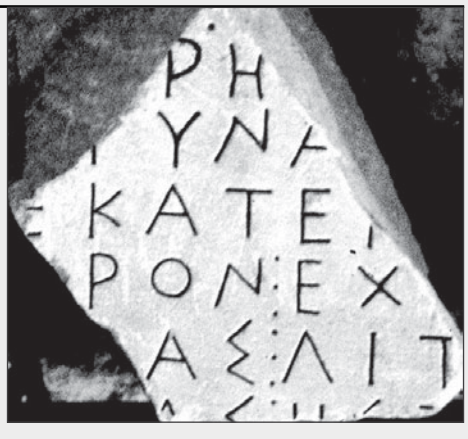
Introduction



The great philosophers Plato and Aristotle and the Greek dramatists of Classical Athens wrote in what is now known as Attic Greek (or Classical Greek), which is one of the four major dialects of the antique Greek-speaking world, the others being Ionic, Doric, and Aeolic.[1] However, in the centuries following the Classical period, Ionic Greek came to have a strong influence on the Attic dialect, transforming it into what we now know as Hellenistic Greek.

Hellenistic Greek spread throughout the eastern Mediterranean in the wake of Alexander the Great's conquest of the Persian Empire. The wave of Greek colonization that followed brought with it the Hellenistic Greek language, which quickly became the common language of the region. Hellenistic Greek continued in use throughout the Roman provinces of the eastern Mediterranean during the Roman period. Owing to its widespread usage, Hellenistic Greek was known, even in ancient times, as the *koine* language or dialect (ἡ κοινὴ διάλεκτος), meaning the "common" language of the people.[2] This explains why the Hebrew Bible was translated into Hellenistic Greek (the so-called "Septuagint") in the third and second centuries BC, and why the New Testament was also written in Hellenistic Greek, rather in than another language such as Aramaic or Syriac.[3] In the centuries that followed,

[1] These dialects correspond to ethnic divisions. Ionic was spoken by the Ionians, Aeolic by the Aeolians, and Doric by the Dorians. Geographically, Ionic was spoken in Ionia and in most of the islands of the Aegean. Aeolic was spoken in Lesbos and Aeolia. Doric was spoken in the Peloponnesus (except Arcadia and Elis) and on the islands of Crete, Melos, Thera, Rhodes, and in parts of Sicily and southern Italy.

[2] Some of the best-known Hellenistic authors are Polybius, Diodorus, Plutarch, Arrian, Cassius Dio, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Lucian, Strabo, Philo, and Josephus.

[3] The Greek translation of the Old Testament or Hebrew Bible is known as the *Septuagint* (LXX). It was translated by the Jewish community in Alexandria, Egypt. In many significant ways, the Greek of the Septuagint is different from typical Hellenistic Greek. This is because its translators tried to preserve the formal properties of the underlying Hebrew text. They were more concerned with preserving a degree of transparency with respect to the Hebrew sources than they were in producing an acceptable literary,

Figure: Ancient Greek inscription (Ephesus).

the Septuagint became the de facto liturgical text of countless synagogues and early churches. Indeed, as the basis for early Christian liturgy, devotion, and theology, the Septuagint emerged as the most significant body of literature in late antiquity.

Given the fact that the New Testament is written in Hellenistic Greek, it follows that those who desire a deeper understanding of its message must strive to attain a thorough knowledge of this language. Learning Greek requires patience, perseverance, and the willingness to struggle. But those who are committed to understanding the Christian gospel should not view this task as an imposition, but as a blessing, for with it comes a deeper knowledge of Scriptures. There can be no doubt that *the ability to read and interpret the New Testament in its original language is a central component of the Reformed tradition*.

