : PIE root *wolw- (to roll) (元 Group 19A)
35. wash 濡 *no (to steep in water, wash one's hair) : Latin natare (to swim) Sanskrit snati (He bathes) (侯 Group 12D)
36. when 曷*gaat (what, when) : Old Saxon hwat, Old English hwaet (what) (歌 Group 15D)
37. where 安*qaan (what, where) : Old Saxon, Old English hwan (when) (歌 Group 15H)
38. wide 博**plaak, *paak (width) : Greek plax (flat surface, anything flat and broad) (元 Group 4D)
39. wind 風 *plum (wind) : Greek pneuma (air, wind) (侵 Group 2)
40. sweep 彗**wopt, *wots (to sweep,) : Old Frisian swepene (to sweep) (月 Group 10A)
41. woods 薄*baak (thicket, bush) : Latin boscus (thicket), Greek boskē (pasture) (鐸 Group 1)
42. worm 蛭*kom? (a kind of worms) : Lithuanian kermis, Sanskrit kṛmi (worm) (東 Group B)

The above-mentioned words are separated and taken out of the correspondences of the cognate groups. If we observe them in the counterparts of cognate groups between OC and PIE, the correspondent relationship of the words would be more distinct. For example:

The OC cognates: (東 Group 2)

虹*gwoon<**gwoom / *kwroons<**kwrooms (rainbow, because it look like a kind of worm both in curved shape and red color.)

蛭*kwonj?<**kwoomə (a kind of worms)

紅**gwoom>*gwoon (pink cloth of silk)

頰*gwoonj?<gwoomə (bright-red mercuric sulfide)

All objects represented by the words are red; the original meaning of the cognates is probably a kind of red worm.

The counterpart of IE cognates:

⁸ 添*thim is written with a phonetic speller 天, so 天 must go back to the form with final *-m (>-n).

⁹ Duan Yucai ("Shuo Wen Jie Zi Zhu", 1815) thought that 思 is an associative compound with 囟 'the cap of head' and 心 'heart' as its meaning, but not a phonetic character with 囟 *n- as a phonetic. Zhu Junsheng (1849) agreed with Duan's opinion. 思 is used as an alternative writing for 息 in "Shi Jing". (《詩經·周南·漢廣》: "南有喬木, 不可休息。" 陸德明《經典釋文》: "息, 一本作思。") 息 'breathe' is an associative compound with 心 and 自 'nose' that is also a phonetic. 自 is also a phonetic speller in 鼻 *biis (nose). Li Fanggui reconstructed 自 as *sbjidh > dzji? (Li Fanggui, 1982: p. 96). So I have reconstructed 自 as **psuk / **spuk > *stuk, and 思 as **psug / **spug > *stu, which are clearly cognate.

Latin uermiculus, root uerm- (bright-red, earlier meaning: kermes)

Old High German wurm, Gothic waurm (worm), English kermes (a kind of worm for making a purple-red dye)

English carmine (red, purplish-red)

English vermilion (bright-red mercuric sulfide, bright-red)

The initial 'u' (>v) in Latin is correspondent to the *w- (*gw-) in PIE.

Some of the correspondences between OC and PIE are strongly demonstrated by comparing homonymic groups of OC with the counterparts of PIE. For example:

之 **k(j)u, *kju (to go) : PIE root *ghe- (to go) (之 Group 7)

之 (sound id.) (relative pronoun: this, these, that, those) : Latin qui, quae (relative pronoun: that, those) (之 Group 8A)

another example :

風 *pum (poem) : Greek poema (a poem) (侵 Group 1A)

風 *plum (wind) : Greek pneuma (air, wind) (侵 Group 2)

諷 *pums (read aloud) : Greek phemi (I say) (侵 Group 3A)

鳳 *bums (phoenix) : Greek phoinix (phoenix) (侵 Group 4)

There are some correspondent words between OC and PIE both in cognate groups and in homonymic groups. For example:

The cognates:

自 **sbirts, *sbis (nose) : Latin spiraculum (spiracle, hole for breathing) (脂 Group 12A)

息 *spuk / *psuk (to breathe) : Greek psukhein (to breathe) (職 Group 3A)

思 **psug, sug (think, consider) : Greek psukhe (mind, to breathe) (職 Group 3B)

The homonymic correspondence of the above cognates:

自 **epsils, *bsiis (self) : Latin ipsius (single, genitive: self) (脂 Group 11)

More correspondences of the words between OC and PIE in cognate groups or in homonymic groups can be found in Part 5 and Section 6.1 of the author's book "Comparison of the Words between OC and PIE".

We list 89 correspondences of the basic words (47 in the Part I, 42 in the Part II) between OC and PIE, which belong to M.Swadesh's 200 basic words list. As for S.Yakhontov's 35 basic words, we present 18 correspondences between OC and PIE; the percentage of correspondent words in all of S.Yakhontov's 35 words is 51%. This evidence shows that the relationship between OC and PIE in the prehistoric period is much more intimate than we had previously thought.

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