

## **Struggling to Order Diversity: The Variegated Classifications of Greek Dialects Before the Rise of Modern Linguistics**

### Abstract

From Antiquity up to the end of the 18th century, the Ancient Greek dialects received extensive attention from scholars. Contrary to modern Ancient Greek dialectology, in which one major classification is widely accepted, pre-1800 theorizing on this topic is characterized by a relatively large number of divisions. While even in Antiquity and the Byzantine era there was some variation, this especially holds for the early modern period (ca. 1500–1800), when scholars proposed classifications in accordance with their own perspectives on the Ancient Greek world. In the present paper, I explore several of the most widespread early modern classifications. I also analyze and contextualize the classificatory principles the scholars used in their struggle to order Greek linguistic diversity. Generally, these are of a non-linguistic nature and show how the study of the Ancient Greek dialects was culturally embedded in various ways in “premodern dialectology”. In Humanist philological education, for example, dialects were often divided into two major subgroups: those with a literary canon and those without. To conclude, I stress the early modern opposition between the firmly canonical status of the Ancient Greek dialects and the general lack of interest in studying and classifying vernacular Greek dialects.

In August 1496, the famous printer Aldus Manutius (ca. 1449/1451–1515) issued in his Venetian office an enormous collection of Ancient Greek and Byzantine grammatical treatises. He states that, in it,

“the various “tongues” in which the works of the Greek poets have come to us, especially Homer, are included: Attic, Ionic, Aeolic, Doric, Boeotian, Cretan, Cypriot, Macedonian, Thesalian, Rhugian, Sicilian, Tarentine, Chalcidian, Argive, Laconian, Syracusan, Pamphylian, and Athenian. All these “tongues” have been used with great liberty. They add, subtract, transmute, invert. There is hardly anything they have not done. In short: they use words like wax.”<sup>1</sup>

From this passage, it not only emerges that premodern scholars clearly struggled

<sup>1</sup> Manutius (1496, \* .ii’): “Linguarum praeterea meminit Atticae, Ionicae, Aeolicae, Doricae, Boeticae, Cretensis, Cypriae, Macedonicae, Tessalae, Rhuginae, Siculae, Tarentinae, Chalcidicae, Argivae, Laconicae, Syracusanae, Pamphyliae, Atheniensis, quibus usi Graeci poetae inveniuntur, et Homerus praecipue. His linguis ac figuris uariis habent illi miram licentiam. Addunt, detrahunt, transmutant, inuertunt. Quid non faciunt? Denique utuntur dictionibus ut cera.” The translation has been adopted from Bean & Lemke (1958, 12) with adaptations. All Latin quotes have been normalized and punctuation is generally adapted to modern conventions. Translations are mine, unless indicated otherwise (as in this note).

with the many Ancient Greek dialects. Also, it is interesting to perceive how Manutius already lists most of the varieties included in the widely accepted modern classification of the ancient dialects – although it must be granted that he does not offer much more than a mere listing (starting with the four ‘principal’ literary dialects). Moreover, he specifically associates the dialects with poetry; this reveals that the dialects were first and foremost investigated within a philological context.

Contrary to modern Ancient Greek dialectology, in which one major classification into Aeolic, Arcado-Cypriot, Attic-Ionic, Doric, Northwest Greek, and Pamphylian is widely accepted (cf. Colvin 2010 & Finkelberg 2014), pre-1800 theorizing on this topic is characterized by a relatively large number of different divisions. While even in Antiquity and the Byzantine era there was some variation, this especially holds for the early modern period (ca. 1500–1800). During this era, scholars proposed classifications in accordance with their own theories, activities, (underlying) assumptions, and/or conceptualizations of the Ancient Greek world.

First and foremost, I explore several of the most widespread ancient, Byzantine, and early modern classifications, so as to arrive at a typology of these dialect divisions. This is of importance since these premodern classifications constituted the fundamentals on which 19th-century dialectologists (such as Ahrens) based their work.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, I analyze and contextualize the classificatory principles the scholars relied on in their struggle to order Greek linguistic diversity. To conclude, I stress the early modern opposition between the firmly canonical status of the Ancient Greek dialects and the lack of interest in vernacular Greek varieties.

## 1. Antiquity and Byzantium

I start with ancient and Byzantine classifications, because early modern scholars relied and elaborated on them. However, I only treat them very briefly, because this topic has already received extensive scholarly attention (cf., e.g., Finkelberg 2014, 461–63 for a synthesis). In Antiquity, two main classifications of the ancient dialects prevailed:

(a) a 4-fold division into Ionic, Attic, Doric, and Aeolic (cf. Strabo 8.1.2), which – from a diachronic perspective – originally was a 2-fold division into Ionic-Attic and Doric-Aeolic, and

(b) a 5-fold division into Attic, Ionic, Doric, Aeolic, and the koine (a Greek *communis opinio* reported by Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 1.21.142.4).