Indeed, all theologians since the Renaissance, including Erasmus, Calvin, and Luther, emphasized the importance of studying the Bible in its original languages.[4] For example, Desiderius Erasmus upheld the knowledge of Greek as an essential component of a sound theological education. He once stated that "While mere knowledge of [Greek] grammar does not make a theologian; still less does ignorance of it."[5]

Similarly, in our own case, while mastering Hellenistic Greek may not be a realistic goal for every student of theology, total unfamiliarity with the original language of the New Testament is indefensible for theologians and seminarians. After all, there is probably no rabbi who cannot read the Tanakh in the original Hebrew, or imam who cannot read the Qur'an in the original Arabic language. But Christians should not approach the study of Hellenistic Greek as if it were a trial or obstacle to overcome. Those who really commit themselves to the regular lifelong study of the Greek New Testament will come to know the true joy of being led through, and beyond, its words to a lived, faithful, transformative relationship with the living God. Indeed, we must not forget that patience in the study of sacred Greek Scriptures nurtures patience in the grace of God!

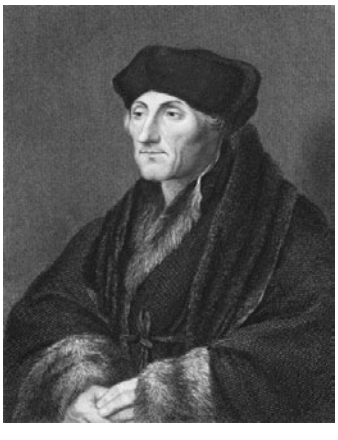
I.1. PRONOUNCING HELLENISTIC GREEK

You may be surprised to learn that many introductions to Hellenistic Greek employ a system of pronunciation developed *by a Dutchman* named Erasmus, who lived

Greek composition. This practice suggests that the Septuagint functioned more as a kind of "inter-text" than as a translation. It probably supplemented the reading and study of the Hebrew Bible rather than functioning independently (cf. see Cameron Boyd-Taylor, "The Evidentiary Value of Septuagintal Usage," *Bulletin of the International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies*, 34 [2001], 72).

[4] The term "Renaissance" describes the period of European history from the early fourteenth to the late sixteenth century. The Renaissance preceded the Reformation by about a century and a half. During the fifteenth century, students from many European nations traveled to Italy to study Greek and Latin literature as well as philosophy, eventually spreading the Italian Renaissance north into Western Europe. In Northern Europe, these changes radically affected religious life.

[5] Marjorie O'Rourke Boyle, *Erasmus on Language and Method in Theology* (Toronto/Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1977), 22, n. 69; cf. 36, n. 26.



Desiderius Erasmus (1466/69–1536).

from 1466/69 to 1536 AD, during the period now known as the Renaissance. Thus, Erasmus was literally, as well as figuratively, a "Renaissance" man. He was among those who pioneered a movement to read the Bible in its original languages. To this end, he collated the ancient manuscripts available at the time to produce the first Greek New Testament in 1516. It was this Greek text – republished later by Robert Stephanus in 1550 – that was used as the basis of the English translation known as the Authorized Version, or King James Version, of 1611. Thus, we have every reason to hold Erasmus in the highest esteem.

The system of pronunciation developed by Erasmus is known as the Erasmian pronunciation system. It gives the same values to Greek letters as their corresponding Latin equivalents. It is also based on the non-linguistic principle that each letter should be pronounced differently.[6]

As might be expected from its origins, this system of pronunciation is entirely artificial. It is merely a "classroom" pronunciation, which has *never been used by Greeks in any period of their history*. We now know, on the basis of thousands of papyri and inscriptions that have been discovered since the time of Erasmus, that this Latinized pronunciation contradicts how Greek was actually spoken.

Even in Erasmus' own time, other pronunciation systems were also in use. For example, the German scholar Johann Reuchlin (1455–1522) introduced a Byzantine pronunciation in Western Europe. This pronunciation system is very similar to the pronunciation system used in this grammar. The ensuing debate over the relative merits of the Erasmian and Byzantine systems became so heated at Cambridge University that, in 1542, the Erasmian pronunciation was actually *forbidden* from use, under penalty of removal from one's degree program (in the

[6] Actually, this system is not consistent in following this rule: Both η and ει, and ευ and ηυ, are assigned the same phonic value.

case of university students) and physical "chastisement" (in the case of primary education). Nonetheless, by the twentieth century, it was the Erasmian pronunciation that won the day in America and Europe.

