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Ritual Speech in the Neo-Phrygian Funerary Curse *Formulae*

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The Neo-Phrygian corpus (1st–3rd centuries AD) consists almost exclusively of *funerary curses* publicly written on the gravestone by the owner(s) of the tombs to warn any potential desecrators that evil would befall them if they should violate the grave. Neo-Phrygian curses have a strong *formulaic* character and pertain to *ritual speech* (Bax 2010: 484–5). Whenever language is meant to produce specific effects on the world, several devices are put in place in order to increase its performative power.

First of all, Neo-Phrygian inscriptions are mostly characterized by a *bilingual structure* in which the epitaph containing the deceased’s biographic information is in Greek, and the curse is in Neo-Phrygian. I argue that this structure was intentional: the fidelity to the ancestral language was perceived as the only way to effectively invoke the ancestral gods in order to protect the tombs from desecrators (cf. so-called “code-switching with the gods”, Love 2016).

Then, the use of formulaic *binomials* (a sequence of two words pertaining to the same form-class on an identical level of syntactic hierarchy connected by a lexical link, as found in Malkiel 1959), is a rhetorical device meant to increase the solemnity of ritual speech. One variant of the Neo-Phrygian curse formulae runs as follows:

ΜΕ ΔΕΩΣ ΚΕ ΖΕΜΕΛΩΣ ΚΕ ΤΙ(Τ)ΤΕΤΙΚΜΕΝΟΣ ΕΙΤΟΥ,

May he be accursed among gods and men.

Here, *δεως*, 'gods' and *ζεμελωσ*, 'men', are in the same case (dat. plur.), they depend on the same preposition *με*, and they are connected by the copulative enclitic conjunction *κε* < PIE **k^we*. Moreover, they are arranged from the shortest to the longest, in accordance with Behaghel’s Law of Increasing Terms (Behaghel 1909). The Indo-European primary opposition between deities and humans (West 2007: 124–5) is evident in the preservation of the PIE roots in Neo-Phrygian: *δεως* < PIE **d^hh₁so-*; *ζεμελωσ*, < PIE **(dh)ǵhem-elo-*. Etymological parallels of this formulaic binomial can be found in Vedic, Italic and Celtic.

Concerning *τι(τ)τετικμενος*, I agree with Lubotsky (2004: 235–6) in considering *τι(τ)* < PIE **d(ǵ)is-* (LIPP, s.v.), but I analyze *τε-τικ-μενος* as the middle perfect participle of the verb *τικ-* < PIE **(s)teig-*, 'sting, pierce' (LIV, s.v.). I think that the act of 'piercing' is related to black magic rites which prescribe harming someone by piercing a 'voodoo doll' (Németh 2018) with sharp objects. In PGM XVI, 15 and 64, the Greek verb *στίξαι* < PIE **(s)teig-* is used to describe the pierced victim's heart, and the same image is found in the *Atharva Veda Śaunaka*, 3, 23, 3, 3. The prescription of PGM, IV, 296-328 gives very precise indications concerning the position of the needles. A perfect parallelism can be found in the *Atharva Veda Śaunaka*, 3, 25, 3-6. In Gaulish, the root PIE **(s)teig-* in the Hospitalet-du-Larzac *defixio* (RIG L-98) commonly means 'to bewitch' (Lambert 2003: 169–72). Thus, the semantic passage in Neo-Phrygian is reconstructable as

'to be pierced (τετικμενος) through (τι)', in the sense of 'being the victim of a spell', and therefore, simply, 'accursed'.

Finally, despite Lubotsky's (1998) and West's (2003) efforts to reconstruct a metric 'proto-formula', too many elements prevent a coherent metric analysis of the Neo-Phrygian curses. Only two inscriptions (Avram 2015; Lubotsky 2017) actually show an attempt of metric regularization and, in my opinion, the stonemasons were trying to reproduce the overall impression of the Greek funerary epigrams in Phrygian. Imitating a metric structure, without actually possessing the technical skills required to master it, is a common feature among the lower social classes wanting to imitate the upper classes. An interesting parallelism can be found in some Latin funeral epigrams containing 'hexametric rhythms' (Warmington 1940, Nos. 42, 90), a sort of approximation of dactylic hexameters.

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