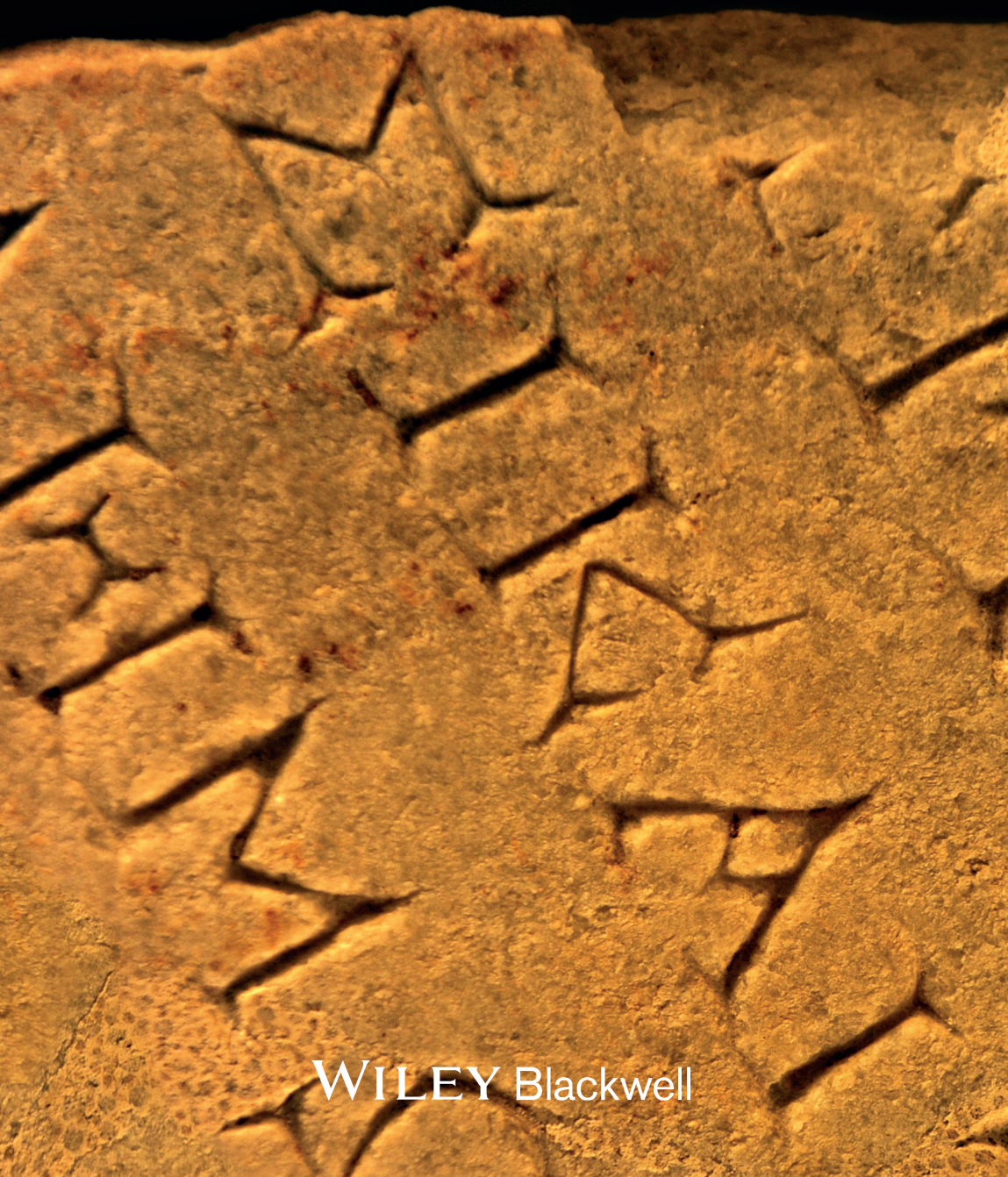
A BRIEF HISTORY OF Ancient Greek

STEPHEN COLVIN



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Contents

List of Figures

Preface and Acknowledgments

All languages are, of course, equally "old": what sets Greek apart from most other languages (apart from Chinese) is that (a) it has been recorded in alphabetic writing continuously for over 2800 years (and there is in addition a brief attestation in Mycenean syllabic script from around 600 years earlier); and (b) it has kept its identity as "Greek" for most of that period. Latin would have a written history of around 2300 years if one included the modern Romance languages in the calculation; but Latin changed both name and cultural identity when it became known as Italian, Spanish, French, etc. If the territories of the Hellenistic empire of Alexander the Great and his successors had remained Greek-speaking, as those of the Roman empire in the West mostly remained Latin-speaking (with the exception of North Africa, and, for a time, the Iberian peninsula), it is likely that a number of competing "Hellenic" vernaculars would have emerged, and there would thus be not one but several Greek languages, some or all of which might have been renamed by speakers anxious to carve out separate national identities. The modern Cypriot dialect is about as distinct from standard Greek as the Spanish of Madrid is from the Italian of Florence; but Cypriots are taught standard Greek in school, and it is used in most printed material, so that there is constant pressure in the direction of the standard. In situations where such political, ideological, and cultural pressure does not exist, a new "language" emerges.

In the classical tradition in the West it is customary to use the term "Greek" to mean ancient Greek, and to use the qualifier "modern Greek" where necessary. Greeks do exactly the reverse for obvious reasons, thus "Greek" and "ancient Greek". In this book the term Greek will refer to whichever period is under discussion in the chapter in question (modifiers are used if there is a risk of ambiguity). Greek words are transliterated and translated (longer passages are translated only): transliteration of ancient Greek gives vowel length, but not the ancient pitch accent; transliteration of modern Greek gives the modern stress accent. Transliteration of Greek names follows the inconsistent but widely adopted mixed system: familiar figures are given in their traditional Latin version (Aeschylus not Aiskhylos), and others are transliterated directly from the Greek (Alkaios).

Greek and Latin are the two "classical" languages of European culture; and since this is a book about language we can start off at once by looking at this word. They are classical because they are traditionally the languages learned in class: this is a late meaning, from French, which connects the adjective *classique* with the word *classe* "class." They are also classical because they belong to the highest rank, are of the first order: this is the meaning of the rare Latin word *classicus*, which is merely an adjective derived from the noun *classis*, "group, class" (originally "called-up group, levy," from the Indo-European root which also gave the Greek *kaleō*, "I call"). The Latin adjective denoted citizens of the top social class, and was not metaphorically extended to writers, let alone languages, until very late. It may seem odd to start a book on the history of Greek with a discussion of a Latin word: but it is an appropriate reminder that the two languages became quite intertwined (reflecting the interaction of the two civilizations), and penetrate the languages of Europe at every level and in every conceivable way.

For example, English has Greek words which were (a) borrowed into Germanic (*bishop* < OE *biscop* < ἐπίσκοπος [episkopos] "one who watches over"), (b) borrowed by Latin, and retained in the Romance languages, reaching English via Norman French (*treasure* < Fr. *trésor* < Lat. *thēsaurus* < θησαυρός [thēsauros] "store-room, treasury, treasure"), (c) borrowed by Latin, and borrowed from Latin into French and from French into English (*allegory* < Fr. *allégorie* < Lat. *allēgoria* < ἀλληγορία [allēgoria] "speaking differently"), (d) bor-

rowed by Latin, and then borrowed directly by English (*comma* < κόμμα [komma] "short clause"), and (e) borrowed directly from Greek, both existing words (*neuron*), and new compounds (*photograph* < *phot-* "light", *graph-* "write").

The vocabulary of modern Greek is similarly intricate: the largest part consists of native Greek words derived from the ancient lexicon, mostly via the Hellenistic *koine* and the modern dialects of the Peloponnese, on which the modern standard language is based. This inherited stock is intermixed with (a) ancient Greek words, either taken from modern European languages and re-naturalized (ψυχολόγος [psichológos] "psychologist"), or borrowed directly, (b) borrowings from Latin (κλασικός [klasikós] "classical"), and (c) borrowings from other languages such as French, Italian, and English, some of which are from Greek roots (σινεμά [sinemá] < Fr. *cinéma[tographe]*: Anc. Gk. κίνημα [kinēma] "movement").

This is in addition, of course, to a number of words borrowed from Turkish during the Ottoman period (1453–1821). Modern Greek καλέμι [kalémi] "nib, chisel" comes from Turkish *kalem*, itself a borrowing from Arabic *qalam* < Ancient Greek καλάμιον [kalamion], "reed, pen." This word also survives in its "native" form in Modern Greek καλάμι [kalámi] "reed, bullrush," extended to mean "(telescopic) fishing rod" (and the diminutive καλαμάκι [kalamáki] "drinking straw"). The history of Greek is a lesson that languages are cultural artefacts, and that a linguistic study is always part of a sociolinguistic study.

The word *Greek* and its relatives in the European languages derive from a Latin, not a Greek word. The Romans called the Greeks *Graeci*, from a tribe that they or some other Italic people encountered in the region of Epirus (opposite the heel of Italy, an obvious first point of contact). This is a perfectly common phenomenon in the naming of foreign peoples and places: the Germans call themselves "Deutsch" (a word simply meaning "of the people"), while the French call them after the Alemanni, a Germanic tribe (English *German* < Lat. *Germānus*, the origin of which is disputed).

The Greeks themselves called their country Ἑλλάς [Hellas] (modern Ελλάδα [Elláða]), and themselves Ἕλληνες [Hellēnes]. Ancient Greek did not have a word for "Greek" (the language): the Greeks referred either to "the Greek tongue" or used an adverb "in Greek," which originally meant simply "in the Greek way" (with a verb such

as "they speak"). The Modern Greek word for "Greek" is Ελληνικά [Elliniká], which is the neuter plural of the adjective "Greek" (and analogously for other languages): this is first attested in the first century AD, but is likely to have been in use in the spoken language before then. The word *Romaíika* "Romaic" was also used to denote Greek in the medieval and modern period (see below). The non-Greek peoples of Asia Minor and the Near East have traditionally used words deriving from the term "Ionia" for the Greeks: Old Persian *Yauna* and Hebrew *Yawan* to Turkish *Yunan*.

The interaction between Greek and Latin started to decline when the Roman empire was split into two halves, the Western empire (capital Rome) and the Eastern empire (capital Constantinople, the old Byzantium). This was done for administrative convenience by the Roman emperor Constantine I in AD 324, and the split was made permanent after the death of the emperor Theodosius in AD 395; after the collapse of the Western Empire in 476 the eastern emperor in Constantinople was the sole remaining Roman emperor: this is how the Greeks ended up calling themselves "Romans" and referring to Greek culture as "Roman-ness" (Ρωμιοσύνη [Romiosíni]).

The eastern empire continued until the fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks in 1453; it was always predominantly Greek-speaking, though the Latin language probably continued to be spoken by a small number of people in Constantinople until the eighth century. Knowledge of classical Greek among the elite in the West survived into the sixth century; after that there is a gap of around 800 years until the Italian renaissance, when Greek scholars from the East arrived and started to teach Greek to the Italian humanists, and manuscripts started to arrive in Italy (brought by travelers, merchants, or Greeks escaping to the West). In fact, there were always Greek speakers living in southern Italy – remnants of the Greek colonists who had arrived in the seventh and sixth centuries BC – and there is evidence that instruction in written Greek for this Greco-Italian community continued in local monasteries. They were, however, cut off from the "high culture" of Constantinople and the pagan texts which survived there.

The language has been the *lingua franca* of the eastern Mediterranean and the Near East, as far as India and Afghanistan; it was the official language of the eastern Roman empire, the greatest power in Europe in its day. Greek is now spoken by 13–14 million

people in Greece, Cyprus, and elsewhere: it is a small player by modern standards, but shares with Latin the distinction of having one of the most widely read literatures, of being one of the most widely learned languages, and of having permeated some of the most widely spoken languages in the world. In the second half of the twentieth century two Greek poets won the Nobel prize for literature: George Seferis (1963) and Odysseus Elytis (1979). It is unsurprising that Greeks of the modern era have felt the "anxiety of influence" as they endeavored to create a new spoken and literary medium out of a language so prestigious that it had once seemed a good idea to try to freeze it for ever in its ancient form. That Greek is a language with baggage no one could dispute; that the baggage has been successfully incorporated into a powerful and expressive living language will be evident to anyone who delves into the riches of modern Greek literature.

This book is designed to be accessible to readers who know little or no Greek. For this reason it aims to be a social history of the language rather than a purely linguistic history, which would be of interest to specialists only (there are other, excellent books for specialists). I have tried to give a sketch of the salient developments in the language, while concentrating on the relationship between the language and the social, literary, and political history of the speakers. Chapter 4, The Dark Ages, is more technical (or convoluted) than other chapters, for which I apologize. It seemed important to give a reasonably detailed sketch of the various views which have been put forward to explain this difficult period in the history of the language.

I am as usual indebted to the kindness of friends and colleagues for comments and criticism, and in particular to Alan Griffiths, George Syrimis, Nick Baechle, and Nick Gonis, who read large chunks of draft and provided polite corrections and criticism. I am grateful to Haze Humbert and the Classics team at Wiley-Blackwell for their patience with an overdue manuscript, and to the press reader for helpful comments and corrections. I have drawn freely on the published and unpublished work of numerous scholars, including colleagues and teachers. Errors and peculiarities which remain are entirely my responsibility. The book is dedicated to UCL students, who have put up with so much and argued so cheerfully.

Stephen Colvin
London, March 2013

1

The Indo-European Beginnings

The Indo-European Roots of Greek

Greek belongs to a family of related languages which are called "Indo-European" because at the time of the discovery of this family the known languages were distributed in Europe and the Indian subcontinent (Indo-European languages were subsequently discovered in Asia Minor and central Asia). The existence of such a family was suggested by William Jones, a British scholar and lawyer who was appointed to the Supreme Court at Calcutta in 1783. Jones was an expert linguist who had taught himself Arabic and Persian at Oxford in addition to Greek and Latin; he was also a radical politician, who supported the American revolution and bitterly attacked the slave trade. When he arrived in India as a judge he learned Sanskrit, the ancient classical language of India and the sacred language of Hinduism, in order to understand the principles of the native Hindu legal tradition (he wrote several books on Hindu and Moslem law in India). In 1786 he delivered a paper in Calcutta to the Asiatic Society of Calcutta, which included the following famous words:

> The Sanscrit language, whatever be its antiquity, is of a wonderful structure; more perfect than the Greek, more copious than the Latin, and

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> more exquisitely refined than either, yet bearing to both of them a stronger affinity, both in the roots of verbs and the forms of grammar, than could possibly have been produced by accident; so strong indeed, that no philologer could examine them all three, without believing them to have sprung from some common source, which, perhaps, no longer exists.

Throughout the nineteenth century work continued on the newly discovered family of languages, mostly in Germany, and this gave rise to the new science of linguistics in the West. In India there was a long and illustrious tradition of linguistics, going back to the late sixth century BC, when the famous grammarian Pāṇini composed his exhaustive grammar of the Sanskrit language (and the tradition of systematic thought about language in India was doubtless older than Pāṇini). There was no analogous "classic" in Greek or in Roman literature. Although in both the Greek and the Roman world there was interest in language, this was mostly related to its importance to philosophy and rhetoric in the early period; there was more technical work on language in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, but this was focused more on textual criticism and the explication of archaic and classical forms of the language for educational purposes. Europeans were still rather unsophisticated linguists in the eighteenth century. However, the kick-start given by the comparison of Greek, Latin, and Sanskrit, followed by study of Germanic and then Slavic, Celtic, and others, led to the development of what we now call historical linguistics: the study of the development of languages over time, and the reconstruction of an unattested "parent language" by systematically comparing the later languages which have survived in written form. This was the start of modern Western linguistics: at the end of the nineteenth century Ferdinand de Saussure, who had been trained in historical Indo-European linguistics, moved from considering the development of languages over time (historical linguistics) to the analysis of structural relations of languages at a given point in time (synchronic linguistics).

The Family Tree

Indo-European historical linguistics was, of course, a child of its time, and many of the linguistic models and metaphors which have become ingrained in our way of thinking about language reflect the

intellectual environment of the nineteenth century. Part of this environment was a fascination with biological taxonomy and the evolution of species: Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859) provoked an intellectual revolution, and it is no coincidence that much of the terminology of historical linguistics is reminiscent of biology. Languages are described as related, and form a family; one aims to reconstruct a parent language, from which the daughter languages evolve; relations between languages are set out in branching tree diagrams, like a family tree. This type of relationship between languages is called genetic. Both the model and terminology have the potential to be extremely misleading, since languages are not in fact organisms: an essential difference from the Darwinian model is that languages (or rather, their speakers) *do* pass on acquired changes. In addition to this, language is a sociocultural force which plays a central role in the self-definition of the speaker: these two facts have consequences for the way we think about language change and the model of the family tree.

It is true that most speakers learn a variety of the native language from parents (or older speakers in general); in this sense a language may be said to be "inherited." But the metaphor does not bear pressing: for in fact a speaker learns not just one native idiom, but a variety of idioms from a variety of different speakers. In addition to grandparents, parents, and siblings, most children are exposed to different varieties of the language from the community at large. A competent native speaker is capable of recognizing a wide range of varieties (and their social connotations), and has mastery of quite a few varieties which are employed in different social situations. This reflects that fact that the notion of a language is to some extent a social construct: a language typically consists of a variety of different idioms and dialects, and in many cases is not clearly distinguishable from neighboring languages. And even when neighboring languages are in fact distinct, they may still form part of the speaker's linguistic competence (monolingual cultures are exotic in the world, not the norm). Of course, in many cultures there is a prestigious standard language which many speakers think of as *the* language (and other varieties may be seen as inferior by comparison to this standard), but this perception is a cultural and political phenomenon, rather than a reflection of linguistic reality.

There are clear consequences for the genetic metaphor of language relationship and language change when we replace the idea of

a uniform language inherited from parents with that of a continuum of language varieties taken over from across the language community. First, it can be seen that the native speaker's competence has multiple sources, and is subject to continuing development, so one cannot contrast the validity or purity of a genetic relationship with "contamination" or "influence" from other sources. The second point is closely related to this: a language change occurs when a majority of speakers adopt for use in a majority of situations a variant which was previously used by a minority of speakers, or in a restricted social context, or both. The reasons that prompt speakers to adopt such changes are complex: sociolinguistic research indicates that these decisions – like decisions pertaining to clothing and personal appearance – are the result of the speaker's desire to shift his or her identity with regard to a particular section of the community. This type of behavior is easy to observe in adolescents, but research indicates that it persists in a subtler form in people of all ages. Speakers may be unconscious of many of the linguistic shifts they are making.

Since the growth of sociolinguistics enabled linguists to understand how languages change, it has become common to emphasize the importance of "areal" factors in describing linguistic change and language relationships, at the expense of the traditional "genetic" family tree. This shift in emphasis offers important insights into the historical development of Greek, even though we have seen that the distinction itself is slightly dubious. "Genetic" can be applied, metaphorically, to features of a language which were observable in an earlier stage of that language, while "areal" covers features which have entered the language from elsewhere.

The language groups which are now derived from the Indo-European parent language are: Albanian, Baltic, Anatolian, Armenian, Celtic, Germanic, Greek, Indic, Iranian, Italic, Slavic, Tocharian. Very poorly attested languages or groups include Illyrian, Phrygian, Thracian; it seems certain that many other languages have disappeared without trace. The relationships between these groups are not identical: for example, Indic and Iranian are so close that they are generally grouped together as "Indo-Iranian," and Celtic, Germanic, and Italic show overlapping similarities which are best explained by their contiguity in the northwestern area of the Indo-European world. It is generally agreed that the Anatolian group must have split off from the parent language earlier than the others, since

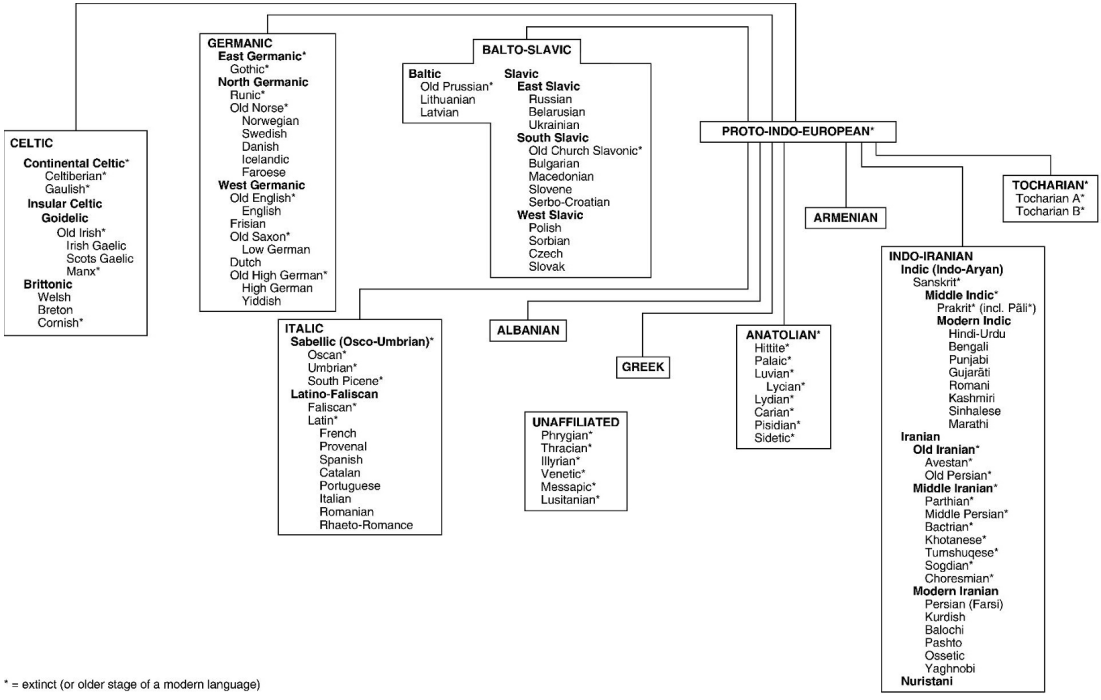


Figure 1.1 Family tree of the Indo-European languages. *Source*: Benjamin W. Fortson IV, *Indo-European Language and Culture: An Introduction*, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), Figure 1.1.

it has peculiarities which sets it apart from the rest of the "family" (such as lack of a separate feminine gender). There are a number of different types of reason for thinking that these languages are related.

Systematic correspondences in the phonology

This means that for Indo-European an inventory of phonemes (sounds) is reconstructed by comparing the daughter languages: we use words which appear to have a similar form and meaning across the I-E languages to build an inventory of phonemes for the parent language, and to postulate a number of sound-change rules for the daughter languages.

Example: the word for "foot" (accusative case):

Greek	Latin	Sanskrit	Gothic	Hittite
πόδα [poda]	*pedem*	*pādam*	*fotum*	*pada*

In this example Greek [p] corresponds to a [p] in Latin, Sanskrit, and Hittite, and to an [f] in Germanic (Gothic). On this basis a phoneme [p] is reconstructed for Indo-European (written **p*), and a sound change **p*>*f* is posited for Germanic. This is known as the comparative method, and is fundamental to historical linguistics. The comparative method does not like sound changes to have exceptions; if we state that an I-E **d*^{h} (aspirated *d*) becomes Greek *t*^{h} (aspirated *t*, written θ) in one word, then *the same change has to operate in all words.*

Abandoning this principle of regularity means that any random, haphazard, or frankly lunatic etymology can be constructed for any language, and this was regularly done from antiquity until the eighteenth century. Compare, for example, the etymologies of the Roman scholar Varro (5.20):

> *Apri* ab eo quod in locis asperis, nisi a Graecis quod hi *kaproi*. *Caprea* a similitudine quadam caprae. *Cervi*, quod magna cornua gerunt, *gervi*, *G* in *C* mutavit ut in multis. … *Volpes*, ut Aelius dicebat, quod volat pedibus.
>
> The word for wild boar [*aper*] comes from the fact that they have a rough [*asper*] habitat; unless it is from Greek, because the Greek word

> is *kapros*. The roe deer [*caprea*] is named from a certain resemblance to the she-goat [*capra*]. Stags [*cervus*] are so called because they bear [*gerunt*] large horns, the *G* of *gervus* has changed into a *C*, as often happens. … The fox [*volpēs*] is so called because, as Aelius said, it flies [*volat*] with its feet [*pēs*].

The comparative method does not allow such random deletion and substitution of sounds: when sounds change, they do so in accordance with clearly defined rules. The Latin word *cervus* "stag" is in fact derived from the I-E **ker-* "horn", which gives the Greek κέρας [keras] "horn" (as well as the English word *horn*).

However, a force that can undo regular sound change is analogy, which plays an important role in all aspects of human language. In English, for example, the verb *to dive* had an original "weak" past tense *dived*, but in some dialects this has changed to *dove* on the analogy of "strong" verbs such as *drive→drove*. In Greek an *s* inherited from Indo-European first became an *h* and finally disappeared between vowels, as in the nom. plur. of γένος [genos] "family": **genes-a* > **geneha* > *genea*. But in some cases the force of analogy led to the retention of an intervocalic *s*. For example, the future tense in Greek was created by adding an *-s-* to the verbal stem:

klep- "steal" →	future stem *kleps-*	*klepsō* "I shall steal"
lu- "release" →	future stem *lus-*	*lusō* "I shall release"

Normally we would expect the intervocalic *-s-* in *lusō* to disappear; but in this case the *-s-* was maintained or restored on the analogy of consonant-stem verbs like *klepsō*. It would have been inconvenient for the future marker to disappear: this would have given *luō*, identical in form to the present tense.

Fundamental similarities in the morphology

Indo-European clearly had a complex inflecting morphology, since all the daughter languages have preserved elements of this. An inflected language is one in which grammatical significance is carried

by changes in the form of the word, usually in the ending and often in the stem as well. A typical Indo-European word is built as follows:

root + suffix + grammatical ending

The root of a word carries the basic meaning: adding a suffix to it creates a stem to which the endings can be added. Thus, to take the verb "to release" that we considered above: *lusō* "I shall release" breaks down as:

lu- (root) + suffix *-s-*	→	*lus-* (future stem) + 1st person ending *-ō*	→	*lusō* "I shall release"

We could also add the "agent" suffix *-tēr* (related to Latin *-tor* as in *pastor*, Engl. *-er* as in *maker*) to the root *lu-* to make an agent noun: *lutēr* "one who releases, deliverer."

In languages such as modern English much of the meaning is carried instead by a fixed word order rather than by endings, and by "auxiliary" words such as *will*, *had*, etc. The older Indo-European languages preserve the complex morphology that we can see in Greek and Latin: of course, they have all changed and innovated in various ways, but on the whole the basic morphological building blocks (the morphemes) are the same, or very similar. For example:

(i) I-E verb "to be" (root $*h_1s$-): $*h_1s$-*mi* "I am," $*h_1s$-*ti* "s/he is"

Greek	Sanskrit	Latin	Hittite	Gothic
emi, *esti*	*asmi*, *asti*	*sum*, *est*	*esmi*, *eszi*	*im* (< **immi*), *ist*

(ii) I-E noun "sheep": nominative $*h_3ewis$ → accusative $*h_3ewim$

Greek	Sanskrit	Latin	Luwian (Anatolian)
o(w)is, *o(w)in*	*aviḥ*, *avim*	*ovis*, *ovem*	*hawis*, *hawin*

In example (i) Latin *sum* is the result of a complicated process of sound change and analogical pressure; apart from that, differences between the forms are the result of regular sound changes. In example (ii) all the differences between the forms are the result of regular sound changes: in Greek the phoneme [w] is found in many dialects, but not in classical (Attic) Greek.

