

PHRYGIAN LITERACY IN CONTEXT: CONTINUED¹

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Phrygian script and literacy were confined to the restricted area of cult and religion.² This is evidenced by the Palaeo-Phrygian inscriptions, despite the fact that some of them are ambiguous and suspected of being of political or secular nature.³

As it has already been stated, the Neo-Phrygian texts are fewer in number than the Old-Phrygian inscriptions and they occur in a more restricted area.⁴ However, they document the survival of Phrygian-speaking population groups in Anatolia in the first three centuries AD.⁵ The texts are uniform and standardised: all of them are funerary inscriptions and with very few exceptions contain malediction formulae. More than the half of them are bilingual: Greek and Phrygian languages in the Roman Imperial times and stirred up a discussion on the social context of bilingualism on Phrygian territory.⁶

In this paper I am not concerned with pure linguistic issues such as the phonological changes and the lexical peculiarities that betray the mutual influences between Greek and Phrygian languages. I would like to lay the emphasis on the cultural context and the function of the Neo-Phrygian texts. They furnish an excellent evidence for the conservatism of Phrygian cult and culture many centuries after the disappearance of Phrygian Kingdom.

It seems that the burial imprecations of Hellenistic and Roman date found in Greater Phrygia outnumber by far this type of inscriptions discovered in other areas of Anatolia. A great number of Neo-Phrygian texts occur on doorstones: stone funerary monuments in the shape of a real door, usually divided in four panels (or coffers) where images of different objects or figures appear. Sometimes a gable-roof is featured above the 'door'. Although spread in other regions of Asia Minor, this type of funerary monuments have been considered a Phrygian specialty.⁷ The mixed nature of their appearance has already been stressed: some types resemble both a funerary stele and an altar.⁸

¹ The considerations offered below are a continuation of two previously published articles: Vassileva 2005; 2006.

² Mellink 1993 and further arguments in Vassileva 2005; 2006.

³ I cannot fully agree with Brixhe's statement that Palaeo-Phrygian 'seems to have been utilized in all registers, whether public or private, sacred or profane.': Brixhe 2002, 248.

⁴ Brixhe 1993, 327-30; 1994, 168-69; 2002, 248.

⁵ Brixhe 2002, 252-53, confirms that the Phrygian was a living language at this time.

⁶ Brixhe 2002.

⁷ See the comments by Waelkens 1986, 13-14.

⁸ Waelkens 1986, 4.

Imitations of free-standing architecture are known from the rock-cut Phrygian façades of earlier time. They usually comprise a central niche shaped like a door opening.⁹ The two wings of the rock-cut façade at Arslankaya door are sculptured in an open position.¹⁰ Those niches were designed for the images of the Great Mother-Goddess (*Matar*, known as *Kybele* to the Greeks). It is generally accepted that these façades were cult places for worshipping the Goddess. A number of Old-Phrygian inscriptions are placed on the façades, usually on the architectural details hewn out of the living rock or following their outlines: on the lintel, inside the fronton, on the tie-beam of the pediment, on or along the side posts of the 'door' or in the undressed rock just above the fronton.¹¹

Although most of the Old-Phrygian inscriptions are dedicatory, there are a few examples of malediction formulae as well. Where the text is understood with more certainty, it is a combination of a dedication plus a curse against an eventual disturber of the monument.¹² The instances of malediction occur in inscriptions both on rock and on stone slabs. Thus, a Phrygian tradition can be followed related to door/façade-shaped monuments accompanied by sacred texts.

Recent studies of the Neo-Phrygian inscriptions demonstrated that many of the bilingual texts are in fact complementary or quasi-bilingual. Often a Greek epitaph is followed by a curse formula in Phrygian.¹³ The close examination of the texts reveals that sometimes parts of them were added later. However, in most cases where possible to verify, the Greek and the Phrygian imprecations are by the same hand.¹⁴ Despite the few exceptions (6 in total) of monolingual New-Phrygian inscriptions, it can be suggested that the curse in Phrygian was meant to strengthen its protection force. This suggestion can find support in two Greek epigram from near Amorion ending with an imprecation in Phrygian. Scholars have defined that the commissioners of these grave monuments were Greek speakers and yet they supplemented their epitaphs with Neo-Phrygian curse formulae.¹⁵ Thus, they suggested that Phrygian might have survived in Roman times as a sacred language.¹⁶ This does not necessarily mean that Phrygian was not a living language in the 3rd century AD and formulaic vocabulary was just used for the sake of its magic power. These examples simply testify to a many-century tradition in Phrygia where inscriptions were carved mainly on ritual occasions and the act of their cutting itself was probably a ritual activity as well.

The above considerations can be further illustrated by examples of monuments where the Phrygian curse is inserted between two Greek texts.¹⁷ Later insertion of a bilingual text on the same monument is also attested.¹⁸ The practice of later additions, especially the imprecations

⁹ Sometimes the façade was reduced to a mere architectural frame for the niche. See most recently Berndt-Ersöz 2003, 28-34.

¹⁰ von Reber 1897, 560, Fig. 5; Haspels 1951, 232; 1971, 88.

¹¹ Vassileva 2005, 85, n. 69; 2006, 228.

