

The Name of the Pelasgians

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IN GREEK AND LATIN TEXTS THE PELASGIANS (Gk. Πελασγοί, Lat. *Pelasgi*) appear to have inhabited Greece and adjacent areas and also Italy before the coming of the Greeks, Illyrians and Italics known in the historical periods.¹ As for the origin of the name denoting this people, three possibilities are to be taken into account: 1° Πελασγοί – *Pelasgi* is a genuinely Greek, Illyrian or Italic word; 2° it belongs to a pre-Greek (= pre-Illyrian and pre-Italic) non-Indo-European language; 3° there is also the possibility that the name is pre-Greek, but already Indo-European.

The first view has been put forward by Kretschmer,² who assumes that Πελασγοί is the name given by the Greek invaders to a tribe whom they found in the Thessalian *plain*, and whom they called therefore “inhabitants of the plain”. According to Kretschmer Πελασγοί contains the true-Greek word πέλαγος in its original meaning of “level space”. The Greek historians and poets would have attached the name to all the autochthonous peoples of Greece. Kretschmer’s explanation causes a serious morphological difficulty: in Πελασγοί < *Πελαγ-σχοί the suffix -σχος seems to function as a characteristic of an ethnic term.

This is also the objection of Alessio,³ who defends the second hypothesis mentioned above: he regards Πελασγοί – *Pelasgi* as a borrowing from a “Mediterranean” language. From Alessio’s point of view “Mediterranean” means “pre-Greek and non-Indo-European”. Πελασγοί – *Pelasgi* would be parallel in formation to the well-known Ligurian names in -asco, such as *Bergamasco*, *Comasco*, etc.⁴ Alessio compares Πελ(ασγοί), etc. with Gk. πέλλα·λίθος

¹ Cf. e. g. Krahe, *Die Indogermanisierung Griechenlands und Italiens*, Heidelberg, 1949, p. 25 and pp. 33 f.

² *Rev. Intern. Ét. Balk.* I, 1935, p. 382. ³ *St. Etr.* XIX, 1946–1947, pp. 166 ff.

⁴ Cf. also Krahe, *Ortsnamen als Geschichtsquelle*, Heidelberg, 1949, p. 13.

(Hesychius), φελλεύς “stony ground”, etc. The Πελασγοί, etc. would have been “inhabitants of the rocky district; inhabitants of the rocks”. It should be pointed out that against Alessio’s assumption we have the fact that the name of the Pelasgians does not exist in the form *Πελασκοί, etc. and that the Ligurian names do not show in their suffixes the supposed alternative form *-asgo.

Since the suggested Greek and “Mediterranean” explanations are not very persuasive, it seems reasonable to take into consideration the possibility of a pre-Greek Indo-European origin, and one is inclined therefore to seek for a solution in the light of the *Pelasgian* theory:⁵ the term Πελασγοί — *Pelasgi* itself may possibly be assigned to the pre-Greek Indo-European language which has been called *Pelasgian* only because in Greek and Latin sources this is the general name for the predecessors of the Greeks and the Italics.

Indeed, the Pelasgian hypothesis affords a very satisfactory interpretation: Πελασγοί — *Pelasgi* can be derived from an Indo-European form **bhelozgho-*, which underwent three changes characteristic of the Pelasgian phonology: **o* > *a*;⁶ the dissimilation of the voiced aspirates **bh* — **gh* > **b* — **gh*;⁷ the sound-shifting **b* > *p* and **gh* > *g*.⁸ Examples of the first change are: Pel. ἄσις “slime, mud” = OHG *waso* “mud” < IE**mos-*;⁹ Pel. παρθένος “maiden, girl” = Gk. πόρτις “calf, young maiden” < IE**por-th-*;¹⁰ Pel. τάρανδος “reindeer (or) elk”, with ταρ- = Gk. δορ(ά) “skin when taken off, hide” < IE **dor-*,¹¹ etc. An example illustrating both the second and the third change is Pel. πύργος “tower, fortress” = OHG *burg*, Goth. *baúrgs* “stronghold, city” < IE **bhergh-*, etc.¹² Instances of the dissimilation and sound-shifting of other voiced aspirates are: Pel. κεβ(α)λή “head” = Gk. κεφαλή < IE **ghebhel-*, etc.;¹³ Pel. κίνδαξ·εὐκίνητος (Hesychius), (ὄνο)κίνδιος “(donkey-)driver” corresponding etymologically to Lat. *de-fendo* “to keep off”, *of-fendo* “to push” < IE **gh^hen-dh-*;¹⁴ Pel. καβάλλης “nag” (“ἐργάτης ἵππος”: Hesychius), which is related to OIr. *gabul* “forked bough, fork”, OHG *gabala*, OE *gafol*, *geafel* “fork”, etc. < IE **ghabh(o)l-*: the primary meaning

⁵ Cf. my monographs: *Le pélasgique. Essai sur une langue indo-européenne pré-hellénique*, Louvain, 1952; *Contributions à l'étude de l'ononastique pélasgique*, Louvain, 1954.

⁶ *Le pélasgique*, pp. 3 f.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 13 ff.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 125 f.

¹¹ KZ LXXII, 1955, pp. 211f.

¹² *Le pélasgique*, pp. 131 f.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 98 ff.

of καβάλλης has been "thill-horse, shaft-horse" (cf. Mod. Germ. *Gabelpferd*).¹⁵

The reconstruction **bhelozgho-*, once accepted, furnishes the clue for the right explanation of Πελασγοί — *Pelasgi*: in **bhelozgho-* we may see an old compound of which the last member **ozgho-* occurs also in Gk. ὄσχος "twig, shoot, sprig", Pahl. *azg* "bough", Mod. Pers. *azay* "twig, bud". IE **bhel-* "to bloom", which is attested in several Indo-European languages (cf. e. g. Gk. φύλλον, Lat. *folium* "leaf", Lat. *flos*, Goth. *blōma* "flower", OHG *bluojen*, OE *blōwan* "to bloom"), may be discovered in the first member. The original meaning of IE **bhel-ozgho-* > Pel. Πελασγοί — *Pelasgi* would then have been "with blooming twigs (or) boughs", used metaphorically to denote men's vital power.

Pel. Πελασγοί — *Pelasgi* < IE **bhel-ozgho-* calls for two final remarks: IE **z* is represented by Gk. σ; the name has been adapted to the Greek and Latin morphological structures: hence the endings -οι and -ι, etc. of the thematic nouns.¹⁶

¹⁵ See a forthcoming paper in *KZ*.

¹⁶ Cf. *Le pélasgique*, p. 25 (Pelasgian loanwords in Greek).

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Editor's Page

Dr. Wilhelm F. H. Nicolaisen, assistant editor of "Scottish Studies," draws to the Editor's attention the existence of a section of "Notes on Scottish Place-Names" in that journal. He will welcome contributions from our readers relating to the usage of transplanted Scottish place-names in the United States and Canada, as well as notes concerning the study and elucidation of such names in Scotland.

PUBLICATIONS RECEIVED

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