

# Phrygian and Armenian: New evidence of a relationship

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## A note on the present state of research on Phrygian

Ch. de Lamberterie, *Grec, phrygien, arménien: Des anciens aux modernes* (Journal des Savants 1/2013: 3–69), p. 24:

“ ... Les nombreuses obscurités [que] renferment [les inscriptions phrygiennes] ont eu précisément pour effet de stimuler l'imagination d'esprits qui se sont ingénies à interpréter des mots de sens inconnu à partir de conjectures étymologiques hasardeuses fondées sur de vagues ressemblances : manière de faire évidemment désastreuse, et qui n'est qu'une caricature de l'approche comparative en linguistique historique. Même le recueil d'Otto Haas, qui se signale pourtant par un effort d'interpréter les textes selon une méthode rigoureuse (notamment à partir des parallèles grecs pour les inscriptions néo-phrygiennes) et constitue à ce titre un réel progrès par rapport à ses devanciers, n'échappe pas toujours à ce travers ; d'autres tentatives plus récentes, franchement aventureuses et fourmillant d'hypothèses toutes plus arbitraires les unes que les autres, représentent une véritable régression sur le plan scientifique.”

I should add that – sadly – the works by O. Haas are not reliable either.

## Sources of the Phrygian language

- **Old Phrygian inscriptions (8.-5. cent. BC, found in a vast area of central and northern Anatolia):**
  - About 350 inscriptions, written in the Old Phrygian alphabet.
  - Inscriptions are of various content: Building inscriptions on rock monuments, dedications, owner's marks on pottery items, etc.  
⇒ In comparison with Neo-Phrygian, a greater variety of words and forms are attested with less repetition, which makes it more difficult to understand something.
  - Many of the inscriptions are very damaged or very short.

- **Neo-Phrygian inscriptions (1.-3. cent. AD, found in the rural area between modern Eskişehir / Kütahya / Uluborlu / Konya / Tuz Gölü):**
  - About 120 texts, written in the Greek alphabet. (In some cases, the letters apparently do not denote the same sounds as in contemporary *koiné* Greek: evidence for an older Phrygian spelling tradition with Greek letters.)
  - Almost all of the inscriptions are curse formulas on tomb stones against possible desecrators.
    - ⇒ Because of their formulaic character, the number of attested forms and words is relatively small. But they are much easier to structure and to understand than Old Phrygian texts.
  - The actual epitaphs on the same tomb stones are almost always in Greek *koiné*). Only a dozen Phrygian epitaphs are known.
  - 90% of the original monuments are lost.
- **Glosses** from the works of Greek authors (e. g. *bekos*, Hdt. 2,2).
- **Other evidence** from non-Phrygian sources: Geographical names, borrowings within Greek inscriptions, etc.

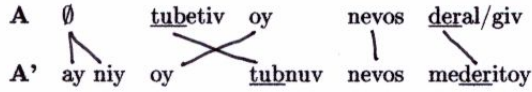
## The stele from Vezirhan

The stele (B-05 in Brixhe 2004b) dates from the late 5th century BC. It carries a Greek and a Phrygian inscription, which is the longest known Phrygian text. Some letters differ in shape from the ones of the Old Phrygian alphabet. Note that <*p*> and <*s*> are particularly hard to distinguish. Spaces are used as word separators.

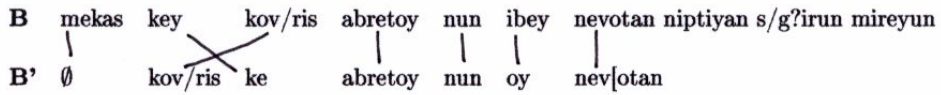
Phrygian inscription from the beginning of the curse (my reading, based on Brixhe (2004b:65)):

