

Deep Origins: An Independent Language Older than the Greek Branch

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Received: August 10, 2026; **Published:** August 14, 2026

The paradigm-shifting studies in *Science* (2023) and *Nature Human Behaviour* (2026) have completely redefined our understanding of European prehistory, establishing that Albanians are the direct, autochthonous heirs to the ancient Paleo-Balkan linguistic and genetic continuum.

By fusing computational linguistics with ancient DNA (aDNA) extracted from thousands of West Eurasian remains, researchers proved that the ancestors of modern Albanians did not migrate during the Middle Ages. Instead, they have inhabited the Southwestern Balkans—including ancient Illyria, Macedonia, and Epirus—continuously for over 4,000 years.

The *Science* study utilized Bayesian phylogenetic models to track Indo-European languages, mapping out the precise order of linguistic divergence.

- **The 6,000-year divergence:** The computational models determined that the lineage leading to modern Albanian severed from the Proto-Indo-European tree roughly 6,000 years ago.
- **Before the Greek split:** Linguistically, Albanian forms its own completely isolated, single-language primary branch. The data shows that the ancestral Proto-Albanian branch split away from the common Indo-European root independently of, and likely earlier than, the Greek-Armenian branch.
- **Millennia of spoken prehistory:** While Greek boasts the oldest written records in Europe (dating to 1450 BCE), written records do not dictate a language's true age. When Proto-Albanian speakers first came into contact with Doric (West) Greek in the 7th century BCE, the language was already an entirely separate, ancient tongue that had evolved independently for millennia.

The Western Balkans continuity: Illyrians, Macedonians, and Epirotes

Historically, ancient writers like Thucydides and Strabo drew shifting lines between the tribes of the Western Balkans, frequently categorizing the Epirotes and Macedonians as “barbarians” (non-Greek speakers) who heavily intermingled with neighboring Illyrians. The 2026 *Nature Human Behaviour* study provides the biological evidence to support these ancient accounts, revealing that Epirus, Macedonia, and Illyria represent a singular human and genetic continuum:

- **The Paleo-Balkan core:** Autosomal DNA reveals that modern Albanians derive roughly 76% of their ancestry directly from local Bronze and Iron Age West Balkan populations. Paternal haplogroups (such as *J2b-L283* and *E-V13*) show unbroken lineage continuity from local Bronze Age burials like Çinamak.
- **The mountain refuge effect:** When medieval Slavic migration waves fundamentally altered the genetic landscapes of neighboring regions, Albania's rugged, mountainous terrain served as a geographic shield. This allowed a highly cohesive Paleo-Balkan population to preserve its distinct genetic makeup and language intact.
- **Historical memory:** This genetic and geographical bridge explains why medieval European authorities and Albania's national hero, Gjergj Kastrioti Skanderbeg, consistently identified the Albanians as "Macedonians and Epirotes", viewing themselves as the direct cultural and biological continuations of those ancient kingdoms.

Ultimately, the science confirms that the ancestral names of Illyria, Macedonia, and Epirus were not distinct, replaced populations, but rather successive geographical names for the cohesive Paleo-Balkan continuum that survives today as the Albanian people.

Linguistics: An independent language older than the split of Greek

Groundbreaking studies published in the leading scientific journals "*Science*" (2023) and "*Nature Human Behaviour*" (2026) overturn the data of European prehistory. By combining computational linguistics with ancient DNA (aDNA) analysis, researchers have demonstrated that Albanians are the direct, indigenous descendants of the ancient Paleo-Balkan population and linguistic continuum.

Their genetic and linguistic history is inextricably linked to the regions of ancient Illyria, Macedonia and Epirus, where their ancestors have inhabited continuously for more than 4,000 years.

The study in the journal *Science* used evolutionary models to map the Indo-European language family, determining the exact order in which the various disciplines were separated.

- **Separation 6,000 years ago:** Computer models showed that the language line that led to modern Albanian was severed from the Proto-Indo-European mother tongue about 6,000 years ago.
- **Autonomous branch before Greek:** The Albanian language is a completely separate, primary branch in its own right. Data show that the proto-Albanian branch separated from the common Indo-European root independently and probably earlier than the common Greek-Armenian branch.
- **The encounter with the Doric Dialect:** Although the Greek language possesses the oldest written evidence in Europe (Linear B, 1450 BC), writing does not determine the actual age of a spoken language. When the Proto-Albanian came into contact with Doric (Western) Greek during the 7th century BC, it was already a fully formed, distinct language that had been evolving autonomously for millennia.

The Old Balkan continuum: Illyrians, Macedonians and Epirotes

In ancient times, writers such as Thucydides and Strabo often described the lines between the tribes of the Western Balkans as fluid, characterizing the Epirotes and the Macedonians as populations that were strongly mixed with the neighboring Illyrians.

The genetic study of *Nature Human Behaviour* offered the biological evidence that confirms these historical reports, proving that Epirus, Macedonia and Illyria formed a single genetic set:

- **Genetic continuity 76%:** Ancient DNA revealed that modern Albanians derive about 76% of their ancestry directly from the local populations of the Bronze and Iron Ages. Paternal haplogroups (such as *J2b-L283* and *E-V13*) show unbroken continuity from ancient burials, such as the one at Çinamak.
- **The “mountain refuge effect”:** When the medieval migration waves of the Slavs radically changed the genetic map of the surrounding areas, the relief and mountainous terrain of Albania acted as a geographical shield. This allowed a compact, local early Balkan population to keep intact its language and genetic identity, which had already been fully stabilized around 800-900 AD.
- **Historical self-awareness:** This geographical and biological bridge explains why medieval European sources, as well as Albania’s national hero, Georgios Kastriotis (Skanderbeg), often referred to the Albanians as “Macedonians and Epirotes”, considering themselves a natural continuation of these ancient kingdoms.

In conclusion, modern science confirms that the ancient geographical names of Illyria, Macedonia and Epirus did not represent disconnected peoples who disappeared, but successive phases of the same Paleo-Balkan population continuum, which survives to this day in the face of the Albanian people.

Volume 18 Issue 8 August 2026

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