In retrospect, it is indeed surprising that a pronunciation system invented by a Dutchman living 500 years ago in Northern Europe, with no real contact with Greek culture, should still be in use in the modern university of the twenty-first century. Nevertheless, in our own era, many New Testament scholars, most notably Chrys C. Caragounis, are now advocating a return to what is termed the *historical Greek pronunciation system*, just as many scholars of biblical Hebrew have adopted a modern Hebrew system of pronunciation.[7] This makes good sense because the historical Greek pronunciation system is very close to the pronunciation employed by Paul and the first apostles.[8]

There are a number of advantages associated with this historical Greek pronunciation system:

1. In contrast to the Erasmian system, the historical Greek pronunciation system is a *real*, euphonic system that is very close to the pronunciation system employed by the first Greek-speaking Christians. It is also known as the modern Greek pronunciation system. Students who adopt this pronunciation system will experience the joy of hearing the sound of the living language of early Christianity. This pronunciation system will allow you to develop a more holistic experience of the sound of early Christian preaching and prayer.

   On the other hand with the Erasmian pronunciation system, one gives up the possibility of learning to speak and hear the Greek as a living language. Indeed, if you were to attempt to speak to any Greek person using an Erasmian pronunciation, that person would be bewildered and perplexed by the strange sounds coming out of your mouth. In contrast, the historical Greek pronunciation system would allow you to be understood.
2. Many textual variants in the text of the Greek New Testament resulted from misunderstanding when the manuscripts were produced by *oral* dictation in scriptoria. An understanding of the original pronunciation aids the New Testament interpreter in explaining such errors in comprehension.
3. Perhaps the best reason to adopt the historical Greek pronunciation system concerns the expectations that we bring to the text. The use of the Erasmian

[7] Chrys C. Caragounis, *The Development of Greek and the New Testament: Morphology, Syntax, Phonology, and Textual Transmission*, WUNT 167, Corrected edition (Ada, Michigan; Baker Academic, 2007), 337–96.

[8] Chrys C. Caragounis, "The Error of Erasmus and Un-Greek Pronunciations of Greek," *Filologia Neotestamentaria* 8 (1995), 151–85; cf. A. T. Robertson wrote that "We may be sure of one thing, the pronunciation of the vernacular κοινή was not exactly like the ancient literary Attic [i.e., Classical Greek] nor precisely like the modern Greek vernacular, but veering more toward the latter" (*A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* [Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1934], 239).

> system encourages one to think of the Greek New Testament as a secret code, whose arcane symbols, once deciphered, will yield God's secret mysteries. The Greek New Testament is not some kind of mysterious secret code that needs to be solved. The use of the historical Greek pronunciation system keeps us always mindful that, in reading the twenty-seven texts of the Greek New Testament, we are reading a real language, once used by real people in real contexts, with all the ambiguities and idiosyncrasies that this implies. Exegesis, when understood in these terms, does not become a quest for hidden treasure, but an open-ended dialogue with the texts themselves.

For those who would argue that the historical Greek pronunciation system does not make absolute phonetic distinctions, one should bear in mind that no language limits itself to such rigid consistency. Moreover, the purported benefits of the Erasmian system of pronunciation shrink when one realizes that there is no consensus, even among those scholars who employ it. There are actually several Erasmian pronunciations according to whether one learns *koine* Greek in the United States, Germany, or Britain.

Learning the historical Greek pronunciation system is not very difficult because it is *entirely regular*. In contrast to English, where the pronunciation of words like "enough," "though," and "through" cause difficulties to non-native speakers, the historical Greek pronunciation system is consistent. This feature allows one to master it easily with a little patience and practice. On the basis of its many advantages, this textbook will employ this system, though the Erasmian system will also be explained for those who wish to use it instead.[9]

I.2. THE USE AND ABUSE OF MEMORY

The study of Hellenistic Greek, like the study of any language, requires time and practice. By its very nature, this task also requires much memorization. If you have not previously learned another language, the task of memorizing significant amounts of information may be an unfamiliar challenge to you. To meet this challenge, it is important that you understand how your memory works.

