



Phrygian Language and the Inscriptions That Preserved It

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History

- Phrygian was the language spoken in the kingdom of Phrygia, in what is now eastern Turkey.
- Phrygian kings Gordias, Midas, and Mygdon have been significant in much of Greek mythology.
- Allies of the Trojans, Phrygians are said to have fought in the Trojan War.
- Phrygia managed to dominate much of western and central Anatolia before being toppled and taken over by Cimmerians.



Language Discovery

Feature	Old Phrygian	New Phrygian
Number of inscriptions	395	117
Dating	ca. 800-330 BC	Late 1 st – 3 rd c. AD
Alphabet	Phrygian	Greek
Writing material	Varied	Stone
Contents	Varied	Funerary
Area	Huge	Restricted
Archaeological context	Mainly yes	Never
Preserved	Mainly yes	Mainly no

- Phrygian has been confirmed by two discovered corpora, or collections of written texts, the Paleo-Phrygian and the Neo-Phrygian.
- These are separated into two stages, due to differences in writing systems, materials, and locations.
- Phrygian *is* considered a fragmentary language, but there are far more remaining inscriptions or text examples than other fragmentary languages.
- Some Phrygian glosses with Greek definitions were created by writers such as Hesychius, which confirm some words found in inscriptions.



Paleo-Phrygian Corpus

- The inscriptions included in Paleo-Phrygian were discovered all over a large swathe of land in Anatolia.
- Most examples of text are found between the cities of Kerkenes Dag and Dorylaion, aside from a few isolated examples in different areas
- The former Phrygian Capital of Gordion contained 259 inscriptions, making up 65.6% of the entire Paleo-Phrygian Corpus.
- Many text samples come from fillings where broken artifacts from various sources and dates are thrown together, making accurate dating difficult for some sources.

Tumulus MM



- A tumulus, or burial mound for a king just outside of the city of Gordion was essential for dating the Phrygian language.
- When the tomb was first opened in 1957, it remained unlooted.
- Inscriptions were found on jars, silver and bronze bowls, and a beam.



Inscription found on a bowl in the tomb

Midas City



- Midas City was a mountain fortress with many monuments dedicated to the Mother-Goddess *Matar*
- 16 inscriptions were found on rock monuments, as well as one example of graffiti on a sherd.
- “Attes the son of Archias, the akenanogavos, made it for Midas, the leader and the king”
- “Iman made this work for Davos”



Middle Phrygian

- A third division, occurring between Paleo-Phrygian and Neo-Phrygian is considered, based on a single inscription found in the city of Dokimeion.
- Dated to the end of the 4th Century B.C.
- Separated because it is the first Phrygian text written in the Greek alphabet, but it still precedes Neo-Phrygian in terms of phonetic features and some spelling differences



Neo-Phrygian Corpus

- Inscriptions date from the 3rd through 1st centuries, B.C.
- Writings are found in a much smaller area than the old corpus, as a large part of Phrygia was occupied by the Galatians, and Hellenization had taken hold on many important cities.
- There are many inscriptions, but the majority of them are only curses, adhering to a repetitive formula.
- Many instances bear resemblance to the standard curse:
 - “Whoever does harm to this tomb, let him be accursed by Zeus in the sight of gods and men”



Neo-Phrygian continued

- Most of these inscriptions were found in smaller villages or towns, as the cities seemed to have switched to Greek in most instances.
- There are only twelve inscriptions discovered that aren't just curses, but they all relate to the epitaphs in some way.
- Every monument that bears a Neo-Phrygian inscription is funerary, mostly in the form of a door-stele, or a grave shaped as a door.



- Door-stele from Prymnessos containing Neo-Phrygian text
- Dated to between 138-161 AD
- First half of the sentence is in Greek, while the second half is in Phrygian
 - Same alphabet is used

“Who damages this monument or contravenes the forgoing injunctions, let him be accursed in the sight of gods and men”

(Very similar formula to most of the other inscriptions)



Interaction with Greek Language

- There was great influence from Greek as it gradually became the dominant language, but some Phrygian influences remained in Greek.
- Many bilingual inscriptions were made in Greek and Phrygian
- Shared imprecative formula, as seen on epitaphs and in curses
- Greek loanwords and borrowings are very present in Phrygian
- Phrygian words also appear in Ancient Greek works, but they are mostly names and cannot be considered true borrowings



Interaction with Anatolian Languages

- Phrygians settled in an area previously occupied by the Hittite Empire, so Hittite language is considered an origin for some Phrygian words or names, but it is also possible that there was no overlap at all between the two cultures
- Many words are possibly borrowed from Lydian, Luwic, and Luwian languages, cultures which occupied adjacent land or ruled over Phrygia for some time



Discussion/Activity

The Phrygian language shares many similarities and features with Greek, which are also shared by Armenian and Indo-Iranian.

Indo-Iranian and Greek have very similar morphological structure, and a lot of similarities are present that continue this.

Some scholars have suggested a subgroup including Phrygian, Armenian, Indo-Iranian, and Greek. Do you think this would be beneficial for further studies, or are these languages best understood as individuals?



Sources

“Phrygian Language.” *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 11 Apr. 2020, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phrygian_language.

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