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Once Again on the Pella Curse Tablet*

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Abstract

The Pella curse tablet contains the word ΔΑΓΙΝΑ. This paper proposes to treat it as an etymological cognate of the gloss θήγεια, which we owe to Hesychius. If this is true, we may interpret the Theocritean *hapax* δαγῦς as a Macedonian loan word.

Keywords

ΔΑΓΙΝΑ; δαγῦς; θήγεια; *katadesmos*; Macedonian phonology; Pella Curse Tablet

Probably the most famous definition of Greekness we owe to Herodotus (VIII, 144, 2): τὸ Ἑλληνικόν, ἐὸν ὁμαμίον τε καὶ ὁμόγλωσσον, καὶ θεῶν ἰδρύματά τε κοινὰ καὶ θυσίαι ἤθεά τε ὁμότροπα.¹ One of the features (but only one, and additionally, not positioned in the first place) granting humans the virtue of being Greek is therefore the use of the common Hellenic language. On the other hand, we know that Greek – through its fascinating and extremely long period of being attested in the phonetic script – has never been uniform. It is worth thus indicating what features are at present considered specifically Greek and allow us to distinguish Greek from the other Indo-European idioms.

In the present paper we are interested first of all in phonology/phonetics. In this context, James Clackson (in his paper *The genesis of Greek*, published in the monograph edited by Anastasios-Foivos Christidis) points to seven isoglosses specific to the Proto-Greek (Clackson 2007: pp. 187–188):

- the development of a series of voiceless aspirated plosives (p^h , t^h , k^h) from the reconstructed voiced aspirated plosives ($*b^h$, $*d^h$, $*g^h$, $*ǵ^h$,² $*ǵ^{wh}$),³
- the development of the glottal fricative [h] from $*s$ before a vowel at the beginning of a word or between vowels,
- the loss of the glide $*y$ between vowels,

* I would like to thank Dr. Elzbieta Olechowska for improving my English.

1 “[...] the kinship of all Greeks in blood and speech, and the shrines of gods and the sacrifices that we have in common, and the likeness of our way of life [...]”. [Transl. A. D. Godley; retrieved 7. 9. 2016 from <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>].

2 In the book printed as $*g^h$ presumably because of the ‘kentum-ness’ of Greek.

3 The contributors to the monograph do not take into account the so called ‘glottalic theory’. Neither is this theory otherwise referred to in the paper.

- the loss of all but *r*, *n*, *s* consonants at the end of the word,
- the specific development of the PIE laryngeals,
- the specific development of the PIE liquid, nasal, and glide sonorants,
- the maintenance (although limited to the last three syllables) of the PIE pitch accent.

The feature mentioned by Clackson first has usually served as an indirect proof that the ancient Macedonian does not belong to the group of idioms that may be considered Greek. The lexical material, limited to onomastics and especially to personal names, indicates that consonants in the Macedonian names went through a different evolution of the PIE voiced aspirated plosives: unlike what happened with Greek consonants, they retained their voicing, but they did lose the aspiration. Thus the question of Greekness of Macedonian is very far from being solved – let us use the conclusion of Anna Panayotou: “Macedonian is now generally studied within the context of the Greek dialects, but that does not mean that all the problems have been resolved as early (archaic and classical) inscriptions are scanty.” (Panayotou 2007: p. 433). A somehow similar quotation, but this time about the people, not the language, we read in Johannes Engels’ paper: “This chapter has supported the view that Hellenic and Macedonian ethnic identity or ethnicity should be regarded as extremely complex and fluid social constructions which surely deserve further study.” (Engels 2010: p. 97). One may say *non liquet* (at least, yet).

As already stated, the lexical and phonological/phonetic material present in the personal names is the most important for analysis, mainly because texts are scarce. It may, of course, happen, as Panayotou suggests, that the Macedonian names manifesting phonetic/phonological otherness “are substratum relics of a tribe which lived in the region and which was linguistically assimilated by the Macedonians” and “that as early as the fifth century BC the only traces of this language were confined to one of the most conservative of areas, that of onomastics or religion.” (Panayotou 2007: p. 439).

Berenice (Βερενίκη), one of the names most referred to in this context, and often denoting the female members of the Ptolemaic Dynasty ruling in Egypt, is a perfect example of the question. Its purely Greek counterpart would be Pherenice (Φερενίκη/Φερενίκη),⁴ and even if the name (as suggested by Michael Meier-Brügger 1992: p. 65) were a Greek loanword, the fact that it took on the Macedonian phonetics, would undoubtedly indicate that the Macedonian counterpart of the Greek /p^h/ is /b/.

The same reasoning, i.e. based on the belief in regular adequacy of Greek and Macedonian phonemes, enabled Olivier Masson to convincingly propose the understanding of the female names Λαομάγα and Βουλομάγα as the Macedonian counterparts of the Greek Λαομάχη and Βουλομάχη (Masson 1984); similarly, the male names e.g. Σταδμέας and Βυργίνος would be the Macedonian counterparts of Greek Σταθμίας and Φυρκίνος (Masson 1998). We may find other examples of such adequacy in Miltiades Hatzopoulos’ paper (Hatzopoulos 2000).

