

A N  
ANALYTICAL ESSAY  
ON THE  
GREEK ALPHABET.

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THE Subject, which I here propose to examine, will of course appear minute and frivolous to those, who are only acquainted with it from the keen ridicule, with which it has been treated by some popular and elegant writers of the last and present centuries (1). I would, however, entreat all persons of this description, who honour the present attempt with their attention, to consider, that even the best and keenest ridicule is no test, either of the truth or the dignity of the subject, upon which it is employed, but has often been most happily exercised upon the best-founded opinions and most important and elevated objects (2). At all events, I hope that they will not condemn the design before they know the consequences of its completion; and if they then find that, by facilitating the acquisition of Grecian Learning, it can bring the highest efforts of human taste and genius, into a stronger or clearer light, they will consider it as adding to the intellectual pleasures of man, which are certainly the most valuable belonging to his nature, because they can be at all times enjoyed without injury to health, fame, or fortune.

(1) See Moliere's Bourgeois Gentilhomme; and Pope's Dunciad.  
(2) See Gulliver's Travels; and Tale of a Tub.

I cannot indeed but think, that the judgement of the Publick, upon the respective merits of the different classes of Criticks, is peculiarly partial and unjust.

Those among them who assume the office of pointing out the beauties, and detecting the faults, of literary composition, are placed with the orator and historian in the highest ranks; whilst those, who undertake the more laborious task of washing away the rust and canker of time, and bringing back those forms and colours, which are the subject of criticism, to their original purity and brightness, are degraded, with the Index-maker and Antiquary, among the pioneers of literature, whose business it is to clear the way for those who are capable of more splendid and honourable enterprises.

But nevertheless, if we examine the effects produced by these two classes of Criticks, we shall find that the first have been of no use whatever, and that the last have rendered the most important services to mankind. All persons of taste and understanding know, from their own feelings, when to approve and disapprove, and therefore stand in no need of instructions from the Critick; and as for those who are destitute of such faculties, they can never be taught to use them; for no one can be taught to exert faculties which he does not possess. Every dunce may, indeed, be taught to repeat the jargon of criticism, which of all jargons is the worst, as it joins the tedious formality of methodical reasoning to the trite frivolity of common-place observation. But, whatever may be the taste and discernment of a reader, or the genius and ability of a writer, neither the one nor the other can appear while the text remains deformed by the corruptions of blundering transcribers, and obscured by the glosses of ignorant grammarians. It is then that the aid of the verbal Critick is required; and though his minute labour, in dissecting syllables and analysing letters, may appear contemptible in its operation, it will be found important in its effect.

The office, indeed, of analysing letters has been thought the lowest of all literary occupations; but nevertheless as found, though only the vehicle of sense, is that which principally distinguishes the most brilliant poetry from the flattest prose; and as, in the dead languages, all sound is to be known only from the powers originally given to the characters representing the elements of it; to analyse these characters, and show what  
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their Powers really were, is the only way to acquire a knowledge of those founds in which the antient poets conveyed their sense. A successful endeavour to obtain this end will not, I flatter myself, be deemed either trifling or absurd in this age of taste and learning.

S E C T I O N I.

AN articulate found is properly that which begins from, or ends in, a suppression or obstruction of expiration, by the compression of some of the organs of the mouth.

These organs are the lips, the teeth, the tongue, and the palate; to which some add the throat, but improperly, for guttural founds are not of themselves articulate: the combinations of them known to the Greeks were only three; I. the lips with each other; II. the tongue with the palate; III. the tongue with the teeth: to which the Latins added a fourth, of the under lip with the teeth: but this the Greeks never employed, and therefore could not pronounce the Roman F (1), though we perpetually pronounce it in our corrupt manner of reading their language.

To represent these three modes of articulation, I am inclined to believe, the first visible signs for founds were invented; for, though articulation be only the *form*, and tone the *substance*, of speech, yet as the form is finite and simple, and the substance infinitely variable, it is natural to suppose that the first signs were invented to represent form rather than substance. It is also this form or articulation which distinguishes human speech from the cries of animals, which are all tones, or vowel founds, variously aspi-

(1) See Quintil. l. xii. c. 10.

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rated, but neither begun, ended, or divided, by the compression of the organs of the mouth.

The first signs or notes of articulation were, therefore, the G (as it was antiently pronounced, and as we still pronounce it when followed by an A, O, or U), the P and the T (1).

