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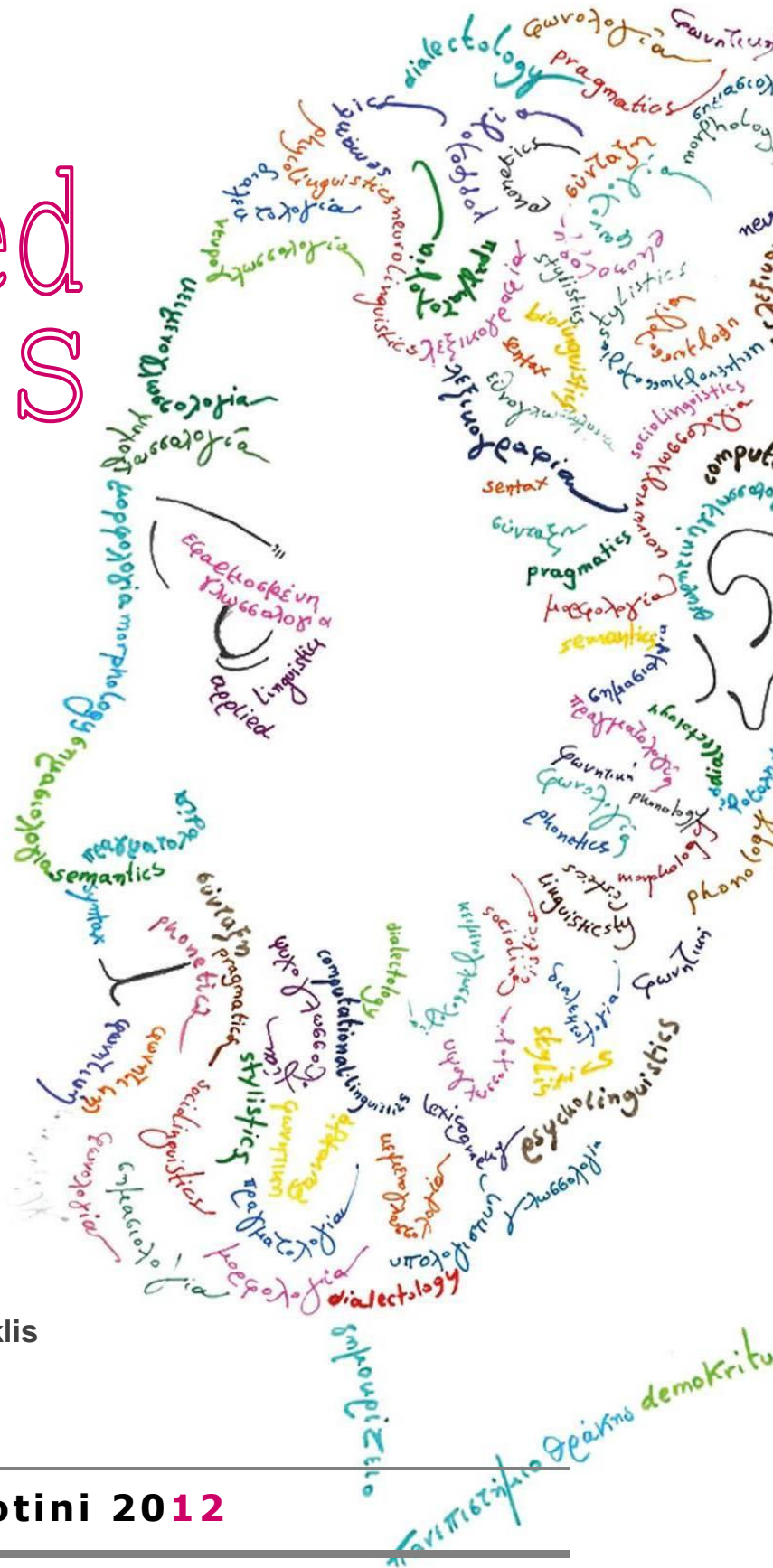
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# LANGUAGE CONTACT IN THE MIDDLE AGES: RHODES UNDER THE HOSPITALLERS\*

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## ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

