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## THE PREHISTORY OF THE GREEK LANGUAGE\*

"The nature of the Greek language during the prehistoric period is ... hard to determine, so that most statements about it must be qualified as probable rather than certain."

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Without doubt Greek belongs to the small group of Indo-European languages which are well-attested by written documents already in the II<sup>nd</sup> millenium B. C. Notwithstanding, the prehistory of the Greek language as well as the prehistory of the Greeks themselves presents a whole set of hotly discussed problems. This character of Greek prehistory becomes even more striking if we compare it with the researches seeking for the origin of the Latin language. In spite of such tantalizing problems as *e. gr.* the exact determination of the territory settled by the Latins before their immigration into Italy, it does not encounter any serious difficulty to clear up the prehistoric position of Latin among the other Indo-European languages. This is all the more surprising since the historical knowledge of Greek is based on an uncomparably greater linguistic material. In the case of the Latin language the common innovations in the phonemic system and in the vocabulary, observed in it and in Celtic, Germanic as well as in Venetic, allow us to trace the gradual movement of the Proto-Latins from Western Europe towards Italy. As regards the prehistory of Greek, however, no such possibility offers itself on account of the insufficient knowledge of the languages neighbouring to Greek in prehistoric times.

Accordingly, the study of common innovations in vocabulary results in nothing in the case of the Greek language and his prehistoric neighbours. Therefore, I propose to attempt a reconstruction of the prehistory of Greek on the basis of phonemic history. The phonemic system of a language can be established to a certain degree even on the basis of a very scanty linguistic material. Thus the development of the Greek phonemic system can be compared with those of even very insufficiently known languages as Pelasgian, Macedonian and Illyrian.

Investigating the prehistory of Greek, we must take, of course, Mycenaean as our starting point. In this connection at first the question arises how the dialectal position of Mycenaean can correctly be determin-

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ed. Since many years in my lectures I professed the opinion that Mycenaean is to be regarded as a dialect very closely related to Arcado-Cyprian without being, however, the immediate forerunner of it. In later times it was A. Heubeck who expounded and supported this theory by a detailed argumentation. As to the linguistic character of Mycenaean we must remark that it was a written language used for administrative purposes. Originally it might have been the dialect of some important Mycenaean centre where it was firstly fixed by introducing Linear B and afterwards it spread on the whole territory of the Greek states of the Mycenaean Age. In this respect Mycenaean can obviously be paralleled with the great administrative languages of Ancient East. Accordingly, Mycenaean can only reflect the differences of the dialects spoken on the territory of the Greek states of the Mycenaean Age and their development in the slightest degree.

The main features of the Mycenaean phonemic system can be outlined as follows: there existed a three-plosive system consisting of voiceless, voiced and aspirated voiceless consonants:  $k - g - kh$ ,  $p - b - ph$ ,  $t - d - dh$ . The Indo-European labiovelars  $q^u$  and  $g^u$  were still preserved and the development of the Indo-European sonant liquids  $l$ ,  $r$  was represented mostly by  $ol$ ,  $or$ . Besides, a whole set of palatalized consonants as  $t'$ ,  $d'$ ,  $k'$ ,  $g'$  came into being, developing later to the spirant  $s$  and the affricate  $dz$  (or  $zd$  and  $z$  respectively). Moreover, in certain cases  $p$  and  $k$  became  $pt$  and  $ks$  before  $o$  or  $u$ . These characteristic features of Mycenaean phonemic system suffices to prove the divergence of Mycenaean from any other Greek dialect on the one hand and by this reason the independent existence of the other Greek dialects already in Mycenaean times on the other hand. It appears that the differentiation of the Greek dialects dates back to a much more remote past than the Mycenaean writing emerged at all.