A morphological oddity that is evident in all I-E languages is the alternation of the vowel *e* with the vowel *o*. This is not a sound change but a morphological marker of Indo-European: thus the Greek verb *pherō* "I carry" has an *e* in the stem *pher-*, but the related noun *phoros* "tribute" has an *o* (stem *phor-*): the same process in the same root can be seen in English *bear* versus *burden*. A third possibility is that the vowel disappears completely: compare the I-E root **ǵenh$_1$-* "procreate, family" in Greek *ǵenos* "race, family", *ǵonos* "offspring", and *ǵnēsios* (adj.) "belonging to the family, legitimate" (the root appears here as *ǵn-*, as in Latin *ǵnātus* "son"). This process, known as ablaut, is fossilized (no longer productive) in the daughter languages, and has suffered analogical interference, with the result that the *e/o* variation appears almost random (hence Latin *ped-* "foot" but Greek *pod-*).

A large number of lexical roots in common

It is clear that related languages are likely to have a large amount of vocabulary in common (although sound changes may have changed the form of the words to some extent): we have already come across some examples above. However, languages very often change the meanings of words, and drop words for no apparent reason (dropped words may be replaced by borrowings, or by other words which have been pressed into service, or which have had their meanings extended). Words which are more likely to resist replacement include the so-called "core" vocabulary: numerals, body parts, family members, and certain others. It is rare, however, for a lexical root to survive in all the major attested branches.

I-E	Greek	Sanskrit	Latin	Anatolian	Germanic
**māter-*	*māter-*	*mātar-*	*māter*	–	*mother*
**ph$_2$ter-*	*pater-*	*pitar-*	*pater*	–	*father*
**d^{h}ugh$_2$ter-*	*t^{h}ugater-*	*duhitar-*	–	*tuwatri-*[i]	*daughter*
**nas-*	–	*nas-*	*nāsus*	–	*nose*
**wed-r/n-*	*hudr-*	*udn-*	*unda*	*wadar*[ii]	*water*
**dwo*	*duo*	*dvā*	*duo*	*dā-*[ii]	*two*
**ǵ^{w}ous*	*bous*	*ǵauḥ*	*bōs*	*uwa-*[i]	*cow*

Notes: [i] Luwian (hieroglyphic) [ii] Hittite

Common vocabulary by itself is not a reliable indicator that two languages are related, since languages borrow words from each other freely: common vocabulary needs to exhibit regular phonological correspondences, and similar morphological patterns (this is important, as morphology seems to be one of the areas of language which is most resistant to transfer across language boundaries).

Similarities in syntax and certain widespread poetic features

Since the I-E languages inherited very similar morphological systems (complex inflected morphology), their syntactic patterning is on the whole similar, at least in the early attested languages. Word order is free rather than bound: there is a tendency for the main verb to come at the end of a clause or sentence, and enclitic words generally follow the first accented word in the sentence. All I-E languages have relative clauses introduced by a relativizing pronoun (as in Engl. "The man *who* came to dinner"): I-E **yos* gave the Greek relative "who" (Gk. *hos*, Skt. *yaḥ*), while other languages use the interrogative and indefinite stem **k*^{w}*i-*/**k*^{w}*o-* (> Lat. *quī*, Hitt. *kwis*). This stem survives in Greek *tis* (and in Latin *quis*) with interrogative and indefinite functions "who?"/ "a certain."

Language is also, of course, used for poetic and aesthetic purposes: in most of the major I-E languages there are traditions of epic poetry which show some interesting commonalities. Now, similarities between poetic or literary traditions do not prove a "genetic" relationship, since these things travel by processes of imitation and osmosis as well: there are also striking thematic similarities between Greek and non-Indo-European traditions of the ancient Near East (for example, the Mesopotamian *Epic of Gilgamesh*), which must be indicative of regional influence. Nevertheless, the I-E poetic traditions come from areas as far removed as Ireland and India, and often raise the possibility of tying thematic echoes to common linguistic forms. In 1853 the German scholar Adalbert Kuhn noticed that the Homeric phrase (*Iliad* 9.413) "undying fame", κλέος ἄφθιτον [kleos ap^{h}t^{h}iton], was exactly cognate with the Sanskrit phrase *śrávas … ákṣitam* (*Rig Veda* 1.9.7). This concept is an important part of the ideology of

the epic poetry (typically, it is the reward earned by the brave warrior), and the phrase may have roots in an ancient tradition of heroic praise poetry. Since then much work has been done on inherited features of language which go beyond pure phonology and morphology, and which give a sense of which "larger" aspects of the surviving languages may go back to an earlier period, from everyday turns of phrase to poetic themes and ideas. Similarities in poetic meter have also been studied in an effort to identify inherited metrical patterns.

Phonemic Inventory of Indo-European

The reconstructed phonemic inventory of Indo-European is set out below: some aspects of it are uncertain, but on the whole it represents a modern consensus:

Consonants

	voiceless stop	*voiced stop*	*voiced aspirate stop*	*fricative*
bilabial	*p*	*b*	b^h	
apical	*t*	*d*	d^h	*s*
velar[i]	*k*	$\hat{g}$	$\hat{g}^h$	
labiovelar	k^w	$\hat{g}^w$	$\hat{g}^{wh}$	

Resonants and semivowels[ii] (consonantal ~ vocalic)

nasals	*m* ~ $\underset{\circ}{m}$	*n* ~ $\underset{\circ}{n}$
liquids	*l* ~ $\underset{\circ}{l}$	*r* ~ $\underset{\circ}{r}$
semivowels	*w* ~ *u*	*y* ~ *i*

Laryngeals[iii]

h_1	h_2	h_3

Vowels and diphthongs

e	*o*	$\bar{e}$	$\bar{o}$	*ei*	*oi*	*eu*	*ou*
a		$\bar{a}$		*ai*		*au*	

Notes: [i] Velars. The reconstruction of I-E velars is complicated by apparent irregularities in their development in the daughter languages: for

example, **ǥ* gives *ǥ* in Greek and Latin, and usually gives *j* (as in Engl. *jam*) in Sanskrit:

**ǥenu/*ǥonu* "knee" > Gk. *ǥonu*, Lat. *ǥenu*; Skt. *jānu*

But in some cases a velar is continued as a velar in Sanskrit too:

**yugom* "yoke" > Gk. *zugon*, Lat. *iugum*; Skt. *yugam*

Since the comparative method (above) does not allow such irregularity, it is necessary to reconstruct two series of velars: a regular series **ǥ*, **k*, **ǥʰ* (for **yugom*), and an additional series, known as the palatal velars, **ǵ*, **ḱ*, **ǵʰ* (for **ǥonu*). However, since the reconstruction of two series is not necessary to explain data within Greek (or Latin) we shall ignore the distinction.

[ii] Resonants/semivowels. These phonemes can be either consonants or vowels, depending on where they appear in the word: [w] is simply [u] in consonantal function. Vocalic liquids and nasals may seem unfamiliar: but *n̥* and *l̥*, for example, appear in the final syllable of *button* and *bottle* in normal spoken English.

[iii] Laryngeals. The exact phonetic value of these sounds can only be guessed at. As consonants they disappeared from all branches of Indo-European except Anatolian, where at least one of them survived as an *h*. However, they left important tracks in the vowel system of Greek:

**h₁* leaves an *e*, and does not affect a neighboring *e* (neutral or E-laryngeal).
**h₂* leaves an *a*, and turns a neighboring *e* into an *a* (A-laryngeal).
**h₃* leaves an *o*, and turns a neighboring *e* into an *o* (O-laryngeal).

Greek is the only major I-E language in which the three vowel colors are maintained (Phrygian seems to differentiate them too, but the language is very poorly attested): all other languages merge them into a single vowel (Latin has *a*, Sanskrit has *i*). In the parent language they may have been varieties of laryngeal [ʔ] (glottal stop) and pharyngeal [ʕ] (Arabic *'ayin*). This category of sounds is hard to define in normal phonetic terms: although generally classed as consonants, the way they affect the air-flow is peculiar compared to

regular consonants (which stop or impede it in the oral cavity), and they often behave like semivowels. In Greek their behavior can be summarized as follows:

**h* between consonants became a vowel: **ph$_2$ter-* > Gk. *pater-* "father".
**h* after a vowel disappeared, but lengthened the vowel (and "colored" an *e*): **si-steh$_2$-mi* > Gk. *histāmi* "I set up, stand", **di-deh$_3$-mi* > Gk. *didōmi* "I give".
**h* before a vowel disappeared (and "colored" an *e*): **h$_2$enti* > Gk. *anti* "facing, in exchange for" (cf. Hittite *hants* "in front"), **h$_3$ewis* > Gk. *owis* "sheep" (cf. Luwian *hawis*).

Indo-European Language and People

If there was an Indo-European language there must, presumably, have been a group of people who spoke it. Since the late nineteenth century a huge amount of effort has been invested in trying to find out who these people were, where they lived, and how they lived. There are two principal sources of conjecture. Firstly, efforts have been made to identify Indo-European speakers with archaeological material. Secondly, reconstructed words have been used as evidence: this has been termed "linguistic palaeontology." In its simplest form the method supposes that if a common word can be reconstructed for an object, the speakers of the reconstructed language must have known that object. For example, since we can reconstruct words for wheel, plough, yoke, horse, and various type of stock animal (pigs, sheep, cattle), it seems likely that Indo-European speakers were familiar with these objects and animals: by extension, it has been concluded that, before dispersal, I-E speakers practiced agriculture. Various other conclusions of a similar nature have, with varying degrees of caution, been arrived at. A problem is that the meaning of a reconstructed word is often not secure: while "mother," "father," "sheep" are clear, many terms for plants and animals – which could give a clue both to the location of the homeland and to the speakers' way of life – have clearly changed meaning in the daughter languages: for example, the Greek word for oak, φηγός [p^{h}ēgos], is the exact cognate of Engl. *beech* (and Lat. *fāgus* "beech").

Much more dangerous is speculation about social structure, religion, or culture: a collection of asterisked and in varying degrees hypothetical words is simply insufficient evidence for anything but the most basic of observations. Furthermore, our reconstructed language is anachronistic in the sense that the comparative method is not good at sorting out different chronological or even dialectal layers in a language: we have a mish-mash of lexical items which we call a language, but which may have been in use at different periods and in different areas of the Indo-European area.

Language has often been thought of as an expression of the soul or psyche of a people: the Roman poet Ennius famously said that he had three souls because he spoke Latin, Oscan, and Greek. Perhaps for this reason there is always a strong temptation to connect a language not just with a group of speakers, but with a "race," a notoriously undefined term. In the nineteenth century there was much speculation about an Aryan race which spoke the newly discovered parent language. The word Aryan was in itself a perfectly harmless term, being the word that the Indo-Iranian peoples used of themselves (Skt. *ārya-* and Old Persian *ariya-*, cognate with the word *Iran*): it was conjectured (wrongly) that it was the common Indo-European self-designation. The term was then adopted by European and North American racial theorists who believed in a hierarchy of races (their own at the top, by odd coincidence), and passed into the paraphernalia of Nazi Germany, along with the equally innocent swastika sign (Skt. *svastika* "good luck charm").

The area which was inhabited by speakers of Indo-European is not known, though there have been many suggestions. There is as yet no consensus over the various efforts that have been made to identify Indo-European speakers with archaeological material. Scholarship since the 1950s has in general put the Indo-European homeland near the rough geographical center of the Indo-European speaking world, between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea (the Pontic-Caspian Steppe): this region has been argued for by archaeologists who identify the "Kurgan" culture of the steppe with Indo-European speakers (*kurgan* is the Russian word for a burial mound, borrowed from Turkic). All arguments over the geography are bound up with arguments over the date of the parent language, and the method of its dispersal. The traditional view has been that the last period of common Indo-European dates to somewhere in the early or

mid-fourth millennium BC. A different view, first propounded in the 1980s, saw the geographical starting point in Anatolia: this view has not been widely accepted, partly because proponents of an Anatolian origin push the date of the parent language back as far as the eighth millennium. However, the debate led to a useful discussion of the ways in which languages spread, which has implications for the whole of the Indo-European area: the older view of migration and conquest by Indo-European speakers (using superior warfare techniques such as horses) is now seen as simplistic: an interesting feature of the Anatolian theory was that it connected the spread of the language with the spread of farming and associated technology, rather than with large movements of people.[1]

Whatever the geographical origin of the Indo-European languages, a date in the fourth millennium still seems more attractive, partly because archaeologists are clear that the products associated with farming and wheeled vehicles (wheels, axles, yokes, wool, etc.) are not found earlier than the fourth millennium: since we can reconstruct Indo-European words for these items, if we were to push the dispersal of the language back to an earlier period we would have to assume that these words – which are found widely across the Indo-European languages – were innovated independently in each language group. In the case of the four farming terms mentioned above, for example, both English and Greek preserve the Indo-European words:

**k*^{w}*ek*^{w}*los*	κύκλος [*kuklos*]	*wheel* (< OE *hweowol*)
**aks-*	ἄξων [*aksōn*]	*axle*
**yugom*	ζυγόν [*zugon*]	*yoke*
**wl̥h*$_2$*n-*	λῆνος [*lēnos*]	*wool* (< OE *wull* < Proto-Germanic **wulno-*)

From Indo-European to Greek

Sometime between the last period of Indo-European (perhaps around the mid-fourth millennium BC) and our earliest surviving Mycenaean texts of around 1400 BC, speakers of one or more dialects of Indo-European arrived in the south Balkan peninsula. Since this region was later known (more or less) as Greece, the new arrivals

are sometimes known as "proto-Greeks" and their language as "proto-Greek." These terms need to be used with some caution: the people who later called themselves Greek were a mixture of the newcomers and the people they found already living in the region, and their language was similarly the result of development of (probably) various closely related Indo-European dialects in interaction on Greek soil.

It is hard to date the arrival of these people, because there is no indisputable evidence from archaeology of a dramatic break in the culture of mainland Greece. This evidence might take the form of both widespread destruction of earlier settlements, and signs of the arrival of a new material culture: for example, new styles of pottery, new architectural forms, or a different style of burial. Furthermore, archaeologists are divided over whether the arrival of a new group of people (let alone a new language) is always reflected by changes in the archaeological remains, and vice versa (this has been dubbed the "pots = people" debate). Such evidence as there is has often been taken to point to a date at the end of the early Bronze Age, around 2100–1900 BC (the period known to archaeologists as Early Helladic III). This is perfectly plausible from a linguistic perspective.

Note

1 The Kurgan hypothesis was proposed by Marija Gimbutas (1931–1994), the Anatolian farming hypothesis by Colin Renfrew (1937–). Conveniently summarized with bibliography in Mallory (1989: chapter six). Linguistic arguments for the later date in Garrett (2006).

2

An Aegean Co-Production

Although we have seen that Greek is an Indo-European language, we also noted in the previous chapter the limitations of a purely genetic account of a language using the family tree model. The history of a language is much more complex: traditionally this complexity has been handled by admitting "areal" influence on top of the basic "inherited" elements. A more dynamic model for the disparate layers and ingredients that make up a language is one in which languages are seen as "co-productions": and not only languages, but also the various dialects that make up a language.[1] Greek developed in Greece out of an Indo-European dialect (or a number of closely related dialects): furthermore, if the assumption is correct that around 1500 years passed between the break-up of the Indo-European language community and the arrival of these dialects into Greece, they are likely to have been in interaction with other languages along the route. These languages are in general unknowable, of course: but it seems likely that, in addition to contact with unrelated languages, many of the Indo-European dialects which later emerged as distinct languages were in contact with each other for some time after the dispersal. For example, Greek, Indo-Iranian, and Armenian share certain similarities, such as the addition of the "augment" in the past tense: this is an element *e-* that was added

A Brief History of Ancient Greek, First Edition. Stephen Colvin.

to the beginning of the verbal stem as a marker of the past: e.g., "I bore" from the I-E root **b*^{h}*er-* "to bear" is:

Gk. *e-p*^{h}*er-on* Skt. *a-b*^{h}*ar-am* Arm. *e-ber*

There are also a number of vocabulary items unique to these three groups, such as the word for "old man":

Gk. *geront-* Skt. *jarant-* Arm. *cer*

It has been suggested that some of the similarities between Greek, Indo-Iranian, and Armenian can be accounted for by supposing that at an early stage speakers of these languages had a period of contact (compare the similarities between the Celtic, Germanic, and Italic languages in the northwestern area). This is not unlikely, though the fact that Armenian is not attested until the fifth century AD makes the comparative data from that language rather uncertain.

We have few remains of the other Indo-European languages of the southern Balkans, but the small pieces of information that survive have always suggested an intriguing closeness to Greek (the poorly attested Phrygian language is sometimes added to the Greek/Armenian/Indo-Iranian trio above). This could well be due to a period of contact, and in some cases perhaps an ongoing relationship until a relatively late period: we shall consider this further below.

The Aegean Context

Greek represents the development of an Indo-European idiom in interaction with the other languages of the Aegean area: some of these may also have had Indo-European roots, and others were probably non-Indo-European. Almost all languages contain words which are not "native" but have been borrowed from a number of other languages, related or unrelated. Greek (like all ancient I-E languages) contains a very large proportion of non-native words: the exact figure is fiddly to calculate, and depends on whether words or roots are counted, but is well over 50%. Loanwords from other

languages can be identified by lack of an I-E etymology, or because their phonology or their shape is unusual. For example, Greek lost initial **s-* in the "prehistoric" period, that is, before the first written texts from the Mycenean period. However, there are many attested words in historical Greek which begin with this sound: in some cases the *s-* comes from a later sound change (for example, from **tw-* and **ky-*), but in most cases words which begin with this sound are borrowings from neighboring languages: thus *sēsamon* "sesame" (from a Semitic language such as Phoenician, already in Mycenean) and *sandalon* "sandal" (probably from Persian).

There are a number of ways that language can assimilate foreign words:

1. A population group moving into a new area will very often assimilate words from the existing group(s) in that area. Linguists call this "substrate" influence, from Latin *substratum* "the layer below": the implication is that the new group (invaders) becomes the dominant group, while the older inhabitants are marginalized or absorbed. In this situation the substrate language, if it does not become extinct, is likely to be heavily influenced by the language of the dominant incomers. The vocabulary of English was heavily influenced by Norman French in this way.
2. Languages absorb elements from neighboring languages, through normal processes of contact, trade, cultural exchange, etc.
3. A language may take over terms from a "culture language," a language of high prestige which is associated with literature, religious texts, or a dominant culture. This type of language may no longer be a living language (Latin, Sanskrit, classical Arabic); in some cases it may be an older form of the same language.
4. A language may absorb words from a *koine* or lingua franca, a language which is used as a language of communication over a relatively wide area by a number of disparate groups. Examples of this would be Swahili in eastern and central Africa, or English in the Indian subcontinent; but there may also be overlap with (3), as in the case of the use of Latin in medieval Europe, or classical Arabic in the Moslem world.

In the case of prehistoric Greek the likeliest sources of influence are (1) substrate languages and (2) language contact. A complicating

factor is that languages often borrow from closely related languages, or dialects of the same language. In English, for example, the word *shirt* and *skirt* both derive from the same Germanic word: *shirt* comes from Old English *scyrte*, with the normal change *sc-* [sk] > *sh-* [ʃ], while *skirt* is a word from northern England which was influenced by the Scandinavian invasions in the ninth century AD (cf. Danish *skjorte*). The English word *cow* comes from the I-E **ǵʷous*; English also has the term *beef* from the same I-E root, borrowed from French as a culture term connected with cookery (cf. *pig/pork*, *deer/venison*, etc.). The French word *boeuf* is the regular development of Latin *bov-*; the English adjective *bovine* is formed directly on the same Latin stem. In four or five thousand years linguists looking at this data would be able to guess that the coexistence of *skirt* and *shirt* was the result of relatively recent dialectal differentiation, and if they had access to additional data – such as some place-names of England – might be able to connect them to the appropriate regions and surmise Scandinavian influence. In the case of *cow* and *beef* and *bovine* they would need to have reconstructed a picture of Indo-European: in this case they would be able to see that the words belong to the same I-E root, and would have to guess why the English words represent three different strands of the parent language. If they had a lot of similar data from English their guesses might come quite close to the truth. By looking at non-native vocabulary in Greek, and at place-names, linguists have tried to isolate strands of influence on Greek and to draw conclusions about Greek prehistory, with mixed results.

A group of Indo-European-speaking people arriving in Greece sometime after 2100 BC will have found at least parts of the region already inhabited: this is clear from archaeology. It is reasonable to suppose that they took over a number of words from the inhabitants; the words they are likely to have borrowed are words for local plants and animals, words for the products of technology or culture which they did not possess, and place-names.

We do not know how many languages they encountered: there may have been a number of different languages, or dialects of the same language. Evidence for non-Greek languages in the Bronze Age Aegean comes from two sources: the views and traditions of the Greeks on the one hand, and modern discoveries and research on the other. The most important Greek traditions about non-Greek

peoples and languages concern a people called the Pelasgians, the sea empire of king Minos of Crete, and the Phoenicians.

The Pelasgians

The term Pelasgian is used rather vaguely in ancient authors to denote an earlier people who had inhabited Greece in some sense before the Greeks: in what precise sense is not clearly articulated. Although there was a tradition among the Greeks that the Doric-speaking part of the population had entered Greece proper after the Trojan war (i.e., after the end of the heroic period), the idea that the Greeks as a whole had entered Greece from elsewhere did not occur to the ancients: and indeed, this is quite right, since the Indo-European speakers who arrived in the region over a millennium earlier were not Greeks, but just one ingredient in the mixture out of which Greek ethnic identity later emerged. Greek writers refer to the Pelasgians as early inhabitants of the Aegean world, but seem slightly puzzled about how exactly to connect them with the Greeks. Areas that were associated with Pelasgians included Attica, the Argolid, Arcadia, Thessaly, and Lemnos. For Herodotus, evidence pointed to the conclusion that "the Pelasgians used to speak a foreign [*barbaros*] language," and he was then obliged to conclude that "the Attic race, being Pelasgian, must have changed its language too at the time when it became part of the Hellenes" (1.57). He does not attempt to integrate this with a version he mentions later on (6.137), namely that the Athenians expelled the Pelasgians after employing them to build the walls around the Acropolis (the Pelasgians fled to Lemnos).

It is clear that in their use of the term Pelasgian the Greeks were trying to capture a number of different strands of tradition and conjecture, not all of which can be expected to cohere. They were aware that a significant civilization had earlier existed in Greek territories: this was evident from the remains of the Mycenean world, such as the "Cyclopean" masonry of ancient sites, from tombs and burial mounds, and from artefacts that turned up from time to time (some of which may have come from Mycenean tombs). The peoples responsible for these earlier remains were covered by the term Pelasgian, which may explain why the Argolid was associated with

them (the Argolid was the traditional home of Agamemnon, leader of the Greek expedition to Troy, and impressive remains of Mycenae were visible in the region). In general the areas associated with the heroic or early Greek world seem to have attracted a Pelasgian pedigree, or at least a connection; hence perhaps the Pelasgian association with Thessaly and environs, which are curiously prominent in Homeric epic, and where the terms Hellas and Hellene seem to have originated (see Chapter 6).

The Pelasgian connection with Athens can be explained by the Athenians' view that they were "autochthonous" (aboriginal, not later arrivals). This Athenian narrative is connected with the tradition that Attica was one of the few regions of mainland Greece which was able to resist the so-called Dorian invasions that followed the Trojan war. If the Athenians were autochthonous, it followed that they must be descended from Pelasgians (the Mycenean wall around the Acropolis was known as the "Pelasgic" wall); however, this Pelasgian ancestry did not make them any less Greek than Dorian Greeks. Herodotus (1.56) records that Croesus, king of Lydia, consulted the Delphic oracle and was told that if he attacked Persia he would destroy a mighty empire. On hearing this, and assuming that the empire in question was that of the Persians, he started to make enquiries in preparation for war:

> After this he was careful to enquire which of the Greeks were the most powerful, that he might win them over as friends. And on enquiry he found out that the Lacaedemonians were foremost among the Dorian race, and the Athenians were foremost among the Ionian race. For it was these two races which were pre-eminent, the latter being a Pelasgian people originally, and the former a Hellenic people. The Pelasgian people has never yet migrated from its home, while the other has wandered far and wide …

Since ancient authors reasoned that at an earlier date some of the ancestors of the Greeks had spoken a non-Greek language, it is easy to see how linguistic minorities within the Greek world could also be explained by invoking the Pelasgians. The island of Lemnos was traditionally associated with them: and indeed, inscriptions from that island have been found written in a non-Greek language which is clearly related to Etruscan. The fact that the Greeks also associated

Etruria (modern Tuscany) with the Pelasgians indicates that there was some awareness in the ancient world of a linguistic/ethnic connection between the two regions. Thucydides says that the inhabitants of the Athos peninsula, whom he describes as "bilingual barbarians," were "mostly Pelasgian, descended from the Etruscans who formerly inhabited Lemnos and Athens" (4.109).

Given the more or less mythical status of the Pelasgians,[2] there are no grounds for any serious attempt to connect items of vocabulary in Greek, or place-names, with a hypothetical pre-Greek Pelasgian language (though this has been attempted); there is no analogy with modern English, for example, in which a cohesive stratum of Germanic words exists which can be derived by regular sound laws from Indo-European. It would not be helpful, either, to use Pelasgian as a term of convenience for the language spoken in Greece before Greek, in the way that "Minoan" is used for the pre-Greek language of Crete: this would imply that there was only one such language, and we do not have the evidence to support this assumption. There may have been more than one language spoken in Crete, too, but the term Minoan is tied specifically to the language of the Linear A texts: there is no analog in mainland Greece.

The Minoans

The Greeks had a tradition that at some distant stage in the past (the heroic era) the Aegean had been subject to a sea empire controlled by Minos, the king of Crete.[3] The Athenians were obliged to send him every year a number of youths and maidens to feed the Minotaur, which he kept in an enclosure called the labyrinth. It was Theseus, the culture hero of Athens, who (with the help of Minos' daughter Ariadne) killed the Minotaur and freed the Athenians from this imposition. Herodotus reports a view that Greeks arrived in Crete only after the time of Minos, but before the Trojan war; and that a second wave of Greeks (presumably Doric-speaking) arrived in Crete after the Trojan war, the Cretans of his day being the result of the mixture of these waves with the earlier inhabitants.[4] However, as with the Pelasgians, there was a vague feeling that these earlier inhabitants of the Aegean had at least a close connection with the

Greeks: Minos ends up as a judge of the dead at *Odyssey* 11.568, and in the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* (393) Apollo chooses "Cretans from Minoan Knossos" (who are sailing to Pylos to trade) to be his temple servants at Delphi. This is one of the very few instances of the word "Minoan" in Greek, an adjective built from the name Minos.

The archaeologist Arthur Evans chose the term Minoan for the pre-Mycenean civilization of Bronze Age Crete (we do not know what they called themselves, any more than we know what the Mycenean Greeks called themselves). This civilization left written records in a script dubbed Linear A that is not yet deciphered, though clearly related to the later Linear B script used for writing Greek. The Mycenean Greeks took over much of Crete during the fifteenth century BC: this is likely to have been a political and military elite, who took over palatial centers such as Knossos and set the scribes to keeping records in Mycenean Greek rather than in the language of the earlier Minoan elite. A large part of the population of the island must have remained unchanged, however; and since Minoan culture was materially superior to anything that existed in mainland Greece, it would be surprising if a number of words had not been absorbed into Greek at this period. Some may have been restricted to the Greek spoken locally on Crete, others may have passed into the dialects of the mainland. And indeed, since there is evidence for widespread Minoan influence on the Myceneans from the sixteenth century, the lexical borrowings are likely to have started before the takeover of Crete. Two types of argument have given rise to suggested Minoan loanwords into Greek.

