

HELLENISTIC GREEK

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1. Hellenistic Greek Defined

The definition given in a former edition of this work of Hellenistic Greek as “the prevailing designation of that mode of speech in use among those Jews who lived among the Greeks, or that peculiar form of the Greek language which it took in the thought and mouth of the Semitic Orient when the two spheres of life began to act upon each other, “ is not only “narrow and historically insufficient” but no longer historically possible. Knowledge of this idiom is no longer gained chiefly from Jewish works, there being now accessible a rich fund of sources in inscriptions and papyri from many lands, and it is of such a character that it bespeaks the interest not only of the philologist, but of him who is engaged in the study of culture and of religious history. Hellenistic Greek can no longer be isolated as a “sacred tongue” or as “Biblical Greek,” conceptions mediated on the one side by religious dogmatics, and on the other side by a dogmatic philology, the latter of which played with the catchwords “classical Greek” and “vulgar” or “common Greek,” and so prevented the perception of the historical fact of the spread of a language to wider usage and of its consequent development. For an impartial method of viewing the subject from a historical-linguistic point of view Hellenistic Greek must be defined as the world-speech of the times of the Diadochoi and the emperors. If all Greek is divided into “ancient,” “middle and late,” and “new” Greek, Hellenistic Greek is in general identical with “middle and late” Greek, used between 300 B.C. and 600 A.D.; i.e., it begins with Alexander’s conquests and closes with the establishment of a national Greek State, the <212> Byzantine empire. Various designations

have been used for the language thus defined: Hellenistic Greek, Greek world-speech, middle or late Greek, and *koinē* (“common”). The most used is the last, *koinē*, employed alone as a noun, though with no general agreement as to its exact meaning. Some understood by it postclassical literature with the exception of Atticizing works (so Winer-Schmiedel). Hatzidakis meant by it the whole development of common Greek, oral and written, between the limits assigned above, 300 B.C. - 600 A.D. With this Schweizer practically agrees, excluding only the Atticizing works. The varying usage to which the term *koine* has been subjected makes it advisable to retain the term Hellenistic Greek for the language as defined above.

2. Constituents of Hellenistic Greek

In historical investigations of the language two tendencies are observable. One emphasizes the Attic as the real basis of Hellenistic Greek, the other minimizes its influence. This is due to the fact that investigators have laid stress upon only one of two sets of sources; they have looked exclusively either upon books, such as the works of Polybius, or have directed their attention to inscriptions and papyri alone and have forgotten or not recognized that these were two sides of a common possession. It is to be observed with Schweizer and with Kretschmer (*Wochenschrift für klassische Philologie*, xvi., 1899, cols. 2 sqq.) that a difference exists in any language between the spoken and the written language, between literature and conversation. The former is bound by law, is polished and regulated; the latter is a thing of wild and intrammeled growth, yielding to the call of the moment's emergency. But neither is to be separated from the other as if they were separate entities. If literature alone is observed, a greater or less degree of Attic influence might be seen, more or less influence of the vernacular also detected. Many of these works bear almost no trace of Attic flavor, but are marked by expressions, turns of thought, and a vocabulary strange to classical Attic. Such results produced a reaction and a conscious attempt to approach the classic standard, the first example of which is Dionysius of Halicarnassus, the contemporary of Augustus. As a consequence, even in the literature which most closely approaches this standard, much is at once discernible as imitation or mere ornament. Discerning inquiry will strip this off as a mask and leave open to the sight the kernel, the origins and the peculiarities of the new world-speech as it appears in the inscriptions and ostraca and papyri of the times, which stream in numbers from Greece, Egypt, and Nubia, and are so rich as to promise a renaissance of Greek philology. Auxiliary to this mass of new material is the literature of the Greek of the Old and the New Testament, the Apocrypha, and the Pseudepigrapha, the legends and books of martyrs, correspondence of various sorts, and particularly the material in the works of the grammarians and lexicographers, including matter which the schoolmasters would have ruled out from the language, but which existed in the vernacular. This contains Attic elements with much that is so un-Attic that it can not be called either Attic or perverted Attic. Of such a character is the reduction in pronunciation of diphthongs to single vowels, which continues to this day, and is registered also in the inscriptions of the Egyptians Greek, going back to a Beotian dialect. Other changes register Ionic or Eolian influence upon the vowels of the whole language. The consonants also underwent change. By sibilant *tt* became *ss*, aspiration was dropped and added (*kuthra* for *chutra*), while Doric influences were also felt. Thus a new speech was made out of diverse elements, just as the New High German has come into being from Upper, Middle, and Low German elements. As elements of the varied Greek-speaking peoples gathered in Egypt and the Orient, they welded the varieties of their mother tongue into a common vernacular, based indeed on Attic, but embracing the other constituents.