In later Antiquity and Byzantium, the latter classification would be most popular (pseudo-Plutarch, John Philoponus, Gregory of Corinth).<sup>3</sup> This is not to say,

<sup>2</sup> See also Colvin (2007, 22), who states that the modern classification “is more or less inherited from the Greeks, and is therefore based on non-linguistic (cultural, political) as well as linguistic factors”. As J. L. García Ramón remarked in the discussion after my talk, this might go a bit too far. It is nevertheless important to stress that Ancient Greek dialectology has a long history and that this history deserves closer investigation. For this will allow to map out more accurately the contribution of each scholar.

<sup>3</sup> The ‘dialectological’ treatises by these authors constituted a triad that was widespread and much-read in early modernity. It was first published in Manutius, Phavorinus et al. (1496) and it was reprinted

however, that ancient and Byzantine scholars were not aware of further diversification within each dialect branch. Already Herodotus (ca. 485–424 BC; cf. 1.142) pointed to four subvarieties of Ionic, which are no longer traceable today due to the early coming into being of an Ionic standard (Colvin 2007, 21). There are numerous other examples.<sup>4</sup> I limit myself here to one other passage, to be found in the *Scholia Marciana* (6th c. AD or later) on Dionysius Thrax' grammar; these offer an extensive account of the subvarieties of Doric and Aeolic (cf. Finkelberg 2014, 463):

But one has to know that a “dialect” differs from a “tongue”, in that the “dialect” comprises “tongues” [...]. For Doric is one “dialect”, under which there are many “tongues”, of the Argives, Laconians, Syracusans, Messenians, Corinthians; and Aeolic is one, under which there are many “tongues”, of the Boeotians, Lesbians, and others. And, to put it simply, there are five “dialects”, Ionic, Attic, Doric, Aeolic, koine, but many “tongues”.<sup>5</sup>

## 2. Early modernity

The relatively simple situation of ancient and Byzantine classifications markedly contrasts to the impressive amount of different dialect divisions proposed by early modern scholars. Often, this even occurs without direct discussion among the authors. They nevertheless start from the same basis: the ancient classifications, on which they elaborate and into which they introduce innovations. The different perspectives on and approaches to the Ancient Greek dialects influenced their classifications. Therefore, I treat the classifications from a 3-fold perspective: philology, biblical studies, and historiography – although I must concede that the lines between these three fields of study cannot always be drawn easily. For this reason, I discuss each classification according to its primary aims.

### 2.1 Philological approaches

#### 2.1.1 Classification into ‘principal’ and ‘less principal’ dialects

I start my discussion with a first important ‘philological’ innovation, which mainly dates to the 1st half of the 16th century, but is inspired by earlier views on subvarieties of the “main” dialects. This innovation consists in the more or less *systematic* inclusion of “less principal varieties” (to use early modern terminology) in the classificatory discourse on Ancient Greek dialects. In 1509, a grammarian from the Italian peninsula states that, “although there are 17 tongues among the Greeks, yet there

numerous times in this period (cf. the appendix of Trovato 1984). The Byzantine author Eustathius of Thessalonica follows Strabo's division; cf. Eustathius (ed. Van der Valk 1971, 14).

<sup>4</sup> See Finkelberg (2014, 463), who refers to, among others, Gregory of Corinth's list of Dorian subvarieties; cf. *De dialectis* 3.111. See also Van Rooy (forthcoming b).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *Scholia Marciana* (ed. Hilgard 1901, 302–3): “Ἰστέον δὲ ὅτι διαφέρει διάλεκτος γλώττης, ὅτι ἢ μὲν διάλεκτος ἐμπεριεκτική ἐστὶ γλωσσῶν [...]· Δωρὶς γὰρ διάλεκτος μία, ὅφ' ἦν εἰσι γλώσσαι πολλαί, Ἀργείων, Λακωνίων, Συρακουσίων, Μεσσονηνίων, Κορινθίων καὶ Αἰολίς μία, ὅφ' ἦν εἰσι γλώσσαι πολλαί, Βοιωτῶν καὶ Λεσβίων καὶ ἄλλων. Καὶ ἀπλῶς εἰπεῖν διάλεκτοι μὲν εἰσι πέντε, Ἰάς, Ἀθήϊς, Δωρὶς, Αἰολίς, κοινή, γλώσσαι δὲ πολλαί.”

