ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The writing of this book has taken close to seven years, encompassing as it does my research first as a doctoral student in the years 2018–22 and latterly as a postdoctoral research fellow from 2022 to 2025. In that time I have benefitted from the support of a range of individuals and institutions, without whom it would never have been completed.

Academic research in the Humanities rarely – and in the case of philology, arguably never – serves the interests of capital directly. In the damagingly commercialised environment of higher education in the twenty-first century, therefore, research that is speculative in its aims and historical in its focus relies entirely on the generosity and moral courage of institutions that are willing to sponsor its undertaking without any profit incentive. Accordingly, I am deeply indebted to the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the Ibn Battutah fund for full financial support during my PhD at Peterhouse, Cambridge, which laid the foundations for this book. My Junior Research Fellowship at Merton College, Oxford, facilitated the substantial revision and expansion of my doctoral thesis into something publishable. I am most grateful to the Warden and Fellows of Merton College for electing me to this position, and for steadfastly maintaining the irreplaceable ideal of the self-standing research fellowship.

Turning now to the academics who have helped me, I begin by thanking my doctoral supervisors, Rupert Thompson and James Clackson. Both taught me as an undergraduate at Cambridge, inspiring what would become a lifelong passion for philology; both took a significant risk in taking me on as a PhD student with the temerariously ambitious aim of reconstructing Proto-Indo-European syntax; both were exemplary in their support of me as a graduate student and beyond. I was doubly fortunate to

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have benefitted from James' keen eye as editor of Cambridge Classical Studies, and his guidance through the publication process. My PhD examiners, David Willis and Philomen Probert, provided exceptionally detailed and helpful feedback on the first iteration of this research. As mentor during my time at Oxford, Philomen has read through substantial portions of the text since then, and I have benefitted hugely from her input over the last three years. I received thoroughgoing feedback on this manuscript from two anonymous reviewers, and the final product would have been significantly worse without them. Other scholars who have helped me on specific topics are thanked at various points in the text. As with those named here, they are exculpated of authorial lapses of judgement or competence.

Since this book began life as my PhD thesis, everyone thanked in the acknowledgements there is implicitly thanked again here. Nevertheless, almost every aspect of it has been amended, updated or entirely rewritten since then. In this connection, I have greatly benefitted from extended discussions and directives concerning the Hittite data from Craig Melchert, who also generously provided feedback on substantial portions of the manuscript. My colleagues at Oxford have also been integral to the progress of my research, and I am especially grateful to the community of postdoctoral and graduate researchers here, whose brilliance and resilience have been an inspiration. Special philological thanks are due to Michele Bianconi, who continues to educate me on the *arcana* of Anatolian with skill and enthusiasm, and whose companionship has elevated my time at Oxford immeasurably; and to Timothy Barnes, with whom have I had the pleasure of sharing time at both Cambridge and Oxford, and whose compendious knowledge of ancient languages has been an invaluable resource over the years.

I thank all the family and friends, too many to mention by name, who have helped me through the last seven years. I thank my wife, Imogen, the sun in my sky, for her faith and forbearance. Finally, I thank my parents, Judith and Ram, to whom I owe all my achievements, such as they are. It is to them that I dedicate this book.

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