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Infinitive forms in Homer, Lesbian and the other Greek dialects: Innovations, archaisms or contact-induced borrowings?

Over a century ago, Jacob Wackernagel said that the Greek infinitives belong “zu den Hauptmerkmalen, um die Dialekte zu scheiden und zu gruppieren” (1920: 258), adding that “der Infinitiv noch für das Urgriechische (...) nicht so etwas fixes und fertiges war”. This formulation suggests two things: first, that Proto-Greek had a great variety of infinitive markers, in which possibly more fine-grained syntactic distinctions were made than in the grammaticalized infinitives of Classical Greek; and secondly, that a choice for a certain subset of these markers was made in every individual dialect, when the infinitive was progressively grammaticalized (among other things by creating infinitive forms for all tense-aspect stems of a verb). Both suppositions are widely shared by present-day scholars (e.g. García Ramón 1990; 1997; 2009; Hettrich and Stüber 2018).

The first leading question to be investigated in this paper is: to what extent can or should the variety of infinitive forms and morphemes attested in the Greek dialects be ascribed to linguistic contact? A contact scenario has been posited for various problematic individual infinitive forms (cf. e.g. Peters 1986: 314 on Megarian εἴμεναι and Argolic δαῖνα), but most famously, all three Lesbian infinitive suffixes have been interpreted as due to contact with Eastern Ionic: athematic *-v* and *-μεναι* (contrast Thess. Boeot. WGr. *-μεν*), and thematic *-ην* (against Thess. *-έμεν*). This contact scenario is part of a wider picture, the Porzig-Risch classification, according to which other features of Lesbian that deviate from the other two Aeolic dialects are interpreted as contaminations with Ionic forms or as late innovations. Moreover, it is repeatedly claimed that *-μεναι* arose by contamination of original Aeolic *-μεν* and Ionic *-ναι*. Similar contaminations are recognized in forms such as Lesb. βόλλομαι ‘want’, allegedly a contamination of older Aeolic βέλλομαι (as in Thess.) with Ionic βούλομαι.

For reasons that I will elaborate in my paper, I am skeptical of such an approach. I will tackle the Lesbian infinitive forms by reconsidering the possibilities to reconstruct the Proto-Greek situation. I will argue (with e.g. García Ramón 2009) that *-μεναι* in Lesbian is a relic, rather than due to contamination with Ionic *-ναι*. Furthermore, I will investigate how the other athematic ending *-v* and thematic *-ην* in Lesbian relate to the endings found in Eastern Ionic and other South Greek dialects (Mycenaean, Euboean). In order to do this, a framework will be laid out according to which Proto-Greek basically had a simple set of athematic infinitive endings: **-men*, **-menai* and **-hen*, **-henai* (along the lines foreshadowed already in Taillardat 1960). In doing so, I will deal with the following main issues:

- (1) What is the original distribution of the forms with and without *-ai*? And what may have been the original function of *-ai*? In order to answer this question, I will consider those dialects (mainly Lesbian, Euboean and Arcadian) where forms with and without *-ai* are both found.
- (2) Must the South Greek ending *-έναι* be reconstructed as **-én(ai)*, **-hén(ai)*, or **-wén(ai)*? Or does it reflect more than one of these pre-forms? I will argue that we should reconstruct this as **-hén(ai)* (**-wénai*, if it existed at all, can explain only Cypriot *to-we-na-i*). A key form to be explained is the infinitive of εἶμί ‘be’ (on which see, among others, Cowgill 1964, Peters 1986, Ruijgh 1992).
- (3) How were *-men* and **-hen* originally distributed? For this question, cf. Plath 1990 and García Ramón 1990, but I will also take into consideration the peculiar distributions in Homer between Aeolic forms with *-μεν* and Ionic forms in *-ναι*. I will discuss the mechanisms by which both morphemes may have spread in the epic language (cf. also Peters 1989), and offer a framework within which to interpret the problematic forms εἴμεναι, ἔμεν and φορήναι, which in my view are all artificial creations of the language of epic.

The conclusions arising from my discussion will be:

- The picture of the infinitives in Proto-Greek that emerges is quite different from the one offered by Wackernagel. We need to reconstruct only a small set of basic endings, which had already

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progressed far (if not all the way) along the grammaticalization path from verbal nouns to true infinitives.

- Lesbian already had its three infinitive endings before its migration across the Aegean, and I will show how this fits in a wider picture of Lesbian as a bridge dialect between South Greek and North Greek before its migration.
- There is further evidence for the hypothesis that the mixture of Aeolic and South Greek elements in the language of epic came into being early on, on the Greek mainland (for this idea, Hoekstra 1981 is fundamental).

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