Each of these was pronounced two ways, with a greater or less degree of force in the compression of the organs; whence were formed three more letters, B, K, and D, which I rank next in succession, though there is reason to believe that neither of them (or, at most, only the last) was invented until several intermediate improvements had taken place in the art of expressing sounds by signs. The want of authentic monuments, however, prevents us from tracing the progress of these improvements, the earliest inscriptions extant having been made when the Alphabet was even more perfect than it is at present. It should seem, indeed, both from the order of the Alphabet, and our manner of pronouncing these letters, that the B, G, and D, ought to rank together in the first class; and the P, K, and T, in the second; which would certainly agree better with the analogy of sound; but, nevertheless, it is contradicted by the authentic testimony of antient monuments, always to be preferred to any conclusions that can be drawn from mere analogy.

In a very antient Greek Inscription found in Magna Græcia, and now preserved in the museum of Monsignor Borgia, at Veletri, the G is expressed by a single perpendicular line, thus I (2), which seems to be its most antient form; for, upon some of the earliest coins extant, it is expressed by the same line a little curved, thus (3); whence came the Roman C, which is used for the G in the Duillian inscription, engraved in the year of Rome 493. The G was not employed as a distinct letter until introduced by Spurius Cervilius Ruga, twenty-seven years afterwards (4). Antiquaries have observed that, in Manuscripts, the round forms mostly

(1) I employ the Latin letters because much nearer to the primitive Greek than the Greek ones now in use.  
(2) Plate I. Fig. 1, from a copy of it given me by Mr. Aftle.  
(3) See those of Gela in Numm. Sic. vet. Pl. XXXI.  
(4) Plutarch. Qu. Rom. Taylor's Civil Law, p. 557; also, in Marm. Sandvicenf.

predominate

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predominate in the letters, and in inscriptions the square, because the former are more easily written, and the latter more easily carved (1). Hence this curved Line, which represented the G, was made with an angular instead of a circular curve, thus ζ, or thus Γ.

The most antient K is a combination of one of these forms with the antient upright line, thus κ, or thus ϰ; so that this letter is, in fact, a junction of two Gammas, in order to express a stronger and more emphatical enunciation by the same organs. This will appear evident by examining the manner in which it is repeatedly written in the Etruscan Inscription, called the Eugubian Table, published by Gori; and also upon some very antient medals of Lesbos and Syracuse, in both of which it is plainly represented by two distinct characters (2). This Etruscan Inscription Gori endeavours to prove, from a passage of Dionysius of Halicarnassus, to have been written two generations before the Trojan war; but, though I do not think his argument quite satisfactory as to this point, it is of very remote antiquity, for the Alphabet is the most imperfect, and therefore, probably, the oldest of any hitherto discovered.

Upon some very eminent coins of Croto, Corinth, and Syracuse, we find the Kappa expressed by a circular supported by a perpendicular line, thus ϰ (3), from which comes the Roman Q. This is, however, equally a combination of the antient Gammas, the two curved lines being joined and divided by a perpendicular one, thus ϰ.

After the invention of the Kappa, the simple Gamma seems to have fallen into disuse in some dialects; for it is not to be found in any Etruscan inscription; and the Etruscan, as well as the Latin, is evidently a corrupt dialect of the Greek; a dialect by much the hardest of any, and therefore probably employing only the hardest and most emphatical palatal consonant, which is the Kappa.

Both these letters retain their powers, with, I believe, little or no variation, in most of the modern languages; except that the English, French,

(1) See Asple's History of Writing.

(2) See Plate I. Fig. 4 and 5, from coins in the cabinet of the Author.

(3) See Comb. Pl. XX. XXI.; and Torremozzi Sic. Pl. LXXVII. Similar medals are in the cabinet of the Author; who has quoted none that he has not seen, having too often proved the inaccuracy of books in these minute but important circumstances.

and

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and Italians, have added a corrupt and barbarous dental sound to the G, when followed by either of the slender vowels. The K is not employed by the Italians, Spaniards, or French, in their own tongues; and in reading the Greek they pronounce it in the same manner as they do the Latin C, that is, like a barbarous semi-vowel, forced out between the tongue and the teeth with a harsh hissing-sound.

The most antient form of the P seems to be that of the Etruscans, which consists of a perpendicular line with another drawn obliquely from it, thus *p*. It exists in the same form, except that the oblique line is curved thus *q*, to distinguish it from the antient Lambda, upon the vase representing the hunt of the Caledonian boar, in the British Museum, which is evidently Greek, and appears, both from the style of the workmanship and form of the letters, to be one of the most antient monuments extant of the art of that people. This curvature, being gradually increased, formed the Latin P, which was previously employed by the Greeks in the same form, as appears from the very antient Veletrian Inscription before cited. In the same inscription, however, it appears in the form which they more commonly employed in early Times; which is indeed nearly the same, only that the curved line is made square instead of round (*p*), for the reason beforementioned. The power of this letter seems not to have varied at all, for it is precisely the same in all the languages of modern Europe, and, as far as we can judge from analogy and etymology, the same as it was in Greece in the days of Homer.

