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THE GREEK VOICED ASPIRATES AND BALKAN INDO-EUROPEAN¹

ABSTRACT: In contemporary Indo-European linguistics growing attention is given to the issue of the “Balkan Indo-European” subgrouping of the Indo-European languages. Different treatment of the Proto-Indo-European voiced aspirates in Greek and the Balkan languages presents a difficulty for this specific classification, as both Greek and the Indo-European languages of the Balkans are members of the subgroup. The problem might be overcome by assuming a longer period of the retention of voiced aspirates in the Balkan region than originally thought of, accounting for inconsistencies in Linear B writing, the medium of the earliest variety of Greek – Mycenaean.

KEYWORDS: historical Greek phonology, ancient Macedonian language

Fairly recently it has become customary in Indo-European linguistics to speak of a Balkan Indo-European (*Balkanindogermanisch*) grouping of “central” Indo-European languages – Ancient Greek, Armenian,

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Albanian, Phrygian and the more scantily attested *Kleincorpusssprachen* like Thracian, Illyrian or Messapian. Whether Tocharian should also be a part of this grouping is doubtful. The idea of the grouping has been proposed by Klingenschmitt (1994: 244f.) and supported by other scholars, most recently by Hajnal (2003), Matzinger (2005), and Sowa (2006b). It is generally assumed to have been a sort of a *Sprachbund*, though the languages themselves are obviously related to each other and the similarities are apparent at nearly every single level, so that the Balkan Indo-European phase might actually be a common proto-phase in the linguistic development of those languages (just like Proto-Greek, Proto-Phrygian etc.). Matzinger (2005: 383) has listed 17 linguistic phenomena linking the languages belonging to this group (Greek, Armenian, Albanian, Phrygian and, according to him, also Tocharian): the development of $*-i/uH_x > *y/w\alpha_x$, the indicative aorist $*arar-e/o-$, $*g^{wh}_2-ai-$, aor. $*e-k^{wl}-e-to$, $*smiyo-$, semantics of $*m\ddot{r}-t\acute{o}-$, $*swek'ur\ddot{a}-$, $*g^{wh}er-mo$, the pronominal $*au-$, vowel prothesis from the laryngeal, three rows of tectals, locative in $*-si$, the medial ending in $*-mai$, the negation $*(ne) h_2oiu k^{wid}$, the present $*g^{w}yoh_3-we/o-$, the preverb $*me$ and lexical $*h_2aig$ 'Ziege', $*pah_2nt-$ 'all' and the root $*(s)meh_3-$ 'verschämt sein'.

However, one of the significant differences in the development of the three main pillar-languages of the Balkan Indo-European group, that is Greek, the Balkan languages like Phrygian or Macedonian, and Armenian, is the difference in the development of the Proto-Indo-European voiced aspirates. In Greek the aspirates were devoiced, in Macedonian and in the other small Balkan languages they were deaspirated, and in Armenian they were both deaspirated and became voiced stops (as in the case of $*b^h$ and $*d^h$), or were subject to more complex contextual changes (e.g. $*g^h$).

The problem concerning the status of the Macedonian language is connected with the problem of the Balkan Indo-European theory and the development of the Proto-Indo-European aspirates. Up to the year 1993, Macedonian was known from the glosses of Hesychius of Alexandria from the 5th century AD and some coin inscriptions (cf. Hoffmann 1906). The characteristic Balkan treatment of the Proto-Indo-European aspirates in Macedonian was one of the most

important arguments against classifying it as a dialect of Greek (e.g. Macedonian *ábruFes* (Hesychius) in comparison to Greek *óphruēs* “eyebrows”, Mac. *dōraks* (Hesychius) and Gk. *thōraks* “spleen”, Mac. *Magas* and Gk. *makh-* in personal names (cf. Weiss 1999: 2-3). In 1986 the Pella curse tablet was found, (published in 1993 by E. Voutiras [1992-1993]) and its language has been classified as Macedonian – a North-Western Greek (Doric) dialect, with voiceless aspirates as in Greek proper. However, the problem remains as to the Hesychius’ glosses and the other attestations of Macedonian which show different reflexes of the aspirates.