Of Mycenaean we have to look out in two directions: *viz.* to the later development and the former history of Greek phonemic system. From the aforesaid it became clear that Mycenaean do not offer any solid basis for the examination of the other Greek dialects, Ionic, Aeolic, and Doric. It would be of great importance to verify whether the Indo-European labiovelars were also preserved in Ionic, Aeolic, and Doric at that time. Unfortunately, on the basis of the later state of these dialects we can only guess that the development of the labiovelars into labials and dentals began in Doric, Aeolic, and Ionic earlier and perhaps it was already at an advanced stage in the XIIth century B. C. As it is well-known, this phonemic change most completely took place in Aeolic, while in Eastern Ionic some traces of the ancient labiovelars were preserved in the form of velars, *e. gr.* in  $\delta\lambda\omicron\nu\nu$ ,  $\delta\lambda\omicron\nu\varsigma$ . This geographical distribution of the development points to its earlier beginning in the North-West. The same development of the Indo-European labiovelars into labials can also be observed in Macedonian and in one part of the Illyrian and Phrygian dialects.

These phenomena are obviously connected with each other. The Aeolians were superseded by the Dorians or Western Greeks, while the latter were intermingled with the Illyrians. One tribe of the Dorians, the

Hylleis, was probably of Illyrian origin. The ethnic interrelations between Macedonians and Illyrians are equally well-attested. At least one part of the Phrygians was also in contact with the Illyrians in its ancient home in the neighbourhood of the Macedonians. All the aforesaid facts clearly speak in favour of the assumption that the development of the labiovelars into labials began in Illyrian and it spread parallel with the influence exercised by the Illyrian tribes on Greeks, Macedonians, and Phrygians. A complete labialization of the labiovelars took place in the language of those tribes which were most strongly influenced by the Illyrians ethnically. These were the Macedonians, that part of the Dorians which superseded the Aeolians, and the western part of the Phrygians. Since in the dialect of the other Phrygians this change did not take place, the outset of this phonemic development can be dated back to the beginning of the immigration to Asia Minor of the Phrygians. As it is generally assumed, the latter event happened approximately in the 12th century B. C. or sometimes later.

Accordingly, the labialization of the labiovelars in Macedonian, Phrygian and Doric or Western Greek could already begin in the 13th century B. C. In this connection the question arises what kind of relation existed between Greek, Macedonian, and Phrygian on the one hand and between Macedonian and Illyrian on the other hand. The phonemic development of Macedonian can shortly be characterized by the following items: Indo-European reduced *o* became *a* in Macedonian, Indo-European *o* remained unchanged, Indo-European sonant nasal *ŋ* developed into *a*, Indo-European *r*, *l* became *ar/ra*, initial *s*-disappeared, intervocalic *-w-* was similarly dropped out, the labiovelars developed into *t*, *d* before palatal vowels and into *p*, *b* before velar ones. All the enumerated phonemic changes exactly coincide with the phonemic development of the Greek language. Contrary to this, Macedonian sharply contrasts with Greek as regards the development of the Indo-European voiced aspirates. In Greek these phonemes became voiceless aspirates, while in Macedonian they developed into unaspirated voiced plosives. This picture of Macedonian phonemic development can only be explained by the assumption that Macedonian was originally a sister language of Greek or possibly even a Greek dialect, the phonemic system of which, however, was later strongly influenced by another language changing the voiced aspirates into unaspirated voiced plosives. In the neighbourhood of Macedonian two such languages existed which the same development of Indo-European voiced aspirates took place in, *viz.* Illyrian and Daco-Mysian. While about a deeper influence exercised by Daco-Mysian on Macedonian nothing is known so far, the close relations between Illyrian and Macedonian are historically well-attested. For this reason the development of the voiced aspirates into unaspirated voiced plosives in Macedonian can probably be ascribed to the influence of Illyrian.