The B seems to have been originally an aspirated P; for, in the Eugubian Inscription, it has that power; and the Macedonians employed it where the Greeks employed the  $\Phi$  and  $\Pi$ , writing BEPENIKH for  $\Phi$ EPE-  
NIKH, and BΥΡΓΟΣ for ΠΥΡΓΟΣ; whence it appears that our Northern words BURGH and BEAR come from the same source as the corresponding ones in the Greek. The Etruscans represented it in two forms, thus *H*, and thus *g*; the first of which occurs only once, and that in the Eugubian Inscription; but the other is common. It is with the first that both the Greek and Latin forms of this letter agree; but its power seems to have been that of the Phœnician Beth, at least if they pronounced it as we do now, which the Greeks seem evidently to have done in some instances; for the verbs BOMBEΩ, BAMBAINΩ, &c. would not have answered



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swered the purpose for which Homer employs them, in making the sound correspond to the sense, if the B were pronounced in any other manner. In other instances, however, or, at least, in other times, they employed it as a palatial aspirate; for we find the Latin V (which we know had the power of our W) sometimes expressed in the Greek by the B, and sometimes by the OΥ diphthong (1); whence it clearly appears that there was then an affinity between them, though they now differ so widely. The Æolians and Dorians, in particular, employed it occasionally as a pure or simple aspirate, like the Digamma, or Roman H, writing ΒΡΟΔΟΣ for ΡΟΔΟΣ, ΒΑΒΕΑΙΟΣ for ἈΕΑΙΟΣ, ΒΕΔΟΣ for ΕΔΟΣ, &c. (2). In the same manner it was introduced into the words ΓΑΜΒΡΟΣ for ΓΑΜΕΡΟΣ, and ΜΕΣΗΜΒΡΙΑ for ΜΕΣΗΜΕΡΙΑ (3); but with what degree or form of aspiration it was pronounced it is impossible for us now to tell; for though, like the OΥ diphthong, it had a resemblance to the Latin V, we cannot say how near that resemblance was. In all modern languages it retains its antient power of a labial consonant, except in the Spanish, and some dialects of the modern Greek, in which it has acquired that corrupt and barbarous sound given by the other nations of Europe to the Latin V, a sound which it seems to have derived from the Byzantine Greeks, as it is enforced by the edict issued by Stephen Gardener, Bishop of Winchester, for the support of their pronunciation in the university of Cambridge, of which he was Chancellor. The Romans seem to have been very licentious and irregular in the use of this letter; for on the Duilian column, before alluded to, the name, which in later times was written DUILIUS, is written ΒΙΛΙΟΣ; whence, as Gori observes, BELLUM and BELLONA appear to be the same words with DUELLUM and DUELLONA (4); and we find accordingly, in the *Senatus consultum Marcianum*, inscribed about seventy-five years after, the name of the goddess BELLONA written DVELONA. In the inscription in honour of L. Scipio Barbatus, which is of the year after the Duilian, the B is also represented by the D and V in DVONORO, the

(1) As in the names VARRO and SEVERVS, sometimes written by Greek authors ΒΑΡΡΩΝ and ΣΕΒΗΡΟΣ, and sometimes ΟΥΑΡΡΩΝ and ΣΕΟΥΗΡΟΣ.  
(2) Priscian, lib. I.  
(3) Lennep, Analog. Græc. p. 286.  
(4) Muf. Etrusc. Class. V.

antient

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antient form of the word *BONORUM*, the final *M* having been usually omitted, and the *U* represented by the *O* in the old Latin.

The most antient figure of the *T*, found in the Etruscan inscriptions, differs little from that now in use. Its power has also probably continued the same, except in the instance of the hissing sound, which most modern nations have given it, when followed by an *I* in the same syllable. This is undoubtedly a corruption, the Greeks having no letter to express this kind of sound but the Sigma.

The *D*, the other dental consonant, does not appear to have been known to the Etruscans, having been probably borrowed from the Phœnicians after the Pelasgian alphabet had been carried into Italy. Its figure, indeed (which is always triangular, though often rounded at one angle), occurs frequently on the Etruscan monuments; but it always stands for the *R*. We find it, however, with the power of the *D*, or perhaps the  $\Delta$   $\Sigma$  or *Z*, upon the Zankléan medals, which contain some of the most antient specimens of Greek writing now extant (1).

These six letters are called mutes, because, if employed according to their original intention, they express no sound of themselves, but only mark the beginnings, endings, and divisions of sound, by which it is articulated, or separated into detached portions, called in writing syllables.

These portions are, however, often divided by other means, which I shall now proceed to examine; but, in that case, it will appear that they are not, strictly speaking, articulate sounds, or essentially different from the cries of brute animals.


The first of these is a partial instead of a total suppression of the breath, by an approximation instead of a conjunction of the organs of the mouth, represented by the letters called aspirates; which, like the mute consonants, are to be divided into three classes, corresponding to the three different combinations of the organs of speech.

