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Quid ergo Athenis et Hierosolymis?

Classical and New Testament Greek combined in an elementary course

As a heading for this contribution we have chosen Tertullian's famous question: "What has Athens to do with Jerusalem? Or the Academy with the Church?"¹ The theme of this conference is *Greco e latino nell'era digitale*, and the audience may feel justified to ask the question: "What has Tertullian to do with the digital era?"

Teaching Greek and Latin in our time does not only involve digitalization; it also requires us to adapt ourselves to changing conditions and new ideas in other fields. In our university—in Lund, Sweden—we have since many years a situation in which elementary Greek is being taught both at the classics department of the Faculty of Humanities and at the Department of Theology and Religious Studies, as it is called today, which belongs to the Faculty of Theology. This is not very rational; obviously, money and resources could be saved if all students of elementary Greek could be taught in the same course. The faculty board—which is common to the two faculties—has tried several times to persuade the two departments to establish a course that combines classical Greek and New Testament Greek and which is offered to both classicists and theology students. But there have been strong objections to that idea, both from theologians and philologists. The objections are, in our opinion, mostly of an ideological character; they are based on attitudes of mutual distrust and manifest a desire to distance oneself from something supposedly alien and possibly harmful, just as Tertullian's rhetorical outburst.

This mutual distrust has a long history in Sweden. I still remember² that the very first time I heard someone express an opinion about the Greek language, it was an unfavourable opinion expressed by a theologian. I was thirteen or fourteen at the time, it happened at school during a lesson about the history of the Church of Sweden. The lesson was about a remarkable religious personality of the mid-nineteenth century, Carl Olof Rosenius. He exerted an enormous influence on the Church of Sweden but, remarkably enough, he was not a priest himself but a layman preacher and writer. As a young man he had decided to become a priest and started studying theology at the University of Uppsala, but after less than a semester he left the university. The reason why he abandoned his studies is not quite clear; some handbooks say that he became ill, others that he had a religious crisis, but according to my teacher—who was a priest in the local parish—the true reason was simply that he failed; he could not carry out his

¹ Tertullian, *De Praescriptione Haereticorum* 7.9.

² "I" here refers to Jerker Blomqvist.

studies successfully. Not that he was lazy or stupid. No, the cause was that during his first semester he was, just as the other theology students, required to study Hebrew and Greek, but Hebrew and Greek are worldly, mundane, disciplines, and a spiritually gifted person like Rosenius could not be expected to cope with such matters.

This happened several years before I started my own Greek studies, and at the time I had no idea what the real issue was. What I had heard was a negative judgement on Greek, even a warning not to devote oneself to learning the language unless compelled to do it. I have paid no attention to the warning, but my teacher's remark stayed in my memory and, when plans for combining classical and New Testament Greek in one course have been on the agenda at the university, it has come to my mind repeatedly.

It should be stressed, however, that the attitude illustrated by Tertullian's question is not dominant in all theological disciplines. The professors who teach those disciplines where linguistic competence is indispensable, such as Biblical and patristic studies, encourage the study of Greek and Hebrew, and in the last few years the exegetes, patristic scholars and Hellenists have also cooperated successfully in major research projects. The objections against language studies primarily come from other theological disciplines. Thus, there is conflict not only between Jerusalem and Athens but also within the walls of Jerusalem itself. The result is that very little competence in the languages of Scripture is required from those who are to become priests in the Church of Sweden. A student must have knowledge of either Greek or Hebrew, but not necessarily of both languages, in order to become accepted for ordination as a priest, and there are no requirements at all of Latin; a priest in the Church of Sweden cannot unconditionally be expected to know even what the phrase *credo in unam ecclesiam* means.

It should also be emphasized that the attitude of classicists to New Testament Greek is not always a recommendable one. Since the renaissance, it has been almost the rule among classical philologists to regard NT Greek as an inferior sort of Greek. The superiority of the classical period in Greek history and its accomplishments has been a doctrine embraced by the majority of them, and everything post-classical has been regarded as second-rate. The texts that make up the New Testament have been classified as products of writers who were unacquainted with Greek civilisation and alien to the benefits of Greek education. Their Greek was faulty. These attitudes were summed up in a sarcastic remark by Nietzsche, often quoted—sometimes incorrectly—by those who want to disparage the New Testament and its language: when God decided to communicate with mankind in writing, it is remarkable that he did not learn the language better.³

The idea of NT Greek as an incorrect or imperfect language is not in accordance with the linguistic data; its validity can easily be disproved. Even the image of NT

³ Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *Jenseits von Gut und Böse. 4. Sprüche und Zwischen spiele*, no.121: "Es ist eine Feinheit, dass Gott griechisch lernte, als er Schriftsteller werden wollte — und dass er es nicht besser lernte."

