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Analogical -εσσι datives in Sicilian Doric: Borrowing, independent development, or both?

A well-known and amply debated problem of Greek linguistics is the motivation behind the extension of the dative plural marker -εσσι from s-stems (ἔπεσσι) to other athematic stems. The phenomenon is typical of the Aeolic group and also prominently features in the Homeric diction, but -εσσι datives are attested – sometimes sporadically, other times more consistently – in other dialects, mostly belonging to the West Greek group. The Doric dialect of Sicily is one of the non-Aeolic varieties in which -εσσι is more solidly present from the Classical age. Traditional views on the -εσσι datives of Sicilian Doric entail the following assumptions:

- they are typical of Syracusan, from where they later spread to the other Doric sub-varieties of Sicily (including the Hellenistic Doric koine);
- Syracuse inherited these datives from Corinth, her *metropolis*;
- εσσι datives were a feature of archaic Corinthian, as shown by their attestations in the inscriptions of Corinthian colonies (Corcyra, Ambracia, Epidamnus and Syracuse);
- in Corinthian they perhaps arose from contact with Aeolic at a very early stage.

Against this traditional backdrop, this paper reviews the attestations of the -εσσι datives in Sicilian texts in order to discuss whether their presence in Sicilian Greek is due to language contact (namely, borrowing from other dialects) or whether it should be deemed an independent development. In considering this question I shall make the case for a more nuanced approach, which takes into account the context of each individual occurrence of -εσσι datives in Sicilian inscriptions. Through this detailed analysis I hope to show that (a) some of the assumptions frequently made in standard reference works concerning the origin and distribution of -εσσι in Sicilian Greek are to be revised; (b) the diffusion and use in context of -εσσι datives in Sicilian texts is likely to depend on a combination of factors: together with independent intra-dialectal developments and dialect borrowing, prestige may also have played a role in some contexts.

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