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The phonological status of voiced stop spirantization in Ancient Greek dialects

In a Greek-Lycian bilingual inscription (dating between V-IV BC), the Greek name Δημοκλείδης is rendered as *Ñtemuxlida* in the Lycian part of the text. Bryce (1986) was the first to note the significance of the double rendering of Greek /d/; the Lycian language contained no phoneme /d/, but since /t/ was allophonically voiced after a nasal, the sequence <*ñt*> could be used to represent a foreign /d/ (cf. *Ñtarijeusehe* = Darius). The letter <*d*>, on the other hand, represented the Lycian phoneme /ð/. The conclusion to be drawn from this is that Greek /d/ must have been realized as [d] word-initially and [ð] intervocally. On the basis of this evidence, it has been suspected (e.g. by Méndez Dosuna 2006: 279) that in some Greek dialects, the whole voiced stop series /b d g/ had positionally conditioned fricative allophones [β ð γ].

That spirantization of the voiced stops occurred dialectally at an early date is well-known, as revealed by various graphemic variations occurring in the epigraphical record (ἀμοιφάν = ἀμοιβήν, Corinth; τόζι = τόδι, Rhodes; etc.); however, most literature dealing with this phenomenon (e.g. Lejeune 1972: 55-56) have not taken into consideration whether these variations represent mere fricative allophones rather than a new phonemic series.

In the present paper, the epigraphical evidence for spirantization in the old dialects of the pre-Christian era is re-examined in light of these considerations. The evidence cited in earlier scholarship, consisting of both dialect-internal graphemic variation and the orthographic representations of cross-dialectal loans, is critically re-evaluated, considering especially the inherent limitations of the epicoric and Ionic alphabets; all evidence found to be unambiguous is then analysed with regard to the position in the word or phrase.

The investigation finds positive evidence for a phonemic fricative series only in Elean (cf. Méndez Dosuna 1991/1993) and Laconian. In the remaining dialects, spirantization is found to occur only in positions cross-linguistically favoured by spirantization. Thus, the evidence is compatible with the above hypothesized system of allophonic variation, while the geographic and chronological distribution of the evidence suggests that this system was widespread already in the Archaic period.

References

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