*Το άρθρο διερευνά την έκταση της γλωσσικής επαφής μεταξύ των ελληνόφωνων και των λατινόφωνων (κυρίως Ιταλών και Γάλλων) στη Ρόδο κατά την διάρκεια της κυριαρχίας των Ιπποτών (1310-1522). Υποστηρίζει ότι οι κοινωνιογλωσσικές συνθήκες που επικρατούσαν εκείνη την περίοδο στην πόλη της Ρόδου ευνοούσαν την γλωσσική επαφή ανάμεσα στους δύο πληθυσμούς και την ανάπτυξη διγλωσσίας / πολυγλωσσίας, ιδιαίτερα στον ελληνόφωνο πληθυσμό, που αποτελούσε και την πλειοψηφία. Επιπλέον, επισημαίνεται η επίδραση της γλωσσικής επαφής στα ελληνικά κείμενα της εποχής που γράφτηκαν στη Ρόδο, όχι μόνο στο λεξιλογικό επίπεδο (κάτι αναμενόμενο), αλλά και στο μορφοσυντακτικό.*

## 1. Introduction

Although the diachronic developments of the Greek language have been the subject of investigation for many decades (or even centuries), there is one aspect of the history of the language whose study remains in its infancy: language contact. The historical study of a language is commonly dominated by a political agenda, and in the case of Greek this was translated into a far-reaching attempt to prove the continuity of the language since ancient times, as well as the paucity of external interference (i.e. language contact) in its shaping throughout the centuries. Fortunately, this politically-motivated perspective has receded recently, and as a result, the study of language contact as an important factor for the history of Greek has been gaining ground, partly as a result of the global rise of such studies in the last three decades.

Nevertheless, systematic investigations into language contact phenomena in Medieval Greek are still rare, possibly due to the fact that this period remains under-represented in the diachronic studies of Greek in general. However, there have been recent attempts to tackle such issues for Late Medieval Greek as well (cf. e.g. Markopoulos, 2010, Μανωλέσσου, 2008, Terkourafi, 2005), which is only to be expected if the sociolinguistic situation of the period (ca. 11<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup>/16<sup>th</sup> c.) is taken under consideration: This was a time when Greek speakers came into close contact with a variety of other languages, as the political situation in the Greek-speaking world after the capture of Constantinople by the Crusaders in 1204 facilitated language contact between Greek- and Romance-speaking populations, which is the main area of interest of this paper.

One such predominantly Greek-speaking area where the local population came into contact with speakers of Romance varieties is arguably the island of Rhodes, which constitutes the focus of this paper. To be more precise, the aim of the article is:

- a) to illustrate the sociolinguistics of the language contact situation that developed on the island from the 14<sup>th</sup> c. onwards, and
- b) to look into the possible linguistic outcomes of this situation, by highlighting various possible instances of contact interference while paying close attention to a particular morphosyntactic phenomenon, namely the double marking in the comparatives of the adjectives.

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## 2. Historical background

Rhodes constituted basically a unique political situation, as it was ruled for two centuries (1310-1522) by the Knights of the Order of St. John, commonly called the Hospitallers, who represented a significant political and military power in the Levant from the 12<sup>th</sup> c. onwards. After their expulsion from the Holy Lands, the Hospitallers were in search of a new strategic stronghold in the eastern Mediterranean. They managed to acquire such a base on 1310, when they captured Rhodes, and consequently most of the Dodecanese, although they were mostly interested in Rhodes and Kos, keeping for themselves the role of distant overlord for most of the other neighbouring islands. They also possessed a stronghold on Asia Minor (Petrouni / Bodrum), and held Smyrna for a limited period of time.

The Hospitallers managed to hold Rhodes against the Ottoman empire for two centuries, before finally having to abandon it on 1523 after a prolonged siege. Thankfully, they were allowed to take their archives when leaving the island, which are still held in Malta. It is only in the past few years that this huge collection of documents had started to be systematically investigated, and very little has been done concerning: a) the situation of the Greek-speaking population under the Hospitaller rule,<sup>1</sup> and b) the language situation on Rhodes. This paper, as already stated, seeks to address these issues by focusing first on the sociolinguistic situation, and secondly on linguistic features of texts produced on the island, in an attempt to establish the extent of language contact phenomena on Hospitaller Rhodes.