(1) In addition to syllabic signs (which represent sounds), both Linear A and Linear B have a small range of ideograms, signs which stand for a whole word (items such as oxen, pigs, wheat, barley, figs, pots and vessels, implements, weapons, metals). These are used in lists of products to make it clear what exactly is being counted or recorded. Some of these ideograms seem to have been built out of the phonetic signs, presumably on an acrophonic principle (the first syllable of the item in question). So, for example, the ideogram for *sāsamon* "sesame" is the syllabic sign *sa* (sign *31). Analysis of the ideograms has given rise to a small number of plausible guesses at Minoan words in Greek.

The ideogram for fig is identical to the syllabic sign *ni* (sign *30, Linear A sign *60): an ancient author (Athenaeus) has preserved the

dialect word for "fig" on Crete, which was νικύλεον [nikuleon]. This is very likely a Hellenized form of the Minoan word; the sign itself looks very like a tree.

The ideogram for wheat (sign *120, Linear A sign *L42) looks like a development of the syllabic sign *si* (sign *41), perhaps combined with the syllabic sign *to* (sign *05): the Greek word for "wheat" is σῖτος [sītos], which must be a borrowing since it lacks an I-E etymology and has an initial *s-* (cf. "The Family Tree" section in Chapter 1 regarding Greek loss of I-E *s*).

The ideogram for wool (sign *145, Linear A sign *Lc46) looks like a modified form of the syllabic sign *ma* (sign *80), combined with the syllabic sign *ru* (sign *26). In Linear B, syllables starting in *r-* and *l-* have to share the same syllabic signs (the transcription *ra re ri ro ru* is purely conventional: the signs represent both *ra* and *la*, etc.). A Linear A sequence *ma-ru* would therefore map easily on to the Greek word μαλλός [mallos], "fleece."

(2) A more speculative approach combines information from archaeology. The argument runs that if it can be shown that Greece in the Bronze Age lacked certain implements or technologies until contact with Minoan civilization, it is possible that Greek terms connected with such fields (those which lack an I-E etymology or are for other reasons clearly loanwords) were taken over from the Minoan language. For example, a clear borrowing into Greek is the word for a bath-tub, ἀσάμινθος [asamint^{h}os]. The archaeologist Colin Renfrew, noting that such objects are not found in Greece until the late Bronze Age, but are attested very much earlier in Minoan Crete, has argued: "There can be little doubt about the Minoan origin of this rather luxurious feature of the Mycenaean palace, and the likely Minoan origin of the word is perhaps enhanced by its occurrence on the Linear B sealing at Knossos." It shares a suffix *nthos* with the archetypally Cretan word *labyrinthos* "labyrinth," and both of these words are attested in Mycenean Greek from Knossos.[5] This might be taken to be a Minoan suffix, and hence as support for this hypothesis, but it is also found in a number of mainland Greek place-names such as *Korinthos* "Corinth," and is rare in Crete: a mountain called Berekynthos is perhaps the only secure example.

The suffix *-nthos* (preceded by *a*, *i*, or *u*) occurs in a wide range of Greek nouns and place-names that are generally assumed to be

loans from a non-Greek or pre-Greek language: ἐρέβινθος [erebint^{h}os] "chick pea," ὄλυνθος [olunt^{h}os] "wild fig," τέρμινθος [termint^{h}os] "terebinth tree" (*pistacia terebinthus*, Mod. Gk. τσικουδιά [tsikouðyá]). It is hard to see why these should have been borrowed from Crete: names of Mediterranean plants such as the terebinth tree are generally thought to have been taken over from local languages by the incoming Indo-European speakers, to whom they were unfamiliar. It would be a big step to assume on this evidence that mainland Greece was also inhabited by Minoan speakers (and there is no archaeological evidence to suggest a connection). Another possibility is what Renfrew and others have called the "Versailles effect" whereby elements of an important cultural center radiate into surrounding regions: these can include styles and customs, but also linguistic elements. The notion that the Minoans carried aspects of their culture into the Aegean during their period of ascendancy in the Bronze Age is attractive, but it has to be questioned whether this would apply to plant names such as the humble chick pea, or to place-names.

The Phoenicians

The Greeks had a long history of interaction with the Phoenicians, a dynamic trading people based along the coast of the southeastern Mediterranean (modern Syria and Lebanon), with important cities at Byblos, Sidon, and Tyre. After the eastern Mediterranean collapse of the twelfth century BC (a sequence of events which saw the disappearance of Mycenean civilization and the Hittite empire) the Phoenicians rose to a dominant position in the Mediterranean. Phoenician colonies and trading posts were established in Cyprus, North Africa, Sicily, Spain, and Sardinia; their famous colony Carthage was founded in the ninth century, when Phoenicians were at the height of their wealth and maritime power.

Greek literature bears witness to a memory of Phoenician importance and influence during the so-called Greek "Dark Ages" following the Mycenean collapse; indeed, contact and trade with the Phoenicians must have played a part in the Greek recovery in the period following the tenth century. On the linguistic side, there are

a number of Semitic borrowings into the Greek language, which almost certainly came from or via Phoenician. A handful are attested already in the Mycenean tablets: κύμινον [kumīnon] "cumin," χρυσός [k^hrūsos] "gold," χιτών [k^hitōn] "tunic, chiton." Later loanwords which became common include δέλτος [deltos] "writing tablet," κάδος [kados] "wine jar," κρόκος [krokos] "saffron," κιννάμωμον [kinnamōmon] "cinnamon," μνᾶ [mnā] "mina" (a Greek currency unit), μύρον [muron] "myrrh." From the sixth century BC, however, Semitic loanwords are more likely to have come into Greek via Akkadian, the lingua franca of the Near East which was used as the language of administration of the Persian empire. The most significant Greek borrowing from the Phoenicians was the alphabet, to which we shall return in Chapter 5.

A far greater degree of influence on Greece and on Greek from the ancient Near East and Egypt was claimed in a series of sensational books by Martin Bernal. In *Black Athena* (1987) he wrote a history of Western classical scholarship, which, he argued, was systematically racist (specifically, anti-African and anti-Semitic) and had suppressed or ignored evidence for cultural, artistic, and linguistic influence on Greece from the Semitic and African cultures of the ancient Mediterranean world. More controversially, he presented a series of arguments in which he tried to demonstrate that much of Greek culture was derived from Afroasiatic (in particular Phoenician and Egyptian) cultures, the result of an occupation of Greece by these peoples in the early to middle Bronze Age.

Much of Bernal's analysis of Western historiography is accepted: there is no doubt that classicists, especially in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, were hostile to the idea of Semitic and Egyptian influence on Greece, even though in many areas the contribution of these civilizations (for example, in art and architecture) was striking. There are certainly examples of this bias from the history of scholarship on the Greek language; for instance, it has often been stated that it was owing to Greek brilliance (and, ergo, Indo-European brilliance – with a conflation of language and race) that the first "true" alphabet was invented, in the Greek adaptation of the Phoenician script. This is because the Phoenician alphabet, like Arabic and Hebrew script, does not regularly indicate vowels: anyone who has learned a Semitic language will understand the reasons for this (the vowels are often morphologically predictable in a way that is alien to Indo-European).

The Greeks sensibly added the extra vowels that are necessary for representing Greek (see Chapter 5): but to claim that an alphabet suited to writing European languages marked a dramatic breakthrough does indeed have its roots in a Eurocentric and (arguably) anti-Semitic world view. In this sense Bernal was in the mainstream of postmodern critical theory, which has challenged the view that "objective" findings of the Western scientific method can be divorced from the politics and ideologies of their era.

His positive attempts to reconstruct an Egyptian and Phoenician history for Greece, however, met with widespread criticism from experts in the field. His claim, for example, that Egyptians and Phoenicians colonized Greece in the sixteenth century BC is flatly denied by archaeologists (for Bernal the Pelasgians were "indigenous Indo-European-speaking peoples colonized and to some extent culturally assimilated by Egypto-Phoenician invasions"). On the linguistic side his claim that the introduction of the alphabet goes back to the same period suffers from the fact that alphabetic writing is simply not attested in Greece before the ninth century at the earliest. More seriously, he proposed a large number of Semitic and Egyptian etymologies for Greek words and Greek place-names which are at best random, and at worst unscientific in that they ignore the comparative method (see Chapter 1) as convenient. Many Greek place-names are given random etymologies (e.g., Larisa in Thessaly, from an Egyptian toponym *R-ꜣḥt* "Entry into the Fertile Lands"), and Greek words too: for example, he says that "there is no reason to doubt" that χήρα [k^{h}ērā] "widow" comes from the Egyptian *ḫꜣrt* [ç^{ʸ}ʔrt] "widow," though the normal I-E etymology of the word derives it from a very common root **ǵ^{ʰ}eh$_{1}$-* "be deprived, be empty." There is no need to repeat here the arguments of modern Indo-Europeanists who have joined battle to rebut, and in some cases to ridicule, Bernal's methodology and conclusions.[6] In any case, the substantive claims for the history of Greek boil down to little more than widespread borrowing of words and place-names, which, even if it were true, would not have huge linguistic implications. It is worth observing that if there had been such a fundamental mixing of populations the effect on Greek would have been far more profound than mere lexical borrowing: from such a dramatic situation of language contact (compare Norman French and Old English) one would expect significant repercussions on the phonology and

morphology of Greek, perhaps even a creolization. The conservative phonology and morphology of classical Greek cannot be reconciled with this scenario.

Modern Hypotheses

Modern work on the sources on non-Greek elements in the language has concentrated on two main areas: words in Greek which look like loanwords and which appear in other Mediterranean languages, and Greek words and place-names which end in *-nthos* and *-ssos* (or *-ssa*).

(1) Words which appear to be borrowings into Greek can be divided into a number of categories. A first category is sometimes called common Aegean, or common Mediterranean: typically these words have sufficient similarity with Latin to make it look like they might come from a common source, without the similarities being systematic. They include:

ἄπιον [apion] "pear": Lat. *pirum*
δάφνη [dap^{h}nē] "laurel, bay": Lat. *laurus* (cf. Greek dialect forms *laphnē*, *daukhnā*)
μίνθη [mint^{h}ē] "mint": Lat. *menta*
μόλυβδος [molubdos] "lead": Lat. *plumbum* (cf. Greek dialect forms *molibos*, *bolimos*)
σῦκον [sūkon] "fig": Lat. *fīcus*

In other cases in this category the word seems to be found in a number of eastern Mediterranean languages (Anatolian, Iranian, Semitic, Egyptian):

οἶνος [oinos]: Lat. *vīnum* (Hittite *wiyana*, Arabic *wain*: cf. Greek dialect *woinos*)
λείριον [leirion] "lily": Lat. *līlium* (Hittite *alel* "flower," Coptic *hlēli*)
ῥόδον [rodon] "rose": Lat. *rosa* (Iranian **wṛ̊d-*, cf. Greek dialect *brodon* < **wrodon*)

In the "other cases" above the words seem to be clear examples of areal diffusion: in whichever language they arose, they spread across a wide area and morphed unpredictably as they moved. The notion that

the words in the first category derive from some pan-Mediterranean substrate is absurd, recalling an era when the areal diffusion of language was barely recognized. These words followed the items they denote, and were transmitted exactly like the words in the second group: the same process that accounts for the various European words for coffee derived from Turkish *kahve*, itself borrowed from Arabic *qahwa* in the Levantine dialect form *qahwe*.

A second general category has no obvious relatives in Latin or in eastern languages: for example, musical instruments with the suffix *-inx*:

σάλπιγξ [salpinx] "trumpet"
σῦριγξ [sūrinx] "pipes, pan-pipes"
φόρμιγξ [p^{h}orminx] "lyre"

The suffix, whatever its origin, made itself at home in Greek: in addition to a number of words without a clear etymology there are also words built on an easily identifiable stem:

στροφάλιγξ [strop^{h}alinx] "whirl, eddy" (*streph-* "turn")
φῦσιγξ [p^{h}ūsinx] "blister; clove of garlic" (*phus-* "blow, swell"; cf. Latin *pustula* "pustule")

This suffix was perhaps at home in spoken or informal registers of the language.

(2) Words in *-nthos* and in *-ssos*. We saw above that these words in *-nthos* have been associated with the Minoans by some modern scholars. In spite of the frequent claim that these words denote items of culture and technology, there are only two clear examples: ἀσάμινθος [asamint^{h}os] "bath," and πλίνθος [plint^{h}os] "brick." Most are found in words for plants (a few animals), and in place-names:

ἄψινθος [apsint^{h}os] "wormwood, absinthe"
κολοκύνθη [kolokunt^{h}ē] "squash"
μίνθη [mint^{h}ē] "mint"
σμίνθος [smint^{h}os] "mouse"
ὑάκινθος [huakint^{h}os] "bluebell, hyacinth"

There are many place-names in *-nthos* and *-ssos* (or *-ssa*) in Greece. The suffix *-ssos* appears as *-ttos* in Attica (Hymettos, Lykabettos, etc.).

It is normal for Attic dialect to have *tt* where the other dialects have *ss*, though it is worth noting that in the other regions which share this dialect feature – Crete and Boeotia – the place-names have *ss* (e.g., Mykalessos, Teumessos in Boeotia; Tylissos, Knossos in Crete).

It has often been speculated that there is a connection between the *-nthos* and *-ssos* suffixes of Greece and the many place-names in *-nda* and *-ssos* (or *-ssa*) in Anatolia: Ephesos, Telmessos, Labraunda, Oinoanda, etc. Scholars have suggested that the Greek words and place-names are borrowings from Anatolian languages such as Hittite and Luwian, or from the Minoan language, or from pre-Greek substrate languages. Some scholars have, indeed, equated these three. It has been suggested that the language of Minoan Linear A is Luwian, or that related Anatolian dialects were spoken across the Aegean area before Greek. Leonard Palmer argued that a variety of Luwian was spoken in Greece before Greek; he reasoned that the name Parnassos derives from the Anatolian *parna-* "house, temple" and an Anatolian suffix *-ssa* (a place-name *Parnassa* is indeed attested in Hittite).[7] None of these theories is impossible, but they remain speculative owing to lack of hard evidence. There is some consensus, however, in the light of recent much greater understanding of the Anatolian languages, that the number of Anatolian words that ended up in Greek has probably been underestimated.

Notes

1 Co-productions: Brixhe (2006: 22) quoting Calvet (1999: 15, 243).
2 See Sourvinou-Inwood (2003) on the Pelasgians.
3 Thucydides 1.4.
4 Herodotus 7.171 (and cf. 1.173 "for in ancient times Crete was entirely occupied by barbarians").
5 Renfrew (1998: 245) on *asaminthos* and its possible Minoan origin. The word occurs in Linear B at Knossos on a small clay sealing (KN Ws 8497) along with the word for "hand basin." The sealings record transactions (orders, deliveries, inventory, etc.) in the palace at Knossos.
6 Bernal (1987: 62, 76, 81) for "widow," "Larisa," and the Pelasgians; volumes 2 and 3 came out in 1991 and 2006. His arguments were challenged in Lefkowitz and Rogers (1996), to which he replied in Bernal (2001).
7 Palmer (1980: 10–26); for Linear A as a Luwian language see Finkelberg (2005: 42–64).

3

Mycenean Greek

The Greek Bronze Age

Dates in the Aegean Bronze Age are given in relative terms by archaeologists, owing to the difficulty of establishing absolute dates for archaeological trends and phases at such a remote distance without documentary evidence. Absolute dates are tied in complicated ways to Egyptian archaeology; they are based largely on pottery styles, and rise and fall as new data are digested and argued over by archaeologists and historians. The Bronze Age runs, very approximately, from 3000 to 1200 BC or a little later. It is divided into three important periods:

Early Bronze Age	3000–2000 BC
Middle Bronze Age	2000–1550 BC
Late Bronze Age	1550–1150 BC

In the archaeology of the Greek mainland these periods are known as Early, Middle, and Late Helladic; in the archaeology of the Cyclades, as Early, Middle, and Late Cycladic; and in the archaeology of Crete, as Early, Middle, and Late Minoan. These periods are further subdivided into three (e.g., Late Helladic I, II, and III); in

A Brief History of Ancient Greek, First Edition. Stephen Colvin.

the Middle and Late periods these subdivisions can be further qualified by the addition of A, B, and C (thus Late Helladic IIIA is, roughly, the fourteenth century BC). The *absolute* dates of these periods differs slightly in the three regions, as might be expected (since the periods are tied to developments in the material culture): so, for example, the start of Late Helladic IIIA is conventionally dated a little earlier than the start of Late Minoan IIIA.

The Mycenean age is the Late Bronze Age, or Late Helladic period. It is during this period that an early form of Greek is attested on clay tablets from a number of Mycenean sites in mainland Greece and on Crete. The tablets are written in a syllabic script known to us as Linear B. The precise dating of the earliest tablets (which are from Knossos) is difficult and controversial, but a date around 1400–1375 BC seems to fit the archaeological record. Tablets from the mainland sites, and perhaps some of the tablets from later stratigraphic levels at Knossos, are dated to around 1250–1200 BC (see Driessen 2008). The Hellenization of Greece must have been well under way by this period, for we can see both archaeologically and linguistically the start of a common culture across Greece (sometimes called the Mycenean *koine*): from a linguistic perspective it is remarkable that there is almost no dialectal variation in the language of the tablets, even though they come from places as far removed as Knossos, Pylos (Messenia), Mycenae, and Thebes. This fact, along with commonalities in architecture, technology, and social structure across the Mycenean world, implies a period of political development and relatively settled conditions in mainland Greece. This would have allowed for the spread of a "chancellery style" among the literate officials of the Mycenean palaces: the spelling and general writing conventions of the tablets, which are more or less uniform, presumably conceal a degree of dialect diversity among the speakers.

It is clear that an important part in the development of Mycenean civilization was played (paradoxically) by the Minoans, a non-Greek people of advanced culture who were based in Crete; Cretan civilization had been literate since the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age (roughly the nineteenth century BC). There is evidence for Minoan colonies and trading posts in the Cyclades and elsewhere (the most famous being Akrotiri on the island of Thera, buried by a massive volcanic eruption a few decades before or after 1600 BC). Archaeological evidence indicates a particularly marked Minoan

influence on Mycenean Greece towards the end of the Middle Helladic period (the early sixteenth century BC): this is the period of the shaft graves at Mycenae.

The end of the Bronze Age is put at around 1200 BC in Greece: at this period of general turmoil in the Aegean Mycenean civilization collapsed. The increase in the use of iron over bronze may have been caused by the interruption to the supply of tin to Greece in the unsettled conditions that followed (bronze is an alloy of copper and tin): tin is not found in Greece, and had to be imported from as far away as Cornwall. It is interesting that the archaeological and historical reality that is the Late Bronze Age coincides in Greek tradition with the "heroic period" in which most of the famous episodes in Greek mythology are set. This mythological period ended with the Trojan War and its immediate aftermath. Later Greeks did not distinguish as sharply as we do between history and mythology: by interesting coincidence, Greek calculations put the Trojan War at around 1200 BC. Herodotus (2.145) thought it occurred 800 years before himself (i.e., around 1225 BC); the Alexandrian scholar Eratosthenes (276–194 BC) calculated it at 407 years before the first Olympiad (i.e., in 1183 BC).

As far as we can tell there was no memory of Mycenean writing in later Greece, though there are plenty of anachronistic references to writing in the heroic period in Greek tragedy (some of the passages are explicit that this is alphabetic writing). A possible exception is the story of Bellerophon in the *Iliad*: after a false allegation of attempted rape, Bellerophon was sent by Proetus of Argos to the king of Lycia with a folded tablet saying "Kill the bearer of this message": "He [Proetus] shrank from slaying him, for he had dread of that in his soul; but he sent him to Lycia, and gave him baneful signs [*sēmata lugra*], engraving in a folded tablet many deadly things …" (*Iliad* 6.167–169).

This is the only passage in Homer that hints at writing: it is not impossible that the poetic tradition in the Dark Ages had some familiarity with inscribed objects from the Mycenean period or earlier: for example, inscribed seals or other precious objects. There are, however, other possibilities: if the first attempts to adapt Phoenician script for Greek were as early as 1000 BC, as some have argued, singers in Asia Minor (where the epic tradition is thought to have developed) may have heard of it; or they may have known of

Near Eastern writing traditions such Anatolian hieroglyphic script, Akkadian cuneiform, or Cypriot writing.

Bronze Age Aegean Scripts

The Linear B script is close to, and clearly a development of, the undeciphered Linear A script of the Minoans. This would explain the deficiencies of the script for writing Greek: it may have been more suited to writing the language of the Minoans (assuming that they devised it, which is not certain). The language represented by Linear A is unknown, though there has been no lack of speculation on the subject (Etruscan, Luwian, and Phoenician have been tried). Some phonetic sequences have been guessed at by applying the values of the Linear B syllabary to Linear A signs, but too few inscriptions in Linear A survive to attempt a realistic decipherment. Linear B may have been adapted from Linear A on Crete after Mycenean Greeks became the dominant power at Knossos.

Writing from Minoan Crete survives in two forms: the earliest records are written in what Arthur Evans, the excavator of Knossos, called "hieroglyphic" script: this was used in particular for seals that were pressed into clay. The second form is a linear script which Evans called Linear A (to distinguish it from Linear B, which he found in later stratigraphic levels in his excavation): this script survives on a small number of clay tablets, which appear to be bureaucratic records similar in nature to the Linear B records, and on a few objects (votive offerings to gods, etc.). Linear A appears to be a development of the earlier hieroglyphic script. Hieroglyphic and Linear A scripts seem to have overlapped for a period, and may have been used to write the same language: hieroglyphic inscriptions are dated to the Middle Minoan or proto-palatial period (roughly the nineteenth to the seventeenth century BC), and the Linear A inscriptions to the Late Minoan I or neo-palatial period (the seventeenth to the mid-fifteenth century BC). It is generally possible to tell that an undeciphered script is a syllabary from the number of signs (an alphabetic script is likely to have 20–40 signs, a syllabic script 50–90).

Linear A is also related to, and perhaps the ancestor of, a family of syllabic scripts on Cyprus. The Greeks on Cyprus used a syllabic

script to write their dialect from the eighth to the third centuries BC: one isolated inscription (*Opheltau*, "of Opheltas") on a bronze spit appears to date to the eleventh century. The Cypriots were unique among the Greeks in not using the Greek alphabet until the Hellenistic period (some late inscriptions give their text in both scripts). The syllabary they used was an adaptation of an earlier Cypriot script which is attested both on Cyprus and at Ugarit (on the Syrian coast) from the sixteenth to the twelfth centuries BC. It appears in slightly different forms at different periods; since the Bronze Age texts have not been deciphered, it is not clear whether it was used for one language, or more than one language. Owing to the clear relationship with Linear A this early Cypriot script is known as Cypro-Minoan.

One text found on Crete, in a context which dates it to around 1700 BC, stands outside all known scripts of the Aegean. This is the Phaistos disk, discovered in the palace at Phaistos. It is made of baked clay and stamped on both sides with 242 signs arranged in a spiral, apparently to be read from the outside to the center in a clockwise direction. There are 45 different signs, and these are unique in the ancient world as they have been imprinted using stamps. The signs themselves are not particularly close to any other known script of the ancient world, and the function of the object is quite obscure: the disk may be an import into Crete, but is in any case a complete enigma.

The Linear B Tablets

Mycenean Greek is written in a syllabic script known as Linear B. This consists of: (a) around 90 phonetic signs for syllables; (b) a large number of pictographic or logographic signs which denote objects – over 100 are attested and others may have existed, or been improvised as the need arose; (c) signs for weights and measures; (d) numeric signs: these are easily deciphered.

The phonetic signs include the vowels *a*, *e*, *i*, *o*, and *u* and the diphthongs *ai*, *au* (V); the other phonetic signs represent syllables made up of the simple vowels preceded by a consonant (CV): thus in addition to the vowel *a*, there are also signs for *pa*, *ka*, *ta*, *za*, etc. (see Figure 3.1). A small number of signs represent a vowel

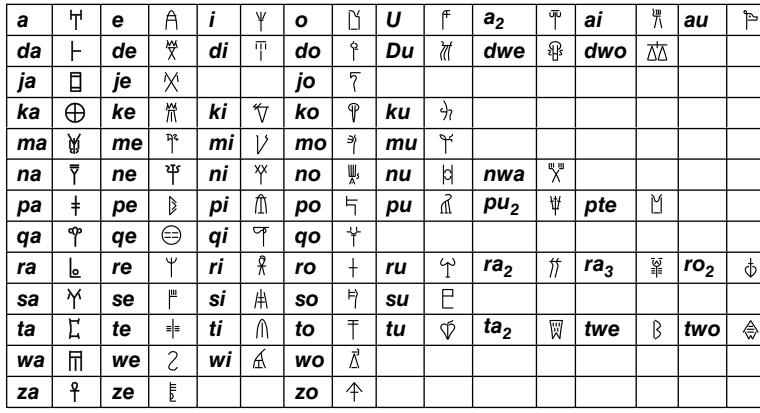


Figure 3.1 Linear B syllabary. *Source*: Silvia Ferrara, "Mycenaean Texts: The Linear B Tablets," in *A Companion to the Ancient Greek Language*, ed. Egbert J. Bakker (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), Figure 3.2.

preceded by two consonants: e.g., *dwe*, *dwo*, *nwa*, *rya*, *ryo* (in these signs the second element seems always to be *y* or *w*, or sounds which developed from them). The phonetic value of around a dozen less common signs is still unknown.

This syllabary is not well suited to writing Greek, for two reasons. First, a syllabary which has signs with the phonetic shape V and CV is inherently unsuitable for writing a language which has consonant clusters or final consonants. With these graphic resources a consonant cluster can be written in one of two ways: with a dummy (non-existent) vowel, or by ignoring one of the consonants. Linear B does both (the second example below also illustrates a deficiency of the script which affects vowels: diphthongs are generally ignored, and the vowel signs have to make do for both long and short vowels):

pe-mo writes [spermo] "seed grain"
ko-to-na writes [ktoinā] "plot of land"

Final consonants are not written:

da-mo writes [dāmos] "people, community" (nom.), [dāmon] (acc.), [dāmōi] (dat.), etc.

The second major deficiency is specific to Linear B: the syllabary does not have all the consonantal signs that are necessary for a complete representation of Greek. Greek distinguished between voiceless, voiced, and voiceless aspirate stops:

π [p]	β [b]	φ [p^h]	(bilabial stops)
κ [k]	γ [g]	χ [k^h]	(velar stops)
τ [t]	δ [d]	θ [t^h]	(apical stops)

Linear B, however, has only one series to represent all three phonemes in the first two cases (bilabial and velar stops): since the decipherment these series have conventionally been represented with a *p-* (*pa pe pi* etc.) and a *k-*. In the third case (apical stops) the syllabary is more generous, providing one series for the voiced stop [d], and a second series for the unvoiced [t] and [t^h] (these are conventionally represented with *t-*). Thus:

te-me-no	[temenos] "land reserved for a high-ranking person"
te-o	[t^{h}ehos] "god"
do-e-ro	[dohelos] "slave"

A further oddity is that the phonemes [r] and [l] are not distinguished by the syllabary: they are both written with the same series (which is conventionally represented by *r-*). This may indicate that the language of Linear A (unlike Greek) did not distinguish between the sounds [r] and [l]. The sound [h] can be represented when it is followed by an *a* (since there is a sign *ha*), but not in any other context (there are no signs for *he hi ho hu*); and the sign *ha* is not consistently used by Mycenean scribes.