The phonemic development of Phrygian can also be paralleled with Greek and Macedonian in many regards. The following points can be mentioned: Indo-European sonant nasal *ŋ* became *a(n)* in Phrygian, the de-

velopments of the Indo-European sonant liquids *l*, *r* are represented by *al*, *ar*, initial *s* disappeared and *s* was also dropped out from the consonant group *sw*-. All these phonemic changes clearly agree with the phonemic development of Greek. As to the development of the consonant system, however, a striking difference between Phrygian and Greek can be observed. While in Greek the Indo-European voiced and voiceless unaspirated plosives were preserved and the voiced aspirates only became voiceless aspirates, in Phrygian the slowly shifting of the whole plosive system can be traced during the 1st millennium B. C. It follows that Phrygian must have been closely related to Greek before the shifting of its plosive system; in fact, it can also be regarded as a sister language of Greek before the 1st millennium B. C.

On the basis of the aforesaid it would be tempting to assume that Greek, Macedonian, and Phrygian formed a group of closely related languages, *i. e.* some kind of linguistic unity up to the 13th century B. C., *viz.* up to the date when the influence of Illyrian began. Before this date the main difference between the phonemic system of Greek and those of Macedonian and Phrygian was only represented by the survival of the Indo-European voiced aspirates *bh*, *dh*, *gh*, *gʰh* in Macedonian and Phrygian in contrast to their development into the voiceless aspirates *ph*, *th*, *kh*, *gʰh* in Greek.

As regards the tantalizing problem of Illyrian, I would emphasize the following points. Illyrian means a whole group of languages, most of which are very scantily attested. On the basis of their scanty linguistic monuments, one made the attempt to distinguish two types of Illyrian languages recently. According to this theory the main features of these two types of Illyrian would be contrasted in the following manner. In type A the Indo-European sonant liquid *r* became *or*, the labiovelars *qu*, *gu* developed into *p*, *b*, while the palatal plosives *k'*, *g'* remained unchanged in contrast to type B where the same phonemes have the following outcomes: the sonant liquid *r* became *ri*, the labiovelars developed into *k*, *g* and the palatal plosives *k'*, *g'* were palatalized into *s* and *z*. Taking into consideration that the phonemic development of "Illyrian B" exactly coincides with that of Daco-Mysian, we can suppose that either the Illyrian tribes speaking "Illyrian B" dialects were strongly influenced by Daco-Mysians or the "Illyrian B" linguistic monuments properly represent Daco-Mysian dialects in reality. Be that it may be, Illyrian B can be neglected for the study of the influence exercised by Illyrian on Macedonian and Greek in any case.

Surely, the theory of the Illyrian influence is generally accepted in Greek linguistic and historical researches. Notwithstanding, if we examine this assumption from the archaeological view-point, serious difficulties arise. The archaeological remains of the Illyrian tribes are well-known both in Hungary and in Yugoslavia and their culture can be characterized as a barrow-grave culture with rich inhumations of tribal heads and warriors. This culture only appears, however, in both territories since the period Hallstatt C or according to the absolute chronology about 750 B. C.

Before this date, during the periods Hallstatt A—B, the so-called urn-field culture, clearly distinct from the Hallstatt C barrow-grave culture, flourished there. As we stated above, however, the beginnings of the Illyrian influence on Macedonian and Greek is to be dated to the XIIIth century B. C. at the latest. The contradiction between the evidence of linguistic research and that of archaeology seems to be unsurmountable.