## 3. Language contact: the sociolinguistic facts

### 3.1 General remarks

The little that is known with regard to the sociolinguistic aspects of life during the Hospitaller rule concerns the town of Rhodes, the capital of the island. Consequently, the discussion that follows (based mostly on Luttrell, 1982, 1992, 2003, 2007, Borchardt et al., 2007, and Τσιρπανλής, 1991) concerns the town itself, which is the most interesting social environment from a language contact perspective anyway, since it represented the multiethnic, multilingual port-city of the late medieval Mediterranean where contact between various populations must have thrived, at least with respect to specific registers (such as maritime talk). Moreover, settlements of Romance speakers in the Rhodian countryside must have been rather sparse, rendering thus the town as the only or at least the major point of language contact on the island.<sup>2</sup>

The Knights themselves lived in the *collachium*, a walled area inside the town. It is clear, however, that not only Knights lived in that area, as other Latins and Greeks lived there side-by-side. The town (*burgo*) was populated by Greeks (artisans, traders etc.), which apparently constituted the clear majority of the inhabitants, but an unknown number of Latins also lived there: Italians (Genoese mainly), French, Catalans etc. in a variety of professions, such as traders, notaries, and mercenaries. The well-documented presence of Turks, Armenians and Jews in the town should be noted as well.

The Greeks were in relatively good terms with their Latin overlords, as we can tell from the fact that no open uprising against the Knights has been recorded (only a minor one in Kos, in the early 14<sup>th</sup> c.). This peaceful co-existence was probably fuelled by the ever threatening presence of the Ottoman empire, as well as by a system of political representation put in favor of the Greeks by 1380 at the latest.

So, all in all, some facilitating factors for language contact between Greeks and Latins in the Hospitaller Rhodes can be isolated: a) They lived side-by-side in the close quarters of the town, and this spatial proximity may well have ended in closer communication between the two parties, b) Various commercial activities involved both parties, c) There was very limited social unrest, which

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<sup>1</sup> A. Luttrell, M. Heslop and G. O'Malley are currently working on a project about the countryside of Rhodes during the first century of the Hospitaller rule, which should shed some light on this issue. The publication of the volume coming out of the project is very eagerly anticipated.

<sup>2</sup> This is a point worth recalling when talking about the influence of this medieval language contact situation in the modern Greek dialect of Rhodes. In other words, absence of interference phenomena in the modern dialect, represented mostly by countryside varieties, is only to be expected given the situation in late medieval Rhodes, and cannot be taken as proof for a supposedly limited influence of language contact in the dialect of Rhodes as a whole.

otherwise could have resulted in a communication “breakdown” between the two linguistic and cultural groups.

### 3.2 The Latin side

Almost nothing has been done to determine whether language contact between Greeks and Latins had any effect on the Romance languages as spoken (and written) on the island. It is fair to say though that, given the cultural integration of the two groups observed at the latest stages of the Hospitaller rule (cf. further below), Greek interference on Romance varieties of Rhodes seems more than plausible. The topic goes beyond the scope of the paper, but some preliminary remarks are in order here.

First of all, there is ample evidence to suggest that a smaller or larger part of the Latin population residing in the town of Rhodes learned Greek. Pre-eminent among them was the group of notaries working for the Knights: some of them could translate from Latin (or Italian) into Greek or vice versa, as can be seen from 15<sup>th</sup> c. documents, which are really important in establishing any language contact phenomena on the island (cf. section 3). Moreover, the co-habitation of the town by Greek- and Romance-speakers led inevitably to mixed marriages, whose offspring, being of mixed descent, may well be bi- or multi-lingual. This could only strengthen knowledge of Greek among the Western population of the island.

What about the Knights themselves? It should be borne in mind that the Knights were a multilingual group, with French being the dominant language among them initially, and Italian being also used widely. They had no great scholarly reputation, and apparently were not very eager to pick up Greek: they were unfamiliar with the local language in their majority. On the other hand, there is evidence that at least some of them learned to speak Greek, while Master Juan Fernandez de Heredia was interested both in ancient and in medieval Greek texts (cf. Luttrell, 1960). As expected, knowledge of Greek among the Knights must have widened with the passage of time, as the two dominant groups of the island (Latins and Greeks) overcame many of their cultural differences to create a community with tighter cultural and financial bonds. This is manifested in the rather surprising fact that at the very end of a 16<sup>th</sup> century manuscript (Montp.S.Medic. 4056), containing among others the poems of the 14<sup>th</sup> century Cretan poet Sachlikis, the following note is found:

- (1) «Ετελειωθει ο ζαχλικης δια χειρος εμου φρα νοελ δε λα μπρω εκ της ροδων καβαλλαρεις τελος. Ει χηρ μεν η γραμματα σεπτεται ταφω η γραφη δε μενουσα εις χρονους πληροστατους».  
“Sachlikis was finished by my hand, fra Noel de la Broue, knight from Rhodes. End. The hand that writes decays(?) in the grave but what is written lives forever long”