3. Vernacular Basis of Hellenistic Greek

Along with these changes it is obvious that with the spread of the language into new parts of the world a mass of words would come in from the Egyptian, Persian, and Semitic tongues—names for animals, plants, and the commodities of public and private life. Political conditions brought about a blending of local peculiarities of dialect in the common *lingua franca*, since neither Attic nor Doric nor Ionic were the norms of language in the new domain. Desire for learning this new speech which was on its way to become the bond of a new world-citizenship promoted its growth. And doubtless much that comes out as new in literature was really far older, having happened to come to light for the first time in the new documents. The old hypothesis that in the new tongue the Macedonian and Alexandrian dialect were predominant can no longer be held, if by “Macedonian” be meant the language of Macedonia. That the vocabulary of Alexandria was influential in the Hellenistic world by reason of the centrality of Alexandria is of course correct. But the character of this new tongue is due to the welding in common intercourse of elements, especially but not exclusively Attic and Ionic, into a new and living vernacular, which in turn became a vehicle of literature. Hellenistic vernacular is not the vulgarizing of a literary language; the literary language is the ennobling of the vernacular.

4. Unity of Hellenistic Greek

It seemed quite natural to differentiate Hellenistic Greek according to local peculiarities, as when K. Dieterich divided it into that of Egypt, Asia Minor, and Greece. The old notion of an Alexandrian “dialect” as a separate philological quantity had a long-lived popularity and a certain specious basis, since most of the writers of note of the period were of Egypt. Naturally the peculiarities they showed were called “Egyptian” Greek. Warning must, however, be uttered against the conception that the local differences in the *lingua franca* hardened into “dialects.” While there were local differences, they were not significant; the common speech was one, and Schmid rightly speaks of the “wonderful completeness” of this common tongue, and of the unity which pervaded its phonetic and morphological changes. So that the phrases “Jewish Greek,” “Christian Greek,” and the like are “fanciful” <213> (Jülicher, in *GGA*, 1899, p. 258), dear though they are to the grammarians, lexicographers, and exegetes of the Greek Bible. Historical ground for thus isolating this literature philologically is not in existence. There are indeed linguistic peculiarities which were isolated or viewed apart, religious tendencies also, which were and remain authoritative for the doctrine of “Biblical” Greek. As long as the Septuagint and the New Testament were the only specimens known of Hellenistic Greek, no special linguistic sense was needed to differentiate them from classical Greek. Comparisons of these with Polybius revealed a different world, replete as they were with Hebraisms and Semitisms. “Hellenistic” Greek became a catchword to express a certain blending of two wholly different languages, exactly as Yiddish is used in modern times. The fixing of this term or of the term “Biblical” Greek was helped by another fact, the dogma of inspiration. In consequence of this the unregenerate were not permitted to pass judgment upon the linguistic character of the Bible (Quenstedt, in Luthardt, *Kompendium der Dogmatik*, Leipsic, 1886, p. 312), and the inspiration assumed for the Old Testament and the New was tacitly carried over to the Septuagint. Thus not only the text, but the quality of the language as language was isolated, and a distinction grew up between a “profane” and a “sacred” Greek. One of the most influential promoters in modern times of this theory was Hermann Cremer, who, in the preface of his lexicon, expressly approves the position of Richard Rothe (in *Zur Dogmatik*, Gotha, 1863, p. 238), who says that one may with good right speak of a language of the Holy Ghost since it lies open in the Bible that the Divine Spirit, oper-

ating in the sphere of revelation, has built for itself a language of religious content out of the speech of the people of the regions where it operated, and formed this new language after a shape suited to the particular purpose. The proof of this position Cremer seeks to introduce in many parts of his lexicon. Until recent times, therefore, the linguistic and the theological modes of thought have agreed in setting Biblical Greek apart as something *sui generis*. The disproof of this theory, which has been a fetter upon linguistics, exegesis, and Christian faith, was attempted in the *Bibelstudien* and *Neue Bibelstudien* of the undersigned (Eng. transl., *Bible Studies*, 2d ed., Edinburgh, 1903), to which reference must be made for the general character of the Greek Bible as a monument of Hellenistic Greek. Further light is thrown by the same author's *New Light on the New Testament* (Edinburgh, 1907); *The Philology of the Greek Bible* (London, 1908); and *Licht vom Osten, Das Neue Testament und die neuentdeckten Texte der hellenisch-römischen Welt* (Tübingen, 1908).