4 Such form of the name is not entirely unknown, cf.: „Le masculin Φερένικος se rencontre en diverses régions, notamment au centre et au nord de la Grèce, même en Attique [...] et le féminin a dû exister à Athènes; il y a en tout cas un nom de navire attique Φερενίκη. Mais dans IG I², 1028, 4, l’épithète archaïque de Φερενίκη se rapporte à une étrangère. Une Pherenika rhodienne était la mère de l’Olympique Peisirrhodos [...]” (Masson 1984: n. 1).

We may go further – assuming such an adequacy might be helpful in proposing another understanding of a crucial point in the Pella curse tablet. The *katadesmos*, 30 cm long lead scroll, found in August 1986 and dated for ca. 1st half of the 4th cent. BC, was preliminarily published by Emmanuel Voutiras (Voutiras 1993). It is written in a variation of north-western (Doric) Greek, but contains twelve letters ΔΑΓΙΝΑΓΑΡΙΜΕ whose meaning could not have yet been established with certainty. We owe the analysis of the problem to Laurent Dubois. The French dialectologist reads the last six letters as γάρ εἶμι, while showing other vowel hesitations (*hésitations vocaliques*) in the tablet, and proposes to interpret ΔΑΓΙΝΑ as δαπινα, which finally enables him to recognize the entire expression as the equivalent of the Attic ταπεινή γάρ εἶμι (Dubois 1995: p. 195). Of course, we cannot exclude a graver's mistake in writing Γ instead of Π or monophthongization and phonetic closure of [e] into [i] in the Greek dialects of that period (e.g. Bartoněk 1972: pp. 124–156) – the tablet indeed contains some graving errors (Panayotou 2007: pp. 441–442). However, the necessity of accepting still another graver's error – unspoken by Dubois – namely that of graving Δ instead of Τ, renders the hypothesis much more problematic.

The true question is what ΔΑΓΙΝΑ actually means – the context of the *katadesmos* might lead to the conclusion that it could be a personal name or a specific term, somehow connected with magic. The word previously unattested either in Greek or in Macedonian might have however a Hellenic explanation, if we accept the adequacy of plosives in personal names: the Greek voiceless aspirated stops as opposed to the Macedonian voiced and non-aspirated, i.e. the hypothesis which enabled Masson to explain some problems in Macedonian onomastics.

In the Hesychius' *Lexicon* we find an obscure (*crux philologorum*) entry (n. 458): †θήγεια· θαυμαστά. ψευδῆ.⁵

The Greek translation of the word quoted by Hesychius leaves no place for doubt in interpreting the grammatical form of θήγεια – it has to be nom./acc./voc. neut. plur., and its meaning leads us into the world of fantasy, fairies, and sorcery. We cannot be sure, whether the word actually existed in this form, from where Hesychius could have taken it, and how he could have pronounced it. Should the spelling be decisive here (despite the Greek pronunciation of the fifth and sixth century AD), we would have the perfect phonetic match to ΔΑΓΙΝΑ – nobody can be certain of the length of the first vowel [a]. The stem θηγ-/θαγ- remains however undetermined: the only possible IE stem **d^heh₂ǵ-*, because of its meaning ('schärfen, wetzen', LIV²: p. 140), does not seem semantically appropriate. We know however many feminine Greek names with the suffix -ίνα/-ίνη. The *Lexicon of Greek Personal Names* (LGPN) has not been completed yet, but thanks to its digitalization we are able to search and analyse on-line more than 35 thousand names, published so far.⁶ Thus in the already published volumes we find 166 attested feminine names ending in -ίνα and 86 ending in -ίνη. Some of them are evidently of Latin origin borrowed by Greek speaking people, e.g. Φαυστίνη, Μαρκελλίνα, Λογγίνα, others

5 The Greek quotations after the edition in the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* on-line. [Retrieved 17. 9. 2016 from <http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu>].

6 [Retrieved 17. 9. 2016 from <http://www.lgpn.ox.ac.uk/online/index.html>].

are simply Latin, e.g. Οὐκτωρῶνα or Παυλίνα as the editors show using accentuation marks. Nevertheless, a big part of the names may be reasonably treated as Greek and what is even more important they are quite frequent in the Vol. IV of LGPN which contains the names attested in Macedonia, Thrace and the northern shores of the Black Sea. It is thus tempting to see in ΔΑΓΙΝΑ another example of a feminine autochthonic name or a technical term with the meaning of ‘sorceress’.

If our reasoning up till here appears rational, we may go further. We owe to Theocritus the technical term for a puppet or doll used in magic: δᾶγυς (Theoc., *Id.* 2, 110).⁷ The term occurs when Simaetha abandoned by Delphis performs a ritual of love magic to regain emotions of her perfidious lover. Could we consider the Greek word δαγυς a Macedonian loan?

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⁷ ἀλλ’ ἐπάγην δαγῦδι καλὸν χροῶα πάντοθεν ἴσα.

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