This Knight, Noel de la Broue, is otherwise unknown to us, as he is not included in the Knights’ catalogues that remain from that period. Nevertheless, this note illustrates the partial cultural osmosis argued for above: at the later stages of the Hospitaller rule, some Knights were not only able to speak Greek, but also interested enough in medieval Greek literature as to copy/write a manuscript containing such works. The fact that the manuscript is full of phonological and syntactic irregularities (Παναγιωτάκης, 1987) does not undermine this conclusion, but simply points out the fact that Noel de la Broue was not a learned man, a scholar in Greek, but must have learned Greek in his everyday-spoken- affairs, providing an example of the results that the multilingualism in town must have brought about.

To sum up, there is solid evidence to argue for bi-/multi-lingualism from the part of Latin speakers on Rhodes, including a –rather modest- number of Knights. The effect of this contact situation on the Romance varieties spoken on the island remains unknown. Multilingualism must have spread with time, as the Latin speakers came closer in cultural terms with the Greek majority of the population. However, it should be stressed that, contrary to the massive shift from Italian - French to Greek that occurred in Crete and Cyprus respectively, no such development can be seen in the case of Rhodes. Apparently, the cultural osmosis between Latins and Greeks did not have the necessary time to give such drastic linguistic results.

### 3.3 The Greek side

There is plenty of evidence in favour of the idea that a considerable number of Greeks were at least bilingual, i.e. they spoke a Romance language (Italian and/or French) as an L2. It is important to note that this instance of bilingualism must have encompassed various aspects of social life:

i) Household: It is well known that many Greeks made their living as servants in Latin houses. Many of them were slaves imported from other Greek-speaking areas. It is easy to imagine that at least a number of them had a passive familiarity with a Romance language, in order to be able to communicate and perform the daily chores. In this way, they were part of the households, and they had the opportunity to practice their L2 knowledge every day.

ii) Marine life: A lot of Greeks were *marinari*, in other words they were obliged to serve for a length of time in the ships of the Hospitallers. It is more than plausible that they learned some sort of marine language while they served. It is also noteworthy that some Greeks even collaborated with Latins in their maritime activities, and obviously this presupposes an open channel of communication between them. This involvement of Greeks with Western sea-traders is very well exemplified in the interesting case of Michael of Rhodes (cf. Long et al., 2009). Michael was a Greek citizen of Rhodes, and we know of him because he wrote in Italian (Venetian) a manuscript containing a portolan, a treatise on shipbuilding and some personal notes from his travels.<sup>3</sup> He ended his career as a galley commander for Venice, a feat that would have been impossible without his solid knowledge of the Italian dialect.

iii) Other professions: Many of the citizens in the *burgo* might also have developed some bilingual skills, depending on whether their profession was of any relevance to the Knights or to the wider Latin community. One such individual was apparently Ayme Cassien, a Greek falconer in the service of the Hospitallers. We hear about him indirectly, through a well-known falconry book written by Jean de Fransières (late 15<sup>th</sup> c.), *Le livre de fauçonnerie*. According to de Fransières, he partly based his own book on a previous similar treatise by Ayme Cassien, who must have written his own work in the early 15<sup>th</sup> century in French.<sup>4</sup>

The case of Ayme Cassien is reminiscent of the story of Michael of Rhodes: they were both bilinguals, with a solid knowledge of French and Italian, respectively, which helped them make their way into the world. It is not difficult to imagine that the group of bilingual Greek speakers with similar aspirations and professional achievements must have been larger, although it is not easy to determine its exact size.

iv) Another such group, perhaps the most important one from a language contact perspective, consists of the notaries who worked in the service of the Knights. There is evidence of a Greek notary already from the mid-14<sup>th</sup> century, who was appointed to translate various mandates and court decisions from Latin (or French / Italian) into Greek. It is unfortunate that most of these translated documents have not survived, but the few remaining can shed important light on the written variety of the period. It is obvious that this variety was partly based on the Latin / French “officialese”, containing various loanwords and calques. Since the notaries must have also served for the writing down of contracts and agreements among the town-dwellers (at least), the variety they used must have constituted an important part of the ‘norm’, influencing thus other spoken and written varieties.

Greeks were also needed for communication and diplomatic relations between the Knights and the Ottoman rulers. All correspondence was conducted in Greek, and various agreements were translated from Greek into Latin / Romance, providing us with interesting material (cf. further below).