- 8 (...) *yos niy ar t sin ti(?) imenan kaka oskavos kakey*  
9 *kan dedasitiy tubetiv oy nevov deraliv mekaş key*  
10 *kovis abretoy nun ibey neyotan niptiyan sirun mireyun*  
11 *ivimun inmeney asenan daket torvetun ↑iray ay niy oy*  
12 *tubnuv nevov mederitoy kovis ke abretoy nun oy nev<otan>*  
13 *yos isekosos ↑emeney dupratoy veban ituv*

**Apodosis A and A'**



**Apodosis B and B'**



⇒ Note, in particular, that:

- *key* seems to be a graphic variant of *ke* “and, -que”.
- A *t*-stem *nevot-* and an *a*-stem *niptiya-* are attested in this inscription in several forms, and in a context that makes me (and others) believe that they go back to PIE *\*nep(o)t-/neptih<sub>2</sub>-*. Thus, *\*p > u* between vowels. But *-pt-* survives in *niptiya*.

## The *Areyastis* inscription

See Brixhe/Lejeune (1984:36sq.). The identification of *ke* and *key* allows us to discover the structure of the inscription’s W-01b part (given below).

<sup>5</sup>  
 Ζ ΕΡΕΤΑ ΜΕΝ ΑΤΕΛΑ ΜΥΤΕΡΑΥΡΕΝΕΚΟΛΕΧ  
 ΣΟΣΕΣΑΙΤ ΜΑΤΕΡΕΝ<sup>1</sup> ΕΦΕΤΕΚΣΕΤ<sup>2</sup> ΝΟΦΕΦΙΜΟΝΟΜΑΝ ΑΥΡΕΤ<sup>3</sup> ΝΑ<sup>4</sup>

**Protasis:** *yos esait materey eveteksetiy*

**First apodosis:** *ovevin onoman daφet*

**Second apodosis:** *lakedo key venavtun avtay materey* (*key* joins the two apodoses together.)

## Phrygian forms in *-s/ψeti* and *-s/ψet*

Compare the following apodoses (my readings):

- 86 *ba[s] | ioi bekos me bere[t]*  
 111 *bas ioi b<e>kos me beret [- - -]*  
 99 *me ke oi | tosseiti bas bekos*  
 18 *be<k>o|s ioi me tosseiti sarnan*

Identification of NP *-sseiti* with OP *ψeti*, and of NP *-sit* with OP *-set* leads to the following observations:

Form	<i>me</i>	main clause	relative clause
<i>eveteksetiy</i> W-01b	–	–	+
<i>egeseti</i> P-04a	–	–	+
<i>dedasitiy</i> B-05	–	–	+
<i>anivaψeti</i> B-07	+	?	–
<i>tosseiti</i> 18	+	+	–
<i>tosseiti</i> 99	+	+	–
<i>daψet</i> W-01b	–	+	–
<i>umniset</i> B-05	–	?	–
<i>omnisit</i> W-11	–	?	?
<i>egesit</i> 58	–	+	–

- The presence of *me* in main clauses correlates with the ending: It occurs only together with ‘Primary’ ending. Therefore, it cannot just be a preverb/preposition here. It appears to be the prohibitive negation (Gk. *mē*, arm. *mi*, ved. *mā*).
- (This casts doubt on the alleged sound change  $*\bar{e} > a$ .)
- In view of their syntactic environments, forms in *-seti* and *-set* show the behaviour of subjunctives.
- OP *-ψ-* : NP *-ss-* occurs after back vowel, OP *-s-* : NP *-s-* after front vowel.
- *-set(i)* is attached to different stems of the same verb (root *da-*), which makes it difficult to take the  $*-s-$  of the sigmatic aorist for its source.
- One might instead think of  $*-s\hat{k}-$ , which reminds of the Armenian subjunctive in *-ic<sup>c</sup>-*.
- **However:** In the thematic 3<sup>rd</sup> Person imperatives *ouelasketou* and *ouelaskonnou*, the group  $*-s\hat{k}-$  may be reflected as *-sk-* ...

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