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Timotheus of Miletus' *Persae*, 147-148: A New Possible Semantic Interpretation

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In his nome *Persae*, Timotheus gives the floor to a Phrygian soldier engaged in the Persian army who begs his Greek aggressor to spare his life in broken Greek. Timotheus describes the multiplication of efforts required to speak Greek through a complex system of images. The aim of this contribution is to provide a new semantic interpretation of the most controversial passage (147-148 Page = 159-160 Wilamowitz):

[...] διάτορον | σφραγίδα θραύων στόματος

The meaning of the phrase διάτορον σφραγίδα in context with the other words is unclear. Wilamowitz (1903) linked διάτορον σφραγίδα to στόματος, understanding the expression as 'the intelligible seal of the mouth', *i.e.* 'the language', followed by Reinach (1903:79), Mazon (1903:212) and Page (1962:410). Croiset (1903:346) interpreted διάτορον adverbially, translating it as 'with a piercing voice', and taking σφραγίδα στόματος as 'the embarrassment sealing his mouth'. For Campbell (1993:105) the meaning is even stronger: 'shattering his mouth seal in piercing cry'. Gildersleeve (1903:235), followed by Hordern (2002:203), considered διάτορον as used proleptically, 'to be pierced', and σφραγίδα στόματος as meaning 'silence'. Janssen (1984:105), Paduano (1993:534) and Sevieri (2011:83) only pointed out that the Phrygian begins to speak, ignoring διάτορον. Nencioni (1950:150) and Lambin (2013:138) opted for a literal translation, 'breaking the piercing seal of his mouth' (to be preferred), without providing a convincing explanation.

The new semantic interpretation of 147-148 proposed here refers to the musical field. If we consider Timotheus as the most outstanding representative of New Music, the use of a metaphor inspired by music (cf. σύντονος, 'shrill', 169) to say that a Phrygian is speaking Greek would be unsurprising. Etymologically, διά-τορον is an o-stem adjective ('*nom d'action*', Chantraine 1979:10-11) derived from the verb τορᾶν < PIE **terh*_{1/3}-, 'to pierce' (Beekes 2010:1495). It can be applied specifically to sounds, with a semantic change from 'piercing' to 'loud, shrill', comparable to Skt. *tarā*- 'piercing, resonating' and perhaps OIr. *tairm* 'sound'. Greek and Byzantine lexicographers (Hsch., *Suda*, Phot., *Etym. Magn.*, Ps. Zonar. *s.v.*) confirm the relationship with a sound, thus 'piercing' in the sense of 'acute' (cf. A., *Eum.*, 567), even 'audible from a distance'. But how can a 'piercing sound' be related to Phrygian?

In Euripides, *Orestes*, 1384, the Phrygian slave mentions the μέλος or νόμος (Plut., *de mus.*, 1133b) ἀρμάτειον, a specific melody characterized by a high register (scholia, *Suda*, *s.v.*) to which his monody has to be sung. The relationship between high register and threnodic songs pointed out by Plut., *de mus.*, 1136c, explains the threnodic use of μέλος ἀρμάτειον in Eur., *Or.*, 1384. Moreover, Phrygians are defined as θρηνητικοί, 'with an aptitude for threnodic songs', by Eustathius (*Commentarium in Dionysii periegetae orbis descriptionem*, 791, 32-34). The νηνιάτον, which Hipponax evokes as a Phrygian composition (fr. 163 West = fr. 173 Degani), is a particular variety of threnodic song. By contrast, the Greek language, called ἰαονα γλωσσᾶν by Timotheus in 149,

may be associated with ionic harmony, defined as ἀνειμένη by Pratinas (fr. 712 Page), and characterized by a lower register.

There must have been a link between the Phrygians, the μέλος ἀρμάπειον, the threnodic songs (particularly the νηνίατον), and the high register to the point that even the Phrygians' way of speaking was identified with a particularly high-pitched tone of voice. Phrygian impressed this 'seal' (σφραγίς), *i.e.* shaped the soldier's 'mouth' (στόμα), a metonymy for his native articulatory capabilities, just as Timotheus impressed his own upon his nome (202-236), σφραγίς being a technical term for the most personal part of a poem (Thgn. 19-20). In conclusion, the Phrygian, accustomed to using a rather 'piercing' tone of voice in his native language, must break this 'seal', *i.e.* abandon this specific trait which characterizes his 'mouth', in order to speak Greek, a foreign language characterized by a lower register.

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