These features of Linear B make it difficult to see what exactly is going on in the language at this period. For example, by the time of alphabetic Greek, words can no longer end in a *-t* or a *-d* (these sounds are simply dropped in word-final position): so, for example, the verbal form ἔ-θηκε [e-t^{h}ēke] "he put, made," which appears in Latin as *fēcit*, is inherited from an I-E form **dhēket*. The verb appears in Linear B in the sentence

o-te wa-na-ka te-ke au-ke-wa da-mo-ko-ro (PY Ta 711)
ὅτε ϝάναξ θῆκε *Αὐγῆϝα *δαμοκόρον (class. Gk.)

[hote wanax tʰēke *Augēwa *dāmokoron]
"when the Lord appointed Augewas *damokoros*"

It is unfortunately impossible to tell whether this final *-t* has disappeared from Mycenean Greek or not, because final consonants are never written: most transcriptions of Linear B assume that it has, but this may be influenced by a subconscious desire to make Mycenean Greek look as much like alphabetic Greek as possible (see Garrett 2006).

The logographic signs in Linear B are not used like logographic signs in other Near Eastern writing systems, such as Akkadian or Hittite cuneiform: in these systems scribes can substitute a logogram for the phonetic writing of a word. In Linear B documents logograms are never used in the main body of the text, but only as part of the totaling formula in texts which are lists of items (as many texts are). A common structure of a document in Linear B is:

1. An introductory line or "paragraph" of syllabic text sketching the subject matter or function of the tablet.
2. A line of syllabic text describing an item: at the end a logogram for that item plus a numeral.
3. Repetition of (2) as necessary.
4. A final line which gives the grand total, with a numeral.

All of the surviving clay texts are administrative documents of this type. There are also a number of short texts painted onto stirrup jars, large vases used for storing and transporting oil or wine. These vase inscriptions typically consist of three words: a personal name + a place name + a second personal name (occasionally the adjective *wanakteros*, "pertaining to or in the service of the *wanax*," i.e., the head of state).

There are no literary texts or letters; if such documents did exist, they may have been written on a less durable substance such as wood. The texts which survive were preserved by accident: they were written on soft clay which was baked hard in the fires which destroyed the palaces (whereas Near Eastern tablets were deliberately hardened to preserve them in archives). They are the day to day records of the administration, and do not seem intended to be more than temporary. They deal with the distribution and collection of agricultural products; the manufacture of products such as textiles, olive oil, and perfume; military personnel and equipment, including armour and chariots; civilian

personnel that the palaces appear to have controlled or been responsible for (mostly workers and slaves); the distribution of items for religious purposes (e.g., offerings to deities); land tenure of various types; and palace inventory. For this reason we have a lot of names in the surviving corpus (some clearly Greek, some non-Greek, and others which are difficult to interpret), and the repetition of a number of key nouns; there are very few verbs, since there are very few complete sentences. Fortunately for us the syllabary used small marks as word dividers (represented in transcription with commas): enclitic words are grouped together with the word they follow in an accentual group.

Since the documents deal with a society about which we know very little, many of the key terms and concepts remain enigmatic even when the Greek word(s) can be identified. For example, a number of tablets mention a class of people called *te-re-ta* who appear to hold important positions in the Mycenean hierarchy: it is generally agreed that this word is *telestai*, plural of *telestās*: it is attested in the dialect of Elis in the sixth century BC with a meaning "official" or "magistrate." The Mycenean *telestai* are identified by their tenure of a particular type of land, which they seem to have the right to hold privately. Now, *telestās* is not hard to analyze in Greek: it is an agent noun derived from the noun *telos*, roughly "man of *telos*." The trouble is that the word *telos* in later Greek has an extraordinarily wide range of meanings: the dictionary gives "performance, consummation, event, result, product, power, authority, office, service, duty, dues, tax" and more. It has been speculated that *telestai* were members of the elite who were granted land by the "king" (Mycenean *wanax*, Homeric *anax* "lord") in exchange for service: this suggestion has been criticized for implying a type of feudalism based on a medieval European model, but it is not impossible.

Four sample texts below with approximate transcription and translation give an idea of the sort of document which survives. Some of the words are marked with asterisks: these are words which have been reconstructed by linguistic means, and which do not survive in this form in alphabetic Greek: however, the roots underlying the words survive in the later language, and the morphology is regular. (The modern equivalents of the units of measurement are based on conclusions drawn by archaeologists on the basis of material objects such as cups, vessels, weights, etc. They are approximate, and alternative

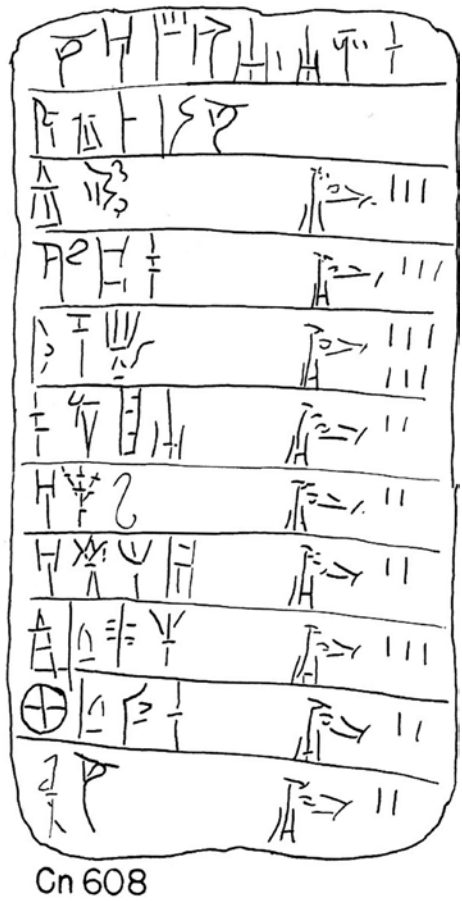


Figure 3.2 Linear B tablet: Pylos Cn 608 (pigs). *Source*: Emmett L. Bennett, *The Pylos Tablets* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1951). Reprinted by permission of Princeton University Press.

theories exist.) By convention, the logograms are given in capital letters (usually in Latin, here in English). The word-dividers are represented by commas (they look quite similar on the tablets, but hover above the line).

(1) PY Cn 608 (see Figure 3.2). A text from the palace archive at Pylos in the southwestern Peloponnese. It appears to record the

distribution of pigs to various areas of the territory controlled by the palace: these pigs are presumably to be raised and then perhaps returned to or distributed by the palace.

.1	jo-a-se-so-si , si-a_2-ro	
.2	o-pi-da-mi-jo	
.3	pi-*82	PIG + *SI* 3
.4	me-ta-pa	PIG + *SI* 3
.5	pe-to-no	PIG + *SI* 6

[*Six more lines of place names and numbers*]

.1	**yoi* **asēnsonsi sihalons*	
.2	*opidāmioi*	
.3	*Piswa* (?)	PIG + *si* 3
.4	*Metapā*	PIG + *si* 3
.5	*Pethnos* (?)	PIG + *si* 6

…

Local officials as follows are to fatten up pigs: Piswa, 3 pigs; Metapa, 3 pigs; Pethnos, 6 pigs; …

The sign for PIG is a clear drawing of the head of a pig: in this text the drawing is ligatured with the phonetic sign *si*, which presumably indicates "sihalos" pigs. The meaning of this word is not known, but it occurs in the Odyssey as a noun or adjective in apposition to the word "pig." The word *yoi*, if the interpretation is correct, is the nom. plur. of the relative pronoun (later οἵ [hoi]).

(2) PY Ep 704, 3–6. An extract from a text from the palace archive at Pylos, giving names of people who have various types of land tenure. It is unusual in containing a number of verbs. (In Mycenean land tenure tablets the land is measured by the amount of seed grain needed to sow it.)

.3 e-ri-ta , i-je-re-ja , o-na-to , e-ke , ke-ke-me-na , ko-to-na , pa-ro , da-mo , to-so , pe-mo WHEAT T 4

.4 ki-ri-te-wi-ja , o-na-to , e-ko-si , ke-ke-me-na , ko-to-na , pa-ro , da-mo , to-so , pe-mo WHEAT 1 T 9

.5 e-ri-ta , i-je-re-ja , e-ke , e-u-ke-to-qe , e-to-ni-jo , e-ke-e , te-o , da-mo-de-mi , pa-si , ko-to-na-o ,
.6 ke-ke-me-na-o , o-na-to , e-ke-e , to-so-pe-mo WHEAT 3 T 9

.3 *Erithā hiereia *onāton ekhei *kekeimenās ktoinās paro dāmōi toson spermo* WHEAT T4
.4 **Krithēwiai *onāton ekhonsi *kekeimenās ktoinās paro dāmōi toson spermo* WHEAT 1 T 9
.5 *Eritha hiereia ekhei eukhetoi-qe *etonion ekhehen thehōi dāmos de min phāsi ktoināhōn*
.6 **kekeimenāhōn *onāton ekhehen toson spermo* WHEAT 3 T 9

.3 Eritha the priestess has an *onāton* lease of public (?) land from the *dāmos* ("people, community"): so much seed WHEAT T 4 [~ 38 liters]
.4 The *krithēwia* (?) women have an *onāton* lease of public (?) land from the *dāmos*: so much seed WHEAT 1 unit plus T 9 [~ 182 liters]
.5 Eritha the priestess has and declares that she has an *etonion* lease for the god, but the *dāmos* say that
.6 she has an *onāton* lease of public (?) land: so much seed WHEAT 3 units plus T 9 [~ 374 liters]

Line 5 appears to record a dispute between the temple and the *dāmos* ("community") over the nature of the lease that the priestess holds. The words **onāton* and **etonion* for types of land-holding may contain the root seen in later Greek *onēsis* "use, benefit." The letter T represents a sub-unit of volume (1/10 of the major unit), around 9.6 liters. The word *dāmos* survives in classical Greek as *dēmos* "people, community."

(3) KN Fp 1. A text from the west wing of the palace at Knossos recording quantities of oil which have been delived to, or are destined for, various cult centers:

.1 de-u-ki-jo-jo me-no
.2 di-ka-ta-jo di-we OIL S 1
.3 da-da-re-jo-de OIL S 2
.4 pa-de OIL S 1
.5 pa-si-te-o-i OIL S 1
.6 qe-ra-si-ja OIL S 1[

.7	a-mi-ni-so , pa-si-te-o-i	<OIL>S 1[
.8	e-ri-nu	OIL V 3
.9	*47-da-do	OIL V 1
.10	a-ne-mo , i-je-re-ja	<OIL>V4
.11	*vacat*	
.12	toso	OIL 3S 2V 2

.1	*Deukioio mēnos*	
.2	*Diktaiōi Diwei*	OIL S 1
.3	*Daidaleion-de*	OIL S 2
.4	*pa-de*	OIL S 1
.5	*pansi theoihi*	OIL S 1
.6	*qe-ra-si-ja*	OIL S 1[
.7	*Amnisōi pansi theoihi*	OIL S 1[
.8	*Erinus*	OIL V 3
.9	**47-da-do*	OIL V 1
.10	*anemōn hiereiāi*	V4
.11	[*blank line*]	
.12	*toson*	OIL 3S 2V 2

.1	In the month of Deukios	
.2	to Diktaian Zeus	OIL S 1 (~ 10 liters)
.3	to the shrine of Daidalos	OIL S 2 (~ 20 liters)
.4	to pa-de	OIL S 1 (~ 10 liters)
.5	to all the gods	OIL 1 unit (~ 30 liters)
.6	to qe-ra-si-ja	OIL S 1 (~ 10 liters) [
.7	at Amnisos, to all the gods	<OIL>S 1 (~ 10 liters) [
.8	Erinys	OIL V 3 (~ 5 liters)
.9	**47-da-do*	OIL V 1 (~ 1½ liter)
.10	to the priestess of the winds	<OIL>V 4 (~ 6 liters)
.12	Total	OIL 3 units, S 2, V 2 (~ 113 liters)

In lines 7 and 10 the scribe was running out of room and omitted the sign for oil. The letters S and V represent sub-units of liquid (1/3 and 1/20 of the major unit respectively).

(4) KN Sd 4401. One of a series of similar texts from the "room of the chariot tablets" in the palace at Knossos (the lower line was written first).

.2 a-ra-ru-ja , a-ni-ja-pi , wi-ri-ni-jo , o-po-qo , ke-ra-ja-pi , o-pi-i-ja-pi CHARIOT [2
.1 i-qi-jo , a-ja-me-no , e-re-pa-te , a-ra-ro-mo-te-me-no po-ni-ki[-jo

.2 *araruiai hāniāphi wrīniois *opōqois *keraiāphi *opihiāphi* CHARIOT [2
.1 *hiqqiō *aiamenō elephantei ararmotmenō phoinikiō*

.1 A couple of chariots inlaid with ivory, assembled, painted purple,
.2 fitted with reins, with leather blinkers, with horn bits (?)

In line 2 the ending of the adjective *a-ra-ru-ja* "fitted" is a slip: the scribe has forgotten he is describing two chariots, which calls for the dual ending in [ō]: the ending *-a* in the Linear B script could be the feminine singular ending [ā] or the feminine plural [ai]. *hānia* in line 2 survives in Homeric and later Greek as the word for reins: in Mycenean the word was probably still [ānhia] from earlier **ansia*. (Words which ended up with an *h* "trapped" at the start of the second syllable generally moved it to the front of the word.)

Greek Language in the Linear B Tablets

It is clear from the texts quoted above that the language of the tablets is an early form of Greek, as Michael Ventris argued in 1952 after his decipherment (see Chadwick 1958). The obscurities of the writing system make it difficult to tell whether some of the key phonological changes which are characteristic of alphabetic Greek had already taken place: we noted above that it is unclear whether the restrictions in place in alphabetic Greek on which consonants could end a word (only *n*, *s*, or *r*) were already in place in Mycenean. Certain aspects of the morphology are also obscured by the syllabary, but on the whole it looks very familiar from later Greek; the vocabulary seems to be the same mixture of Indo-European and non-Indo-European elements as in the later language.

Phonology

In a couple of cases sound-changes characteristic of later Greek seem not to have occurred in Mycenean:

(1) Mycenean has not yet changed the labiovelar stops inherited from Indo-European into the simple stops of alphabetic Greek. In the parent language these consonants seem to have been velar stops with lip-rounding (as in Engl. *queen*): in classical Greek we find the following changes:

**k*^{w}	> *t* or *p* (depending on the phonetic context)
	**k*^{w}*e* "and": τε [te], cf. Lat. *-que*
	**lik*^{w}- "leave": λείπω [leipō], cf. Lat. *linquō*
**g*^{w}	> *d* or *b* (depending on the phonetic context)
	**g*^{w}*ous* "cow": βοῦς [bous], cf. Lat. *bōs*
**g*^{wh}	> *t*^{h} or *p*^{h} (depending on the phonetic context)
	**g*^{wh}*er-* "heat": θέρμος [t^{h}ermos] "hot," cf. Lat. *furnus* "oven"

In Linear B these three stops are represented by a series of syllabic signs which are conventionally transcribed *q-*:

qe "and": later τε [te]
qa-si-re-u "chief, official": later βασιλεύς [basileus]
re-qo-me-no "leaving": later λειπόμενοι [leipomenoi]
qo-u-ko-ro "cow-herd": later βουκόλος [boukolos]

It is impossible to prove how this series transcribed with a *q-* was pronounced in Mycenean, but it is clear that the sounds they represent had not yet merged with *t* and *p*, etc. The likelihood is that the sounds were still labiovelars.

(2) Later Greek seems not to have liked two *h*-sounds (aspirates) in the same word: when this happens there is a strong tendency to de-aspirate one of them, usually the first (this is known as "Grassman's Law" after its discoverer). Thus the verb *ἔχω [hek^{h}ō] "I have" in the present tense became ἔχω [ek^{h}ō]: but the future tense remains ἕξω [heksō] because there is only one aspirate in the word. This process is already in place before the time of our earliest Greek texts, and has often been assumed to be pre-Mycenean. In fact, it may well

have taken place after the end of the Mycenean period (i.e., during the "Dark Ages"). Words are conventionally transcribed in their classical form in this chapter (thus *e-ke* "he has" as [ek^{h}ei]), which may be inaccurate.

In most areas of Mycenean phonology sound changes characteristic of Greek have already occurred:

(3) The syllabic resonants **m̥ *n̥ * l̥ *r̥* of Indo-European have already disappeared in Mycenean. They are vocalized in the way familiar from alphabetic Greek (the choice of an *a* or an *o* vowel varies among the Greek dialects: Mycenean uses both, with a marked preference for *o*):

**spermn̥*	Myc. *pe-mo* [spermo]	class. σπέρμα [sperma] "seed"
**k^{w}etr̥-pod-*	Myc. *qe-to-ro-po-* [k^{w}etropod-]	class. τετράποδ- [tetrapod-] "quadruped"

(4) **s* has become *h*, or disappeared, between vowels and at the start of words:

**sm̥teron*	Myc. *ha-te-ro* [hateron]	dialect ἄτερος [hateros] "other"
**wetesi*	Myc. *we-te-i* [wetehi]	class. (ϝ)ἔτει [(w)etei] "year" (loc. sing.)

(5) The phoneme **y* in later Greek became either *h-* or *z-* at the start of a word before a vowel: the sound change **y* > *h-* seems to be in progress at the time of the Linear B tablets (the relative pronoun is written *o-* [ho-] and *jo-* [yo-]). The change **y* > *z-* has already happened:

**yeug-*	Myc. *ze-u-k-* [zeug-]	class. ζεῦγος [zeugos] "yoke, pair of animals"

The sound represented by Linear B *z-* is generally thought to be some sort of affricate: [zd], [ts] or similar (here transcribed with the neutral *z-*). After a consonant, **y* merges with that consonant in a process known as palatalization: as in Engl. *Tuesday*, where the first syllable often sounds like *choose*. This has already happened in Mycenean:

**tr̥pedya*	Myc. *to-pe-za* [torpeza]	class. τράπεζα [trapeza] "table" ("three-legged")
**pantya*	Myc. *pa-sa* [pansa]	class. πᾶσα [pāsa] "all" (feminine adj.)

Morphology

The morphological features of Mycenean are not particularly startling: for the most part they are what might be expected in an archaic version of Greek. Examples include:

1. The genitive singular of the *o*-stem (second) declension is written *-o-jo*. This looks very like the Homeric ending *-oio*, and survives in the Thessalian dialect in the Classical period.
2. The dative singular of *Zeus* is written *di-we*, which must represent [diwei] with the earlier dative ending which survives in the name *Diweiphilos* (lit. "dear to-Zeus"). The classical ending *-i* of the dative is in fact the old locative ending (the two cases merged).
3. An instrumental plural ending written *-pi* is used regularly for first and third declension nouns: *to-pe-za e-re-pa-te-jo po-pi* [torpeza elep^{h}anteiois popp^{h}i] "a table with ivory legs" (with [popp^{h}i] < [pod-p^{h}i]). This must be the ending -φι [-p^{h}i] which is familiar from Homer (where, however, it is used as a metrical convenience, in singular and plural, with instrumental, locative, ablative, genitive, and dative function).
4. In text 2 above the verb *e-u-ke-to* corresponds to classical εὔχεται [euk^{h}etai] "she declares." The ending *-toi* is found in the Arcado-Cypriot dialect, where it evidently represents an archaic feature. All other dialects of the later language have *-tai*, which must be analogical on the first person ending *-mai*.
5. In classical Greek a prefix *e-* is added to the past tense of verbs (the so-called augment); in Homeric Greek, however, this prefix is often missing. In Mycenean it appears in just a couple of examples at most (most clearly in *a-pe-do-ke* [apedōke] "he gave" in one tablet from Pylos): in all other cases it is absent. It must therefore have been an optional element in early Greek: of the other Indo-European languages, only Sanskrit and Armenian show any sign of it.

Vocabulary

The vocabulary of Mycenean, when it is not obscured by the writing system, shows two familiar groups of words in addition to the items inherited from Indo-European. The first comprises words which are characteristic of Greek, but lack a clear I-E etymology:

a-to-ro-qo [ant^{h}rōk^{w}os], later *anthrōpos* "human"
do-e-ro [dohelos], later *doulos* "slave"
la-wo [lāwos], later *lāos* (Attic *leōs*) "people"

The second group comprises words that Greek borrowed from neighboring languages:

e-re-pa [elep^{h}ās], later *elephās* "ivory"
ku-mi-no [kumīnon], later *kumīnon* "cumin"
ku-ru-so [k^{h}rūsos], later *khrūsos* "gold, golden"

A special item of the lexicon is personal names. Around two-thirds of the words on the Linear B tablets are names, some place-names but mostly personal names. We even have some descriptive names of oxen from late Bronze Age Knossos: these are recorded on small tablets which give a man's name (presumably the person who has charge of them), followed by the names of the oxen and finally BOS ZE 1, i.e., the pictographic sign for an ox followed by the syllabic sign *ze* (short for *zeugos*, a pair of animals), and the number.

ai-wo-ro	[aiwolos]	"dappled"
ke-ra-no	[kelainos]	"dark"
wo-no-qo-so	[woinok^{w}orsos]	"wine rump"
to-ma-ko	[stomargos]	"white mouth"

Most of the names are of course human names, both male and female. Very many are familiar-looking Greek names: others are non-Greek (at Knossos it would reasonable to expect a pool of indigenous names, some perhaps Minoan), and many are difficult to interpret owing to the script. Easily recognizable names (with classical equivalent in brackets) include: *a-ke-ra-wo* (Agelāos), *a-ki-re-u* (Akhilleus), *e-ko-to* (Hektōr), *e-u-me-ne* (Eumenēs), *i-do-me-ne-ja*

(Idomeneia), *ka-ra-u-ko* (Glaukos), *ko-pe-re-u* (Kopreus), *ku-pi-ri-jo* (Kuprios), *ma-na-si-we-ko* (Mnēsiergēs), *o-re-ta* (Orestēs), *si-mo* (Sīmos), *si-ra-no* (Silēnos), *te-o-do-ra* (Theodōra), *te-se-u* (Thēseus), *wa-tu-o-ko* (Astuokhos).

This short list shows a mix of name formations and name types similar to later Greek. There are the heroic compound names which seem to be a type inherited from Indo-European (*Agelāos*, leader of the host); common descriptive names (*Glaukos*, gleaming, silver), including ones based on physical characteristics (*Simos*, snub-nosed); and names derived from place-names (*Kuprios*, Cypriot). A special class includes so-called copronyms (*Kopreus*, derived from the word *kopros*, "dung"): these are names which appear curiously unflattering or offensive. They are quite common in the ancient world, and seem designed to ward off the evil eye from an infant in a world in which child mortality was high.

4

The Dark Ages

The End of the Late Bronze Age

The Linear B tablets were preserved by being baked in the fires which destroyed the great Mycenean centers in mainland Greece in the late thirteenth century BC. The situation at Knossos was complicated by a history of Minoan-Mycenean interaction (there were more destructions, and they are harder to interpret), but on Crete too a major destruction at the same period brought the Mycenean period to a close and a general retreat to the hills. It is not at all clear what caused this wave of destruction. It is generally thought to be part of a wider tumult in the eastern Mediterranean: at the same period the Hittite capital Hattusa was attacked and the Hittite empire in Anatolia collapsed, and Egyptian records imply that Egypt was also attacked by a confederacy of foreigners from areas to the north of Egypt (the so-called "sea peoples"), but managed to fight off the threat. A temple inscription of Ramses III claims that he repelled them in the eighth year of his reign (around 1180 BC):

> … as for the foreign countries, they made a conspiracy in their islands. All at once the lands were on the move, scattered in war. No country could stand before their arms: Hatti [the Hittites], Kode [Cilicia],

A Brief History of Ancient Greek, First Edition. Stephen Colvin.

> Carchemish, Arzawa [western Asia Minor] and Alasiya [Cyprus]. They were cut off. A camp was set up in one place in Amor [Amurru, north Syria]. They desolated its people, and its land was like that which has never come into being. They were advancing on Egypt while the flame was prepared for them. Their league was Prst, Tjkr, Škrš, Dnn, and Wšš united lands …[1]

A letter found at Ugarit contains a request for help from the king of Ugarit to the king of Cyprus. Ugarit was an important city on the Syrian coast, which had close links with the Mycenean world and other regional powers. It was attacked and destroyed around 1180 BC, apparently before the letter could be dispatched:

> 1. To the King of Cyprus, my father, say: thus speaks the King of Ugarit, your son. (*Lines 5–11 contain an elaborate greeting.*)
> 12. My father, behold, the ships of the enemy arrived: my cities were burned with fire, and they did evil things in my country. Does my father not know that all my troops [and chariots?] are in the Land of Hatti, and all my ships are in the Land of Lycia ? They have not [yet] returned, and the country is thus abandoned to itself. May my father know this! Now, the seven ships of the enemy that came here inflicted much damage upon us.[2]

Scholars have argued over whether there is any sign in the surviving Linear B tablets from Pylos that the Myceneans were aware of the impending attacks, or were making preparations for war. Some of the tablets indicate at the very least that the palace at Pylos took military preparedness very seriously: for example, tablet Jn 829 records an instruction to local officials in the regions of the Pylian kingdom to collect bronze from temples "for the points of darts and spears," while tablet An 1 starts "Rowers going to Pleuron" and is followed by a list of place-names and figures. It is one of a series of tablets which records the dispatch of rowers from areas around the Pylian kingdom to specific destinations. Another tablet in this series (An 657) starts "Thus the watchers are guarding the coast" and is followed by paragraphs giving locations, names of officers, and numbers of men under their control (130 altogether).

Whether or not the inhabitants were aware of an imminent threat, Pylos and other Mycenean sites in Greece were burned around 1200 BC and did not recover. In the twelfth century (Late Helladic IIIC)

Mycenean culture ebbed away, and the 300 or more years from the mid-twelfth century to the late ninth century have traditionally been known to scholarship as the Dark Ages. Archaeologists have sometimes preferred the more neutral "Early Iron Age," but the older term is not wholly inappropriate, for the following reasons. First, loss of Greek literacy in this period means that it is hard for us to reconstruct the history of these centuries, so they are dark for us. Second, archaeology paints a fairly grim picture of life following the Mycenean collapse: a dramatic fall in the population, a retreat to small communities, a collapse in trade, and overall a much lower standard of material culture.

Climate change may have played a role in the Aegean collapse (and recovery), in two ways: change in climate can affect both agriculture and human mortality in a region, and these in turn can cause populations to move in search of more clement conditions. Data from paleoclimatology indicate that significant climate changes took place in central and southeastern Europe around 1400, 1230, and 800 BC.[3] These dates certainly correlate suggestively with historical developments in the Aegean world. It has been suggested that a sudden cold period in central Europe (starting around 1400 and ending around 1230) might have sent populations south, which would have caused disruption in the Balkans and the Aegean area. At the end of this period a warming (around 1230) could have caused drought and disrupted living conditions in the Aegean: the highly specialized and stratified economies of the palaces would have been severely shaken by consecutive years of severe drought. Conversely, a cooling around 800 (a return to more temperate conditions) would have led to an improvement in agriculture and life expectancy in the Aegean.

It seems likely, though it cannot be proved, that at least some of the devastation was caused by "outsiders," people from outside the Mycenean world. A historical analog would be the third century BC, when Celts arrived in the Balkan peninsula and sacked Delphi before moving on to Anatolia, where – known as the Galatians – they were contained with difficulty (Mitchell 1993: 13–20). Even if outsiders played no role in the destruction of the palaces, in the unsettled centuries which followed some sites were abandoned completely, and others were occupied by new groups (the collapse of Mycenean control in Greece left an obvious power vacuum).

