

Greek: A history of the language and its speakers. By Geoffrey Horrocks. London & New York: Longmans, 1997. Pp. xxii, 393.

Reviewed by BRIAN D. JOSEPH, *Ohio State University*

Greek is one of the most thoroughly studied languages there is, rivalling perhaps only English and Chinese in this regard, and there is an enormous scholarly literature covering all aspects of its grammar and use. Moreover, Greek itself is like a laboratory for historical linguistics, inasmuch as the recorded history of Greek spans some 3500 years, from Mycenaean Greek of the Bronze Age to the present day. Indeed, after roughly the 8th century BC, Greek offers a virtually unbroken documentary record that by any measure is substantial, containing texts, inscriptions, contemporary grammatical accounts, and the like, all grist for the historical linguist's mill.

Scholarship on Greek has been helped somewhat, though some might argue also hindered as well, by the impression/ideology that it is one language, whether one is talking about the Greek of Homer of the 8th century BC and the world of Odysseus the legendary hero, or the Greek of 20th century AD and the world of another notable Odysseus, Nobel Prize winner Elytis. This view has meant that scholarship can simply be about "Greek" and is seemingly relevant to all stages of the language, a luxury that is not available in the same way for Latin and its later instantiations in the Romance group or Russian and its (near) predecessor, Old Church Slavonic. What has happened, however, as a result, as author Horrocks (hereafter H) notes in his Preface (p.xv), is that the unmarked sense of "Greek" has come to be *Ancient* Greek, so that the latter stages of the language have special descriptors, e.g. 'Modern' Greek, 'Byzantine' Greek, etc.

Perhaps for this reason, the latter stages of Greek have not received the attention they might have from scholars, and there is actually a paucity of handbook-like materials on these periods. Further, there are just a few works that treat the whole of the history of the Greek language.

For the former, one can cite the 1969/1983 book by Browning, Tonnet 1993, and Thumb 1912. However, Browning's wonderful and delightful work is overly concise, and is perhaps more a sketch than a detailed handbook, and the same can be said of Tonnet's fine book. Thumb, on the other hand, while providing a lot of historical information, really aims at a description of the modern language. For the latter, there are Meillet 1920/1965 and Palmer 1980, but they actually pay very little attention to the Medieval and Modern periods, concentrating instead on the unmarked sense of 'Greek', i.e. Ancient Greek.

Similar in scope but far less successful, though with somewhat more of a focus on the latter stages, are Costas 1936 and Moleas 1989. More detailed yet is Jannaris 1897, but it is a bit chaotic in its organization and does not have the benefit of 20th century scholarship into Greek grammar, both historical and synchronic.

Thus, even with all the scholarship there is on Greek, H's book fills a huge gap in the literature. Richly documented with numerous examples and extended passages from literary sources and inscriptions, and fully up-to-date in terms of findings about Greek and about linguistic theory, H's book covers Greek and its development in three sections, totalling 17 chapters. In a deliberate choice on the author's part, the overall focus is on the latter history of Greek, giving particular attention to the post-Classical, Medieval, and into the Modern era. H states in his preface: "[in] most histories of (ancient) Greek ... the Koine [is] treated almost as an afterthought ... [and] the Byzantine period ... remains for many a closed book" (p.xvi), and it is clear that he sees this book as an opportunity to illuminate some of the periods in the history of Greek that have not received the attention they deserve. Thus, in Section I, 'Ancient Greek: From Mycenae to the Roman Empire', there are relatively short chapters on 'Ancient Greek and its dialects' (pp.3-16), 'Classical Greek: official and literary 'standards'' (17-23), and 'The rise of Attic' (24-31), but considerably more substantial chapters on 'Greek in the Hellenistic world' (32-70), 'Greek in the Roman Empire' (71-101), and 'Spoken koine in the Roman period' (102-127). Section II, 'Byzantium: from Constantine I to Mehmet the Conqueror', contains six chapters of varying lengths, but all adding up to a substantial section: 'Historical prelude' (131-145), 'Greek in the Byzantine empire: the major issues' (146-168), 'Byzantine belles lettres' (169-178), 'Middle styles in Byzantium' (179-204), 'Spoken Greek in the Byzantine empire: the principal developments' (205-253), and 'Texts in the 'vernacular'' (254-290). Finally, Section III, 'Modern Greek: from the Ottoman Empire to the European Union', is defined by five chapters: 'Ottoman rule and the war of independence (1453-1833)' (293-297), 'Spoken Greek in the Ottoman empire' (298-321), 'Written Greek in the Turkish period' (322-333), and 'The history of the modern Greek state' (334-343), closing with 'The 'language question' and its resolution' (344-365).

As this list of chapters and the book's very subtitle reveal, an important aspect of this work is that it is not just about the Greek language in the abstract as a formal symbolic system, but rather it is also about the people who used the language. As a result, H provides a considerable amount of information on the external setting for the language, with highly readable chapters, as seen above

on Byzantine history, the Ottoman empire and its hold on Greece, and 20th century Greek history. Some of these events had profound effects on the language — for instance, the Ottoman rule brought hundreds of Turkish loan words into Greek, and population exchanges with Turkey in the 1920s after the failed irredentist offensives forever altered the dialect distribution of Modern Greek — and H is right to spend time in the book on this historical background. Similarly, considerable attention is paid to the ‘language question’, the conflict between an archaizing high-style (exemplified best in the *katharevousa* or ‘puristic’ Greek of the 19th and 20th centuries) and a vernacular lower style (as exemplified in the *dimotiki* or ‘popular’ Greek of the 19th and 20th centuries). Although the issue came to a head and was politicized and in a sense institutionalized after the 1821 War of Independence from the Ottoman Empire, this stylistic tension has deeper, pre-Modern, roots, reaching back into the Hellenistic period, as indicated by H’s concern with ‘Atticism’ in the Roman period and ‘middle styles’ and vernacular texts in the Byzantine era.

