Reconstructing the Segmental System of Proto-Graeco-Phrygian: a Bottom-Up Approach

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Abstract : Recent scholarship on Phrygian has begun to more closely examine the long-held belief that Greek and Phrygian are two very closely related languages. It is now clear that Graeco-Phrygian can be firmly postulated as a subclade of the Indo-European languages. The present paper will focus on the reconstruction of the phonological and phonetic segments of Proto-Graeco-Phrygian (= PGPh.) by providing relevant correspondence sets and reconstructing the classes of segments. The PGPh. basic vowel system consisted of ten phonemic oral vowels: */a e o ā ē ī ō ū/. The correspondences of the vowels are clear and leave little open to ambiguity. There were four resonants and two semi-vowels in PGPh.: */r l m n i̯ u̯/, which could appear in both a consonantal and a syllabic function, with the distribution between the two still being phonotactically predictable. Of note is the fact that the segments *m and *n seem to have merged when their phonotactic position would see them used in a syllabic function. Whether the segment resulting from this merger was a nasalized vowel (most likely *[ã]) or a syllabic nasal *[Ṇ] (underspecified for place of articulation) cannot be determined at this stage. There were three fricatives in PGPh.: */s h ç/. *s and *h are easily identifiable. The existence of *ç, which may seem unexpected, is postulated on the basis of the correspondence Gr. ὅς ~ Phr. yos/ιος. It is of note that Bozzone has previously proposed the existence of *ç (< PIE *h₁i̯-) in an early stage of Greek even without taking into account Phrygian data. Finally, the system of stops in PGPh. distinguished four places of articulation (labial, dental, velar, and labiovelar) and three phonation types. The question of which three phonation types were actually present in PGPh. is one of great importance for the ongoing debate on the realization of the three series in PIE. Since the matter is still very much in dispute, we ought to, at this stage, endeavour to reconstruct the PGPh. system without recourse to the other IE languages. The three series of correspondences are: 1. Gr. T (= tenuis) ~ Phr. T; 2. Gr. D (= media) ~ Phr. T; 3. Gr. TA (= tenuis aspirata) ~ Phr. M. The first series must clearly be reconstructed as composed of voiceless stops. The second and third series are more problematic. With a bottom-up approach, neither the second nor the third series of correspondences are compatible with simple modal voicing, and the reflexes differ greatly in voice onset time. Rather, the defining feature distinguishing the two series was [±spread glottis], with ancillary vibration of the vocal cords. In PGPh. the second series was undergoing further spreading of the glottis. As the two languages split, this process would continue, but be affected by dissimilar changes in VOT, which was ultimately phonemicized in both languages as the defining feature distinguishing between their series of stops.