are 5 principal tongues, common, Doric, Aeolic, Ionic, and Attic”.<sup>6</sup> As we have seen, Manutius had already named 18 different varieties of Ancient Greek in 1496. Later on, in 1554, a French Hellenist would make explicit the classificatory principle used to distinguish the “principal dialects” from the “less principal dialects”: the being extant of books or – to put it differently – the possession of a literature.<sup>7</sup> This type of classification would become widespread in the following centuries (cf. Van Rooy forthcoming a for some examples). In many cases, however, it remained unclear whether the “less principal dialects” were, in fact, subvarieties of the 4 or 5 “principal dialects” or more marginal forms of speech that were not specifically related or subordinated to one of the “principal dialects”.<sup>8</sup> Also the number of subvarieties or additional varieties mentioned by early modern scholars varies to a great extent.

### 2.1.2 The introduction of a “poetic dialect”

From the 2nd half of the 16th century onwards, scholars increasingly felt the need to introduce a so-called “poetic dialect” into the classification of the Ancient Greek dialects. The earliest testimony seems to date to 1569, when a French scholar proposed a division into five varieties: Attic, Ionic, Aeolic, Doric, and “Poetic” (cf. Vuidius 1569, 137v). The problematic language of Ancient Greek poetry, which was often dialectally mixed, probably encouraged philologists to include the poetic dialect into their classifications. This rather odd innovation from a modern point of view proved to be successful and was picked up by many later scholars. I have found examples as late as 1757 (cf. Anonymus 1757, 4). Yet, the existence of a poetic dialect came to be discarded in the 17th and 18th centuries (cf. Ursinus 1691, 512 for an early example). Moreover, already in 1537, a Spanish grammarian even carefully distinguished between “dialects” and “poetical properties”.<sup>9</sup>

### 2.1.3 A three-way classification

At the beginning of the 18th century, a 3-way division into Attic, Ionic, and Doric came to be common due to the influential handbook of Michael Maittaire (1668–1747), published in 1706 and republished in 1738 and 1807. Here, tradition meets innovation. For Maittaire starts from the alleged close kinship between Doric and Aeolic, which had already been stipulated by Strabo and Eustathius (cf. sub 1.), and which was reportedly confirmed by Pindar:

All dialects of the Greek language can be very neatly reduced to 3 principal dialects, namely Attic, Ionic, and Doric. To these, Clement of Alexandria, Strabo, Plutarch, [...], and almost

<sup>6</sup> Virunius (1509, 20<sup>v</sup>–21<sup>r</sup>): “[...] cum xvii sint linguae Graecorum, tamen principales sunt quinque linguae communis, Dorica, Aeolica, Ionica et Attica, [...]”

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Antesignanus (1554, 11). See Van Rooy (forthc. a) for a discussion of his views on the ancient dialects.

<sup>8</sup> Compare Caninius (1555, a.3<sup>v</sup>) to Amerotius (1520, Q.i<sup>v</sup>). The former explicitly considers them subvarieties of the four main dialects, whereas the latter seems to suggest that the “non-main” tongues are varieties on the same horizontal level, only differing in prominence.

<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, he must grant that there is some doubt as to whether some particularities need to be attributed to the dialects or to the “properties of the poets”. Cf. Vergara (1552 [1537], 310, 365).

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all grammarians add Aeolic as a 4th dialect. Because this, indeed, (as Strabo and Eustathius themselves inform, and as Pindar seems to suggest) is strongly allied and as similar as possible to Doric, I believe that it needs to be referred to Doric along with many others and that it does not need to be treated separately<sup>10</sup>

Maittaire also points to the Greek grammar of Richard Busbeius (1606–1695) as a source of inspiration.<sup>11</sup> Relying on ancient, Byzantine as well as early modern sources, Maittaire thus construes a 3-fold classification of the Ancient Greek dialects. This new distinction would be both approved and refuted by later scholars.<sup>12</sup>

It is also worth the while to remark that Heinrich Ludolf Ahrens (1809–1881), generally regarded as the founding father of Ancient Greek dialectology (cf., e.g., Finkelberg 2014, 463), relies on Maittaire's classification. Yet, Ahrens curiously interprets it as being 4-fold rather than 3-fold.<sup>13</sup> This alone already makes clear that also Ahrens elaborated on tradition and that his contribution to Ancient Greek dialectology needs to be reevaluated from a historical perspective. This aspect has been largely neglected, which is probably most clear from the entry "Classification of Dialects" in Brill's *Encyclopedia of Ancient Greek Language and Linguistics*, in which Section 1, "Ancient Dialectology", is immediately followed by Section 2, "The modern Classifications". Unfortunately, early modern theorizing is not included, even though it was the fundament on which the "great 19th-c[entury] syntheses" were built (to quote Finkelberg 2014, 463).

