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Phrygian and the Early History of Greek Dialects

Although the evidence for Phrygian is scarce – several dozens of quite short texts plus about 300 graffiti dating to the 8th-5th c. BC and a hundred of mostly formulaic Neo-Phrygian inscriptions dated to 2nd-3rd c. AD – it is clear that Phrygian is the closest linguistic relative of Greek (cf. de Lamberterie 2013, Ligorio-Lubotsky 2018, Obrador-Cursach 2020). Moreover, their affinity is not simply a linguistic abstraction: numerous indications suggest that the Phrygians and the Greeks were in a close *geographical* contact possibly until as late as the early post-Mycenaean period (12th-11th centuries BC). This is implied, for instance, by literary evidence on the European relatives of the Phrygians, Βρύγες (Hdt. 7.73 or Str. 7.3.2) or Βρύγοι (Hdt. 6.45), who were the neighbours of the Macedonians and whose areal might have extended as far west as Epidamnos/Dyrrachium (cf. Appian, *BC* 2.6.39); by the titles *vanak* and **lavagetas* attested with *Midas* in OPhr. inscription M-01a, which have a distinct Mycenaean sounding; or by archaeological evidence for the migration from the Balkans to Anatolia at the end of the 2nd millennium BC. The evidence would not even be incompatible with the idea that early Greek and ‘proto-Phrygian’ once formed a dialect continuum.

Seen in this perspective, Phrygian evidence is potentially important for understanding the dialectal situation in the northern parts of Greece as in the late 2nd millennium BC as, by extension, in the later period. It is especially relevant for three questions. First and most immediately, it bears on the problem of linguistic situation in Macedonia and the definition of the linguistic character of ‘Macedonian’. Second, as the initial phase of the Doric migration is quite probably associated with the northern regions, one may expect that West Greek dialects would be somewhat closer to Phrygian than, for instance, Ionic-Attic. Third, there may exist some features which Phrygian shares with Aeolic, also generally associated with the northern regions, and especially Lesbian, with which Phrygian was apparently in contact even in the 1st millennium BC. The main points I will bring into discussion are the following (work in progress):

1) The evidence of the *defixio* from Pella (SEG 43:434) and a number of features in Macedonian inscriptions (cf. O’Neil 2006) suggest that the language spoken in Macedonia proper was a specific North-West Greek dialect. However, contrary to earlier claims (cf. Hatzopoulos 2007 or Méndez Dosuna 2012), this evidence does not settle the problem of definition of ‘Macedonian language’ once and for all. The fact remains that some other ‘Macedonian’ linguistic evidence (e.g., κεβαλήν/κεβλήν· κεφαλήν, ἀδή· οὐρανός, cf. αἰθήρ, ΠΝ Βερενίκα = Φερενίκα etc.) demonstrates the phenomenon of de-aspiration of PIE voiced aspirates which finds an exact parallel in Phrygian (cf. Βρύγες/Βρύγοι vs. Φρύγες, OPhr. *bratere* (dat.sg.) ‘brother’ or NPhr. δεως ‘god’ (dat.pl.) < PIE **d^hh₁so-*). There is, however, no real contradiction with the Doric evidence: both dialects/languages might have co-existed on the territory of the *Macedonian Kingdom*. In all probability, the North-West Greek dialect was spoken in the core part of Macedonia, the plain of *Emathia*, and was the language of the Argead dynasty, while the ‘de- aspirating dialect’ was the language spoken in the northern and western *mountainous* areas of the kingdom, still inhabited in the 1st millennium by the Briges and their closest linguistic relatives.

2) There may indeed be found a number of features which Phrygian shares specifically with North-West Greek. Even if a part of them are rather trivial, representing retained *archaisms*, some are more specific, and the general picture seems to support the relatively closer position of ‘proto-Phrygian’ and North-West Greek. One may point out the following features: 1) stability of the non-syllabic *u* (present also in Aeolic, but to a lesser extent); 2) absence of assibilation in *-ti* (cf., e.g., Phr. *egeseti*); 3) a tendency for more open realisation of front vowels *e* and *ē* (present also in Aeolic, but less markedly), cf. OPhr. *matar* < PIE **meh₂tēr* or NPhr. αναρ ‘man’ < PIE **h₂nēr* (usually explained as PIE *eh₁* > *ā*, cf. Ligorio-Lubotsky 2018: 1819), on the one hand, and West Greek *ιαρός*, *ἄτερος*, particle *κα* etc., on the other; the phenomenon of lowering of *ē* to *ā* finds an exact parallel in Elean (cf. *μά* = *μή*, *Φράτρα* = *ρήτρα* etc.); 4) the Phrygian forms in *-set(i)* (e.g., *egeseti*, *εγεσιτ*, *τοτοσσειτ*), associated with future/probable actions, may be compared with ‘Doric future’ featuring suffix *-σε-* instead of usual *-σ-* (i.e. Phr. *-seti* = *-se-* + *t(i)*); 5) Conditional conjunction *αἶ* (NW Greek, Lesbian and Thessalian) = Phr. *ai* (vs. *εἰ* in Att.- Ion. and Arc.; *ἦ* in Cypr.).

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3) There are also a number of features which Phrygian shares with Aeolic. Besides the retention of the non-syllabic *u* and particle *ai*, mentioned above, they are: 1) development of the sequence *-*Vns* > -*Vis*, cf., e.g., Lesbian acc.pl. ταίς, τοίς and Phr. ending *-evais* (e.g. in *arkiaevais* or *memevais*), gen.sg. *-evanos*, < *-*evans* and poss. acc.pl. forms in *-ais/-ois*; the feature can be defined as common innovation; 2) poss. gen. sg. in *-oi* in Phrygian (e.g., Κλευμαχοι or *Davoi*) which probably goes back to *-*oio* < *-*osio* corresponding to gen sg. *-oio* found in Mycenaean, Homeric and Thessalian (where it demonstrates exactly the same contraction to *-oi*); 3) poss.(!) development of *r* and *l* > *or/ro* and *ol/lo*, as in Aeolic, Mycenaean, Arc.-Cyp. (vs. Att.-Ion.), cf. OPhr. *por* (NPhr. *πουρ*) < **pr*.

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