On the whole, there is considerable evidence of multilingualism from the Greek part of the population, on various social channels. The knowledge of Italian and / or French could mean a brighter future for the Greeks of Rhodes, and it is probable that a considerable number of them attempted to take advantage of it.

#### 4. Language contact: linguistic facts

It has been established that multilingualism was enough widespread among the Greek population (particularly in the town of Rhodes) for contact interference phenomena to appear on the Greek variety of the island. Unfortunately, this is not very easy to substantiate, since the extant material is very thin and one has to work with admittedly much less than required in order to draw any solid conclusions. To be more precise, the only literary material surviving from the Hospitaller Rhodes are the writings of E. Limenites (“The plague of Rhodes” and possibly 1-2 other works), and some folk songs originating probably from the Dodecanese. As to the non-literary material, the archive of the Knights (as already

<sup>3</sup> His manuscript is interspersed with short prayers in Greek, hence our certainty about his native language and his religion.

<sup>4</sup> This is not really known, but is very possible since the profile of de Fransières does not match with him speaking Greek; furthermore, it is unlikely that he would have failed to mention the fact that he translated Cassien’s treatise from Greek into French (cf. Wistedt, 1967).

stated) contains mostly documents in Latin, and very few documents in Greek. Still, they constitute our basic source of non-literary material, together with documents related to the diplomatic contacts between the Knights and the Ottoman Turks surviving in the Turkish archives.

The question is, given the sociolinguistic situation described above, what would be the expected result of this case of language contact? Obviously, one can expect a considerable amount of lexical borrowings from Romance languages into Greek, given the partial/full bilingualism of the Greek speakers and the social prestige of the Romance languages on the island. And this is exactly what is found in Limenites, which contains a great number of loanwords, such as: *μπουνιάλα* (sword < It. *pugnale*), *φέστα* (fest, <It.  *festa*), *μανιγόρδος* (gravedigger, <It. *manigoldo*) and many more. The same applies to the non-literary documents, where Italian loanwords abound, e.g. *βηζαρίσει* (= notify), used as a translation of the It. *notifichera* (Τσιρπανλής, 1968, Β'): it is noteworthy that *βηζαρίσει*, itself a loanword, is given as the Greek equivalent of an Italian word, which illustrates its already established status in the Greek lexicon of the period.

More interestingly, one could also expect some morphosyntactic interference, especially in three different instances: a) in the Greek variety spoken as a second language by Romance speakers (cf. e.g. Thomason, 2001 on interference through shift and the possibility of syntactic transfer even prior to lexical borrowing), b) in translations from Italian / French into Greek, possibly as an effect of the specific genre, and c) in the case of full bilingual Greek speakers, where syntactic calquing might have been an option in certain communicative circumstances.

The second instance is represented in (2) below, an example taken from a document that survives in both an Italian and a Greek version, where the preposition «*από*» is used as an equivalent for the Italian preposition “*de*”: but this equivalence does not hold in this syntactic environment:

(2a) «... και να δίδη πάντοτε μαντάτον από κουρσάρικα κατελάνικα»

(2b) “... e che sempre auisi dele fuste de corsari Catellanj...”

“and to always give notice about Catalan corsair ships”

(Τσιρπανλής, 1968, Α' 13)

This semantic correspondence does not hold in this context, though: the Greek preposition, contrary to the Italian one, was not normally used to convey the meaning of ‘reference’, so the example illustrates nicely a case of syntactic interference.

Another possible instance of syntactic interference can arguably be seen in the case of the analytic comparatives of the adjectives. There is some controversy regarding the emergence of the comparative marker ‘*πιο*’ in Greek and whether it is a loanword from the equivalent Italian ‘*piu*’ or whether the whole analytic comparative construction in Greek was built on the Italian model. Jannaris (1897) assumed an Italian origin, although he gave no arguments for this assumption, and no real progress has been made since concerning the issue (cf. Χειλά-Μαρκοπούλου, 1990). Regarding the earliest known examples of this analytic comparative construction, Kriaras’ dictionary gives examples of ‘*πλια/πια* + Adjective (either positive or comparative degree)’ for the formation of the comparative and superlative starting from the late 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>5</sup>

There is some interesting evidence on this construction in the non-literary documents coming from Rhodes. The diplomatic correspondence between the Master Pierre d’Aubusson and the Ottoman rulers contains three instances of the new analytic comparative formation, two of which involve the use of the comparative form of the adjective together with ‘*πια*’, as in (3):

(3) «... διατιν το τελος τις πραξης αυτις θοροντα υνενπραμα πια καλιωτερα να τελιωθη μετα τον...»