5. Pronunciation and Inflection

The most significant marks of the living Hellenistic Greek were its treatment of sounds and inflections, and upon these the conception of a special Biblical Greek is wrecked. Every one of the minute peculiarities distinguishing the text of the Bible from that of Plato and Xenophon is found in the contemporary Greek of the *lingua franca* as evidenced in the inscriptions, ostraca, and particularly the papyri now in hand. That this quality inheres especially in the papyri is not a matter of accident, since they more nearly concern private and common life. The inscriptions, which are public, are often, particularly when official, consciously made to approach the norms of literary style; while the papyri are often unpolished and express the many needs and varying situations of the daily life of the mass of the population. And this general situation is borne out by the formulas and usage of legal procedure. Schmiedel's edition of Winer's grammar of New Testament Greek, appearing though it did before the mass of newly found material was accessible, pointed the way to the newer conception of the language, and was fortified by K. Dieterich's *Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der griechischen Sprache . . . bis zum zehnten Jahrhundert* (Leipzig, 1898). The works of Schmiedel, Blass, and Moulton on New Testament Greek, and the *Neue Bibelstudien* of the undersigned make it unnecessary to recount here the peculiarities of Hellenistic Greek. It is sufficient to say that the documents so often referred to, coming from the times of the Diadochoi and the emperors and often dated most precisely to the very day, afford rich material to illustrate Biblical Greek (cf. on this material U. Wilcken, *Griechische Papyri*, Berlin, 1897, and *TLZ*, xxi., 1896, pp. 609 sqq., xxiii., 1898, p. 628 sqq.).

6. Lexicography

The vocabulary of the Greek Bible shows the characteristic additions of Hellenistic Greek. While the same evidence is not forthcoming as for changes in sound and inflection, it is not needed. It is self-evident that the vocabulary of this world-speech, which enriched itself from all the lands subjected to the Greeks, can not be fully known. From the newly discovered sources words are continually emerging which are vainly sought in the lexicons; it is not surprising therefore that many words in the texts already known occur only once. That these were newly coined by the authors on the spur of the moment no intelligent person will maintain; they are simply *hapax heurēmena* ("words found only once"), not *hapax eirēmena* ("words used only once"). These words "found" only once are numerous in the Greek Bible, and have been employed to strengthen the theory of a "Biblical" Greek—indeed Cremer designates such words as "Biblical" or as "belonging to the New Testament," in the latter case as due to the constructive strength of

Christianity, in which he is followed by Grimm, who conveys the impression that they were unknown elsewhere, though Thayer's edition is, in this matter, more prudent. Of a great number of these *hapax heurēmena* one may at once assert on internal grounds that their rare occurrence is mere accident. In other cases there turn up in hitherto unknown authors, in the inscriptions, ostraca, and papyri, words, and combinations which have hitherto been assumed to be exclusively "Biblical" or of the New Testament. And the same fact is true of "Biblical" meanings of common words, which meanings have been regarded as peculiar to Biblical <214> Greek. In commentaries on the New Testament these meanings have received much emphasis, the dogmatic utility of which would be undermined were a careful examination of the facts undertaken. Unfortunately the situation in this regard has been confused by not keeping distinct the linguistic-historical and the religious-historical points of view. It is true that both Greek Judaism and Christianity have created new words and new meanings for words; but these are facts in the history of religion, not of linguistics, since the words or meanings originate out of Jewish or Christian faith and not out of Jewish or Christian *Græcitas*. It would be as correct to speak of Gnostic Greek or the Greek of the Stoa or the Greek of Neoplatonism as of "Jewish" or "Christian" Greek on the ground that they have created new words or given new meanings to words. So that from the lexicological point of view the Greek Bible is a document of the Hellenistic world-speech.