According to nutritionists, it is better to eat many small meals than to gorge oneself on a huge meal near the end of the day. This principle is equally true for learning Greek. Many short study sessions are preferable to infrequent Greek "gorging" sessions. In other words, frequent study sessions will result in better memory retention than will long, uninterrupted study sessions. Therefore, try to avoid the demoralizing task of attempting to play catch-up after having ignored your Greek

[9] See Section 1.9.

studies for several days. This type of intensive, uninterrupted study usually results in *cognitive overload*. It occurs when your memory cannot process information in the quantities or speed it is presented.

Before entering your long-term memory, your *working memory* must first process new material. While your working memory is busy, it cannot learn new material. Because your working memory can handle only a fixed amount of information at any one time (e.g., six to eight new words), a wise strategy is to practice for relatively *short* periods of time with *repeated* study sessions. In other words, *"little and often" is the rule*.

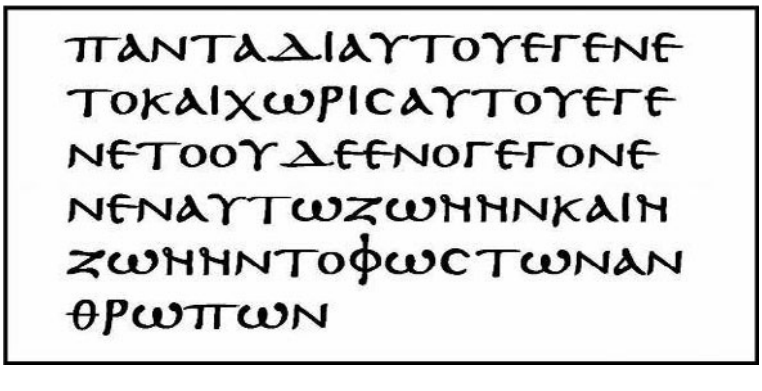
Also bear in mind that there are two types of memory practice: maintenance rehearsal and elaborative rehearsal. Maintenance rehearsal, or what might be called rote memorization, involves repetition and memorization. Such maintenance practice requires a great deal of energy and a high number of repetitions before a learner can perform the skill or use the knowledge with confidence. Though maintenance rehearsal serves to keep information active in the working memory, it also clutters the short-term memory. Consequently, it is not very efficient.

Elaborative rehearsal causes learners to *interact* with the content. This type of practice connects the new content with what learners already know, or it applies practice to solving real problems, such as translating the Greek New Testament. You will learn Greek more quickly and easily if you attempt to deal with the material in multiple perspectives, as well as trying to memorize facts by rote. To help students meaningfully *interact* with Hellenistic Greek, this grammar textbook is supplemented by a workbook (available online). The Workbook will give you the opportunity to translate real passages from the Greek New Testament, thereby applying your growing knowledge of Hellenistic Greek to real problem solving. The vocabulary lists at the end of each lesson will provide the words required for the translation of each new set of biblical texts.

1.

Alphabet and Pronunciation

Let us begin our Greek odyssey by becoming acquainted with some of the features of ancient manuscripts of the New Testament. Many of the features that one associates with a printed Greek edition of the New Testament were absent in the oldest manuscripts. For example, a typical New Testament manuscript recording John 1:3–4 would look something like this:



Among the differences between modern printed editions of the Greek New Testament and ancient New Testament manuscripts are the following:

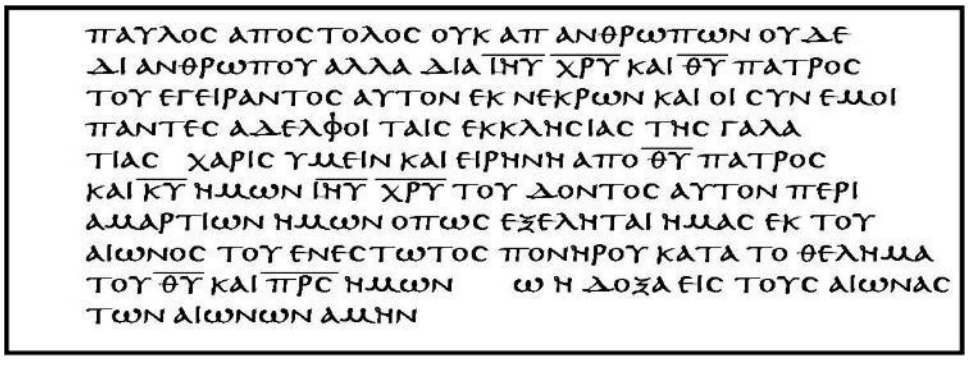
1. The original manuscripts were written only in rounded capital letters (known as *uncials*), whereas modern printed editions use mostly lowercase letters.[1]