### 2.2 Biblical studies: The subdiscipline of "biblical dialectology"

In biblical studies, the idiosyncratic language of the New Testament and the Septuagint was problematized early on. In the 1st half of the 17th century, a "dialectological" solution was proposed for this issue. The Bible (and the New Testament in particular) was said to be composed in a kind of linguistic conglomerate, constituted by seven different dialects: Attic, Ionic, Doric, Aeolic, Boeotian, the poetic dialect, and the "Hebraizing" dialect (cf. Pasor 1650[1632], 143). I think you can really speak of a subdiscipline, which could be called "biblical dialectology", because this idea would provoke a number of writings that are wholly dedicated to this theory.<sup>14</sup> It

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Maittaire (1706, i–ii): "Omnes linguae Graecae dialecti ad tres praecipuas commodissime reduci possunt, uiz. Atticam, Ionicam et Doricam. His quartam addunt Aeolicam Clemens Alexandrinus, Strabo, Plutarchus, [...] et plerique omnes grammatici. Quoniam uero illa (uti ipse docet Strabo, Eustathius et innuere uidetur Pindarus) Doricae est ualde affinis et quam simillima; ad Doricam una cum multis aliis referendam esse, nec seorsim tractandam, sentio."

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Maittaire (1706, ii). However, this 3-way distinction is at best implicit in Busbeius' grammar. For Busbeius (1696, 66) states that there are five dialects differing from the common language, with Boeotian and Aeolic being very similar to Doric. It is interesting to see that both scholars literally belonged to the same 'school', for they composed their handbooks for the London Westminster School.

<sup>12</sup> Munthe (1748, 3) refutes Maittaire's classification, whereas Harles (1778, xxviii) approves of it.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Ahrens (1839–1843, I, 1): "Quod uulgo quattuor Graecae linguae dialecti enumerantur, Attica, Ionica, Dorica, Aeolica<sup>1)</sup>, indicare uidetur omnes, qui reliquis non usi sint, Graecos Aeolice locutos fuisse stirpis." In n. 1, he refers to Maittaire.

<sup>14</sup> See, apart from Pasor (1650 [1632]), e.g., also Wyssius (1650) and Leusden (1670).

was also in this context that the term *dialectology* was first used (in the title of Wyssius 1650). Some would add the “common tongue” as the basis of the seven dialects (cf. Wyssius 1650, 3). Others made a distinction between the five “proper” dialects (Attic, Ionic, Doric, Aeolic, Boeotian) and the two “improper” dialects (poetic & Hebraizing; cf. Leusden 1670, 84).

### 2.3 Historiography: an 18th-century 3-layered classification

Nevertheless, it is in a historiographical account that we find the most elaborate early modern classification of Ancient Greek dialects. A German dissertation, which was uttered on the 9th of February 1709, proposed a division that consists of three hierarchical layers (cf. Ferberus & Thryllitius 1709a, D.2v–D.4r):

(1) there are four principal and primary dialects, spoken by entire nations (*dialecti primariae/principales* or *ἔθνικαί*): Ionic, Attic, Doric, Aeolic;

(2) each of these primary dialects comprises several secondary, regional dialects (*dialecti secundariae* or *ἐγγώριοι*);

(3) each of these secondary dialects comprises, in its turn, several “city” or “topical” dialects (*dialecti urbanae* or *τοπικαί*).

It is also worth the while to mention here that the koine is not reckoned among the 1st group of dialects, probably because it was considered an invention or even a ‘dream’ of scholars in another dissertation held by the same person later that year (November 2).<sup>15</sup> This classification shows the great detail with which early modern scholars sometimes approached the Ancient Greek dialects. This sharply contrasts with the limited discussions of vernacular Greek variation.