The difference in the treatment of aspirates, especially as regards Greek and the neighbouring Balkan languages, is quite startling. Unless we want to interpret the Balkan writing of <β>, <δ>, and <γ> as voiced fricatives (so Brixhe 1997), we are bound to seek some explanation for this difference, especially if we want to eliminate the traditional Proto-Greek phase (with the voiceless aspirates *p^h, *t^h, *k^h) in favour of the single Balkan Indo-European phase common for all of the languages belonging to this sub-group. The solution might be found in the theory of Ivo Hajnal who, in his two recent articles (Hajnal 1993; Hajnal 2003), postulated that the existence of doublets <pu> and <pu₂> in Linear B may point to the fact that the early Mycenaean Greek preserved voiced aspirate /b^h/ in its system.

The sign <pu₂> was used to denote the voiceless aspirated /p^hu/ as in e.g. <pu₂-te> for /p^hutēr/ and earlier *b^huHtēr (classical *phutēr* “gardner”), and to denote voiced /bu/ as in e.g. <da-pu₂-ri-to> /dabur-int^hos/ (classical *labúrinthos* “labyrinth”). Assuming that the Linear B script was adopted in the 17th century BC, we may state that the <pu₂> sign was used to denote /b^hu/ and /bu/ (mainly in non-Greek words) at that time. This way <pu₂-te> would be a kind of historical orthography originating from the time when */bhutēr/ was still pronounced in very early (ca. 1650 BC) Mycenaean Greek when first inscription in Linear B is attested. This might also account for the existence of other voiced aspirates in early or pre-Mycenaean (cf. Sowa 2006a: 119). The following table represents this development (after Sowa 2006a: 119, Hajnal 2003: 137f.):

Table 1. The development of the Linear B signs <pu₂> and <pu>

	<pu ₂ >	<pu>
1700 BC Origin of Linear B	/bu/ /b ^h u/	/pu/
change of */b ^h / > /p ^h /	/bu/ /p ^h u/	/pu/
1400 BC Texts in Linear B	/bu/ /p ^h u/	/p ^h u/ /bu/ /pu/

The preservation of the voiced aspirate /b^h/ in early Mycenaean may point to the fact that also the other aspirates *d^h and *g^h were present in pre-Mycenaean and, earlier, Balkan Indo-European period. Already Schwyzer (1939: 70) and, more recently, Weiss (1999: 6) claimed that the devoicing of aspirates did not have to be Proto-Greek.² The development of aspirates from Proto-Indo-European would then be as follows:

Table 2. The development of the Proto-Indo-European voiced aspirates

PIE	*b ^h	*d ^h	*g ^h	
BalkanIE	*b ^h	*d ^h	*g ^h	
Balkan	b	d	g	Balkan languages
(Pre-Myc.)	*b ^h	*d ^h	*g ^h	and/or Proto-Greek?
Early Myc.	b ^h	t ^h	k ^h	1650 BC
Mycenaean	p ^h	t ^h	k ^h	1400 BC

This solution is not without problems. For one thing, the Early Mycenaean phonological system with voiced /b^h/ but voiceless /t^h/ and /k^h/ would be quite uneven. Perhaps that is why /b^h/ was later devoiced.

² Weiss (1999: 6) writes that “*The devoicing of the voiced aspirates is common to all known Greek dialects, but there is nothing that requires it to be Proto-Greek*” (Weiss 1999: 6). Schwyzer (1939: 70) already observed that the different treatment of the aspirates in Greek and Macedonian “*erklärt sich nur, wenn sich das makedonische Griechisch vom übrigen schon zu einer Zeit getrennt hatte, als noch mediae aspiratae (bh dh gh) gesprochen wurden, die dann wie im Illyrischen und Thrakischen die Aspiration verloren*” (Schwyzer 1939: 70). For quite a similar idea also taking into the account the problem of Macedonian but without mentioning the idea of Balkan Indo-European grouping or Hajnal’s hypothesis see now Negri, – Rocca (2006).

Moreover, despite finding common ground for linking the Balkan languages and Ancient Greek in the treatment of voiced aspirates under the Balkan Indo-European grouping, the reason for de-voicing rather than deaspirating the aspirates in Greek still remains unknown.

The case of Macedonian could be solved by assuming that we had two languages called “Macedonian” in ancient times. One of them was the dialect of Greek evidenced by the Pella curse tablet (“Macedonian A”) and the other one an independent Balkan language (“Macedonian B”), belonging to the Balkan Indo-European subgrouping and evidencing the Balkan reflexes of the Proto-Indo-European voiced aspirates attested in Hesychius’ glosses. However, the attested material of Macedonian still does not allow us to confirm or falsify any of the existing hypotheses, and assuming that Macedonian is a dialect of Greek requires us to investigate it in view of the Greek dialectology. Work in this direction still has to be done (cf. Sowa 2006a).

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