The solution of the problem was, however, shortly indicated by me already some twenty years ago in a paper dealing with the archaeological remains of the Cimmerians. Since that time my views became also supported by recent archaeological researches carried out in Hungary. Beginning during the II<sup>nd</sup> period of Hungarian Bronze Age a large-scale immigration of the barrow-grave culture from Southern Germany and Austria wholly transformed the archaeological picture of Hungary until the end of the III<sup>rd</sup> period of Hungarian Bronze Age. According to our present knowledge the early home of the Illyrians is to be sought exactly in South Germany. Consequently, there can be hardly any doubt that the bearers of the Bronze Age barrow-grave culture flourishing in South Germany were the Illyrians. On the basis of all these evidences the sequence of the prehistoric events beginning from the II<sup>nd</sup> period of Bronze Age can be reconstructed in the following manner. The advance of the Illyrians from Southern Germany towards the East began during the II<sup>nd</sup> period of Bronze Age and it culminated at the end of Hungarian Bronze Age when along the Danube the barrow-grave culture also reached the North Balkanic territories. Without doubt, it was this first Illyrian migration which already reached the Macedonians, Western Greeks and Dorians during the XIIIth century B. C. But at the end of the same century the spreading of the urn-field culture, coming from the North and first of all from Lausitz, also began. The movement of the urn-field culture exactly coincides with the spreading of the Venetic tribes in Northern France, Southern Germany, Northern Italy, Austria, Western Hungary and in some part of the Balkan peninsula and Asia Minor, well-attested by written sources. Accordingly, the population of the urn-field culture can probably be regarded as Venetic. In all probability, these two great movements, *viz.* the first migration of the Illyrians and the subsequent spreading of the Venetians gave rise to the so-called Aegean Migration playing great part also in early Greek history. Afterwards, four centuries later the Venetic tribes of Middle Europe were superseded by a second Illyrian migration which determined to a great degree the ethnic picture of this territory up to the coming of the Celts. After all, two Illyrian migrations and an intervening movement of the Venetians are to be distinguished.

Before the Ist Illyrian Migration, *i. e.* before the XIIIth century B. C., Macedonian and Phrygian phonemic systems only differed from the Greek one in preserving the Indo-European voiced aspirates. Later on, under the influence of Illyrian, these phonemes developed into unaspirated voiced plosives in Macedonian while the whole plosive system of Phrygian underwent a slowly shifting as a result of the influence exercised by the ancient languages of Asia Minor on it. Besides, a further dif-

ference was caused by the various measure of labialization of the labio-velars similarly under the influence of Illyrian both in Macedonian and Phrygian and in the Greek dialects. As evidence for the former existence of the voiced aspirates in Phrygian and in Macedonian the names *Φρύγες* – *Βρύγοι* and *Φαίηκες* – *Βζίακη* can be quoted. At that time when the Greeks became acquainted with them, both names were still preserving the voiced aspirates, being replaced by voiceless aspirates in Greek later.

Now, at this point the question arises how the distinctive features of the Greek phonemic system differentiating it from the Macedonian and the Phrygian ones came into being. Referring for a more detailed discussion of this problem to my paper on "The Pelasgian and the ancient Balkanic languages", I restrict myself to the following points here. The Pelasgians may be regarded as the early population settled on the territory which was inhabited by the Greeks in later times. The phonemic system of Pelasgian can be recognized on the basis of the place-names and the loan-words adopted by the Greeks. It presents a picture standing rather near to the phonemic system of Thracian and agreeing in many essential points with those of Hittite and the other ancient languages of Asia Minor. On the basis of the isoglosses existing between Thracian, Pelasgian, Hittite, Luwian, Palaeon and Hieroglyphic Hittite, all these languages can very likely be united into one group of ancient Indo-European languages which differentiated from the other Indo-European languages at a very ancient date.

Comparing Pelasgian and Greek phonemic systems, we come to the striking result that the main features of both phonemic systems are almost identical but in most cases they go back to different forerunners.

In this respect it is very instructive to contrast the system of plosives in both languages. In Pelasgian the Indo-European voiceless plosives *k*, *t*, *p* became voiceless aspirates: *kh*, *th*, *ph*, the voiced plosives *g*, *d*, *b* developed into voiceless plosives: *k*, *t*, *p* and at last the voiced aspirates *bh*, *dh*, *gh* were shifted into voiced plosives: *b*, *d*, *g*. Greek presents the same final outcome, but the phonemic development was entirely different. In Greek the Indo-European voiceless and voiced plosives remained unchanged and the voiced aspirates only developed into voiceless aspirates. This character of Greek phonemic development can probably be explained by the influence of the Pelasgian phonemic system. The same statement is also in force as regards a whole set of other phonemic developments in Greek, as *e. gr.* IE *po-* > Greek *pto-*, IE *tu-* > Greek *su-*, IE *k'* > Greek *s*, IE *g'* > Greek *z*, IE *l*, *r* > Greek *ol*, *or*, the subsequent expansion of the use of the phoneme *s* and others.