[1] Greek paleography divides letters into two primary classes: large and small. Small letters are also known as *cursives* or *minuscules*. The class of large letters is subdivided into *capitals*, which are used in Greek inscriptions, and uncials, which are adaptations of capitals used in manuscripts. Whereas capital letters are characterized by a preference for straight strokes meeting at angles, uncials make more use of curved strokes.

Figure: Relief of man holding the tiller of a small boat (ancient Corinth).

2. The original manuscripts abbreviated sacred names (so-called *nomina sacra*) for "God," "Jesus," and others.[2]
3. In printed editions of the New Testament, editors also add a variety of other marks that were *not* used in the original manuscripts. These editorial marks include the following: breathing marks, accents, iota subscripts, diaeresis marks, apostrophes, letter spacing, and most punctuation. These marks will be discussed in Chapter 2.

These features were introduced by editors in later centuries to facilitate the reading and comprehension of these ancient texts. If you are wondering about the value of such editorial work, consider the following text. Would you rather read *this* version of Galatians 1:1–5?


ΠΑΥΛΟC ΑΠΟCΤΟΛΟC ΟΥΚ ΑΠ ΑΝΘΡΩΠΩΝ ΟΥΔΕ
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ΤΟΥ ΕΓΕΙΡΑΝΤΟC ΑΥΤΟΝ ΕΚ ΝΕΚΡΩΝ ΚΑΙ ΟΙ CΥΝ ΕΜΟΙ
ΠΑΝΤΕC ΑΔΕΛΦΟΙ ΤΑΙC ΕΚΚΛΗCΙΑC ΤΗC ΓΑΛΑ
ΤΙΑC ΧΑΡΙC ΥΜΙΝ ΚΑΙ ΕΙΡΗΝΗ ΑΠΟ ΘΥ ΠΑΤΡΟC
ΚΑΙ ΚΥ ΗΜΩΝ ΙΗΥ ΧΡΥ ΤΟΥ ΔΟΝΤΟC ΑΥΤΟΝ ΠΕΡΙ
ΑΜΑΡΤΙΩΝ ΗΜΩΝ ΟΠΩC ΕΞΕΛΗΤΑΙ ΗΜΑC ΕΚ ΤΟΥ
ΑΙΩΝΟC ΤΟΥ ΕΝΕCΤΩΤΟC ΠΟΝΗΡΟΥ ΚΑΤΑ ΤΟ ΘΕΛΗΜΑ
ΤΟΥ ΘΥ ΚΑΙ ΠΡC ΗΜΩΝ Ω Η ΔΟΞΑ ΕΙC ΤΟΥC ΑΙΩΝΑC
ΤΩΝ ΑΙΩΝΩΝ ΑΜΗΝ

Or would you rather read *this* edited version?

1:1 Παῦλος ἀπόστολος οὐκ ἀπ' ἀνθρώπων οὐδὲ δι' ἀνθρώπου ἀλλὰ διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ θεοῦ πατρὸς τοῦ ἐγείραντος αὐτὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν, **2** καὶ οἱ σὺν ἐμοὶ πάντες ἀδελφοὶ ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις τῆς Γαλατίας, **3** χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ **4** τοῦ δόντος ἑαυτὸν ὑπὲρ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν, ὅπως ἐξέληται ἡμᾶς ἐκ τοῦ αἰῶνος τοῦ ἐνεστῶτος πονηροῦ κατὰ τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ πατρὸς ἡμῶν, **5** ᾧ ἡ δόξα εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων, ἀμήν.

If you are not sure, you might want to return to this question in a couple of weeks. In any case, though the editing of ancient New Testament texts is necessary, my point is

[2] E.g., **θc** for θεός (God), **ιc** for Ἰησοῦς (Jesus), **κc** for κύριος (Lord), **χc** for Χριστός (Christ).

this: This editing does constitute a kind of *interpretation* of the text. It actually *adds* information to the text that is not explicitly in the text itself. Even though these editorial additions are helpful and necessary, they are subject to being questioned and changed.

