The geographical term Macedonia means nothing else but the land inhabited and/or ruled by the Macedonians. Its extent has followed the expansion of the Macedonian kingdom from its foundation around 700 BC to its suppression by the Romans in 168 BC. That is why it is impossible to give a single geographical definition of its limits. In the five centuries of its existence Macedonia proper (excluding the external fluctuating dependencies never integrated into the state) came to comprise the lands from the Pindus mountain range in the west to the plain of Philippi in the east, and from Mt. Olympus in the south to the Axios gorge between Mt. Bar nous (Kaimaktsalan) and Mt. Orbelos (Beles) to the north. Almost ninety percent of its lands fall within the present-day borders of Greece, of which it is the northernmost province.

The Macedonians were not the first inhabitants of the country to which they eventually gave their name. Ancient literary sources mention the Pieres in Pieria, the Brygoi, remnants of a people who migrated to Asia Minor, where they are known under the name of the Phrygians, the mysterious Bottiaians, who allegedly hailed from Crete and Athens, Pelasgians in Emathia, the Almopes in Almopia, the Eordoi in Eordaia, Paionians along the Axios, and further east the Mygdonians, Edonians, Bisaltai, and Krestonians. Our ignorance of the languages spoken by them—except for the Brygoi/Phrygians—does not allow us to determine their precise habitat, and even less their ethnic affinities. All these population groups,
whatever their origin, were either expelled or reduced to a subordinate position and eventually assimilated by the conquering Macedonians.4

The origin of the Macedonians themselves has, for more than a century, been the object of a lively debate, in which scientific considerations are sometimes inextricably intermingled with ulterior motives of a political nature. Macedonian authors, like most Greek writers of the late classical and Hellenistic period, used the Attic *koine* instead of their local dialect, while conclusive epigraphic evidence concerning the ancient Macedonian speech was not forthcoming. Inscriptions discovered in Macedonia were both rare and late, dating from after the reign of Philip II, who had introduced the Attic *koine* as the official idiom of his administration. We therefore had to rely on the contradictory evidence of ancient authors, who may have not been immune to political considerations when they stressed the common origin and common language of the Macedonians and the other Greeks or when they denied it. As for the collection of glosses, that is rare words attributed by ancient authors to various foreign and Greek peoples, among which feature the Macedonians, their *ex hypothesi* exotic nature and the uncertainty of the manuscript tradition deprives them of a large measure of their value as evidence.5

In the last thirty years the discovery, systematic collection and publication of a large number of inscriptions, sometimes of an early date, has made it possible to study in perspective proper names and technical terms that preserve phonetic and morphological features, as well as their divergences from the norms of the *koine*. Very recently a couple of longer texts entirely written in the local idiom have come to light and been published. They leave no doubt that Macedonian was a Greek dialect presenting affinities partly with the dialects attested in the inscriptions of Thessaly and partly with those known from documents discovered in north-western Greece. Moreover its phonology seems to have been influenced to a limited extent by the languages of the conquered peoples, in which the distinction between voiced and unvoiced consonants tended to be blurred.

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