Greek as an independent entity is highly questionable. The texts included in NT are not linguistically uniform; they display considerable differences in both grammar, vocabulary and style, no less than contemporary pagan texts. In order to cope successfully with the diversity of texts that make up the NT, the student will need an extensive knowledge of contemporary Greek in all its varieties.

It is also evident that the number and importance of those divergences from classical Greek that can be detected in NT have been exaggerated. Both classicists and theologians have focussed on recording linguistic details that differentiate the New Testament from other Greek texts, rather than assessing the amount of fundamental similarities shared by Biblical and extra-Biblical writing. It is quite possible to find long stretches of text in the NT—one page or more—which do not deviate at all, or only in a few details, from the grammatical norm of classical Greek. This is demonstrated, e.g., by putting a section from a speech by the Athenian orator Lysias (12.8–13) beside a passage from the *Acts of the Apostles* (27.19–32).⁴

Languages change over time. The remarkable thing with the Greek language is not that it changed in the 450 years that separate Lysias from the *Acts of the Apostles*; the remarkable thing is that it changed so little. There existed a linguistic norm for the prose writers to follow, established in the fourth century B.C., and there existed throughout antiquity schools and other educational institutions that taught precisely that linguistic norm. Both Lysias and Luke must be supposed to have attended such schools. The basic identity of the Greek used by Luke in the *Acts* with Lysias' Attic is a much more relevant characteristic of NT Greek than its deviations from the Attic norm.⁵ It is also a relevant fact that Lysias and Luke are more close to each other than Lysias and his contemporary Euripides.

However, not everything in NT is impeccable, or almost impeccable, Attic. There are passages of another sort, too. They follow a different norm, a norm that we may call Septuagint Greek.⁶ It is important to realize that this is a norm, too, on par with the one followed by the Atticizing writers. It is not an imperfect variety of Greek, written by uneducated persons and characterized by being interspersed with random grammatical errors. The NT writers had learnt Greek both by using it as a normal tool of communication in the multilingual environment where they lived and by attending to schools where they were taught to read and write. In the Jewish communities to which they belonged the Septuagint variety of Greek was well known; the Attic variety, in its *koine* form, was used in other contexts, including oral communication.

⁴ On the comparison of these two texts (and others) see J. Blomqvist, 'The languages of the synagogue: An evaluation', in: Birger Olsson & Magnus Zetterholm (eds.), *The Ancient Synagogue from its Origins until 200 C.E. Papers Presented at an International Conference at Lund University, October 14–17, 2001*, Stockholm 2003 (Coniectanea Biblica. NT Series 39), pp. 303–311.

⁵ On the continuity of the Attic norm throughout the centuries and conceivable explanations of it cf., e.g., J. Blomqvist, 'Una lingua che ha resistito al tempo: I tre millenni del greco', *Rivista di cultura classica e medioevale* 46, 2004, pp. 139–147 [translated into Italian by Saverio Siciliano].

⁶ On the concept of Septuagint Greek and its use as a model by NT writers cf. A. Wifstrand, *Epochs and Styles. Selected Writings on the New Testament, Greek Language and Greek Culture in the Post-Classical Era*. Tübingen 2005, pp. 17–58; on Septuagint Greek in a socio-linguistic perspective, G. Walser, *The Greek of the Ancient Synagogue. An Investigation on the Greek of the Septuagint, Pseudepigrapha and the New Testament*, Stockholm 2001 (Studia Graeca et Latina Lundensia 8).

It is typical of the socio-linguistic situation of Greek that, when used for literary purposes, there existed a number of different varieties of the language, each of them linked to a peculiar literary genre. The so-called Homeric dialect was used for epic poetry throughout antiquity, and the considerable differences that exist between Lysias' and his contemporary Euripides' Greek are to be explained from the fact that Euripides and Lysias worked in different genres. When the Jews decided to translate their holy scriptures into Greek, they created a particular variety for that purpose. This happened in the third century B.C., and approximately at the same time Theocritus created another peculiar variety of Greek to be used in a new literary genre, viz., bucolic poetry. The appearance of Septuagint Greek as a distinct variety in the third century and its use by the writers of the NT 300 years afterwards should be considered a perfectly normal phenomenon within the socio-linguistic framework of the Greek language. The writers of the texts that were eventually collected to form our NT were educated enough to be aware of the different linguistic registers and to choose between according to the demands of the context.⁷

Thus, contrary to what Nietzsche and others thought, the writers of the New Testament knew their Greek. Theologians of today cannot sanction their indifference to the language by protesting that God did not care to learn it accurately either, and the classicists should be aware that Luke, Matthew and the other NT writers were more fluent in the language than any twenty-first century professor of Greek.

There exist no valid linguistic arguments against creating a course in elementary Greek that can be offered both to students of classics and to theology students. Not without pressure from the faculty board, the two departments involved at Lund University have expressed their interest in creating such a course.