### 2.4 Classifications of vernacular Greek variation in early modernity

Inspired by the ancient and Byzantine heritage, early modern scholars offered relatively rigid and canonical classifications of Ancient Greek dialects. The situation was vastly different with the mapping out of vernacular Greek variation. For interest in this issue was not triggered by philological, theological, or historiographical concerns as was the case with the ancient dialects. Rather, early modern scholars generally treated vernacular variation only when they had an intrinsic interest in contemporary Greece and its inhabitants. Symptomatically, the earliest rudimentary estimation of vernacular dialects came from the pen of a Greek correspondent of the German scholar Martinus Crusius (1526–1607): Symeon Cabasilas (1546–after 1605). For he states that “there are many different dialects, more than 70”, of which “that of the Athenians is the worst”.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Kirchmaier & Thryllitius (1709, C.2<sup>v</sup>). As with many early modern dissertations (cf., e.g., Consideine 2008), the identity of the author is unclear: the *praeses*, the *respondens*, or both? Yet, it seems likely that Thryllitius had a considerable input in both dissertations, which partially overlap as to their contents. Early modern views on the Greek koine vary to a great extent. However, for lack of space, I will not elaborate upon them in this paper.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Cabasilas in Crusius (1584, 461). Gesner (1555, 47<sup>8</sup>) had already referred to vernacular Greek

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From the 17th century onwards, Western scholars tried to grasp vernacular Greek and its varieties. The most extensive classification of vernacular dialects is offered by the German academic Johannes Tribbechovius (1677–1712). He proposes a 3-fold classification into insular dialects, continental dialects, and the Constantinopolitan dialect. It is clear that his suggestion is largely inspired by geopolitical factors. The geographical contrast between the Greek mainland and the islands was probably transferred to Greece's linguistic context. The introduction of the Constantinopolitan dialect into the division was politically motivated. For the city was the seat of the patriarchate and the heart of the Ottoman imperium at that time.<sup>17</sup> Despite the presence of speakers of all vernacular Greek dialects, Constantinopolitan speech is still presented as the purest and best variety. Interestingly enough, Tribbechovius claims that Greek students who were living at Halle in his times (cf. Moennig 1998) confirmed this view. Constantinopolitan speech shared its purity with the continental tongues of Thessaloniki, the Peloponnese, and the rest of mainland Greece, especially that of Ioannina. For in Ioannina, vernacular speech had remained pure, because the erudite ancient language was intensively cultivated there and because of its geographical isolation.<sup>18</sup>

Tribbechovius' (1705) division into insular and continental dialects was picked up by a Greek émigré who originated from Larissa, but mainly worked in England and Germany during his adult life: Alexander Helladius (1686–after Easter 1714).<sup>19</sup> Helladius politicized the contrast between insular and continental dialects: for he stresses that the islands were Venetian-occupied, whereas the mainland was Ottoman-occupied (cf. also Reinhardus 1724, 42). Remarkably enough, he links this to a linguistic factor as well: namely, lexical evidence. For the insular “Italo-Greeks” (*insulani/Italo-Graeci*) are said to have many words in their speech that are not used by mainlanders (*continentem inhabitantes*). This must be read in close connection to the geopolitical opposition between the islands and the continent: mainlanders use more Turkish words, which they borrowed from their Ottoman occupiers, whereas the insular Greeks under Venetian rule introduced many Italian words into their speech (Helladius 1714, 190–91, 194 & 203). Interestingly enough, Helladius (1714, 188 et sqq.) recounts several anecdotes from his own life to exemplify the confusion caused by Greek (and German) dialect variation.

### By way of conclusion

The principles that underlie Ancient Greek dialect classifications are, almost as a rule, of a non-linguistic nature; instead, they are informed by cultural and literary dialects, but without offering a classification.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Tribbechovius (1705, a.4<sup>r</sup>–a.4<sup>v</sup>): “Illa quidem una eademque semper est, haec uero pro diuersitatibus locorum uarie iterum distinguitur. Commodè tamen refertur ad duas classes νησιωτικὴν et στερεοτικὴν, insulanam et continentem, siue quae in continenti est. Quibus si speciatim addideris tertiam sc. C[onstantino]p[ol]itanam, minime peccaueris; [...].”

<sup>18</sup> Cf. n. 16 and Tribbechovius (1705, a.4<sup>v</sup>).

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Helladius (1714, passim) and Moennig (1998, 315–17) for biographical information.



factors and by the authority of ancient, Byzantine, and early modern scholars. They show that the study of the Ancient Greek dialects was culturally embedded in various ways before the rise of “modern” Ancient Greek dialectology, generally identified with the work of Ahrens (1839–1843). I also hope to have demonstrated that 19th-century scholars did not create Ancient Greek dialectology *ex nihilo* and that their contribution needs to be framed within earlier scholarship. Lastly, I stressed the stark contrast between the canonical classifications of Ancient Greek dialects and the relative lack of interest in (classifying) vernacular Greek varieties. Yet, from the 18th century onwards, these vernacular dialects came to be increasingly laid out into general distinctions. In doing so, early modern scholars relied on geographical, political as well as linguistic principles. For, in this case, they were not as ‘bound’ by an authoritative literary tradition as they were when discussing the ancient dialects.

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