But, as each of these marks signifies a particular mode of constrained expiration, by the approximation of some particular organs to each other, the most natural and easy way of expressing them would be to invent some

(1) See Torremuzzi Sic. PL XLV. Similar medals are in the Author's cabinet, and in most others, they being common.



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mark of general constrained expiration, which, being affixed to each of the signs before invented, might distinguish each different mode of constrained expiration according to the different combinations of the organs by which they are produced. Hence come the simple aspirate, figured by the Phœnicians and Etruscans thus , by the Latins thus H, and by the Greeks thus Η, and thus Η̣; which, being prefixed to a vowel, signifies that the tone, which it expresses, should be uttered with a forced and condensed expiration; and, when affixed to a consonant, that the breath, which forms that tone, should not be totally suppressed and interrupted by it, but only confined and constrained by the approximation only of those organs, the entire junction of which is signified by the consonant alone. The second Greek character for this simple aspirate does not seem to have been in use till the other was appropriated to express another letter. An antient scholiast, cited by M. de Villoison (1), says, that, when the Η became a vowel, it was divided into two letters, the first of which, Η̣, was employed to signify the aspirate, and the second, Η̅, the slender, or simple vowel sound. Quintilian and other old grammarians seem to have held the same opinion (2); so that there can be no doubt but that these marks were so employed in the manuscripts of their times. There is, however, no instance of the Η̅ in any antient monument now extant, or in any manuscript anterior to the ninth century, though the Η̣ occurs upon the medals of Tarentum, Heraclea, and Lesbos, and also on the Heracleian tables, and an earthen vase published with them by Mazochi; who has conjectured, with much ingenuity and probability, that these two notes were first employed in opposition to each other, to signify the thick and slender enunciation of tone, by Aristophanes of Byzantium, the inventor of the accentual marks (3). The present notes (c) and (v) are corruptions of them, which were gradually introduced to facilitate writing (4). Dr. Taylor supposed that the Η was the Ionian aspirate, the Η̣ the Dorian,

(1) Proleg. in Homer. p. 5, where the marks, through an error of the copyist or printer, are transposed.  
(2) Lib. I. c. 4. & Gramm. vet. Putsch. Col. 1829, & seq.  
(3) Comm. in Tab. Heracl. p. 127.  
(4) Ibid.

C and

and the F the Æolean (1); but we find the F in its Pelasgian Form,  $\mathcal{L}$ , with the  $\mathfrak{f}$  on the Heracleian tables; and the Lesbians, whose coins have the latter aspirate, which he calls Dorian, were Æolians.

Distinct marks or characters were invented for each of the aspirated consonants at a very early period; so that, I believe, there is not more than one genuine example extant in which they are separated in the primitive mode. This is a votive inscription preserved at Venice, in which we find KH for X, and ΠH for Φ, as in the Latin (2), which was derived from the Æolian or Arcadian alphabet, before the aspirated consonants had found a place in it. In the oldest Etruscan Inscriptions, however, as well as the Sigeian, supposed to be the oldest Greek extant except coins, we find them, both palatal, dental, and labial, expressed by characters not only distinct, but which have no apparent resemblance of form to the letters from which they are derived.

The palatal aspirate, which consists of either the Gamma or the Kappa aspirated, was made by the Etruscans, I believe, invariably, and by the Greeks sometimes, like a divided V, thus  $\Psi$  (3). Its usual form, however, was composed of two transverse lines thus X; which, on the very antient medals of Naxos in Sicily (4), is employed, as in the Latin, to signify the  $\Xi$  or abbreviated mark for the ΓΣ and ΚΣ, unless indeed, as I am inclined to think, the name of that city was really NAXΣOΣ contracted to NAXOΣ, as ΔΣANKΛΕ to ΔANKΛΕ, by an elision of the Σ, much affected by the Greeks in the refinement of their language, when the sound of that letter was deemed harsh and barbarous. The power of the Greek X seems to have been nearly the same as that which the Spaniards now give to the Roman X, the Tuscans to the C, and the Scotch to the GH. We are apt to pronounce it as if it were a plain K without any aspiration; and the French have given it the barbarous sound of their own CH, a sound which to a Greek would have appeared scarcely human. It was pro-

(1) Ad Marm. Sandvicense, p. 45.

(2) See Pl. I. Fig. 2. I have not seen the originals, nor any *fac-simile* either of this or the Veletrian Inscription; but as both have been generally acknowledged to be authentic, and contain no internal evidence to the contrary, I have ventured to quote them.

(3) See Pierres gravees du Duc d'Orleans, Tab. II. Pl. II.

(4) See Torremuzzi, Pl. III. Fig. 2, from a medal now in the cabinet of the Author.

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