This leads up to the practical problem that we are faced with when creating a course that offers elementary education in Greek to students from both faculties. The basic question could be expressed in this way: What are the students to be required to learn in the first half (ten weeks) of their first semester of Greek studies, so that, after those ten weeks, they are well prepared for continuing with the next stage of their studies, which is devoted to reading original texts, whether those texts are Attic prose of the classical period or the texts of the New Testament.

How we—provisionally—envisage the contents and its arrangement in a textbook intended for this combined course is shown by the chart on the following pages. The book will include an introduction (“Inledning”) and 21 chapters. The introduction and chapters 1–16 are common to Classical and New Testament Greek. Chapters 17–21 appear in two versions, one for Classical (I) and one for New Testament (II) Greek.

⁷ Luke evidently practises “code-switching” between Atticizing and Septuagint Greek and allows more of the latter variety in the gospel; cf. *Acts* 27.19–32 with, e.g., ch. 8.26–39 of the gospel.

Lärobok i klassisk och nytestamentlig grekiska

Innehållsförteckning

Inledning

Det grekiska språket
Släktskap och grannspråk
Tidsramen
Den geografiska ramen
Dialekter och litteraturspråk
Texttraditionen

1

- a) skrift och skoluttal
- b) presens indikativ aktivum av ω -verben
- c) bestämd artikel
- d) 1 deklinationens feminina substantiv

2

- a) presens indikativ aktivum av verba contracta
- b) översikt av nominalsystelet
- c) 2 deklinationens maskulina, feminina och neutrala substantiv
- d) adjektiv med tre slut (1 och 2 deklinationen)

3

- a) översikt av verbsystemet
- b) presens indikativ medium-passivum av ω -verben
- c) adjektiv med två slut

4

- a) personliga pronomina (inkl. αὐτός)
- b) 1 och 2 deklinationens contracta
- c) 1 deklinationens maskulina substantiv

5

- a) presens imperativ av ω -verben
- b) presens infinitiv av ω -verben
- c) presens particip av ω -verben

6

- a) imperfekt i aktivum och medium-passivum av ω -verben

7

- a) presens konjunktiv i aktivum och medium-passivum av ω -verben
- b) presenssystemet, rekapitulation hittills

8

- a) presenssystemet av de små μ -verben
- b) några stora μ -verb
- c) konjunktiv av μ -verben

9

- a) reflexiva pronomina
- b) reciproka pronomina
- c) possessiva pronomina
- d) demonstrativa pronomina
- e) indefinita pronomina
- f) interrogativa pronomina
- g) relativa pronomina

10

- a) tredje deklinationen, allmänt
- b) tredje deklinationens stammar på k-, p- och t-ljud
- c) oregelbundna substantiv på k- och t-ljud

11

- a) aorist, allmänt
- b) sigmatisk aorist
- c) tredje deklinationens stammar på - $\nu\tau$

12

- a) tredje deklinationens stammar på - ρ och - λ
- b) tredje deklinationens stammar på nasal
- c) aoristus secundus

13

- a) tredje deklinationens stammar på - σ
- b) kappa-aorister
- c) rotaorister
- d) aorist passivum

14

- a) tredje deklinationens stammar på digamma
- b) tredje deklinationens stammar på -j (l)
- c) futurum, sigmatisk
- d) futurum av $\epsilon\iota\mu\acute{\iota}$

15

- a) tredje deklinationens stammar på -u och -u/-ε
- b) blandad deklination
- c) perfekt aktivum
- d) perfekt med stamväxling
- e) betydelsen av perfekt

16

- a) räkneord
- b) adverb bildade från adjektiv
- c) perfekt medium-passivum
- d) pluskvamperfekt

Classical Greek

I.17

- a) attiska andra deklinationen
- b) optativ
- c) partikeln ἄν

I.18

- a) kasussyntax: ackusativ
- b) kasussyntax: genitiv
- c) absolut genitiv

I.19

- a) kasussyntax: dativ
- b) komparationen

I.20

- a) infinitivens funktioner
- b) ackusativ med infinitiv
- c) bisatser

I.21

- a) konditional satsfogning

New Testament Greek

II.17

- a) infinitivens funktioner
- b) ackusativ med infinitiv

II.18

- a) kasussyntax
- b) absolut genitiv

II.19

- a) komparationen
- b) partikeln ἄν
- c) optativ

II.20

- a) bisatser

II.21

- a) konditional satsfogning

Epimetrum

In a letter of August 15, 2006, the Professor of New Testament of the Department of Theology and Religious Studies informs us that his department is no longer interested in continuing the planning for a combined course in elementary Greek. Elementary Greek should, in his opinion, be taught to theology students only in combination with New Testament exegesis; involvement of Classical Greek will make it difficult to integrate the exegetical element.