The scale and the nature of movements of people during these centuries is a matter for debate: for clues as to what was going on in Greece during this period we rely on three sources of evidence: (a) linguistic evidence, (b) archaeological evidence, and (c) the later traditions and stories of the Greeks about the period.

The problem with (c), the mythographic sources, is that Greeks in the first millennium BC had specific views on ethnicity which they naturally projected back to the myth-historical past. Narratives which describe movements of peoples, or the emergence into history of an ethnic group in a particular location, generally appear to us to have an essential ideological component: that is, they cannot be described as "true" or "false" without qualification, because ethnic identity has a meaning within a particular culture but is unstable or incoherent when pressed from an external scientific perspective. This is because ethnicity is not a given, but a constructed quality; in other words, the people themselves are best qualified to tell you who they are, and this explanation will not necessarily reflect the conceptual categories either of an external investigator, or of later stages of the same culture. Moreover, since narratives which we would consider to be "mythological" had a real and present force in ordering and justifying the contemporary world in the Archaic and Classical periods, such narratives are often open to the suspicion of having been pressed into service to underpin a contemporary political position.

The problem with (b), the archaeological evidence, is that the material record provides datable evidence of destruction, construction, and reconstruction, and of the evolution of cultural practices and styles (architecture, technology, ceramics, burials, etc.), or of the sudden introduction of new practices and styles; but it cannot tell us who the people were who lie behind these events, or the language they were speaking. Moreover, the same material record is subject to differing and sometimes radically opposed interpretations by archaeologists.

Linguistic analysis of Greek before and after the Dark Ages can provide an important extra source of information in addition to these sources. It has the advantage of not being concerned with the ethnic definition of speakers; it looks at the pattern of similarities and differences in the dialect features and tries to work out a plausible linguistic history to account for them. Linguists may make

hypotheses about movements of speakers to account for the distribution of language varieties; just as, for example, one needs to assume the immigration of groups of Germanic speakers to the British Isles to explain the distribution of Germanic and Celtic in Britain and Ireland, or the movement of speakers of English, French, Spanish, and Portuguese to the Americas. Nevertheless, hypotheses of movements (where independent historical evidence is not available) are controversial because the mechanisms of language spread are more complex than mass movements of people.

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries it was widely assumed (as it was assumed in the ancient world) that a change of language in a region presupposed a large-scale population movement. It is now recognized that the appearance of a new language in an area is not necessarily the result of a massive immigration of people: language *A* does not always replace language *B* because a large number of speakers of *A* have taken over the territory of *B*-speakers and replaced or swamped the earlier population. Language *A* may prevail because the speakers are politically powerful, perhaps the result of being militarily and technologically advanced; language *A* may dominate in urban centers, while *B* becomes confined to scattered rural settlements; language *A* may be a high-prestige language which it is necessary to learn to participate in political-cultural activities such as writing. When we try to reconstruct the history of Greek before the widespread use of the alphabet, the changing distribution of the dialects may lead us to suppose that Greek speakers were on the move, but we cannot be sure of the size of the movement or the precise mechanisms by which a linguistic variety took hold and spread in an area.

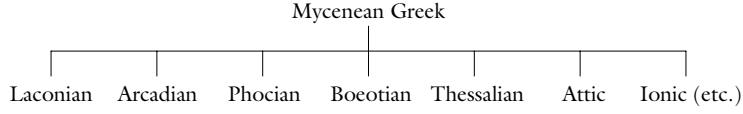
Mainland Greece

For the history of Greek before the appearance of written texts in the eighth century we have two pieces of evidence: the language of the Linear B tablets from the Late Bronze Age, and the distribution of the Greek dialects in Greece in the eighth century onward.

The question is what this can tell us (or what we can guess) about the development of the language between the mid-sixteenth century BC (the start of the Late Bronze Age, when the Myceneans became

dominant in the Aegean) and the eighth century. Before we look at the guesswork and speculation that this question has given rise to, we should be clear that even during the centuries following the introduction of the alphabet to Greece (the Archaic, Classical, and Hellenistic periods), much of the detail of the Greek language is completely obscure to us: both the linguistic development of the language and the geographic and social distribution of the varieties. This is due to lack of evidence: outside of a few (peculiar and exceptional) urban centers, inscriptions are late and scanty. Large areas of northern and western Greece are almost without data before the *koine*, and where local inscriptions do exist in the late fifth or fourth centuries, the suspicion is that these are written in a local, koineized standard, and do not reflect local vernaculars closely. Even in Ionia, the cradle of Greek literacy, inscriptions appear to be written in a standardized epigraphic *koine* from the earliest period. The handful of standardized town idioms that we know about does not give us a firm foundation on which to speculate about the preceding centuries.

In the Late Bronze Age we find surprising homogeneity in the language of the Linear B tablets from across the Mycenean world. This homogeneity (not complete, but nevertheless striking), plus the fact that this variety is attested around 500 years earlier than the other dialects of Greek, suggests, as a working hypothesis, that it is in fact the ancestor of all the Greek dialects that we know from the alphabetic period. The stemma would look like this:



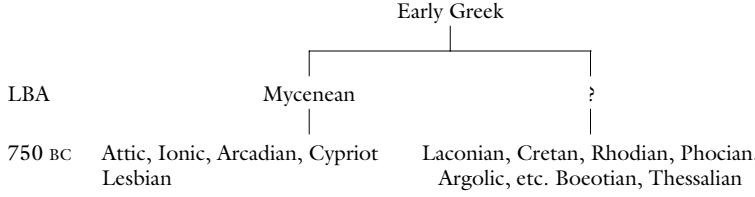
A closer analysis of the language of the tablets makes it clear that this stemma is not possible. A sound change has already happened in the language of the Linear B tablets, which is shared by some of the classical dialects, but not all. This is the change *ti* > *si* in verbal endings (3 sing. and 3 plur.) and certain other words: δίδοντι [didonti] > δίδονσι [didonsi] "they give." There is nothing surprising phonetically about this assibilation: it is attested in the third person of verbal endings in other Indo-European languages, including Hittite in Anatolia: compare the Hittite forms of the verb *kuen-* "strike, kill," where the endings **-ti* and **-nti* have become *-zi* [-tsi]

and *-nzi* [-ntsi]: 3 sg. *kuenzi*, 3 pl. *kunanzi* (the verb is a cognate of the Greek θείνω [theinō] "kill" < I-E **ǵ*$^{\text{w}}$*hen-*). In the Italian peninsula, however, the endings remained unassibilated:

Latin	3 sg.	*stat*	< **stati*
	3 pl.	*stant*	< **stanti* (compare Oscan *stahint*, where *h* indicates hiatus)

This split treatment of the I-E verbal endings **ti* and **nti* occurs within Greek. Dialects which assibilate **ti* > **si* are: (a) Mycenean (Late Bronze Age), (b) Attic, Ionic (spoken in Euboea, the islands of the north and central Aegean, and Ionia), Arcadian, Cypriot, Lesbian (Lesbos and adjoining mainland). Dialects which preserve the inherited **ti* are: (a) "Doric" or "West Greek" dialects in the Megarid and the Peloponnese (apart from Arcadian) and the southern Aegean islands Melos, Thera, Crete, Karpathos, Rhodes, and Kos (and adjoining mainland around Knidos), plus "Northwest" dialects in central Greece (Phocis, Locris) and northwestern Greece (Epirus, Acarnania, and Aetolia); (b) Boeotian and Thessalian in north and central Greece: these are traditionally classed (with Lesbian) as "Aeolic" dialects.

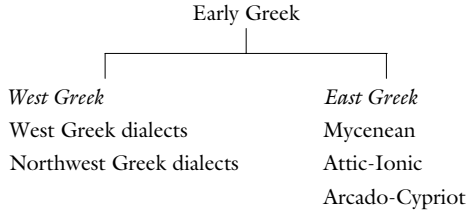
This means that a new stemma would have to look like this:



It does not follow from this either that Mycenean is the ancestor of the *didonsi* dialects listed below it, or that the Linear B language was the only *didonsi* dialect in Greece in the LBA. Similarly, the gap in the LBA slot above the *didonti* dialects has the potential to be misleading: it might be taken to imply that we are looking for a unitary proto-dialect from which the attested *didonti* dialects derive. In fact, the gap merely records the obvious fact that since there are dialects with *didonti* (the older or more conservative form) in the alphabetic period, there must have been dialects with *didonti* in the Bronze Age. Another notable feature of the stemma is that it

splits up Lesbian, Boeotian, and Thessalian, which are traditionally grouped together as the "Aeolic" group.

The diagram represents our data accurately enough, but since the nineteenth century classical linguists have attempted to divide the dialects into higher-level groups which are supposed to cast light on the linguistic situation in the Late Bronze Age and early first millennium. Following the decipherment of Linear B, a widely accepted stemma with conjectural higher-level groups looked like this:



A variant of this schema replaces the term "West Greek" with "North Greek", and "East Greek" with "South Greek." These geographical terms reflect (a) the perception that in the historical period speakers of West Greek were generally to be found in the western and northern regions of Greece, and (b) the conjecture that during the Late Bronze Age speakers of *didonti* dialects were to be found to the north and west of the Mycenean world (north of the Peloponnese and west of Boeotia). The question remains what to do with the Aeolic dialects (Lesbian, Boeotian, Thessalian) if one accepts this schema: if the three dialects derive from a unitary proto-Aeolic dialect that was spoken in the Late Bronze Age, it is not clear whether this proto-Aeolic should be classified as a West or an East Greek dialect.

Ignoring for the moment the problem of Aeolic, let us return to the position of Mycenean in the stemma and conjectures about the Late Bronze Age. We have already seen that the language of the Linear B tablets is more or less uniform from all Mycenean sites (there are some minor variations). It is also incomplete: the writing system gives only a partial insight into the phonetic reality of the language it represents, and the bureaucratic nature of the documents gives rise to the suspicion that their language is in any case likely to be a rather specific and perhaps standardized variety. It seems certain that some degree of linguistic diversity is "hidden" by the

standardized language of the tablets; the question remains whether the hidden varieties were merely the normal range of social varieties (which are always likely to be unrepresented in a written language), or whether they included an idiom (i.e., a *didonti* variety) which modern scholars, following the Greeks of the first millennium, have generally thought of as a geographical/ethnic variety ("Doric") rather than a social variety.

We have seen that the scribes wrote a *didonsi* variety of Greek; but it is also clear that *didonti* varieties must have been spoken contemporaneously somewhere in the Greek world. There are a number of possibilities.

(1) *Didonsi* varieties were spoken by a social elite who controlled the palatial economies and their resources; *didonti* varieties were spoken by population groups who were subordinate to this elite (the slaves or workers involved in production, for example).

(2) *Didonsi* varieties were characteristic of urban (palatial) centers controlled by the Mycenean elite; *didonti* varieties were predominantly rural. There is an obvious overlap with the previous category; for example, agricultural workers living in villages (such as the communities responsible for the pigs in PY Cn 608, see Chapter 3).

(3) *Didonsi* varieties were found in areas of Greece which comprised what we now think of as the "Mycenean world," areas in which palatial centers with archives have been discovered. In mainland Greece this would include Messenia, the Argolid, Attica, Boeotia, and perhaps Thessaly. In other areas *didonti* varieties would have been prevalent: these might have included Elis, Achaea, Aetolia, and Epirus.

There are two scenarios which have been discounted:

(4) The suggestion, made in 1909 and in vogue for a couple of decades, that *didonti* varieties were not heard in Greece until after around 1200 BC: they were spoken by a "tribe" of Greeks called the Dorians, who swept into Greece around 1200 and occupied the areas where *didonti* dialects were spoken in the historic period, subjugating the previous inhabitants. The scenario is incoherent, since the Dorians can hardly have been "Greeks," speaking a dialect of "Greek," before they were located in Greece. As we saw in Chapter 2, the language is a co-production which developed in Greece from the interaction of a number of idioms and ethno-linguistic identities. The idea was typical of its time in mixing up linguistic varieties (types of language) and "ethnic" varieties (types of people).[4]

(5) The Linear B tablets were written in a *didonsi* variety, which does not reflect local linguistic practice: in Pylos and Thebes at least, *didonti* dialects were spoken by everyone. This scenario depends on assumptions along the lines of the following. If the Linear B writing system was developed at Knossos after the palatial center had been taken over by Myceneans from, say, Mycenae itself, which is perfectly plausible, then the language would have reflected the variety spoken by the new Mycenean elite who controlled the palace. This was then frozen as a scribal language bound up with the Linear B writing system, and exported to palaces on the Greek mainland as a package; scribes at these sites would have learned to write an idiom which did not reflect local speech habits, but did not change the system they had been taught.

It is true that writing systems are naturally conservative: but the scenario in this strong form seems unlikely, especially since we do not find plausible examples of "misspellings" with *ti* instead of *si* in the tablets (or any other linguistic feature associated with *didonti* dialects), which are after all temporary records preserved by accident in fire. A completely frozen scribal language might be expected in literary or religious texts, or in documents in international diplomacy; and even then, if the scribe's own language was a closely related dialect of the scribal language, a degree of contamination would be expected.

There are indeed a small number of *ti*~*si* alternations in the tablets, but these are easy to explain. For example, adding the suffix *-ios* to a place-name in Greek gives you an ethnic adjective or noun: as in English *London* + *er* > *Londoner*, *Boston* + *ian* > *Bostonian*. So in Greek *Korinthos* "Korinth" gives *Korinth-ios* "Korinthian": in a *didonsi* dialect this would be expected to turn into *Korinsios*. This is what we find in Mycenean: from *ko-ri-to* [Korinthos] the ethnic *ko-ri-si-jo* [Korinsios]. In *didonsi* dialects of classical Greek, however, we find *Korinthios*: this is obviously owing to the analogy of the base word *Korinthos*. Place names ending in *-tos* and *-thos* produce a couple of similar alternations in Mycenean: this is analogy, rather than the work of a scribe who spoke a *didonti* dialect.

Of the scenarios sketched in (1) to (3), the first two are Marxian approaches which posit situations that could be paralleled in well-documented cases from the modern world: for example, from the sixteenth century an English-speaking elite was superimposed on Irish

speakers in Ireland, and the Irish language became associated with area (predominantly rural), occupation (agricultural labor), and socioeconomic status (low). These are two different languages, but the same situation can occur with two varieties of the same language: in the United States during the period of slavery and beyond, standard English was spoken by, or at least the model for, the white population, while Africans spoke a distinct variety similarly associated with rural location, agricultural production, and socioeconomic status. In both cases, of course, there was the important added ingredient of ethnic identity, a factor which defies speculation in the case of Bronze Age Greece; or rather, since ethnic identity grows out of a number of contemporary factors such as status, location, dialect, appearance, religious practice, and others, to cite it as a determiner of dialect use in the Bronze Age would be a circular argument.

Scenarios (1) and (2) have an important feature in common: the *didonsi* dialects are discontinuous. If the elite in palatial centers around Greece were speaking varieties which shared this innovation, it would be absurd to suppose that they had all innovated independently, as though assibilation went naturally with political power or high living. An innovation such as *didonti* > *didonsi* starts in a particular region and spreads through contact, so long as there are no ideological barriers (i.e., resistance based on antipathy to the core innovating group). If, therefore, (1) or (2) were correct, we would have to suppose that the dominant group had fanned out from a region where they had earlier been concentrated, and subjugated local Greek-speaking populations. This is not, of course, impossible, and it is clear that Myceneans took over Knossos from the Minoans in the fifteenth century; but it creates a new complication in the history of Late Bronze Age Greece, one which would not be posited on other grounds.

The central problem in Greek dialectology from this early period is the fact that between around 1400 and 1200 BC *didonsi* varieties are attested in the Linear B tablets from Crete, Pylos, the Argolid, and Boeotia – all areas in which *didonti* varieties were spoken by the time of the first alphabetic inscriptions. Scenarios (1) and (2) could explain this: after the collapse of the palatial civilization, the *didonsi* varieties of the elite lost their political and economic advantage; they were minority varieties, and were simply submerged by the surrounding *didonti* varieties. This would not explain very economically

the *didonsi* variety in Arcadia, a remote and mountainous region in the central Peloponnese which our hypothetical Mycenean warriors would have been uninterested in subjugating. Scenarios which make the two varieties a function of socioeconomic group require a population movement earlier in the Bronze Age.

If we return to scenario (3) we need to consider how the *didonti* varieties moved east and south to become dominant in regions in which, we have suggested, the innovative *didonsi* had spread by the end of the Bronze Age. We are not talking about "Doric" dialects: this term, insofar as it is useful when applied to a large group of disparate dialects, can only apply to first-millennium dialects: many of the features which are used to define the dialects are simply not relevant to the Bronze Age. Still less are we talking about Dorians: this is an ethnic term of the first millennium, and it has been pointed out that as a term of identity it may well have developed in the Peloponnese in the centuries following the Mycenean collapse. We are looking at a specific isogloss (*didonti*), which typically bundles with a number of other isoglosses:

	didonti	vs.	*didonsi*	"they give"
+	*hiaros*	vs.	*hieros*	"sacred"
+	*didomes*	vs.	*didomen*	"we give"

An isogloss (on the analogy of isobar) is a line on a map which gives the limit of a particular linguistic feature. Isoglosses can be plotted with a certain amount of precision; a dialect, on the other hand, is a construct, since isoglosses rarely coincide exactly, and a "dialect group" is even more tenuous. Furthermore, perceptions of dialect boundaries among speakers generally reflect ideologies in addition to linguistic boundaries. In England, for example, there is a popular notion of "northern" English and "southern" English (which are bundled with various supposed social and cultural traits). The two most important isoglosses used to demarcate these dialect groups are:

Foot-Strut	north of this isogloss, the vowel in both words is [ʊ]; to the south, *foot* has [ʊ] and *strut* has [ʌ]
Trap-Bath	north of this isogloss, the vowel in both words is [æ]; to the south, *trap* has [æ] and *bath* has [ɑ:]

In the east of England the isoglosses start in the Wash and run west towards Bristol and the Welsh border, but they do not coincide completely: the further west they run the greater the divergence. These differences are known as markers, because they function at a high level of psychological awareness; but the country is criss-crossed by numerous isoglosses which intersect and give rise to dialects with differing levels of community awareness. Dialects with high awareness are typically associated with major urban or cultural centers.

It is therefore illusory to try to map "dialects" in any degree of detail in the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages. On our scenario (3), the *didonti* isogloss shifted during the 400 years or so after 1200. We need to be clear that there is no linguistic way from *didonsi* to *didonti*: the spread of *didonti* is not a phonetic innovation. By the time of alphabetic literacy we find *didonti* (and *hiaros*) across the former Mycenean world in mainland Greece, with the exceptions of Arcadia and Attica. The easiest explanation is a movement of people in the depressed and turbulent centuries following the Mycenean collapse; depopulation and power vacuum would have provided conditions for movements of people south into the Peloponnese and east as far as the Aegean. We saw at the beginning of the chapter that other factors, such as turbulence in central Europe and the Balkans, might also have provided an impetus. The movement within Greece may have been relatively restricted: compare, for example, the relatively small numbers of newcomers in Ptolemaic or Umayyad Egypt, or Norman England. In all of these cases the new arrivals had a profound impact on the language of the region over the course of a couple of centuries. If this account is right it would not be difficult to account for the survival of a *didonsi* dialect in Arcadia, one which seems to be quite closely connected with both Mycenean Greek and with the dialect of Cyprus. Natural features such as mountains and rivers often affect the direction of isoglosses: in the case of a remote and mountainous region like Arcadia the isoglosses seem not to have penetrated deeply enough to affect the core features of the *didonsi* varieties that were spoken there (at least in the urban centers which put up inscriptions in the Archaic and Classical periods).

Nevertheless, even if *didonsi* varieties were predominant until 1200, we should not underestimate the linguistic diversity that is likely to have existed across such a large and geographically

challenging territory. Late Bronze Age Greece probably encompassed pockets of non-Greek language (few regions are entirely monolingual, at any period in history). It is also likely that some *didonti* varieties were heard within territories controlled by the Myceneans: first, there may have been pockets where a *didonti* variety had become ensconced; second, isoglosses will have been fuzzy around the periphery; and third, a movement south and east may well have started during the centuries of Mycenean wealth and power.

Greeks in the Aegean

At the beginning of the alphabetic period the Greek language was spoken across the Aegean and along the coast of Asia Minor from the Troad as far as the Carian/Lycian border; there were also Greek speakers on the island of Cyprus. The dialects of classical Greek are conventionally divided into four main groups (see Chapter 6), and all four groups are represented.

1. Lesbian: in the northern part of the region, around the Troad and the island of Lesbos, as far south as Smyrna. This dialect has traditionally been grouped with the dialects of Thessaly and Boeotia (the Aeolic group).
2. Ionian: the central region of coastal Asia Minor, from Smyrna to Miletos, was known as Ionia. The islands of the north and central Aegean were also inhabited by speakers of Ionic. The dialect is closely related to Attic.
3. Cypriot: the Greek dialect of Cyprus is unexpectedly close to that of Arcadia, so close that the two are grouped together by linguists (Arcado-Cypriot).
4. West Greek: southern Aegean islands, as far as Knidos and Halicarnassus in Asia Minor.

Greek was clearly heard around the Aegean before the end of the Mycenean period: archaeological evidence and Hittite records make it clear that in the Late Bronze Age there was interaction between Greeks and non-Greeks on the coast of Asia Minor, and Miletos seems to have been under Mycenean control by the end of the period

(Bryce 1989). Linear B tablets from Pylos designate groups of women working for the palace as "from Milātos" (Miletos) and "from Knidos." There were also trading links with Cyprus in the Late Bronze Age, though the first Mycenean settlements on the island seem not have been until after 1200 BC (Late Helladic IIIC), after the collapse of the palaces. Cypriot and Arcadian are close, and of all the dialects have the most in common with Mycenean Greek. We have seen that Arcadian looks like an isolated remnant of varieties that were spoken in the Bronze Age Peloponnese; the Greek dialects (*didonsi* varieties) that arrived in Cyprus in the twelfth century must therefore have come from the Peloponnese also, perhaps spoken by emigrants fleeing the turbulence that followed the collapse of the Mycenean palaces.

Cyprus is a special case; on the whole, the distribution of the dialects in Asia Minor at the end of the Dark Ages reflects population movements which took place from around the middle of the eleventh century. Given the very close relationship between Attic and the Ionic dialects spoken in Euboea, the Aegean islands, and Ionia, it is generally concluded that the dialect spread out from Attica with settlers during this period. There seems, analogously, no way of getting West Greek dialects onto Thera, Crete, Karpathos, and Rhodes, and across to Asia Minor, without assuming a similar process which started in the Peloponnese; this would presumably have been an extension of the movement which saw the dominance of *didonti* dialects in the Peloponnese by the end of the Dark Ages.

The Aeolic dialects Lesbian, Thessalian, and Boeotian present peculiar difficulties. We saw above that a hypothetical proto-Aeolic group (the Bronze Age ancestor of the three dialects) is difficult to fit into a simple genetic schema which divides a unitary proto-Greek into two branches, east and west Greek. This is because the three dialects share enough features to make them appear related (and Greek tradition linked the three in an Aeolic "ethnic group"), but the similarities are distributed in puzzling ways. There are almost no features which are common to all three dialects, but a fair number which are shared by two out of the three. Those phonological or morphological features which can be stated seem to have exceptions, so that they appear more like "tendencies" than "rules"; Thessaly is a very large area which seems to have contained a substantial degree of dialect variation within it; and all three share

significant isoglosses with neighboring dialects (Thessalian and Boeotian with West Greek, Lesbian with Ionic).

None of this is very surprising from a linguistic viewpoint, so the problem is perhaps in the model that we are trying to push the data into. The family-tree stemma for the history of the Greek language has some explanatory use, but is limited. The genetic model for this type of stemma does not work perfectly, as we saw in Chapter 2, because the dialects are in continuous and complex interaction: this means that when a particular dialect has been identified and named (which can be a misleading exercise in itself), it cannot be traced back to a single "parent" in the stemma. Importantly, this is also true for the top of the stemma, the so-called "proto-Greek" which gave rise to all the later dialects. This reconstructed unitary language is an artificial and misleading node in the tree: it goes back to an era when the prevailing picture was one of the "proto-Greek" nation arriving en masse in Greece and fanning out across the country.

This model is one of unity followed by divergence. If, however, we stick to the view of Greek as a co-production which arose in Greece, we arrive at a model which is almost the exact reverse of this: diversity followed by unity. That is to say, a number of dialects emerged across the Balkan peninsula in interaction with each other: the emergence of "Greek" (and "the Greeks") as an abstract concept which unified these varieties was a political and ideological development. The naming of a language is a crucial step in its development: ideological, but none the less important for that. Latin turned into Italian after speakers had developed a national Italian consciousness; when a national canonical text (Dante) had emerged which legitimized the new language; and when speakers had named their language "Italian" rather than "Latin." In the following chapters we shall examine how Greek emerged from the turbulence of the Dark Ages: a new language with dialects, rather than the chaotic diversity of the preceding centuries.

On this model Lesbian, Thessalian, and Boeotian were formed for the most part by development and interaction *in situ*: the overlapping isoglosses go back to a period when speakers lived in contact with each other. Given the historical position of the three dialects, it has been assumed, not unreasonably, that this period of contact was located in a region north of Attica, before part of the population crossed the Aegean. The Aeolic contact period may have been short,

and late (perhaps after the collapse of the palaces): a loose grouping intersected by competing isoglosses rather than a unitary idiom.

Notes

1 Kuhrt (1997: 387); same text is translated by Pritchard (1969: 262). The inscription is from the temple of Ramses III at Medinet Habu.
2 *Ugaritica V*, no. 24 (Nougayrol *et al.* 1968: 87–90): translation from the French.
3 Discussion of climate change in the Bronze Age by Moody (2005), Neumann (1993), Bintliff (1982: 147–150).
4 Kretschmer (1909): see Colvin (2010: 204–205) for a summary.

5

The Alphabet

The Greek alphabet was borrowed and adapted from the Phoenician alphabet: the Greeks borrowed the letter forms, the order in which they come in the alphabet, and the letter names (*alpha*, *beta*, etc.). The date and place of the adaptation is one of the most hotly disputed topics in classical scholarship.

Around 1000 BC the eastern Mediterranean was largely literate. The collapse of Hittite power around 1200 meant that cuneiform documents were no longer being produced in Anatolia, but speakers of Luwian (a language closely related to Hittite) were putting up monuments carved with Luwian "hieroglyphic" script (a distinct Anatolian script, not Egyptian hieroglyphic) in southeastern Anatolia and northern Syria. The Egyptians, of course, wrote in their own distinctive script, but used Akkadian cuneiform for communication with foreigners. On Cyprus a group of related syllabic scripts was used to write a variety of languages, including (by the tenth century) Greek; they are known to modern scholars as Cypro-Minoan, because they are clearly related to the Minoan Linear A script of Crete (and hence also to Linear B). In the Levant, the eastern Mediterranean from Syria down to the Sinai peninsula, a new script (or family of scripts) had established itself, and was spreading. This is known as the North Semitic script. Unlike the other scripts of

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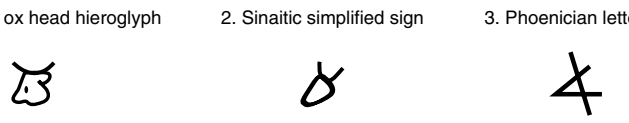

Figure 5.1 Ox head to *ʾalf*.

the region, this script was not syllabic, but alphabetic, and used no logograms. It had developed out of an alphabetic script attested as early as the eighteenth century BC: inscriptions in this very early script have been found in the Sinai peninsula, and it probably had its origin there (for this reason it is known as the Sinaitic or Proto-Sinaitic script). It had almost certainly evolved under the influence of Egyptian writing. Many of the letters look like Egyptian hieroglyphic signs which have been borrowed and reused: the Egyptian sign was named (by the Semitic-speaking adapters) and its value in the new alphabet was the first sound of that name (the acrophonic principle). Thus the hieroglyphic ox head was called (in a local north Semitic language) *ʾalf* "ox," and it was given the value ʾ (the glottal stop [ʔ]).[1] The graphic development from the ox head hieroglyph to the Phoenician letter *ʾalf* can be seen relatively easily (Figure 5.1). Note that the value of the new alphabetic letter had nothing to do with the value of the Egyptian hieroglyph, or with any Egyptian word.