¹² The so-called 'Areyastis Monument', also a rock-cut façade, offers an example of two dedications and a curse formula: Lubotsky 1988, 25. Several more Old-Phrygian inscriptions are suspected of being imprecations as they contain the relative pronoun *yos/ios* (B-01, B-03, B-06, P-04f and P-06; Brixhe and Lejeune 1984, Brixhe 2004, 68-73) and the relative indefinite pronoun *ios ni* (P-04a). However, the texts are very short or badly damaged for a better understanding of their meaning.

¹³ Examples in Haas 1966 and Brixhe and Drew-Bear 1997, No. VI and VII.

¹⁴ Brixhe 2002, 252.

¹⁵ Brixhe and Drew-Bear 1997, 102, No. VI and Haas 1966, 125, No. 82.

¹⁶ In his more recent article C. Brixhe argues against his previous view, insisting on a regular use of Phrygian to convey information about the deceased: Brixhe 2002, 252.

¹⁷ Brixhe 2002, 252, n. 19; No. 103: a Greek epitaph is followed by a blank space of equal size and then by Phrygian and Greek curse, which are written by the same hand.

¹⁸ Lubotsky 1997.

(possibly on the death of the person for whom the monument was designed) parallels the Old-Phrygian tradition where some of the inscriptions on the rock-cut façades were written by another hand or cut later.¹⁹ The impression of a Phrygian conservatism becomes stronger, if one considers the architectural outlook of some of the New-Phrygian funerary monuments, which resemble building façades.²⁰

A missing link in this long tradition seems to be provided by the Old-Phrygian inscription from Vezirhan (Bithynia).²¹ It is a peculiar stele, usually defined as 'Graeco-Persian'. There are three scenes in relief: on top is a strange-looking female figure with birds on her shoulders and two lions in her hands, interpreted as the image of the Great Goddess. In the middle of the stele there is a scene read as a banquet but the relations between the different figures are not very clear. And finally, below is a hunt scene: a horseman, helped by a dog, has thrown his spear at a wild boar.²² Below the third scene there are five lines of a Greek inscription, then the Phrygian text of 13 lines, followed by the last two lines of the Greek text. However poorly understood, the Phrygian part, as well as the Greek one, suggests a dedication plus a Phrygian malediction formula in the last six lines. Only 'the banquet scene' may convey the idea of an epitaph.²³ The monument is dated to the late 5th century BC, and the Greek text is considered to have been added a generation or so later.²⁴ If this is the case, then the identical name of the dedicant, Kallias, in the Phrygian and the Greek texts seems strange. The choice of this already engraved stele to add the Greek dedication must have been meaningful. Possibly, like on the earlier rock-cut façades, inscriptions were carved at different ritual occasions, at certain time intervals (determined by the ritual calendar?), not necessarily long apart.

As I argued elsewhere, the nature of some of the earliest Phrygian inscriptions might not need to be strictly defined as dedicatory or funerary, as it was often both (when the rock-cut monument was perceived as a symbolic grave).²⁵ The Vezirhan stele can contribute to the arguments in favour of this view. The dedication usually placed on a rock-cut monument is now written on a stone slab, which would later become the normal grave monument. The association of the Neo-Phrygian stone 'doors' both with funerary steles and altars can be considered in the same context.²⁶

Finally, a number of Old-Phrygian inscriptions have been suspected of being metric.²⁷ Rhythmic patterns have long been detected in New-Phrygian texts, especially in the malediction formulae.²⁸ The combination of Greek epigram and Neo-Phrygian texts curses can fall in line with an old tradition of using metre in such type of texts.

¹⁹ The most famous examples being the so-called 'Midas Monument', M-01 and 'Areyastis Monument', W-01.

²⁰ Despite the fact that some of them were associated with the cult of Mitra, No. 48, cf. Lubotsky 1997. However, some of the Phrygian vocabulary of this inscription points out to the worship of the Great Mother-Goddess.

²¹ Neumann 1997; Brixhe 2004, 42-67, B-05.

²² The monument itself is yet unpublished. The only available photograph is to be found in a catalogue of the Archaeological Museum of Istanbul *The Anatolian Civilizations 2*, Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Ankara, 1983.

²³ Two more Old-Phrygian (monolingual) inscriptions, recently published, are considered epitaphs: one is an early 5th century BC 'Graeco-Persian' stele from Daskyleion, the so-called 'Manes stele', B-07, Gusmani and Polat 1999, 137-162; Brixhe 2004, 73-85; the other is the latest 4th-3rd century BC Old-Phrygian text, written on a Greek-style funerary stele, found near Afyon: W-11, Brixhe 2004, 7-26. The meaning of both texts is rather obscure.

²⁴ Brixhe 2004, 67.

²⁵ Vassileva 2006, 228.

²⁶ See above note 8.

²⁷ M-01d, W-08, W-10, P-04a.

²⁸ Lubotsky 1998, 413; West 2003, 77; the discussion being reviewed by Vassileva 2005, 87-88; 2006, 229-30.

The Neo-Phrygian texts confirm the restricted use of written Phrygian language for the needs of the cult (funerary context). Although their function diverged compared to the Old-Phrygian inscriptions, their major features, as well as the monuments on which they appear, corroborate the view of a strong Phrygian cultural conservatism.

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