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Let them have bread: the true meaning of the Phrygian word "bekos"

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Let them have bread: the true meaning of the Phrygian word – “bekos”

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Abstract

The Phrygian word bekos is older than Egyptian but does it really mean bread? Who are these Phrygians whose word for bread is bekos (also written as becos) and where did they come from that this same word also appeared on funerary stelae? The usage of this unique word in both contexts would have made a good philologist – perhaps in those days to say – “objection your majesty! This word although older than our language, does not mean bread”. What could bekos have meant in reality and are there any cognates out there. Pharaoh needs to know the truth and the truth could have saved those children.

Language deprivation experiments, which involves isolating infants from the normal use of spoken or signed language in an attempt to discover the fundamental character of human nature or the origin of language, are thought to have been conducted throughout history although there seemed to be no evidences to substantiate them. These forbidden experiments as one scholar called them are often carried out to establish if language was implanted into our consciousness.

ACCORDING TO HERODOTUS (Histories 2.9) Pharaoh Psammetichus I sought to establish the original language and for this purpose, he ordered that two children be reared by a shepherd, forbidding them from hearing a single word, and instructing the shepherd to report the children’s first utterance. After two years, the shepherd reported that on entering their chamber, the children fell before him, extending their hands, calling bekos.
Upon enquiry, the pharaoh learnt that this was the Phrygian word for "wheat bread" but strangely enough, the word- bekos was also attested several times in Palaeo-Phrygian inscriptions on funerary stelae.

Could it be true that this ancient word actually means “wheat bread” or could it have meant a different thing? Why was this very word for bread on funerary stelae? As a historical detective, this is case where you had to apply philology and logic to arrive at the exact rendering. Perhaps, one might have reasoned that those resting in peace were also expected to pray for their daily bread in their “Afterlife”.

Extending their hands and calling bekos, reveals what this word could have meant yet not many know where the word was coming from although it speaks of phrygians. The very fact that it was on funerary stelae coupled with the fact that the children extended their hands when using it is remarkably symbolic, revealing and justifying. In a nutshell, the actual meaning of this word must fit the context of both usages. Pharaoh needs to know the truth and the truth would have set those children free.

The word bekos does not mean bread although it is used to ask for bread hence its presence on funerary stelae. This word is actually older than Egyptian language although it does not mean wheat bread rather it simply means - please. The actual word is biko and the monogene bi can be found in quite a lot of languages asking for the same thing. Another similar root- be means cry and it can as well be found in Hebrew.

One can now appreciate why those children were extending their hands while using this word as it was used to make a request and its presence on funerary stelae confirms that it had been used to make a votive prayer. The word- b’kho appears also in Peshitto Aramaic, where its meaning is a bit closer to the original meaning - there, it means to weep, to lament (these are the very things one does when one is pleading). The other variant beh’yo means weeping, lamenting.

According to Gerald Massey’s “Book of Beginnings”, Egyptian beka means to beg, to pray. Could beka have been the actual spelling considering that if I elide those vowels, and insert the original vowels, I will arrive at the exact rendering with the same meaning? The Old High German “beta”, German “bitte”, Gothic “bida” means prayer, request. The German bitte is the usual word for a conversational request “please”. Even the English word – bid is from Old English, biddan, which has the sense of asking, entreating, praying or beseeching. Yet again, in the original language, we can find such words as bite meaning- borrow.
and *binye* meaning- lend whereas in German, we have *bieten* meaning *to offer*. *Bekos* was the very word that made Egyptians to give up their claim to being the oldest people on earth.

In conclusion, how could the children have learnt this word if someone did not tell them about it before or during their isolation? In addition, they could have heard it from someone else before they were isolated. What the “Pharonic Isolation Experiment” teaches as well as proves is that we cannot learn in isolation – thus, it justifies the noble ideal of “diffusion of languages”. This simple experiment although often misinterpreted proves at least the diffusion of Egyptian language from the Phrygian tongue considering that in Egyptian, we have a cognate. Moreover, this hypothetical Phrygian word is coming from the Old kingdom of Egypt, which is located East of the River Niger. Truly, the word is older than Egyptian and by pharaoh’s accepting that Phrygian was older than their language, he was simply justifying that there was another language, which was older than Egyptian. Thus, in as much as we are a great nation, our language could have originated with the Phrygians, who I can reveal are people from across the River Niger. The first things children are often thought are courtesies - how to say please (*biko*); thank you (*daalu*) and greeting (*ekene*). Gesture and speech tend to resonate with one another – now, when I extend my hand and say *biko*, you should know that I am simply pleading for something.

References

Herodotus, Histories 2:9

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