*AXENITIKA*

THE HISTORY OF ANOTHER CAPPADOCIAN DIALECT STILL SPOKEN IN GREECE

Mark Janse

*Δ*iaLing

In June 2005, my friend and colleague Dimitris Papazachariou and I discovered speakers of the Misiotika dialect of Cappadocian, a Greek-Turkish mixed language until then believed to have died out in Greece in the 1970s. Together with its closest relatives Pontic and Pharasiot, Cappa­docian gained notoriety among historical and contact linguists due to the priviliged status accorded to it under the general denominator ‘Asia Minor Greek’ in Thomason and Kaufman’s ground-breaking monograph on language contact and genetic linguistics (1988). Asia Minor Greek has become a text­book example of a ‘mixed language’ (even though the term has received various interpretations in the literature).

Like the other Asia Minor Greek dialects, Cappadocian is a very archaic Greek variety whose morpho­logy is essentially Late Medieval rather than Modern Greek. It has also maintained a number of con­spicuous Ionic features which can be traced back to the period of the Milesian colonization of the Pontus region on the Black Sea coast of Asia Minor. In addition, Cappadocian has a number of features not found in other Modern Greek dialects which can be traced back to the Anatolian substrate in Asia Minor (Luwian in Cappadocia and Carian in the Ionian dodecapolis on the west coast of Asia Minor, including Miletus which had been variously controlled by Minoans, Myceneans, Hittites and ‘foreign-language speaking’ Carians (Homer, *Iliad* 2.867-8) before it was conquered by Ionians fleeing from invading Dorians, who killed all the Carian men, adults and children alike, and married their widows according to Herodotus (*Histories* 1.146-7). The most pervasive influence, however, comes from the Anatolian Turkish adstrate/super­strate, which was in sustained and close contact with Cappadocian from the end of the eleventh century until the Greek-Turkish population exchange in 1923-24.

The twelve Cappadocian dialects described by Dawkins in his classic work on Asia Minor Greek (1916) can be subdivided into North, Central and South Cappadocian, each of which can be further subdivided into West and East varieties. Misiotika is one of two Central Cappadocian dialects, the other one being Axenitika. The latter is much better documented than the former. Dawkins included seven folktales from Axo in his monograph (1916: 388-404), but only one from Misti (1916: 384-388). Mavrochalyvi­dis, an educated native speaker from Axo, published a detailed grammar with proverbs and folktales (Mavrochalividis & Kesisoglou 1960). Dawkins’ notebooks from his 1911 field trip to Cappadocia contain three unpublished folktales from Axo collected and edited during my visiting fellowships in All Souls College, Oxford, in 2007 and 2014, and published in Janse and Daveloose (2019) and Daveloose (2019a; 2019b; 2022). Axenitika figures prominently in my comparative grammar of the Cappadocian dialects (Janse 2023).

After the population exchange, refugees from Axo settled in various places in Greece. In 2014, during a field trip to Αxos Milopotamou, a Cappadocian refugee village, I was introduced to Apostolos Pavli­dis, who was presented as the last speaker of Axenitika in Crete. On that occasion, he gave me a number of stories written by himself in Axenitika, one of which was recently published in a collective volume on the history of Cappadocian Axo (Janse 2022). After my meeting with Pavlidis, I decided to speak Axenitika in addition to Misiotika at the annual Cappadocian festival called ‘Gavuštima’, to which I have been invited as honorary speaker since 2006.

During my Erasmus teaching staff exchange at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki in October 2022, I finally made it to Axos Giannitson, another refugee village 50 kilometers west of Thessa­loniki, obviously named after its ‘mother’ village in Cappadocia, like Axos Milopotamou. To my surprise and and pro­found emotion, I met with a number of elderly men in the local *kafenío*, all semi-speakers, like the remaining Misiotika speakers (the last speakers of the first generation having died in the 2010s). In my DiaLing talk I will present the results of my first field trip, including some ‘guerilla’ record­ings made with my iPhone in the streets of Axos. I will discuss some of the phonological features distinguish­ing Axenitika from its closest relative Misiotika, which make the two dialects sound completely differ­ent despite profound similarities in the grammar and the lexicon. I will highlight some of the archaic features which can be traced back to the Ionic and Anatolian substrates and which have survived until the present day. Finally, I will discuss some of the inherent difficulties in conducting fieldwork with endangered language communities in countries with a generally hostile attitude to languages other than the national language taught in schools for ideological reasons as is the case of Standard Modern Greek.

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