The most important North Semitic alphabet, Phoenician, had developed by the eleventh century. It is the Phoenician alphabet which lies behind the Arabic, Aramaic, and Hebrew scripts. The Aramaic alphabet was borrowed from Phoenician in the eleventh century BC, and gradually modified; the original Hebrew script was also an off-shoot of Phoenician, and probably distinct from it by the ninth century BC. From the fifth century BC, however, Hebrew was written in the Aramaic alphabet (the characteristic "square" Hebrew script is a development of this). The Arabic alphabet is also a development of the Aramaic alphabet.

The Greek alphabet was adapted from the 22 letters of the Phoenician alphabet, with some additions and adaptations to suit the phonology of Greek, sometime after 1000 BC. Exactly how long after is not clear, but it now seems unlikely that this process could have taken place after around 850 BC, even though the first inscribed Greek texts that we have were written about a century after this date. We shall consider the reasons for this assumption below.

Adaptation of the Phoenician Alphabet into Greek

All 22 Phoenician letters were adapted into the Greek alphabet, in the same order, and with more or less the same names: subsequently a couple fell into disuse, and five extra letters were added by the Greeks to the end of the alphabet (see next section). In Archaic and Classical Greece more or less every region had its own variety of the Greek alphabet: letter shapes varied slightly, and there were some variations in the use of the letters *phi* (Φ), *chi* (Χ), *psi* (Ψ), and *xi* (Ξ): we shall consider these further below. After around 400 BC all areas of Greece gradually adopted the Ionic alphabet, and this is the alphabet that we now consider standard (for the phonetic values of the Greek letters in the Classical period see the Appendix). The three letters marked with an asterisk do not appear in the Ionic alphabet, but are found in other regional alphabets.

			Phoenician name	*Phoenician value*
Α	*alpha*	<	*ʾalf*	[ʔ] glottal stop
Β	*beta*	<	*bēt*	[b]
Γ	*gamma*	<	*gīmel*	[g]
Δ	*delta*	<	*dālet*	[d]
Ε	*e psilon*	<	*hē*	[h]
*F	*wau*	<	*wāw*	[w]
Ζ	*zeta*	<	*zayin*	[z]
Η	*(h)ēta*	<	*ḥēt*	[ħ] pharyngeal fricative voiceless
Θ	*theta*	<	*ṭēt*	[tˤ] pharyngealized stop
Ι	*iota*	<	*yōd*	[j]
Κ	*kappa*	<	*kap*	[k]
Λ	*lamda*	<	*lāmed*	[l]
Μ	*mu*	<	*mēm*	[m]
Ν	*nu*	<	*nūn*	[n]
Ξ	*ksi*	<	*sāmek*	[s]
Ο	*omikron*	<	*ʿayin*	[ʕ] pharyngeal fricative voiced
Π	*pi*	<	*pē*	[p]
*Μ	*san*	<	*ṣādē*	[sˤ] pharyngealized sibilant
*Q	*qoppa*	<	*qōp*	[kˤ] pharyngealized stop

P	*rhō*	<	*rēš*	[r]
Σ	*sigma*	<	*šin*	[š] palatal sibilant
T	*tau*	<	*taw*	[t]

The letters are named on an acrophonic basis: that is to say, in Phoenician the letter representing the sound [b] is named *bēt*, which means "house," because the word begins with a *b-*. Greek has kept to the same principle, except that the words do not have any meaning (*sigma* is an exception – it means "hissing" in Greek). The addition of a final *-a* to the Phoenician words is easy to explain: Greek words can only end in a vowel or the consonants *n*, *r*, or *s*, so the final vowel is a "support" vowel to avoid breaking this phonological rule.

It can be seen by running an eye down the list of Phoenician sound values that there are no vowels. Anyone who knows a Semitic language will find this unsurprising (the morphosyntactic structure of Semitic languages makes it far easier to predict vowels than in Indo-European or Turkic, for example): in the modern world Arabic and Hebrew are generally written without vowels. The Greek adaptations were as follows:

A	[a] [ā]	<	*ʾalf*	[ʔ]
E	[e] [ē] [ę̄]	<	*hē*	[h]
I	[i] [ī]	<	*yōd*	[j]
O	[o] [ō] [ǭ]	<	*ʿayin*	[ʕ]
Y	[u] [ū]	<	*wāw*	[w]

The reasoning behind these adaptations is not hard to work out:

A. *alpha*: the Phoenician word begins with a glottal stop, which a Greek would not hear (since it is not a phoneme in Greek). On the acrophonic principle, therefore, it is natural to make this letter represent the first audible sound in the word.

E. *epsilon*: Phoenician is richer in aspirates than Greek, having both *hē* and *ḥēt*. The latter had already been used for the Greek [h], leaving *hē* (a fainter aspirate) free to represent the *e* vowel which characterizes the syllable. The name *epsilon* is medieval ("simple *e*" as opposed to the digraph AI which was also pronounced [e] by that time): in the Classical period it was still called εἶ [ę̄]: the Greeks simply named this letter for its sound.

I. *iota*: the vowel [i] is simply the vocalic version of the semivowel [j], which makes the consonant *yōd* an obvious choice; and since the consonant did not exist in Greek, a Greek would probably have heard the name of the Phoenician letter as [ijod].

O. *omicron*: this is hard to relate phonetically to the Phoenician pharyngeal *ʿayin*. But the name of the letter in Phoenician means "eye," and the words for "eye" in Greek begin with an *o-* (*omma*, *ophthalmos*); the adaptation in this case depends on the translation of the letter name and the acrophonic principle. The name *omicron* ("short *o*") is late: in the Classical period it was still called οὖ [o̱]: as with *epsilon*, it was named after the sound.

Y. *hypsilon*: the vowel [u] is the vocalic version of the semivowel [w] (compare *iota* above), which explains the choice of *wāw*. In this case, however, Greek also had the consonantal phoneme [w] (though it dropped from a number of dialects): the adapters therefore kept [w]*/wau* in its original place in the alphabet, and added the new vowel [u]*/hypsilon* to the "supplemental" letters at the end of the alphabet (see below). The sign for the vowel in Greek was given a slightly different shape to differentiate it from the consonant (in early Greek script the letter forms are more similar than their modern printed form would suggest). The name *hypsilon* is Byzantine ("simple *u*" as opposed to the digraph OI, since by that time the two sounds had fallen together): in the Classical period it was simply called ὖ [hū] (compare *epsilon*).[2]

It is a striking coincidence that early Semitic scripts sometimes used the consonant signs above to indicate vowels: in particular, *ʾalf* (*ʾaleph*) for [a], *yod* for [i], and *waw* for [u]. This device is found in Aramaic and Hebrew, but is not attested in early Phoenician script. When a consonant sign is used to indicate a vowel in this way in a Semitic script, it is called a *mater lectionis* (Latin "mother of reading") by grammarians. It is impossible to be sure whether the Greek adapters hit on the same idea independently, or whether it was known as a possibility to their Phoenician contacts; the fact that in the cuneiform Ugaritic alphabet of the thirteenth century BC there was limited use of analogous *matres lectionis* (special signs for *ʾaleph*+*a*, *ʾaleph*+*i*, *ʾaleph*+*u*) suggests that the device was to some extent established in the region.

The classical Greek (Ionic) alphabet has two further vowel signs, which were not in widespread use outside Ionia until the late fifth

century BC (a striking gap in the Greek alphabet as originally devised is the lack of signs for long vowels):

(H) *ēta*: since Ionic dialects had lost the sound [h], this letter was freed up to represent the long *e* in the first syllable of *(h)ēta* in the Ionic alphabet. Other regions, which preserved [h], had to make do with using the sign E for both long and short *e* vowels: this was unsatisfactory, as they were quite distinct phonemes in Greek. However, when these regions took over the Ionic alphabet after the end of the fifth century they then lost the ability to write the sound *h-*.

(Ω) *ōmega*: this letter was invented in Ionia to represent a long *o* (on the analogy of *ēta* for long *e*): it is merely an *omicron* with a bar underneath. Before the adoption of the new letter, the sign O was used for both long and short *o* vowels. The letter name means "big *o*" and is Byzantine: in the Classical period both phoneme and letter were simply called [ō] after the sound.

The three consonants with asterisks in the alphabet above fell out of use for different reasons. The letter F [w] was retained in regions where the local dialect kept the sound [w]; the sound was lost in Attic and Ionic at an early date, so the alphabets in these regions discarded the sign for it. With the spread of the Ionic alphabet after 400 BC the letter fell out of use: it makes an unexpected late appearance in the second century AD in an inscription from Sparta written in "revival" Laconian dialect (see Chapter 9). It is now called by its Byzantine name *digamma* ("two gammas," from the shape).

The letter *qoppa* (which became *Q* in the Roman alphabet) was dropped at an early date by all Greek alphabets, since it was redundant. Both *kappa* and *qoppa* were used originally to denote the velar /k/: *kappa* before the vowels *e*, *i*, *a* (front and mid vowels), and *qoppa* before *o* and *u* vowels (back vowels). The distinction between a front velar and a back velar is not phonemic in Greek (any more than in other Indo-European languages): the position of the /k/ in the mouth is simply determined by the following vowel.

The letter *san* was used for /s/ in some varieties of the Greek alphabet (e.g., in Corinth and Crete); most used the letter *sigma*. For reasons which are not entirely clear, the earliest Greek alphabet(s) offered the possibility of using either letter for this sound, and local alphabets picked one or the other. Roger Woodard (1997: 181–184) has made the attractive suggestion that *san* was originally used for an

affricate sibilant with a value such as [t^s]; in areas where this sound did not exist, or had merged with another sound such as [t] or [s] or [zd], *san* was free to be used for normal Greek [s]. This is connected with the suggestion that the adapters of the alphabet were Cypriot, to which we shall turn below.

The "Supplemental" Letters

The Greek alphabet does not end with *tau*. The standard Ionic alphabet has five extra letters: Υ (*hypsilon*), Φ (*phi*), Χ (*chi*), Ψ (*psi*), Ω (*omega*). These were added by the Greeks to the end of the borrowed alphabet, and are known as the supplementals; we have seen the reasons for the appearance of the vowels *hypsilon* and *omega* among these additional letters. Of the three consonants, the letter Φ (*phi*) is straightforward: the alphabet already had Θ (*theta*) to represent the Greek aspirated stop [t^h]. Greek has two further aspirated stops, namely [p^h] and [k^h]: *phi* was therefore invented on the analogy of *theta* to represent [p^h] (the letter shape is a circle with the bar vertical instead of horizontal).

The representation of [k^h] brings us on to the letters *chi* and *psi*, which are less straightforward, and which need to be considered along with the letter *ksi* in the main alphabet. Alert readers will have noticed that this letter, like the Latin letter *x*, is an oddity in the original adapted alphabet: it represents *two* phonemes, namely *k*+*s*. The sign *psi* (for *p*+*s*) in the supplementals was clearly created on the analogy of *ksi*: (voiceless) stop+[s]. There are in fact three voiceless stops in Greek, namely [k], [p], and [t], but the sequence [ts] is not possible in Greek, so no sign was devised.

Curiously, the Greek alphabets differ in the values they assign to these three supplementals: they can be divided into three major groups on the basis of how they do this. The three groups are known as the Red, the Blue, and the Green alphabets (these convenient color terms come from the first printed map of the distribution of the Greek alphabets by A. Kirchhoff in 1887).

1. In the Red group are the alphabets of Euboea, Boeotia, Thessaly, most of the Peloponnese (Elis, Achaea, Arcadia, Laconia,

Messenia), and the western colonies of these regions (Italy and most of Sicily).
2. In the Blue group are the alphabets of Athens, Megara, Argos, Corinth, the Cyclades, Ionia, and Lesbos.
3. In the Green group are the alphabets of Crete, Thera, and Melos.

The relationship between the letter signs and their values in the three groups is as follows (a dash indicates that the letter is not in use):

	Red	*Blue*	*Green*
Φ	p^h	p^h	–
X	k+s	k^h	–
Ψ	k^h	p+s	–
Ξ	–	k+s	–

A small subsection of the Blue alphabets did not use any letter for [p+s] or [k+s], but spelled out the clusters with two letters. This "Light Blue" sub-group is important because it includes the old alphabet of Athens, along with Aegina and the central Cyclades.

The Ionian Greek alphabet that we are used to, and which usurped the other alphabets in the course of the fourth century BC, is a Blue alphabet. The distribution table above explains the letter *X* in the Roman alphabet: the alphabet was carried to northern Italy by Euboean colonists who used a Red version. The cross-over in value of the signs X and Ψ between Blue and Red alphabets is a minor variation which is not too surprising; even less surprising the decision to drop the "irrational" letters *ksi* and *psi* by the Light Blue group. The absence of all four letters from the Green group, however, is hard to explain, especially since [k^h] and [p^h] are phonemic, and since the group does use *theta* for [t^h]. It suggests that the earliest version of the Greek alphabet ended with *tau* (like its Phoenician model), and that the supplementals were added after the initial adaptation: in this case the alphabet may have become embedded in Crete without the additional signs, which were subsequently resisted (with the exception of the vowel *hypsilon*). Some support for this view was provided by the publication in the 1980s of four copper tablets which contain an early version of the Greek

alphabet (copied out several times), but only the original 22 letters from *alpha* to *tau*. They were found in the Fayum, Egypt. It is unfortunately hard to date the tablets, since they were the product of an illegal excavation, and lack archaeological context; scientific analysis indicates that they are not a modern forgery, but does not give a precise date in antiquity. The alphabet on the tablets seems to reflect a date in the ninth century BC; it is then hard to explain how they turned up in the Fayum (there were no Greeks in Egypt at this date). It has been suggested by Brixhe (2007) that they could be a Hellenistic copy of an earlier artefact, the signs on which were thought to have magical properties.

We saw above that the letter *hypsilon* was created to represent the vowel [u], and is an altered version of the sign *wau*, which represented [w]. This sign is absent from the alphabet in the Fayum tablets: presumably *wau* was used both for consonantal [w] and for vocalic [u] at this period (as in most Semitic scripts). In the Phrygian alphabet, which was derived from the Greek alphabet (a Red version) at an early date, there is a similar split in the shape and function of the sign for *yod*: the familiar vertical line <I> is used for the vowel [i], while a Z-like sign was used for the consonantal [j] (which is phonemic in Phrygian, as in Latin and English).

If the presence of two signs can be shown to be early in Phrygian (this is not completely clear), an early version of the Greek alphabet may have had them too. The Greeks would subsequently have jettisoned the consonantal sign, since [j] is not a phoneme in Greek: it exists only as a glide after the vowel [i] (the presence of a couple of syllabic signs *ja jo* in the Cypriot syllabary shows that Greek ears picked up on the intervocalic glide). This would explain rather handily the odd fact that half the local alphabets of Greece had a similar "crooked" *iota* (angular, with three or four bars), while the other half had the plain vertical line. Phoenician *yōd* has a Z-like shape, so this is clearly the oldest, and the simple vertical must be an innovation. Alphabets which use the letter *san* for [s] generally have the crooked *iota*, while those which use *sigma* use the vertical line: this must be to avoid confusion, since the crooked *iota* looks rather similar to a *sigma*. In any case, the Fayum tablets, and the fact that Phrygian inscriptions are now attested as early as around 800 BC, show that the adaptation of the alphabet needs to be pushed back at least as far as the mid-ninth century, and perhaps earlier.

Greek Views on the Alphabet

The Greeks were interested in the alphabet and its origins. They retained a strong tradition that they had got the alphabet from the Phoenicians; in the last quarter of the fifth century Herodotus recorded the following:

> Now these Phoenicians who came with Cadmus … introduced into Greece upon their arrival many arts, not least the art of writing, of which the Greeks till then had, it seems to me, been ignorant. And originally they shaped their letters exactly like all the other Phoenicians; but afterwards, in course of time, as the sounds of the language changed, they altered the forms of the characters as well. Now the Greeks who were living around this region [Boeotia] at the time were for the most part Ionians. They learned the letters from the Phoenicians and adopted them, altering the shapes slightly as they used them, but still referred to them as "Phoenician," as was indeed right, since it was the Phoenicians who had introduced them to Greece. (5.58)

The term "Phoenician" is applied to alphabetic writing elsewhere in Greece. A long and important inscription from the city of Teos in Ionia from around 475 BC specifies certain forbidden activities (interfering in the city's grain supply, conspiring with a foreign enemy, etc.) and pronounces curses on any person who engages in such activities. The inscription ends with the following clause: "Whoever breaks the steles on which the curse is written, or knocks out the letters or makes them illegible, that man is to die, both himself and his family."

The word for "letters" here is *phoinikeia*, which could be literally translated "Phoenician things." This can be connected with an inscription that was discovered in Crete in the 1970s, written on a piece of bronze armor, and dating to around 500 BC. It is a contract between a community in central Crete and a scribe Spensithios whom they have just hired: "We the city … pledged to Spensithios subsistence and freedom from all taxes … on condition that he act for the city in public matters, both sacred and secular, as scribe and recorder. No one else shall act as scribe …"[3]

The verb here translated "to act as scribe" is *phoinikazō* (the stem *phoinik-* and the verbal suffix *-azō*). This can be analyzed as "to do Phoenician [things]"; and the noun here used for "scribe" is

phoinikastās, which is an agent noun (representing someone who does the action of the verb) from the verb *phoinikazō*. The use of the word Phoenician (or rather, its stem *phoinik-*) in areas as far apart as Ionia and Crete, in addition to isolated references in classical literature, illustrates the persistence of the belief that writing had come to Greece from this region.

It is worth adding that the adjective *phoinikeios* "Phoenician" could also mean "purple/red" or "relating to palm trees." Almost all scholars have rejected the possibility that letters of the alphabet were called "red things": it is true that in some inscriptions on stone the carved letters were stained with a red dye to make them stand out, but this was hardly a widespread practice. The palm tree connection does at least have support in an ancient (if obscure) source. Cadmus was the son of Agenor, a mythological king of Tyre; in some accounts Cadmus is given a brother called Phoinix, who was also said to be responsible for introducing the alphabet to Greece (*Phoinix* could mean "the Phoenician"). A curious entry in the Suda, a huge Byzantine encyclopedia which preserves words and snippets from ancient sources now lost to us, and a good deal of confusion besides, gives the following under the heading "Phoenician letters" (*Phoinikeia grammata*): "The Lydians and Ionians say that the letters were named after Phoinix son of Agenor, who discovered them. The Cretans contradict this, saying that the name derives from the practice of writing on the leaves of palm trees."

Phoinix is the word for palm tree in Greek: the passage is suggesting that *phoinikeia grammata* means "signs on palm leaves." It is an interesting coincidence that this suggestion is attributed to Crete, which knew writing in the Bronze Age: although it has been pointed out in this context that most of the surviving Linear B texts are written on clay tablets shaped like palm leaves, we have no evidence that the Greeks ever used real palm leaves for writing on (unlike southeast Asia, where this was common). It is not of course impossible that on Crete, or elsewhere in Greece, artifacts with Minoan or Mycenean writing were known in the first millennium (cf. opening section of Chapter 3 [*semata lugra*]).

In Greek literature the invention of writing is sometimes associated with two of the great "culture heroes" of Greek mythology: Prometheus and Palamedes. In the Aeschylean tragedy *Prometheus Bound*, the hero claims credit for a long list of inventions that have

benefited mankind (including architecture, astronomy, arithmetic, and most forms of transport):

> And the science of numbers – that outstanding skill –
> I discovered to them, and the combining of letters,
> A tool that allows all things to be remembered, the mother
> of the Muses.
>
> (459–461)

Palamedes makes a similar claim in a fragment of lost play by Euripides:

> And those drugs against forgetfulness I alone established;
> laying down consonants, vowels, and syllables
> I discovered knowledge of letters to mortal men.
>
> (*Palamedes*, fr. 578)

It is writing which kills Palamedes in the end: Odysseus plants a letter in his hut at Troy which implies that he is engaged in secret and treacherous dealing with Priam (king of Troy), and Palamedes is executed by the Greeks as a result. Both Prometheus and Palamedes are examples of the Greek fondness for devising mythologies of a "first inventor" (*prōtos heuretēs*) for skills and cultural practices of significance. It is worth noting that Cadmus is not such a figure in Greek tradition. He did not "discover" or "invent" writing: he imported a foreign technology to Greece.

The Modern Debate

Given that the Greek alphabet is an adaptation of the Phoenician alphabet, we would like to know who was responsible for the adaptation, where this took place, and what the circumstances and mechanisms of the adaptation were. Since we have no reliable information from the ancient world, we are in the familiar position of relying on a mixture of circumstantial evidence and informed guesswork. There are two basic models.

1. The usual assumption is that the process of adaptation was a process which took place at a specific time and in a specific location:

not necessarily between two people on one day, but probably in a given community in response to a particular impetus.

2. However, not all technologies are borrowed by group A from group B on a unique occasion, before then spreading through group B: some (for example, musical techniques) may be borrowed on multiple occasions from group B, before converging to a recognizable and distinct form in group A. This has occasionally been offered as an alternative model to the simpler process above.

The local scripts of Archaic Greece show some fairly trivial regional differences, easily explained as the result of the spread of writing at different speeds in different regions of the Greek world over the course of several centuries; and particularly unsurprising if the date of the first Greek and Phrygian writing is pushed back into the ninth century. But some of the peculiar features of the adaptation (for example, the sign *ksi*) would be hard to explain as the result of coincidence in numerous technology swaps. This suggests that the Phoenician script was adapted to write Greek on a specific occasion which gave rise to the attested alphabets of the Archaic and Classical periods; the supplemental letters were added relatively soon to the original 22 signs. This event eclipsed any earlier or later adaptations, but did not prevent local innovations and alterations as the script spread. In some areas there may even have been a conscious effort to make the local script distinctive from neighboring ones, as a marker of political identity.

The adaptation of the alphabet could have taken place just about anywhere in the Mediterranean where Greeks and Phoenicians came into contact in the early first millennium BC. For Greek characters in the *Odyssey*, which probably reflects life in this period, the Phoenicians are a familiar presence in the Mediterranean world, and this picture is supported by archaeological evidence. The leading candidates proposed over the last few decades include Al Mina (a coastal trading post in northern Syria, established around 800 BC, where Greek pottery has been found), Crete, Cyprus, Euboea, Rhodes, and the "Tyrrhenian" region (the Greek trading post at Pithekoussai and the neighboring Italian mainland): there is archaeological evidence for Phoenician trading activity in all of these places. Scholars have made cases for one place over another based on their view of the date of the adaptation, and the impetus.

We need not assume that there was one overriding reason which made Greeks want to write. It has been argued that the reasons were: (a) economic: trade and accounting, (b) social: a prestigious elite practice, (c) literary: to write down literature, (d) ideological: distinctive Greek script reflected a growing Greek identity.

Of these, (a) and (b) are the most promising. If the Phoenicians were using writing as part of their trading activities, Greek counterparts may well have been impressed by the practical benefits. But commercial utility is not always the driving force in the spread of a new social practice (or not the only one). The Phoenician practice of writing dedications on objects in temples is likely to have come to the attention of the Greeks; this is a practice which slipped easily into the secular realm, in the form of private inscriptions on pottery. Phoenician inscriptions on votive statuettes and pottery, and casual "graffiti" on vases, are attested in the Old Phoenician period (around 1100–700 BC), and are strikingly reminiscent of Greek practice. The earliest surviving Greek inscriptions are inscriptions of this type on pottery; this does not prove that commercial or utilitarian use of script is not equally old, since these documents are likely to have been written on perishable materials. But a range of different stimuli (top down and bottom up) may have been instrumental in the spread of the new technology.

The romantic suggestion that the alphabet was taken over specifically for the purpose of writing down the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* was presented in an interesting book by Barry Powell (1991). The reception was mixed: some critics sat on the fence ("the case as presented here still rests ultimately more on possibilities and a willingness to believe than on demonstrable probabilities," Lang 1991); others expressed skepticism while admiring the "stylish and elegant" presentation of the argument (Ridgway 1992); and some rejected the notion outright. As Hugh Lloyd-Jones (1992) noted in his review, the theory "raises not inconsiderable difficulties":

> At the start the new invention would have been intelligible only to the inventor and his immediate circle. In the early period, the alphabets used by the various Greek communities were by no means identical with one another. Certain letters called "supplementals" – *phi*, *chi*, *psi*, *omega* – had different values in different places; in Crete and in its neighboring islands of Thera and Melos, they do not appear at all. Powell's view that they belonged to the original alphabet, but

> were abandoned or given different values in certain places during the half century following the alphabet's invention, is not convincing. Fascinating as is the bold conjecture that the alphabet was invented specially to record the great poems, the humdrum notion that it was invented by traders to help them in the conduct of their business seems a good deal more consonant with the way things usually happen in ordinary life.

For these reasons, in addition to the chronology (the adaptation is placed around 800 BC), the real picture is likely to have been more complex, although the new ability to write down lines of verse must have helped in the spread of writing among the elite. The fourth consideration (d) is also unlikely to have provided the initial impetus for the adaptation of Phoenician script: nevertheless, it is clearly a factor that must have been central to the widespread adoption of the skill in the eighth century, in the context of the emergence of Homeric epic as a "national" text in the Greek world. Many of the earliest graffiti on vases are hexameter lines, and some apparently allude to Homeric poetry (see below).

There are a number of good reasons to put Cyprus at the top of a list of candidates, and one major obstacle. Firstly, it had been a major locus of interaction between Greeks and Phoenicians for centuries before the foundation of the Phoenician settlement at Kition (Larnaca) in the tenth or ninth century BC. Secondly, there was an unbroken tradition of literacy on the island from the Bronze Age to the first millennium: inscriptions in Cypro-Minoan script are attested from the fifteenth century to the early twelfth centuries BC. Greeks from the Mycenean world started to arrive on the island in the Late Bronze Age, and (since they were used to literacy) were probably instrumental in adapting the indigenous Cypro-Minoan script for Greek: the earliest attested Greek inscription in the Cypriot syllabary (a name in the genitive on a bronze spit) dates to the eleventh century. Cyprus is the only region of the Greek world that did not adopt the Greek alphabet around the time of its invention: inscriptions until the fourth century BC (the Macedonian conquest) are written in the Cypriot syllabic script. Roger Woodard (1997) has argued that this script was developed by arrivals (or refugees) from the Mycenean world who were familiar with the Linear B script; and further, that there is evidence of the influence of the Cypriot

syllabary on the adaptation of the Greek alphabet. In particular, the alphabet includes the irrational sign *ksi* for [ks], which the Cypriot syllabary also has; and, as we noted above, includes the signs *san* and *sigma* for [s] (*san* may have been devised to denote an affricate such as [t^s], specifically, the sound which [k^w] had become in Arcado-Cypriot dialect before *e* and *i* vowels).