As noted above, H presents a number of texts, fully glossed and translated, for the reader. The texts are well-chosen to show certain aspects of style of the time or interesting linguistic features, and each is accompanied by some discussion of particular points evident in the language thus revealed. Throughout the presentation, the reader is treated to the result of an interesting — and rather bold — decision on H’s part to provide a phonetic transcription for every example; this necessitates taking a definitive stance for various changes on matters of chronology and intermediate stages. Though much detailed information is known about the pronunciation of Greek at various stages in its development and about the various sound changes that characterize some of the differences between these stages, there is still much that is not known. But this is no case of fools rushing in, for H’s decisions about pronunciation are generally quite reasonable and while not unassailable, are all defensible as representing received wisdom even if not necessarily the only possible account. In this regard, he sets a high standard for all subsequent works in this field, which might be well-advised to adopt H’s transcriptional stages.

The various chapters and discussion of texts give H an opportunity as well to present the major developments in the phonological, morphological, and syntactic systems of Greek across its several stages of development. There is particular attention in the syntax to the developments with the weak (so-called ‘clitic’) pronouns, which shift over time from elements positioned within a sentential domain (generally occurring in second position) to ones positioned

with regard to the verb (generally, positioned before finite verbs and after nonfinite ones), with much fluctuation and messiness in the transition. In this regard, H employs the armamentarium of recent versions of generative syntax, drawing largely on the ‘Government and Binding’ framework. In morphology, the complexities of the changes in verbal categories and the markings associated with them lead H, rightly, to devote more space overall to the verb than to the noun in the Medieval period, and most every significant change receives some explanation. H is quite approving of the role of analogy in reshaping the noun and the verb, and particularly the later instantiations of the ancient contract verbs, where some truly fascinating developments are to be found, especially in the nonactive voice forms. Similarly, phonological changes are not ignored, and in fact, as suggested above, confront the reader in each example cited.

This is a book with very few flaws. I personally would have liked to see more attention given to Greek as a Balkan language and in relation to its Balkan neighbors, beyond the two pages (166-168) that H limits himself to on this topic. Since many of the profound differences between Ancient and Modern Greek involve changes in the direction of structures found in other Balkan languages such as Albanian or Macedonian, much more can and should be said, even if it is not always clear who was influencing whom — at the very least, contacts with speakers of neighboring languages has constituted a significant piece of the external context of the development of Greek, even if it was sometimes an ‘linguistic exporter’ rather than an importer. Also, some details in the overall development of the future tense strike me as wrong, even if H has the general picture right. In several places throughout the book, H discusses the significant changes that led to a later Greek periphrastic future based on the verb “want” (Greek qevlw [‘qelo]), and he does affirm a role for the Medieval periphrasis of qevlw with an infinitive (e.g. qevlw gravyein [‘qelo ‘grapsin] “I will write”) in the ultimate development of this tense. However, the actual step leading to the precursor of the modern future affix qa [qa] (as in qa gravyw [‘qa ‘grapso] “I will write”)¹ was most likely not the “strengthening” of a “future use of nav [na] + subjunctive ... by the prefixation of qev [qe], a reduced form of 3rd sg. qevlei [‘qeli]” that H posits (231), but rather a reduction of a phrasal combination of qevlei with the usual Medieval Greek

¹Though written as if two words in the current standard orthography, there are in fact good reasons for treating qa as an affix now; see Joseph 2000 for discussion.

replacement for the infinitive, a subordinating *nav* plus subjunctive (e.g. *qevlei na gravyw* “I will write” (literally, “it-will that I-write”).²

Despite such correctives, all in all, this book is an outstanding contribution to scholarship on Greek. While it is not the last word — and thus should be treated as a point of departure for a true and full historical grammar of the Medieval period — author Horrocks deserves a hearty *mpravbo* [brávo] ‘bravo!’ for a job well done.³

Reviewer’s address:

Brian D. Joseph
Department of Linguistics
222 Oxley Hall
Ohio State University
COLUMBUS, Ohio U.S.A. 43210-1298
e-mail: joseph.1@osu.edu

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²See Joseph 1978/1990, 1983, 2001, To appear (all following Psicharis 1884 and Bànescu 1915) for details. The *qevlei na gravyw* source is not directly attested in early Medieval Greek, but that fact need not stand in the way of accepting this account (see Joseph & Pappas 2001, Forthcoming); interestingly, H himself, on p.307, acknowledges that some facts from Cyprus “point strongly” to this view of the origin of the modern future as being correct (despite what he says on p.231).

³The one other review of this book that I am aware of, Méndez Dosuna 2001, is equally laudatory, while giving a considerably more detailed discussion of various points than is offered here.

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