7. Syntax

At first sight the syntax of the Greek Bible may seem to warrant the designation of Biblical Greek. In the Psalms and in the Synoptic Gospels there are constructions, collocations of words, and methods of sentence-building which can not be duplicated even in the papyri which proceed from the peasantry of Egypt. Here is a Greek which is full of Semitisms. Yet other parts of the Scripture do not contain these elements; IV Maccabees, the Pauline Epistles, the Epistle to the Hebrews differ in this respect from the books named above, and belong to the common Hellenistic speech. Syntactically these are to be disconnected from the works with so pronounced a Jewish flavor, and the reason is seen to be that they are original compositions while the others mentioned are translations from the Hebrew or Aramaic; thus for the latter a new measure is secured for their syntactical peculiarities, and we should speak not of Jewish Greek, but of translation-Greek. But a question arises whether this translation is in the every-day Greek of the translator or is simply a Greek fashioned upon the Semitic model. In the former case it would then be a part of the *lingua franca*; in the latter case it would be a Jewish Greek existing only on paper in which the original was not translated into Greek, but simply transferred word by word into Greek equivalents. Or, to put the matter in another form, are the "Semitisms" of the Bible normal or exceptional? Following out this distinction as made in H. Paul, *Prinzipien der Sprachgeschichte* (Halle, 1898), pp. 67 sqq., 145 sqq., translation-Greek is a variety which is seen to be artificial and existent only on paper; its numerous syntactic Semitisms are therefore exceptional. If there was a Jewish idiomatic Greek, how was it that the Greek Jew, Paul, who wrote not books, but only letters, did not employ it? and why did Philo and the author of the Aristeas letter write Greek that was so un-Jewish? Two Biblical authors make further argument unnecessary, Sirach and Luke. Both have prologues of which it can not be said that they are "Jewish-Greek" or that they "Hebraize." Yet both authors have made use of Semitisms, though not with the same frequency. For those who argue <c2> for a "Jewish Greek" the occurrence of these two kinds of Greek from the same pen is embarrassing. The explanation is, however, exceedingly simple. In the prologues these authors wrote as they spoke; in the body of the work

they were more or less dependent, directly or indirectly, upon a Semitic basis. The Jewish Greek was, therefore, not a living speech, but an inferior method of translation. The Septuagint is more Jewish than the Synoptic Gospels because the former had a documentary basis; the latter came probably from the oral tradition of a bilingual people (cf Merx, in *Deutsche Literaturzeitung*, xix. [1898] 989). That there are, so to speak, normal Semitisms along with the exceptional is to be recognized; they exist as a coloring of certain books, just as sermons and religious papers of the present are colored with Biblical terminology. An investigation, therefore, of the Semitisms of, say, the old Christian texts is an urgent need. A comparative view of the writers of the Hellenistic common speech would doubtless show that many of the so-called Semitisms are rather parts of the every-day language. Such cases are the use of *anastrephesthai* (“to walk”) and *anastrophe* (“walk”) in an ethical sense, *onoma* (“name”) in the sense of person, the numeral used distributively by doubling it, and so on. The number of real Semitisms would be greatly reduced and would appear due to the religious terminology. How much came into the common speech in pre-Christian times can hardly be estimated, but that technical words were introduced is certain, through only a single “Egypticism” is known, *onos hypo oinou*. So that from the point of view of syntax the Greek Bible belongs to the common Hellenistic speech. Its Semitisms are curiosities, but are not of linguistic importance any more than are the Latinisms or other linguistic booty which Greek took over in its conquest of the world of the Mediterranean lands.

8. The Greek Bible not Literary Greek

When the question is raised whether the Greek Bible is a monument of the vernacular or of the literary language, it must be borne in mind that the boundaries between the two are fluctuating. Moreover, distinction has to be made among the various books in this Bible. Blass says of the Epistle to the Hebrews that it is the only book in the New Testament which in structure and style shows the care and finish of an artistic writer. The Pauline letters, on the contrary, are monuments of the vernacular; his vocabulary is of the sort that an Atticizing grammarian would have continually corrected in order to get rid of the words forbidden to literature. His sublime combination in I Cor. xvi. 13 of *gregoreite stekete* (“watch ye, stand fast”) is one that no writer who regarded form would have permitted himself to use; both verbs are, as Blass calls them, “plebeian.” But to expect literary Greek of the apostle would be wrong—he was no *littérateur*, but a writer of letters, who spoke as the common people of Ephesus and Corinth spoke; he was just Paul who knew the world-speech of Asia, Europe, and Egypt, Paul with a native eloquence and a prophetic pathos which came from his soul of fire; and as he spoke so he wrote. Similarly the Gospels are monuments of the vernacular, and the same is true of most of the books of the Septuagint; they swarm with words which were the abomination of the Atticists. Investigations into the individual books with reference to their inner character would be both timely and profitable. It is a significant fact for the religious-historical judgment of the earliest Christianity that the men of this, its classical time, were anything but bookish. In the more popular texts of the later Christian centuries, the legends, romances, letters, accounts of martyrs, and the like are to be seen monuments of the living speech on its way to become the New Greek (cf. H. Rheinhold, *De gratitate patrum apostolicorum librorumque apocryphorum*, Halle, 1898, pp. 1-113; B. W. Fritz, *Die Briefe des Bischofs Synesius von Kyrene*, Leipsic, 1898).

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