

Appendix B.1

A short History of the Greek Language

Greek is a living, growing, language. Pronunciation and grammar have changed through the centuries, and also varied between different dialects at the same period.

The Minoans

The Minoans, centered on Crete, flourished from ca. 2,200 B.C. until about 1,400 B.C., when their culture was destroyed, probably by a volcanic eruption and earthquakes. Evidence for the severity of the eruption can be seen in the island of Santorini, which shows clearly that it is the remains of a volcano of enormous size. The Minoans apparently spoke a language other than Greek. The only spoken trace of their language which remains to the present is a number of places with names ending in -ossos.

The Minoans were amongst the first to use a script which was written in a line rather than in a box (Mesopotamian cuneiform, Egyptian hieroglyphics). Because of this it is called Linear A. Linear A and the language of the Minoans have not yet been deciphered. They appear not to have been related to Greek

The Mycenaeans

The earliest Greek "alphabet" (strictly, a syllabary) of which we know is that called Linear B, used by the Mycenaeans, ca. 1,400 B.C.

Linear B was an adaptation of Linear A. The Mycenaean culture developed on the Greek mainland, with large fortified citadels at Mycenae, Tiryns, and other sites. The Mycenaeans came into contact with the Minoans, took the ideas of Linear A, and developed a script for their own language.

After the decline of the Minoan civilization, the Mycenaeans became the dominant culture in the Aegean. Their adventures were the basis for the legends of Troy and the Trojans.

However, during the time of disturbances generally called the Dorian Invasion, or the Greek Dark Ages, ca. 1,200-1,000 B.C., it appears that civilization was so disrupted that people forgot how to read and write in Linear B.

In 1952 Linear B was deciphered by Michael Ventris, an architect who was also a linguist, who showed that it represented a very early form of the Greek language.

Archaic Greek

The alphabet which eventually spread throughout the Western world was developed by Semitic peoples in the Middle East, probably around 1,700 - 1,500 B.C. The Semitic alphabet only had consonants, but no letters to represent vowels.

The Phoenicians used a form of this alphabet, and had trading contact with the early Greeks, who took the Phoenician alphabet, ca. 950-750 B.C., and adapted it to the Greek language.

To do this, the Greeks invented the letters Upsilon, Phi, Chi, Psi, and Omega, for sounds which were not represented in the Semitic alphabet, and added them to the end of the alphabet. They also assigned vowel sounds to some of the letters, thus giving us a true alphabet with a means of representing every sound of the language.

It appears that, in the early stages of the development of the Greek alphabet, there may have been several points of contact between the Phoenicians and the Greek tribes, and several variations of the alphabet.

In the Western version, the Hebrew letters qoph and vav were retained, becoming koppa and digamma in the Greek alphabet, and eventually "Q" and "F" in English. This was the alphabet which spread to the Greek colonies in Italy, then to the Etruscans, the Romans, and into Europe.

In the Eastern version, associated with Ionia (what is now Western Turkey), koppa and digamma were dropped.

Eventually this Ionic version was adopted by Athens, and became the Greek Alphabet as we now know it.

The Semitic origin of the Alphabet is shown by the names of the letters - they were initially pictographs, and their names were the names of actual objects. Alef was an ox (head), Beit a house (or tent), Gamal a camel, Daleth a (tent-)door.

The Greeks kept the names for the letters, even though they meant nothing in Greek.

They have come into English with very little modification.

Archaic Greek used several letters which dropped out of use by about the time of Homer (ca. 800 B.C.), and which are usually omitted from the alphabet as we now learn it.

Classical Greek

Attic was the dialect spoken at Athens, the center of Greek culture.

In 403 B.C. Athens made Attic the official dialect, and adopted the Ionic alphabet, giving the Greek alphabet as we now have it.

Many of the classical Greek plays, poetry, and treatises were written in the Attic dialect.

Athens was the home of Aristotle the philosopher.

Hellenistic Greek

Philip II of Macedon (382-336 B.C.) ruled the mountainous region to the north of mainland Greece.

He brought Aristotle to his court to teach his young son, the future Alexander the Great.

In 333 B.C., after the death of his father, Alexander gained control of the kingdom and set out on his campaign to conquer the world. Alexander made the Attic dialect the official language of his Empire.

The language continued to develop and change through the years, becoming simpler grammatically (the "dual", used when speaking of a pair of things, dropped out of use), and incorporating vocabulary from other dialects and languages of the Empire. This version of the language was referred to as $\kappa\omicron\iota\nu\eta$ - the koiné or "common" Greek.

The Books of the New Testament were written in $\kappa\omicron\iota\nu\eta$. As they were written mainly by and for people with a Jewish background they contain Hebrew words transliterated into Greek (e.g. Amen, Rabbi, Hallelujah), and some of the writers do not keep strictly to conventional grammar. For example, Matthew and John sometimes use a triple augment to make a past tense - the equivalent of saying "he wented".

The $\kappa\omicron\iota\nu\eta$ was predominant during the period 330 B.C. (Alexander) to A.D. 330 (Constantine)

During the Byzantine period, from A.D. 330 until the fall of Constantinople (Byzantium) to the Turks in 1,453, $\kappa\omicron\iota\nu\eta$ was used by the leaders of the Eastern Churches, with centers of scholarship at Alexandria and Constantinople.

The system of accents commonly used for modern printed versions of the New Testament came into general use in the 9th century A.D.

The cursive forms of the letters came into use in the 10th century A.D.

After the Fall of Constantinople to the Turks in 1453 Greek continued to be used in the Orthodox Church, but the language of the people became corrupted by the incorporation of Turkish words.

For nearly 400 years the mainland and islands of Greece were under the domination of the Turks.

With the War of Independence, 1821-1832, Greece (though not Ionia) managed to throw off Turkish rule, and began to reconstruct her classical heritage.

Attempts were made to "purify" the language, and an official "correct" version, called the katharevousa was imposed in the schools. Katharevousa is now used for government documents and literary work.

Demotic is the normal spoken and written everyday Greek. Demotic tends to have simpler grammar, and fewer case endings. The Dative case has almost dropped out of use - it is now more common to use the Genitive case with a preposition. Also, rough breathings are no longer aspirated. (The equivalent of "I hit him" becoming "I 'it 'im")

In 1982 Greek government decreed that, instead of a variety of accents, only the acute accent should be used in printed material, and the rough and smooth breathing signs were abolished. This means that many modern Greek fonts do not include the range of letters and accents required for work with ancient versions of the language. The Unicode Consortium for fonts has assigned two regions for Greek characters - "Basic Greek" (range 0374 - 03E1), which includes the unaccented letters, and "Greek Extended" (range 1F00 - 1FFF), which includes the accented characters.