On the basis of this evidence we can presume that the beginning separation of Greek from Macedonian and Phrygian and the first development of major dialectal differences within Greek itself took place at that time when the Greeks immigrated to the territory inhabited by them in the historical period where they superseded the Pelasgians living there.

Herewith we arrived at a very remote period of the prehistory of the Greek language. Notwithstanding, there exists some possibility to trace

further back the development of Greek. At the time before the immigration to Greece of the Greeks, the phonemic system of the Greek language makes a very archaic impression. The Indo-European vowel phonemes *a*, *e*, *o* and  $\bar{a}$ ,  $\bar{e}$ ,  $\bar{o}$  and the system of plosives (*k*, *g*, *gh* — *p*, *b*, *bh* — *t*, *d*, *dh*) as well as the labiovelars  $g^u$ ,  $g^v$ ,  $g^uh$  still remained unchanged. Besides, the sonant liquids *l*, *r*, too, were still preserved. Even in the case of *s* the evidence speaks in favour of the assumption that this phoneme was maintained up to the time of the immigration. In a whole series of Indo-European languages the same stage of phonemic development can probably be assumed at that time. All the same, there exist some starting points to determine the linguistic position of Greek among the other Indo-European languages even in this remote period.

In Greek, Macedonian and Phrygian the Indo-European sonant nasals *m*, *n* became equally *a* (in Phrygian *an*). Among the Indo-European languages the same development can be observed in Indo-Iranian, Daco-Mysian, Illyrian [*a(n)*], Venetic and one part of Celtic. All these languages formed a coherent linguistic area in prehistoric times. On the one hand, Indo-Iranian was mostly settled towards the East, but Daco-Mysian was neighbouring upon it even at historic times. On the other hand the territories of Illyrian, Venetic and Celtic were also connected with each other. Greek, Macedonian and Phrygian are obviously to be inserted into the same linguistic zone. Taking into consideration the gap existing between the early territories of Illyrian and Daco-Mysian, we have probably to insert Greek, Macedonian and Phrygian in this zone somewhere between Illyrian and Daco-Mysian.

Arriving at this point, linguistics must stop. However, the question necessarily arises in what time and territory this period of Greek prehistory can probably be placed. To answer this question archaeology can successfully help linguistics. We can take our starting-point from two directions. On the one hand, the archaeological culture of the Iranians and that of the Daco-Mysians can rather clearly be traced in South Russia since neolithic times. Accordingly, the archaeological cultures of the Proto-Greeks, Proto-Macedonians and Proto-Phrygians are necessarily to be sought to the West of the Tripolye culture, *i. e.* in the Carpathian basin and then they can presumably be identified with the Western Transylvanian culture and the Tisza Culture and perhaps also with the Lengyel culture. On the other hand, it is generally assumed that the earliest neolithic culture of Greece, *viz.* the Sesklo-culture as well as the closely related other archaeological cultures up to the Körös-culture are probably to be connected with a population of Anatolian origin. Accordingly, the bearers of the Sesklo- and Körös-cultures and those of the other related cultures may be regarded as tribes speaking the languages of the Pelasgo-Hittite group.

From the aforesaid it necessarily follows that on the basis of a comparison of the linguistic evidence with the archaeological one it is only one possibility that can really be taken into account for the immigration

of the Greeks from the Carpathian basin to Thessaly, *viz.* the Dimini-migration. However surprising this may be, the Dimini-culture only fulfils all conditions imposed by the linguistic and archaeological evidence. Of course, this assumption does not contradict the earlier theory, according to which the Greeks entered their later home only at the beginning of the Middle Helladic period. The Dimini-culture stopped exactly in Thessaly which can be regarded as the starting-point of the Greek invasion happening later in the Bronze Age.