“because the end of this affair, as we believe, is something that should better end with him... = because we believe this issue should end with his participation”

(Lefort, 1981 / 21, d. 1489)

This example is taken from a document written possibly by a Latin, since it contains not only numerous grammatical and syntactic problems, but also some writing peculiarities that support the theory of a non-native scribe. According to my knowledge, together with the other two similar instances in the same archive (Lefort, 1981: 15, 18), it constitutes the earliest attestation of such construction by a margin of at least a century. Is it coincidental that it occurs in Rhodes during this

<sup>5</sup> The form ‘*πιο*’ must derive from the earlier attested ‘*πια*’, which in its turn may have derived from the form ‘*πλια*’. It is not clear whether the Italian form ‘*piu*’ constituted the phonological model for the derivation of ‘*πια*’ from ‘*πλια*’. This paper is mostly interested in the syntactic/semantic equivalence of the two constructions, so the phonological issue will be left aside.

period of language contact, when Italian was the dominant Romance language on the island?<sup>6</sup> It is also telling that all of Kriaras' examples come from Crete or Cyprus, i.e. areas of strong contact situations between Greek and Italian. Note that the literary texts from Rhodes contain two more instances of this construction, the one involving the positive degree of the adjective ("The plague of Rhodes", 123) and the other the comparative degree ("Love songs", 42).

It has been convincingly demonstrated (Heine & Kuteva, 2006) that the development of an analytic comparative construction is very common in situations of language contact across Europe. The double marking of the comparison (i.e. with a comparative marker being added to an adjective in the comparative degree) can be considered as one of the common stages of this development, which eventually wears off. This description fits well with the Greek data, strengthening the plausibility of a language contact account for this construction.

In this scenario, the L2 Greek speakers probably formed this construction, through interference from their L1 (Italian). Their imperfect learning is probably manifested in the double marking of comparison, which was subsequently restricted with the diffusion of the construction in the native Greek population. Obviously, much more evidence is needed in order to argue convincingly for a contact account for this morphosyntactic development in Greek; but it has been shown that the earliest attestations of an analytic comparative construction can be found in the material from Hospitallers' Rhodes, which, given the morphosyntactic and sociolinguistic context of these attestations as explained above, can be supportive of a language contact origin.

On the whole, the evidence for lexical borrowing is solid, while morphosyntactic interference is much more difficult to prove, especially with such a limited material. However, there is evidence of such an effect on a small scale, while large scale effect (for instance, the emergence of a new comparative construction) is also likely, but not certain yet. Further investigation is needed and more examples of such developments are to be found in order to substantiate the case for morphosyntactic interference from Romance languages in the Greek variety spoken in the late medieval (town of) Rhodes.

## 5. Conclusions

The Hospitaller rule favoured in many ways the development of a multilingual society in the town of Rhodes itself. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that, according to the available sociolinguistic evidence, a situation of rather intense language contact between Greeks and Latins must have developed inside the *burgo* of Rhodes. This assumption is corroborated but only partly by the linguistic record, which is poor, but it still contains evidence that language contact influenced the variety of Greek spoken (and more clearly written) on Rhodes, primarily (but probably not exclusively) on the lexical level. An interesting case of possible morphosyntactic interference has been isolated, namely the emergence of the analytic comparative involving the marker 'pio', but more evidence is needed to argue convincingly for a contact – related development.

By the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, the cultural osmosis that must have gone a long way on Rhodes was also evident in the use of language on the island. Two inscriptions bear witness to this development: the phrase 'PALI THARO' (=courage again) used as a personal motto by the Knight Jacques de Bourbon in a coat of arms of the late 15<sup>th</sup> century; and a cannon cast of the early 16<sup>th</sup> century found with the signature 'ΓΕΩΡΓΙΟΣ ΛΑΜΠΙΑΔΗΣ ΝΤΕ ΡΟΔΩ', with the exceptional mixture of a Romance preposition (NTE – de) with the highly archaizing Greek Dative ending '-ι' in the word 'ΡΟΔΩ'. As always, language contact had some unexpected results.

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<sup>6</sup> Most of the documents from the Knights' archive dating from the latter half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century onwards are written in Italian. According to Luttrell (p.c.), most notaries working on Rhodes were imported from Italy.



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