An obvious objection to Cyprus as the birthplace of the alphabet is precisely the fact that Cyprus was the one region of Greece which resisted the alphabet, and continued to use its own script for writing Greek until the Hellenistic period. It is not in theory hard to understand why the Cypriots resisted the new alphabet: writing habits are notoriously conservative, and the presence of Phoenician settlements on Cyprus, with whom the Greeks were in competition, may have provided additional antipathy to the Phoenician-style script. Whatever the mechanism of the adaptation, the Cypriot script may have been a catalyst (examples have been found across the Aegean, which implies that it may have been reasonably familiar to Greeks in other regions); and if the speculation above is correct, the script had an influence on the way the Phoenician alphabet was adapted to write Greek. There may, consequently, have been a greater degree of continuity in Greek writing in the Aegean than previously imagined.

The History of Greek Writing

The oldest intelligible Greek inscription is generally held to be an inscription on a ceramic wine jug found in the Dipylon cemetery in Athens in the 1870s. It is dated to around 740 BC, and consists of one hexameter line followed by a second line of 11 letters which are hard to make sense of, but may possibly contain words for "this" and "receive":

1 Whoever of all the dancers now dances most friskily
2 … [*he is to receive this ?*]

In this text the *alpha* (A) is on its side, as in Phoenician script, and the *iota* is of the "crooked" variety, with three bars, and not distinguished clearly from the *sigma*. Perhaps a decade or so later is the

"Cup of Nestor," found on the island of Pithekoussai in the 1950s. It consists of three lines of verse scratched onto a cup:

1 [I am] Nestor's cup, good to drink from
2 whoever drinks from this cup, him straightway
3 shall the desire of Aphrodite of the beautiful crown seize.

The inscription is widely assumed to be a joking allusion to the cup of Nestor as described at *Iliad* 11.632. (In the first line "I am" is restored: the letters are damaged and cannot be read.)

Both of the above inscriptions are written right to left. The direction of writing was not fixed in early Greece, though texts of over one line in length were generally written *boustrophedon* ("as the ox ploughs") until the mid-sixth century: the direction of the writing switches at the start of every new line. In the early period writing is mostly, though not exclusively, right to left; left to right direction gradually became the norm over the course of the seventh century. The reasons for the switch in preference are not clear; Greek written in the Cypriot syllabary was mostly right to left, except at Paphos, and Linear B was always left to right.

Punctuation

Greek texts were written without spaces between words, and mostly without punctuation signs. In archaic inscriptions use was sometimes made of two or three dots, arranged vertically like a colon, to mark off words or phrases. In literary papyri two dots (*dikōlon*) could also be used to mark a change of speaker (in a play, or in Plato's dialogues). A horizontal dash in the left margin called a *paragraphos* ("beside the writing") is widely used in papyri to mark new speakers or new sections in a text: major divisions (such as the end of a poem) may be marked with a small symbol called a *koronis* in the margin next to the *paragraphos*. It can take the form of drawing of a bird, or a more abstract shape not unlike the modern §. The only ancient account of Greek punctuation is in the *Grammar* of Dionysius Thrax (170–90 BC), who says there are three types of *stigmē* (the word means point or dot): the final point, the middle point, and the "under" point (*hypostigmē*):

> The final point is the sign of a completed thought, the middle point is used for the sake of breathing, and the under point is an indicator of sense which is not yet complete. In what respect does the point differ from the under point? In time: the interval is substantial with the point, with the under point it is much less.

This is borne out in a number of papyri which use a dot above the line as a full stop or period, and a middle or a low dot to mark the end of a clause.

The range of punctuation marks used in a modern printed text of Ancient Greek, and in modern Greek, is a Byzantine development, and they were not in regular use before the ninth century AD: the full stop or period (.), comma (,), semi-colon (·) and question mark (;). The terms *komma* ("cutting") and *kōlon* ("limb") were both in use by the Roman period in the sense of "phrase" or "clause" (within a sentence).

Breathings and accents

In modern printed texts the presence or absence of *h-* is marked by the (mandatory) addition of a diacritic sign ῾ (*h-*) or ᾽ (no *h-*) above the vowel: thus ἁ [ha-] and ἀ [a-]. These signs are called the "rough breathing" and "smooth breathing" respectively (the terms are translations of the Greek), and were devised by Alexandrian grammarians in the third or second century BC: the earliest form of the rough breathing was ⊦ (the first half of an H), and that of the smooth breathing ┤ (the second half of an H). They were not used regularly until the switch to "minuscule" writing in the ninth century AD. In the Hellenistic and Roman periods they were used sporadically to indicate the start of a new word, since gaps in the writing were not used for this purpose.

Greek accent signs were devised at the same period, perhaps by Aristophanes of Byzantium, head of the library at Alexandria in the early second century BC. Like breathings, they were mostly used for the purpose of marking word division, and disambiguation; use of the accent signs was not regular until the ninth century AD. Ancient Greek had a pitch accent on each word: one syllable in the word was pronounced on a slightly higher pitch than the other syllables, as in Japanese and Norwegian. This rising pitch is denoted by an acute (´)

accent on the vowel of the syllable: λόγος [lógos] "word," σοφός [sophós] "wise."

If the accent is on the final syllable of a word, the acute accent changes to a grave (`) accent when another word follows (which presumably indicates that the rising pitch was modified or canceled owing to accent on the following word): σοφὸς λόγος [sophòs lógos] "a wise word."

On a long vowel or diphthong, if the pitch rises on the start of the vowel it will fall on the end of the vowel: this is written with a circumflex (῀), which probably developed out of the acute followed immediately by the grave accent (´`): νοῦς [noûs] "mind," πᾶν [pân] "everything."

If the pitch rises on the second part of the long vowel (or diphthong) it will be written as an acute: Πάν [pán] "(the god) Pan": the difference between "everything" and "Pan" is thus [páan] versus [paán].

In Modern Greek the accent has changed from a pitch to a stress accent, and since 1982 the acute accent (only) is employed to indicate its position.

Writing Greek

From the sixth century BC, when writing takes off in the Greek world, attention was paid to the aesthetics of the letter forms in texts made for public display: chiefly on stone, but also those painted on vases. "Informal" inscriptions (such as graffiti) were, of course, likely to be messier. Letters were constructed of straight lines and 45 degree angles: curved letters (such as B, Θ, O) are formed with attention to balance and proportion. Papyrus was available in Greece from at least the late sixth century, and so far as we can tell, formal writing in ink on papyrus followed the same principles, and was more or less indistinguishable from epigraphic writing until the end of the fourth century BC. This type of formal writing was characteristic of rolls containing literary texts (a luxury item).

Papyrus is of course perishable, and documents on papyrus generally survive only from Egypt, where they were protected by the extreme dry climate, though our oldest surviving example of this type of literary writing is a papyrus from the mid-fourth century BC preserved in the tomb of a Macedonian noble in Derveni (it was

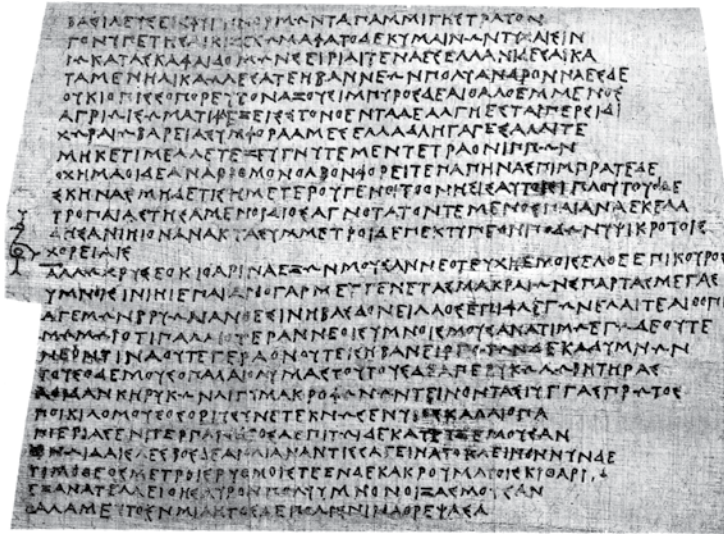

Figure 5.2 Timotheos papyrus with koronis. *Source*: Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung/Staatliche Museen zu Berlin/bpk photo agency.

carbonized in the funeral pyre of its owner), discovered in 1962. Better preserved is a slightly later fourth-century BC papyrus containing part of Timotheos' poem *The Persians* (Figure 5.2) which was found inside a sarcophagus at Abusir in Egypt in 1902. From the third century, with the Macedonian conquest of Egypt, and the foundation of the library at Alexandria, a "book hand" emerges, a rounded form of the earlier epigraphic script: *omega*, for example, began to be written in the form ω and *sigma* in the form C. This large, often rounded script consists of what we would consider to be "capital" letters, and remained (more or less) the standard Greek book script until the ninth century AD: in the Roman period the rounded forms of the book hand begin to appear in inscriptions on stone as well. In the Hellenistic period we see the emergence of a distinct cursive "documentary" script, the style used in day-to-day business documents and letters. Letters were joined together in writing, and letter shapes were modified to accommodate this. There is no firm boundary between the two styles, but, as one authority has put it, "at the extremes they are as different as chalk and cheese."

Capital letters continued to be used for books, but by the late eighth century AD the everyday cursive style (especially that used in

government offices) had become formalized into a new style of writing at Constantinople, known as minuscule. This regularized the now familiar distinction between capital and "lower-case" letters: the lower-case Greek letters of modern texts are derived from minuscule. It replaced the old capital script completely in the ninth century for all purposes. Capitals were now reserved for headings. This was considerably more economical with parchment, and ancient manuscripts were recopied in the new script: almost all surviving ancient texts derive from a minuscule copy of this period. Accents and breathings were written, and by the tenth century word division was normal. Modern Greek handwriting derives from minuscule.

Notes

1 The hieroglyphic ox head sign is Gardiner (1957: 461) sign F1.
2 [hū] and not [ū] because the vowel *u-* was always aspirated in Greek at the beginning of a word (a phonetic development which is not fully understood).
3 Teos: full text and translation in Colvin (2007: 112–114); Spensithios: text and translation in Colvin (2007: 156).

6

The Greek Dialects

Greek Attitudes to Dialect

The history of Greek until the Macedonian conquest at the end of the fourth century BC is the history of the Greek dialects. There was no standardized Greek language, just as there was no unified political entity called Greece. In this respect Greek was very different from Latin, which from its first appearance in the third century BC as the official language of the Roman republic shows hardly any variation: linguistic diversity in Italy was to a large extent hidden by the use of a standardized language. In Greece, on the other hand, speakers used the local dialect for all purposes, and cities put up inscriptions in local dialect (written, as we have seen, in the local alphabet).

There is little evidence that the Greeks looked down on other dialects of Greek, thought of them as in some sense "incorrect," or indeed found them intrinsically amusing. They seem to have been unworried by and even uninterested in diversity within the language. This is in striking contrast to their view of non-Greek languages, and is bound up with the wider issue of the Greek view of foreigners. In the late summer of 479 BC the Greeks were at a critical point in their struggle against the Persian invasion. The previous year they had been defeated at Thermopylae, but had then destroyed the

A Brief History of Ancient Greek, First Edition. Stephen Colvin.

Persian fleet in a victory at Salamis. According to Herodotus (8.144), the Persians sent a message to the Athenians at this point, offering them security and autonomy if they would come to terms. The Spartans were alarmed, and urged them not to do a deal with the Persians, to which the Athenians replied with some spirit that it was shameful of the Spartans to fear such a thing, and gave a famous statement of Greek national identity:

> for the reasons which prevent us from doing this are many and serious, even if we wanted to: firstly, the burning of our temples … and secondly, the fact that the Greeks are of the same blood and the same language, and have common temples to the gods and sacrifices, and similar customs.

This shows that there was a concept of a Greek language, which was not affected by the dialectal diversity. This language was, of course, opposed to that of "foreigners." The normal word for a non-Greek is *barbaros*, which was borrowed by the Romans and passed into English as the word *barbarian*, though in classical Greek it lacks the strongly pejorative implications of the English word. The word seems to be made up from the nonsense syllables *bar bar*, which mimicks the way foreign languages sounded to Greek ears. When the Athenian comic poet Aristophanes brings barbarians on to the stage, they speak fractured Greek or lapse into gibberish; but when he brings non-Athenian Greeks into his plays he puts an accurate representation of their dialect into their mouths (this seems to be demanded by the realism inherent in Greek comedy), without making the dialect the butt of the humor. Characters never complain that they cannot understand a fellow Greek, for example. There is no general word for "a Greek from a different city": the word used, when necessary, is *xenos*, which merely denotes someone that you do not know, and for this reason comes to mean both "guest" and "stranger."

There is one passage of comedy that is clearly making a joke of another dialect: this is a fragment of a play called *The Phoenician Women* by the comic playwright Strattis (roughly contemporary with Aristophanes), whose plays survive only in a small number of fragments. An unknown character says:

> You don't understand anything, you Thebans! For one thing, people say that your word for a cuttlefish is *opitthotila* [lit. "back-fouler"]. A

> rooster you call *ortalikhos*, a doctor *saktas*, a bridge *bephura*, figs you call *tuka* … (Strattis *PCG* 49)

This exception to the general tendency not to use language to bash other Greeks may be explained by the fact that the Athenians loathed Thebes, an important regional rival which had sided with the Persians in the Persian Wars, and with the Spartans in the Peloponnesian War. Thebans were satirized by the Athenians for being gluttonous and stupid, a stereotype that the Boeotian poet Pindar alludes to (in the finest literary Doric) in a lyric victory ode for Hagesias of Syracuse:

> Now stir your comrades, Aineas …
> And with our truthful words
> Let us see if we can deflect that ancient jibe, "Boeotian pig."[1]

There is no doubt, of course, that Greeks found some dialects harder than others. Dialects spoken by Greeks living in remote locations are likely to have required more attention to follow, especially if the dialect in question was not closely related to that of the hearer. Thucydides (3.94) mentions a wild Aetolian tribe from the mountains of northwestern Greece, who live in remote unwalled villages (unlike the classical Greek city or *polis*). It is worth noticing that an outlandish dialect of Greek is (for an Athenian) associated with semi-barbarous eating habits: "These people [the Eurytanians] make up the largest part of the Aetolians; it is said that their language is very difficult to understand, and that they are eaters of raw flesh."

To speak any dialect of Greek, then, counted as speaking Greek, and also guaranteed one's credentials as a Greek. When the dialects came into contact, strategies seem to have been based on common sense or convenience rather than anxiety about linguistic difference. So, for example, written records from international (pan-Hellenic) contexts merely reflect the dialect of whoever drew them up: inscriptions recording interstate treaties are written in the dialect of the city in which they were discovered, and were presumably drawn up in two separate dialects when they were agreed, with a copy for each city. Epitaphs for the deceased are

written in the local dialect (where the tomb was located), rather than in the dialect of the deceased; inscriptions at pan-Hellenic sanctuaries like Delphi and Olympia were written in the dialect of the city or the writer responsible for them.

When Greeks from different regions interacted, it is likely that a certain amount of leveling, or linguistic accommodation, took place. This is a process by which speakers minimize the perceived peculiarities of their own dialect, usually by adopting features which they think most dialects (apart from their own) share. We have no evidence for this: the prediction grows out of modern sociolinguistic work in dialectology, which has found that people who speak differently will behave cooperatively when the cost is lower than the anticipated reward (the cost here being the speaker's own sense of identity and integrity). In other words, they will converge to some extent in interaction. This is generally a subconscious process, which explains why it does not figure in dramatic dialogue (and writers, of course, have literary reasons for not allowing their characters to engage in linguistic accommodation, since they need to keep the characters distinct). The Greeks in the Classical period seem not have suffered from a high degree of linguistic insecurity, since there were no grounds for telling them that the way they spoke was inferior to the way they had spoken in the past, or to the way that Greeks in other regions spoke. Linguistic politics did not play a large role in Greek culture until the Hellenistic period, when both of these charges were possible.

Classical Greek did not have a word with the specific meaning "dialect." It had three words which denoted language, and these could be used in contexts where we would use the term dialect:

1. *glōssa*, literally "tongue", the most common general term for language and dialect.
2. *dialektos*, related to the word dialogue (Gk. *dialogos*), from the verb "to converse (with)." Its meaning covers speech, language, national language, and dialect. (In post-classical Greek it became specialized in the meaning "dialect".)
3. *phōnē*, usually meaning voice or speech in a general sense, but Thucydides uses the adjective *homophōnos* ("homophonous") of the Messenians and Spartans to mean "speaking the same dialect."

Social Dialect

Modern linguistics does not recognize any linguistic difference between a "language" and a "dialect": the difference between them is political or ideological, not linguistic. Mutual intelligibility, for example, does not work as a criterion. Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish are mutually intelligible, but have the status of separate languages; while many "languages" have dialects which are not mutually intelligible (Arabic, Chinese, and Italian, for example). National borders are not always or even often linguistic borders: around the Dutch border German and Dutch dialects are extremely similar to each other, and around the Franco-Italian border the same is true of the local dialects of French and Italian. The modern notion of a language is to a certain extent a construct, very much associated with the modern notion of the nation state. In practice, although one talks of the French language, there are in France numerous dialects, both social and regional: the modern standard that foreigners learn is based on the language of the cultural and political elite in the Île-de-France (Parisian region), and much influenced by the literary language. The best definition of a language is perhaps one attributed to the Yiddish linguist Max Weinreich (1894–1969): a language is a dialect with an army and a navy.

Although there was no such national standard in pre-Macedonian Greece, since the dialects had equal status, there is some evidence for the emergence of regional standards within the dialects. Inscriptions in most areas are written in a relatively uniform language which must reflect the culture of writing: when a language (dialect) is committed to writing, the written variety tends to be adopted across the region as a standard, and is then (usually but not always) extremely resistant to change. The written language becomes a type of *koine* which all speakers use regardless of the variety that they speak.

It is also possible, though this is much harder to document, that over the course of the sixth and fifth centuries BC, within each dialect community some varieties gradually attained a higher social status than others. This would have happened as communities in Greece became more populous, more prosperous, and more highly stratified, and would have reflected the social and political structures in

the individual states: there is no reason to think, for example, that the sociolinguistic situation in Sparta and Athens would have been very similar to each other. The fact remains that almost all our information in this area comes from Athens (and even here it is scanty): we shall consider the evidence for social varieties of Greek at the end of the chapter.

Sources for the Greek Dialects

Our evidence for the dialects of Greek comes from inscriptions carved on stone (occasionally bronze), and to a lesser extent from smaller, "informal" texts such as graffiti (typically scratched on vases or ceramic fragments after firing), vase inscriptions (painted by the artist before firing), and curse tablets scratched onto metal (usually lead or bronze). We shall not in this chapter be taking Greek literary texts into account, since the language found in these sources is a specific form of the language (literary dialect), and because most literary texts have undergone a fair amount of corruption during the course of 2000 years of copying by hand.

The advantage of inscriptions as a source is that they are not the result of centuries of transmission (though many are fragmentary and have to be "supplemented" or filled out by guesswork). It is also the case that the language is likely to represent the local dialect without interference from literary language, though this needs to be qualified. For example, inscriptions in verse are often influenced by literary language: they are often written in a language approximating to, or at least containing features of, epic (Homeric) language. Such inscriptions are mostly either funerary, carved on grave monuments, or written on objects dedicated to a god (usually in a sanctuary). It seems to have been felt that the grandeur of verse, along with out-of-the-ordinary language, was appropriate to contexts where the mortal world came into contact with higher powers. Nevertheless, regular prose inscriptions are written in local dialect. Even though the language may be a "chancellery" language, that is to say the variety that was taught to scribes and generally accepted as suitable for inscriptions, there is no reason for it to contain elements of other dialects.

The number and quality of inscriptions across the Greek world varies dramatically, which means that we are quite well informed about a small number of dialects (Attica, Boeotia, Elis, for example), and very badly informed about most regions. As we noted in Chapter 4, large areas of northern and western Greece are almost without inscriptions till the Hellenistic period. Large regions such as Thessaly and Laconia are very poorly documented; and some of the most important cities (Megara, Corinth, Syracuse) also have yielded few inscriptions. In some cases this is because few written documents were produced: this is probably the case for northwest Greece, Thessaly, and Messenia. In other cases it is likely that inscriptions were produced on wood or metal, or were destroyed by later events (Corinth, for example, was destroyed by the Romans in 146 BC, and almost all inscriptions from before that date have been lost).

Dialect and Ethnicity

The Greeks divided their dialects into three broad groups: Doric, Aeolic, and Ionic. These groups correspond to three of the ethnic subdivisions or "tribes" that they recognized amongst themselves: it is not clear how old this division is, or when it was first extended to dialect. Nor was it comprehensive: many Greeks (the inhabitants of Arcadia and Elis, for example) did not regard themselves as Dorians, Aeolians, or Ionians. The three-fold division of the Greek people is set out in an early epic fragment, the "Hesiodic" *Catalogue of Women*:

> From Hellēn the warrior king there sprang
> Dōros and Xouthos and Aiolos lover of horses[2]

Hellen means "Greek": this is clearly the mythological ancestor of the Greek race. His three sons are the ancestors of the Dorians, Ionians, and Aeolians respectively: Xouthos married Kreousa, daughter of the king of Athens, and their son Ion was founder of the Ionians (who included both Athenians and Ionians). The Greeks tried to unite their various traditions, as well as contemporary realities, by means of such genealogies: contradictions (i.e., unreconciled traditions) and competing versions remained. As a result there

is no definitive ancient account, but in the fifth century BC and later it was widely accepted that Hellen was king of Thessaly: this is because Homeric epic famously did not use "Hellenes" as general term for Greeks, but appears to locate "Hellas" in Thessaly, near to or part of Achilles' home territory Phthia.[3]

Hellen left Thessaly to his son Aeolus: the Boeotians and eastern Aeolians (Lesbians) later migrated from there to their historical homelands. The Dorians received, or arrived at, a small area north of the gulf of Corinth, near Parnassus: this area (Doris) is one of the ancestral homes ascribed to the Dorians in ancient sources before their "reconquest" of the Peloponnese. Xouthos looks like a relatively late invention, and his role in explaining the historical distribution of the Ionians is more than usually convoluted. He was given the northern Peloponnese (classical Achaea): his descendants were subsequently expelled by the Dorians. However, Athens was generally acknowledged to be the cradle of the Ionian race: thus Herodotus (1.147) defines the Ionians as those "who are of Athenian descent and keep the feast Apaturia." Since the Athenians claimed to have sprung from the soil of Attica (autochthony), Xouthus also has to be at Athens for a period in order to father Ion: some versions have him stop at Athens to marry Kreousa before arriving in the Peloponnese.[4]

The Greeks, like most peoples ancient and modern, associated language (dialect) with ethnic group. Our classification of the dialects into (Attic-)Ionic, Doric, and Aeolic rests on the categories inherited from the ancient world, which were based to a large extent on non-linguistic subdivisions among the Greeks. Mythological accounts of ethnic kinship could be manipulated to reflect contemporary claims and issues, and we need to be wary of trying to map these precisely onto the linguistic map of the Greek world. On the other hand, it would be absurd to suppose that the Greeks constructed relationships between dialects ignoring the evidence of their own ears. When Greek sources discuss dialect, they are referring either to the way Greeks spoke in specific places (Thebes, for example), or to one of the higher-level groups that they identified, namely Doric, Aeolic, and (Attic-)Ionic. It is unhelpful that modern discussion of the dialects inherited this ambiguity, because local vernaculars are a concrete phenomenon, while the second (higher-level) groups are an abstract category.

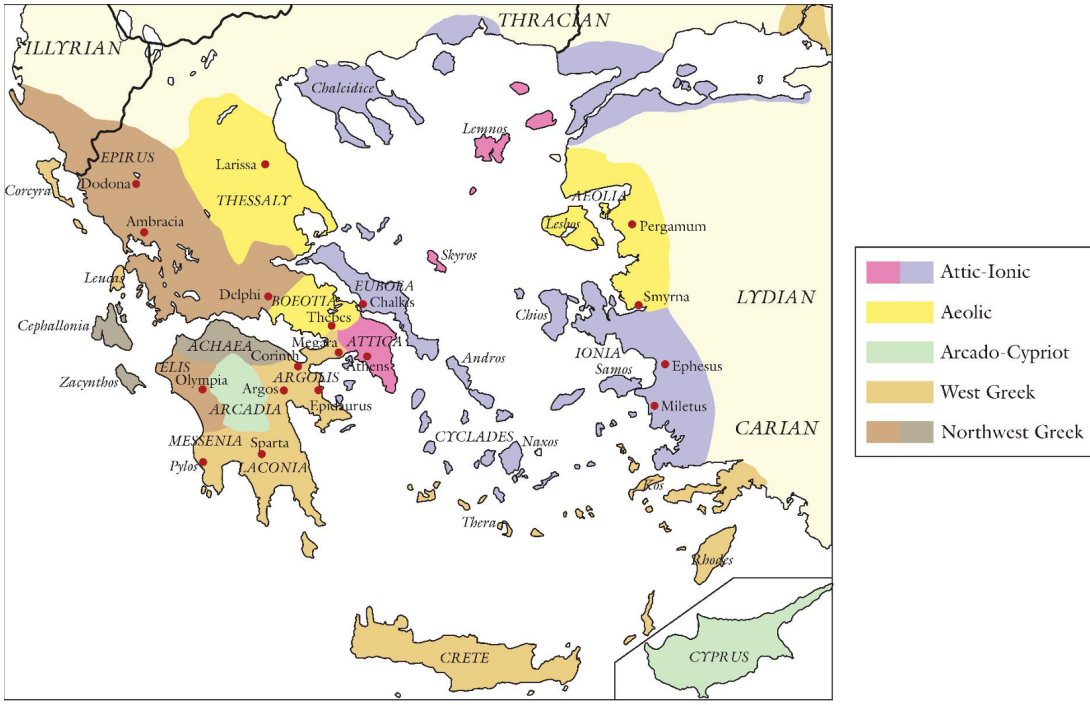

Figure 6.1 Map of the Greek dialects around 500 BC.

Modern Classification of the Greek Dialects

Modern dialectologists group the Greek dialects into four main sub-families, plus one dialect which stands outside this classification.

1. Arcado-Cypriot
   - Arcadian
   - Cypriot
2. Attic-Ionic
   - Attic
   - Ionic: Euboean, central Ionic, eastern Ionic
3. Aeolic
   - Lesbian (eastern Aeolic)
   - Thessalian
   - Boeotian
4. West Greek
   - Doric: Saronic, Argolic, Laconia/Messenia, smaller islands, Crete
   - Northwest Greek: includes Phocis, Locris, Achaea, Elis
5. Pamphylian (unclassified)

For the sake of illustration, and to avoid too much linguistic detail, we shall consider the following five "diagnostic" features for each dialect (plus in each case a couple of idiosyncratic features):

1. *Didonti* versus *didonsi* "they give": does *ti* > *si* in the third person plural of the verb?
2. The verbal ending of the first person plural ("we"): either *-men* (Attic) or *-mes* (as in *didomen* "we give").
3. The ending of the infinitive of the verb "to be": either *-nai* (Attic) or *-men* (this applies to the whole class of verbs that "be" belongs to, an archaic group known as the athematic verbs). Thus "to be" is *ēnai* (Attic, Arcadian) or *ēmen* (West Greek, Boeotian).
4. The conjunction "when": either *hote* (Attic) or *hoka*.
5. The dative plural of nouns ending in *-os* (e.g., *anthrōpos* "person"): either *-ois* or *-oisi* (as in *anthrōpois* "to the people").

