

On the Hellenic Language: *A Reminder*

The Origins

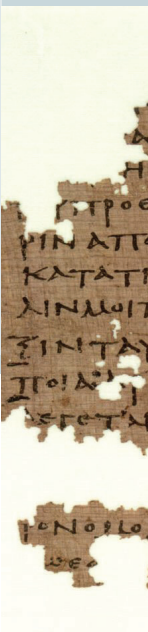
No one really knows how and when the Hellenic language started. Its origins remain a mystery shrouded in the mist of time. What seems to be true is that the Hellenic language sprang from a sort of 'mother language'; one scholars call conventionally Indo-European. Lots of other languages came about in the same way and thus the Hellenic language is a sibling or a cousin, so to speak, to many languages, both ancient and modern: Sanskrit, Latin, Farsi, German, French, Russian and English, to name just a few. Being an offshoot from this Indo-European 'mother', the Hellenic language started at some point to develop on its own and eventually became a distinct language of a distinct people: the Hellenes. This process took quite a while –to be honest, a thousand years– and in the meantime what would come to be known as the Hellenic world started taking shape.



The First Script

As far as one can tell on the basis of historical reasoning and the extant archeological findings, the first Hellenes who spoke a set of cognate dialects appeared in the northwestern parts of modern-day Hellas around 2200-2000 BCE. From there they started migrating and spreading south-

wards through Thessaly into the Peloponnese, and became known as the tribal groups of the Achaeans, the Ionians and the Aeolians. Nowadays we know for sure that around the middle of the 2nd millennium BCE a sub-group amongst the Achaeans started writing – actually inscribing– their language on clay tablets. These are the famous Mycenaean tablets, and the script we see on them has been dubbed by scholars 'Linear B' (deciphered by Michael Ventris and John Chadwick in 1953). A bit earlier there was also in use a 'Linear A' script –also of Hellenic provenance– but scholars still can't be absolutely sure of how it should be read.



The One and only Alphabet

What is amazing is that lots of words we use today were already in use 3,500 years ago. This testifies to the continuity of the Hellenic language, which for that matter is regarded as one of the most resilient languages in the world. It has retained its distinct identity and at the same time grown by enriching itself through self-development, on the one hand, and the accommodation of materials from other languages, on the other. There is virtually no other

language that can exhibit such a creative continuity throughout time. And this is only part of its strength and importance. Shortly after 1000 BCE the Hellenes adopted the Phoenician alphabet and adapted it to their own phonetics creating the alphabet that eventually became the basis for all European languages. That is why one can definitely say that there is no such thing as the Latin alphabet; there is only the Hellenic alphabet which was written differently in the West!

The Classical Miracle

In the meanwhile, the Hellenic language was ma