1.1 THE GREEK ALPHABET AND PRONUNCIATION

Whereas the English alphabet consists of twenty-six letters, the Greek alphabet has only twenty-four characters. Many of these letters are similar to the English (i.e., Latin) characters that you already know. However, in many cases their pronunciation is different from their corresponding Latin letters. Nonetheless, Greek is a regular phonetic language, which is to say that words are spelled as they are pronounced.

Given that it is the practice of modern editions of the Greek New Testament to employ mostly lowercase letters, it is suggested that you begin by learning the lowercase letters. The column labeled "phonic value" in the following table provides the historical Greek pronunciation for each letter. The Erasmian pronunciation system is provided in the appendix to this lesson for those who prefer to use it (Section 1.9).

Upper case	*Lower case*	*Letter name*	*Pronunciation guide*	*Phonic value*
Α	α	**al**fa	f*a*ther	[a]
Β	β	**vi**ta	*v*at	[v]
Γ	γ	**gha**ma	*y*et (when followed by *e* and *i*-sounds), before other vowels, as "*g*o," but deeper from the throat: "gho"	[y] or [g]
Δ	δ	**dhel**ta	*th*e	[dh]
Ε	ε	**e**psilon	b*e*t	[e]
Ζ	ζ	**zi**ta	*z*oo	[z]
Η	η	**i**ta	between "d*i*d" and "s*ee*"	[i]
Θ	θ	**thi**ta	*th*ink	[th]
Ι	ι	**io**ta	between "d*i*d" and "s*ee*"	[i]
Κ	κ	**kap**pa	*k*eep	[k]
Λ	λ	**lam**dha	*l*etter	[l]
Μ	μ	**mi**	*m*oon	[m]

Upper case	*Lower case*	*Letter name*	*Pronunciation guide*	*Phonic value*
Ν	ν	**ni**	*n*oon	[n]
Ξ	ξ	**ksi**	o*x*	[ks]
Ο	ο	**o**mikron	d*o*g	[o]
Π	π	**pi**	*p*ut	[p]
Ρ	ρ	**rho**	r (trilled)[3]	[r / rh][4]
Σ	σ/ ς[5]	**sig**ma	ro*s*e	[s][6]
Τ	τ	**taf**	*t*op	[t]
Υ	υ	**i**psilon	between "d*i*d" and "s*ee*"	[i]
Φ	φ	**fi**	*f*ind	[f]
Χ	χ	**khi**	"lo*ch*,"[7] but softer as in German, "I*ch*", before [i] sounding vowels	[kh]
Ψ	ψ	**psi**	hi*ps*	[ps]
Ω	ω	**om**ega	d*o*g	[o]

1.2 PRONOUNCING VOWELS

Letter	*Phonic value*	*Example*	*Pronunciation*
α	[a]	ἀπό	(a-**po**)
ε	[e]	ἐλπίς	(el-**pis**)
ι	[i]	ἴσος	(**i**-sos)
ο	[o]	ὄνομα	(**o**-no-ma)
η	[i]	μή	(mi)
υ	[i]	κύριος	(**ki**-ri-os)
ω	[o]	φῶς	(fos)

Notice that ι, η, and υ are all pronounced the same way, [i] (between "d*i*d" and "s*ee*"). During the Hellenistic period, there was a loss of qualitative distinction between these vowels. This phenomenon is termed *itacism*.

[3] Like a trilled French *r*.
[4] Transliterated *rh* when the first letter of a word.
[5] Initial or internal sigma is written as σ. This sigma is known as *medial sigma*. But as the last letter of a word, sigma is formed like ς. This sigma is known as *final sigma*.
[6] But like *z* as in "zoo" before voiced consonants (β, γ, δ, μ, λ, μ ν, ρ), e.g., κόσμος, προσδῶ, σγουρός, σβέννυμι.
[7] Rough guttural or aspirated sound: *ch* as in Scottish "lo*ch*" or German "Bu*ch*."