Arcado-Cypriot

The newcomer here is Arcado-Cypriot, which was not a dialect (or ethnic) group that the Greeks recognized. We have seen that Cypriot was the only dialect not written in the Greek alphabet, but in a syllabic script of around 50 signs which was devised on Cyprus and is related to the Minoan Linear A script of the second millennium BC. This script was deciphered in the 1870s, and by the first decade of the twentieth century it was generally agreed that the dialect has a significant relationship with Arcadian. The relationship is counter-intuitive, given the position of Cyprus in the eastern Mediterranean, while Arcadia is a landlocked territory in the mountains of the central Peloponnese. It seems likely that both dialects go back to a common ancestor which was spoken in the Peloponnese in the Late Bronze Age (around 1550–1150 BC): in the crisis of around 1200 BC, which saw the collapse of Mycenean power and wealth and the destruction of Mycenean sites, emigrants from this region arrived in the comparative calm and prosperity of Cyprus. These emigrants were presumably headed by a reasonable number of the former elite, not only because they were able to command transport, but also because they carried with them to Cyprus a knowledge of the Linear B writing system: when they modified the indigenous script on Cyprus to write Greek, they incorporated some features of Mycenean Linear B.[5] We have seen that Cypriot and Arcadian are the closest of all the historical dialects to Mycenean Greek, which would fit this scenario; there is also good archaeological evidence for arrivals on Cyprus from the Aegean world at about this date. Speakers of this Bronze Age *didonsi* dialect in the Peloponnese were subsequently assimilated by newcomers, and formed part of the new Doric Peloponnese; a small number were isolated in Arcadia and cut off from the *didonsi* variety in Attica, with whom they had previously been in contact. The earliest surviving inscriptions from Arcadia date from the sixth century BC; by this time it is clear that the Arcadians are surrounded by Dorians (who spoke *didonti* dialects).

Linguistic features include:

1. *Didonsi* (with Attic-Ionic and Lesbian).
2. Verbal ending of the first person plural ("we"): *-men*.

3. The ending of the infinitive of the verb "to be": *-nai* (*ēnai* "to be").
4. The conjunction "when": *hote*.
5. The dative plural of nouns ending in *-os*: *-ois*.

In spite of at least 500 years of separation, Arcadian and Cypriot preserve a range of significant features in common:

6. Both dialects preserve some archaic-looking vocabulary, which they share with Mycenean and/or Homeric Greek. For example, *aisa* "share; fate, destiny" (Arc., Cyp., Homer); *phasganon* "sword" (Cyp., Homer, Myc.); *oiwos* "sole, single" (Arc., Cyp., Homer, Myc.).
7. Other features shared with Mycenean include peculiar forms of the prepositions meaning "to" and "from": Arc.-Cyp. *pos*, a shortened form of Myc. *posi* "to" (Attic *pros*); and Arc.-Cyp. and Myc. *apu* "from" (Attic *apo*).
8. All prepositions meaning "out of, from" are followed by the dative-locative case in Arc.-Cyp. and Mycenean, and also Pamphylian (in Attic and other dialects by the genitive case).
9. Oddities shared by Arc. and Cyp. include the preposition *on* meaning "on, up" (Attic *ana*); the conjunction *kas* "and" (Attic *kai*); and the pronoun *sis* or *tsis* "who, whoever" (where the initial sibilant contrasts with the normal form of the pronoun, which is *tis*).

There is no evidence that anyone in the ancient world made a connection between the two dialects. There are, however, myth-historical references to a connection between the two regions. Pausanias records a tradition that the Arcadian fleet under its leader Agapenor was blown off course to Cyprus after the Trojan war, where they remained and founded Paphos. Herodotus says that the Cypriots are an ethnic mix of settlers from Arcadia, Attica, and Kythnos, as well as from Phoenicia and Africa.[6]

There is no literary tradition that we know of in either Arcadian or Cypriot dialect, which also explains why these two dialects had a rather low profile in the ancient world. There were without doubt oral traditions of poetry and song in both regions, but these have not survived.

Attic-Ionic

This is the dialect group that most people mean when they refer to "classical Greek" (grammars of classical Greek give the forms of the Attic dialect, and usually give a brief account of the areas where Ionic differs). Attic is the dialect of Attica, the region in which Athens is located. It is a rather large area by the standards of an ancient Greek "city state," and it seems unlikely that a single uniform dialect was spoken across the region: in the north there is a long mountainous border with Boeotia, and border towns such as Oropos changed hands several times. To the east the coast of Attica is in close proximity to Euboea, where an Ionic dialect was spoken; and to the southwest, beyond Eleusis, was the territory of Megara, a Doric-speaking city. Nevertheless, the language of inscriptions is more or less uniform in Attica, at least in the lack of regional variation. The language of official inscriptions of the Athenian state certainly had its own style (which to some extent reflects the content of these inscriptions – the publication of decrees, laws, treaties, etc.), and occasionally appears a little more conservative than the language of private inscriptions.

Ionia is the coastal strip of Asia Minor (modern Turkey) which runs from Phokaia on the gulf of Smyrna down to Miletos. The dialect of the north-central Aegean islands is also a variety of Ionic, and the dialect of Euboea is in effect a hybrid of Attic and Ionic (the three varieties are sometimes called Eastern, Central, and Western Ionic). Ionic dialects were also spoken in the colonies founded by speakers from these regions: Chalkis and Eretria founded cities in Sicily and southern Italy, and Phokaia founded Marseilles and Nice. It is striking that the dialect of the cities of Ionia, as it appears on inscriptions, is extremely uniform, which suggests that the culture of writing spread early in Ionia and that a standard written language (based on the dialect of Miletos) was adopted along with the practice of writing. As for the spoken language, Herodotus (1.142) tells us what we would have suspected anyway, that a number of different dialects were spoken in Ionia and the adjacent islands of Chios and Samos.

Linguistic features include:

1. *Didonsi* (in comon with Arcado-Cypriot and Lesbian).
2. Verbal ending of the first person plural ("we"): *-men*.

3. The ending of the infinitive of the verb "to be": *-nai* (*ēnai* "to be").
4. The conjunction "when": *hote*.
5. The dative plural of nouns ending in *-os*: *-ois* in Attic, in common with West Greek and Boeotian, *-oisi* in Ionic (in common with Lesbian and Pamphylian). Some early Attic inscriptions have *-oisi*.

The dative plural is an area where the two dialects diverge: there are other minor differences which reflect areal convergence:

6. Attic has *-tt-* in common with Boeotian where Ionic has *-ss-* (so the word for "sea" is *thalassa* in Ionic, *thalatta* in Attic and Boeotian).
7. Eastern Ionic has lost the phoneme /h/, which Attic (along with Euboean and central Ionic) retains: so the word *hēlios* "sun" is *ēlios* in Ionic (and Lesbian).

Distinctive phonological features which distinguish Attic-Ionic from the other dialects include the following:

8. *ā* becomes *ē*: so the word *mātēr* "mother" (Latin *mater*) becomes *mētēr* in Attic-Ionic. Thus the word *metropolitan* is based on the Attic form, while *matricide* comes from Latin.
9. The sound *w* (*digamma*, written F) has disappeared: so *oinos* "wine" where other dialects have *woinos* (Latin *vinum*).

There are also some differences in vocabulary. In Aristophanes' comedy *Peace* the protagonist and his slave discuss what sort of animal they should sacrifice when the new goddess Peace is officially installed in Athens (929–933):

Trygaios: Which animal … do you think we should use?
Slave: *Oi*! [A sheep]
Tryg.: *Oi*?
Slave: Certainly.
Tryg.: But that's an Ionic word.
Slave: That's right, so that whenever anybody in the Assembly argues that we ought to go to war, those present panic and shout "*oi*!" in Ionic …

The play on words derives from the similarity (to Athenian ears) between the Ionic word for sheep (in the dative case, required by the grammar of the sentence) and a yelp of fear. The word *oïs* "sheep" (from *owis*, cf. Latin *ovis*) had been replaced in everyday Attic by the word *probaton* (the word in modern Greek), almost certainly because *oïs* had become awkward to inflect after the disappearance of the sound [w]; *probaton* had been a generic term for livestock (its original meaning was "moveable assets").

Attic-Ionic is by far the best attested dialect of Greek, for three reasons. Firstly, there is a huge literature written in these dialects, including Homeric epic, tragedy, comedy, history (Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon), philosophy (Plato, Aristotle), and the political and legal speeches of figures such as Demosthenes and Lysias. Secondly, the number of inscriptions from Attica and the Ionic-speaking areas far exceeds those of other regions of Greece. Thirdly, the *koine*, the common dialect which became the official language of Greece after the Macedonian conquest, was based on Attic-Ionic.

Aeolic

We have already seen in Chapter 4 that there is some dispute whether Thessalian, Boeotian, and Lesbian go back to a clearly defined proto-Aeolic dialect of Bronze Age Greece, or whether they emerged in the fluid situation which followed the collapse of the Mycenean palaces. They do seem to be related (i.e., share material which goes back to a period of common development): each of the dialects has features shared with the other two, though there are few shared by all three.

Linguistic features include:

1. Lesbian (in common with Attic-Ionic) was a *didonsi* dialect, while Boeotian and Thessalian have *didonti* (in common with West Greek). In Lesbian *didonsi* became *didoisi* owing to a regular sound change of *ons*> *ois* (and *ans*> *ais*): this became a regular feature of Lesbian poetic language, and even crept into Doric poetic language.
2. Verbal ending of the first person plural ("we"): Lesbian has *-men*, Boeotian and Thessalian have *-mes*.

3. The ending of the infinitive of the verb "to be": Boeotian and Thessalian have *-men* (*ēmen*), while Lesbian has what seems to be a hybrid form *-menai*.
4. The conjunction "when": Boeotian and Thessalian have *hoka* (with West Greek), Lesbian has a compromise form *hota*.
5. The dative plural of nouns ending in *-os*: Boeotian and Thessalian have *-ois* (with Attic and West Greek), Lesbian has *-oisi* (with Ionic).

There are some features shared by the three dialects:

6. The word for "one" (feminine gender) was *ia* in the three dialects, but *mia* in the other dialects, as in modern Greek.
7. They all used a patronymic adjective to specify the father of an individual ("*x* son of *y*"), while other dialects simply put the father's name into the genitive case. The adjective was formed by adding the suffix *-ios* to the stem of the father's name: thus *Nikias* gives an adj. *Nikiaios*.

All three dialects show the results of centuries of areal interaction and convergence by the time they are attested in inscriptions. Boeotian and Thessalian were influenced by West Greek: we can see that Boeotian was heavily influenced, since we have a fair number of Boeotian inscriptions. Inscriptions from Thessaly are unfortunately very few. Thessaly is a large area, and so far as we can judge there were a number of sub-dialects (as one might expect): dialects in the West of the region seem to have been particularly open to influence from West Greek, those in the East (around Larisa) less so. Lesbian, on the other side of the Aegean, was in interaction with Ionic, and the two dialects share a number of important features. In general the three Aeolic dialects are a good reminder that dialects develop in a location, and it is a mistake to assume that their "ancestry" is the most important factor in explaining them.

When ancient writers (mostly grammarians in the Hellenistic and Roman periods) refer to Aeolic dialect they are almost always referring to literary Lesbian, the poetic dialect of Sappho and Alkaios. In the fifth century BC Herodotus and Thucydides are clear that Thessalians, Boeotians, and Lesbians are related peoples who were separated by a series of migrations: this relationship is named with

the ethnic adjective Aeolic. Thucydides (1.12) shows that Greeks of his day thought that Boeotians had migrated south from Thessaly: "Sixty years after the capture of Troy the present-day Boeotians were driven out of Arne by the Thessalians, and settled in what is now called Boeotia."

Furthermore, a passage (7.57) describing the opposed Greek forces at Syracuse during the Athenian campaign to subdue Sicily in 413 BC makes clear his assumption that eastern Aeolis (Lesbos and hinterland) had been populated by emigrants from Boeotia following the move from Thessaly:

> Besides these there were Aeolians: the men of Methymna, subjects who paid with ships rather than tribute, and men of Tenedos and Ainos, who paid tribute. These, though Aeolians, were constrained to fight against Aeolians, that is, the Boeotians, their founders, who were on the side of the Syracusans.

Of the three regions, only Lesbos had a famous and ancient literary tradition, going back to the semi-mythical Terpander. Boeotia had two very famous poets, Hesiod and Pindar, but neither used Boeotian dialect: Hesiod composed epic, and so used the Ionic-based epic dialect, and Pindar wrote lyric poetry, for which Doric was the conventional dialect. The Boeotian poet Corinna did indeed compose in her native Boeotian, but the dialect forms in her text suggest that she lived and wrote in the Hellenistic period. The grammarian Apollonios Dyskolos (second century AD) distinguishes the Boeotian of Corinna from "Aeolic" (by which he means literary Lesbian): a typical example is his comment on the possessive adjective *hos* "his, her" (which he says was *wos* in Aeolic): "The Aeolians have the form with [w] (*digamma*) … and so do the Boeotians: cf. Corinna in her poem *Euonymiae* …"

Pausanias, however, who lived at about the same time as Apollonius, assumes that his readers will understand that Boeotian is an Aeolic dialect. He records as follows the dubious tradition that Corinna entered into a competition with Pindar, and won: "I believe that her victory was partly due to the dialect she used, for she composed, not in Doric speech like Pindar, but in one Aeolians would understand …"[7]

The only extended passage in an ancient author which discusses the relationships between the Greek dialects is in the geographer and historian Strabo (around 64 BC–24 AD). He gives the impression

that he thought of Aeolic as a catch-all term for dialects which were not clearly Attic-Ionic or Doric: hence he applies it to Arcadian and Elean, and by implication to speakers of Northwest Greek north of the gulf of Corinth (in Aetolia and Acarnania, for example). However, there are two specific reasons for this conclusion.

Firstly, although he is talking about the Greek dialects in this passage (8.1), at the back of his mind are the ethnic divisions that the Greeks traditionally accepted, and the story of the migrations which underpinned these divisions: for Strabo, the "Dorians" are the people who re-took the Peloponnese and then mixed with the previous inhabitants, whom he took to be Aeolians.

Secondly, having acknowledged the existence of four dialects (Attic, Ionic, Doric, Aeolic), he constructs the same relationship for Doric and Aeolic as for Attic and Ionic, an extreme closeness which is the result of earlier unity. The neatness of this parallel relationship was perhaps attractive in itself, but the conclusion is based on thoughtful analysis: Boeotian and Thessalian are Aeolic, but clearly had a large number of Doric features as well. It was (therefore) a reasonable assumption that the Arcadians, who also appeared to speak a dialect which was a mixture of Doric and something else, were also originally Aeolic.

Strabo seems to have concluded that people to the north of the gulf of Corinth, who sounded rather similar to Dorians, must be Aeolians too; and it is certainly true that these dialects share a couple of distinctive features with Boeotian, Thessalian, and Arcadian. For example, the preposition "to, into", which is εἰς [eis] in Attic-Ionic and most Doric dialects, is ἐν [en] (the same word as Latin *in* and English *in*) in Boeotian, Thessalian, the Northwest Greek dialects, and Arcadian. (This is in fact a shared archaism, so cannot be used to prove a linguistic relationship.)

Strabo makes it clear that he thinks that the populations and dialects of the Peloponnese are to a greater or lesser extent mixed:

> Now the peoples who had less contact with the Dorians, as was the case with the Arcadians and with the Eleians … spoke the Aeolic dialect, whereas the rest used a sort of mixture of the two, some sounding more Aeolic and some less. And even now the people from the different cities [*sc.* in the Peloponnese] almost seem to speak different dialects, though because of the predominance which has been gained by the Dorians, they are all said to speak "Doric." (8.1)

Finally, it is worth bearing in mind that the Greek adjective *aiolos* (which has the same form as the proper name Aeolus) could also mean "varied, variegated": this may reflect an early perception that the people subsumed under this term were a more diverse group than the Ionians and the Dorians.

West Greek

West Greek is a term invented by modern linguists. The dialects fall into two main groups. (a) Doric of the Peloponnese: this excludes the dialects of Achaea and Elis, but includes the West Greek dialects of the southern Aegean islands (Crete, Rhodes, Cos, and others). It more or less corresponds to the ancient use of the term Doric. (b) Northwest Greek: the dialects of Achaea, Elis, Locris, Phocis (Delphi), Aetolia, and Acarnania.

This is a large group of dialects: there are a number of features that they have in common, but (as with all dialects) many of the features that they exhibit are the result of development in interaction with neighboring dialects, both West Greek and others. For example, Megarian, Corinthian, and Argolic dialects on the Saronic coast of the Argolid were in local interaction with Attic in the Saronic gulf region, and share some important features with that dialect.

There is a tradition among classicists of referring to the retention of inherited [ā] (where Attic-Ionic changed to [ē]) as "Doric alpha." This comes from fact the students of ancient Greek are brought up on grammars which give Attic-Ionic as the norm: the only other dialect they meet is the Doric of lyric poetry, and they therefore imagine that this is a diagnostic feature of Doric, a sound-change even. The term is unfortunate and meaningless: all the Greek dialects retain [ā] apart from Attic and Ionic.

Linguistic features include:

1. *Didonti* (in common with Boeotian and Thessalian).
2. Verbal ending of the first person plural ("we"): *-mes*.
3. The ending of the infinitive of the verb "to be": *-men* (*ēmen* "to be").
4. The conjunction "when": *hoka*.
5. The dative plural of nouns ending in *-os*: *-ois* (with Attic, Boeotian, Thessalian).

There are a some vocabulary items that are generally regarded as characteristic of West Greek (often shared with Boeotian and Thessalian, which have a lot in common with West Greek): for example:

6. The word "sacred" is *hiaros* (Attic *hieros*); "first" is *prātos* (Attic *prōtos*).

Doric was the dialect most associated with lyric poetry, especially that sung by a chorus: one of the earliest and most famous lyric poets was Alkman of Sparta, whose work has survived in fragments. The chorus in tragedy, which is an Athenian genre, typically sings a substantial piece of lyric poetry between the spoken scenes; these "choral odes" are in a watered-down form of literary Doric, while the spoken dialogue is in Attic.

The Northwest dialects share a few common features which are not found in "southern" Doric: in particular, they tend to raise the vowel [e] to [a] in front of an [r]: so *pherō* "I carry" becomes *pharō*. (This is characteristic of British and Irish English too: compare *clerk* [klāk] or [klark].) The dialects of Elis (Olympia) and Phokis (Delphi) must have had quite a high profile, since they were spoken at major pan-Hellenic sanctuaries where important athletic contests took place (the Olympic and Pythian games): both areas produce large numbers of inscriptions. Other Northwest dialects were spoken in regions which were remote, or politically marginal in the Classical period. These dialects are poorly known, since inscriptions are late, and give the impression of being written in a local *koine* (a written standard) rather than a close approximation to local dialect.

Pamphylian

Pamphylia is a small strip of land on the Mediterranean coast of Asia Minor (Turkey). Inscriptions from this region reveal a very peculiar dialect of Greek which has proved hard to classify within the framework of the conventional dialect groupings. Inscriptions are rather hard to understand. Herodotus and Strabo record the story that the Pamphylians were the descendants of Greeks who arrived with the seers Calchas and Amphilochos after the Trojan war; Strabo also records the tradition that Laconia and Argos had contributed

colonists to cities such as Aspendos, and that Side was a colony of Aeolian Kyme.[8] This mixed legendary heritage matches the appearance of the dialect rather well: it shares some striking features with Arcado-Cypriot (which would suggest a Mycenaean ingredient); at the same time it is a *didonti* dialect (this and other features are shared with West Greek). It also shares some features with eastern Aeolic, though the significance of these is hard to quantify.

Linguistic features include:

1. *Didonti* (with West Greek).
2. Verbal ending of the first person plural ("we"): not known.
3. The ending of the infinitive of the verb "to be": *-nai*.
4. The conjunction "when": *hoka* (with West Greek).
5. The dative plural of nouns ending in *-os*: *-oisi* (with eastern Ionic, Aeolic).

A striking isogloss with Arcado-Cypriot (and Mycenean) is:

6. Prepositions meaning "out of, from" are followed by the dative-locative case.

Pamphylian is surrounded by Anatolian languages belonging to the Luwian family, and shares with them some phonological features (and it is close to Cyprus, which also seems to share certain features with the mainland languages).

Social Dialects of Greek

The language of a reasonably large area such as Attica can be thought of as a number of overlapping varieties, some of which are tied to region, others to social group, gender, and age, and almost all to a combination of these. Evidence for such "social dialects" is scarce, since our two main sources, literature and inscriptions on stone, are themselves associated with very specific linguistic registers: namely, a formal variety used by the literate elite. However, this elite must have comprised quite a small percentage of the population: the educated class of (male) citizens with leisure to take part in the political and cultural life of the city. Most estimates put the number of male

citizens in the range 35,000–45,000, and then quadruple that figure to take account of women and children. To this one has to add slaves (perhaps as many as 100,000) and resident aliens (non-Athenian Greeks, estimated at 25,000–30,000): this gives a total population approaching 300,000, of which the male citizens formed around 10% or slightly higher. Many of these will not have been wealthy residents of Athens: the number includes rural farmers and the urban poor (the lowest property class who did their military service by rowing in the navy).

For evidence of the way non-elite social groups spoke we rely on informal written sources such as graffiti (usually incised on pots), inscriptions painted on ceramics by the artist, ostraka, and curse tablets (scratched on lead). These sources give us glimpses of vernacular Attic, but the very fact of being written makes them uncertain evidence, since (a) the writer must have had access to a reasonable degree of education, and (b) spelling conventions always disguise the writer's vernacular to some extent. Spelling mistakes in these sources give us a clue about how sounds were being pronounced by the writer.

The evidence, such as it is, points to the conclusion that during the fifth century BC sections of the population of Attica were speaking sub-elite varieties which in most (but not all) respects anticipated the later development of the (elite) standard language; and that these vernaculars reflected some of the developments that were taking place in neighboring Boeotia (that is to say, isoglosses crossed the Attic-Boeotian border to a far greater extent than one would guess from official or literary sources). For example, the phonological change [ei] > [ē] > [i] seems to have been complete by the end of the fifth century BC in sub-elite Attic, as in Boeotian. It is worth noting that we are unlikely to be dealing with a simple High → Low continuum; in most speech communities the non-elite dialects are the most innovative varieties, and there are (therefore) a number of competing variants at this level. A characteristic of elite language is that it is conservative: innovative features are typically suppressed. Women are likely to have been speakers of an innovative sub-elite variety. They had little access to education or the cultural life of the city; even if they were not legally barred from the theatre, it seems unlikely that large numbers of citizen women would have been in attendance. They were excluded from

the political and legal institutions where power derived from the manipulation of language; much of their day to day interaction will have been with slaves.

There are some references in Greek comedy to different social dialects in Attica. In a fragment of a lost play by Aristophanes (*PCG* 706) the chorus says of an unknown person:

> His language is the normal dialect of the city –
> Not the effeminate high-society accent,
> Nor uneducated, rustic talk.

It is noticeable that Aristophanes does not poke fun at "uneducated, rustic talk" in his plays – after all, a large section of his audience would have been Attic farmers and urban laborers who spoke like this – but he does occasionally make fun of the linguistic affectations of the *jeunesse dorée*.[9]

A sour comment on Athenian speech habits in the Classical period survives in the *Constitution of the Athenians* of an anonymous commentator nicknamed the "Old Oligarch." The writer implies that Athenian naval supremacy has been responsible for a range of decadent behaviors, including linguistic contagion: "Further, hearing every type of language, they have taken one feature from here, another feature from there. Greeks on the whole use their own language, customs, and dress; but the Athenians use a mixed bag taken from all the Greeks and barbarians."[10]

This mixed, international variety of Attic is what lies at the heart of the Hellenistic *koine*.

Notes

1 Pindar, *Olympian* 6.89–90. The sentence is addressed to the chorus leader, who led a chorus ("your comrades") of men or boys as they sang (and possibly danced) the ode.

2 Fragment 9 in Merkelbach and West (1967). The poem is not by the author of *Works and Days* or *Theogony*, but is perhaps as early as the seventh century BC.

3 See for example *Iliad* 2.684, 9.395: discussed by Thucydides (1.3) and Strabo (9.5).

4 For the Dorians see Herodotus 8.31; for Xouthos see Pausanias 7.1, with a slightly different version at Strabo 8.7.1. Euripides' *Ion* is a famous treatment of the myth.
5 See Palaima (1989) and Woodard (1997: 44–47, 217–218).
6 Pausanias 8.5.1, Herodotus 7.90. For the ethnic mix and "hybridization" on Cyprus see Voskos and Knapp (2008).
7 Pausanias 9.22.3; for Apollonius Dyskolos see Corinna, frag. 660 (*Poetae Melici Graeci*).
8 Calchas and Amphilochos: Herodotus 7.91, Strabo 12.7.3. Argos: Strabo 14.4.2. Laconia: Strabo 12.7.3. Kyme: Strabo 14.4.2.
9 See, e.g., Aristophanes, *Knights* 1375–1381.
10 Pseudo-Xenophon, *Constitution of the Athenians* 2.7–8.

7

Homer and the Epic Tradition

The epic poems *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are perhaps the most influential texts in the history of the Greek language. The Greeks attributed them to Homer (Greek *Homēros*), a poet about whose life and dates they seemed to know very little. The other two ancient epic poems that the Greeks often ranked with Homer were Hesiod's *Theogony* and *Works and Days*. These are shorter didactic poems, and (on linguistic grounds) perhaps half a century or more later than *Iliad* and *Odyssey*: but their language is more or less identical, and much of what follows on Homer applies equally to Hesiod.

A number of cities and islands claimed Homer: since the dialect of the poems is largely Ionic these were mostly in Ionia, and the leading contenders were Chios and Smyrna. Chios is mentioned in a couple of classical sources: a fragment of the lyric poet Simonides of Keos (born perhaps around 556 BC) quotes *Iliad* 6.146 as follows:

> ἓν δὲ τὸ κάλλιστον Χῖος ἔειπεν ἀνήρ·
> "οἵη περ φύλλων γενεή, τοίη δὲ καὶ ἀνδρῶν"
>
> The single finest thing that the man of Chios said was:
> "Even as the generation of leaves, so too is the generation of men."

A Brief History of Ancient Greek, First Edition. Stephen Colvin.

This was far from universally accepted, however, since arguments over Homer's provenance continued unabated in the Classical and Hellenistic periods. It may be an oblique reference to a guild or school of rhapsodes which is known to have existed on Chios. They were called the "Homeridae": the term means "sons (or descendants) of Homer," and a handful of references to the group in classical sources from Pindar to Plato implies that they specialized in, and in some sense regarded themselves as authorities on, the recitation of Homeric epic, and probably claimed to be guardians of the Homeric tradition. In the *Homeric Hymn to Delian Apollo* (3.172) the author of the Hymn identifies himself as "a blind man who dwells in rocky Chios." However, the language of the poem indicates that it was composed later than *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and not by the composer(s) of the two great epics: given that the Homeric Hymns seem to have been composed as preludes to the recitation of Homeric epic, this poem may also reflect the activity of the Homeridae on Chios.

From an early period the great rival of Chios in claiming Homer was Smyrna: Pindar is reported (in one of the spurious *Lives of Homer*) to have associated him with Smyrna, and coins with his picture were issued by the city in the second century BC. It is unlikely to be a coincidence that the Smyrna-Chios region was the front-runner among claimants to Homer, given the way epic language would have struck contemporary Greeks. It is where the Ionic dialect area meets the eastern Aeolic area: inscriptions from Chios are in Ionic, but with some Aeolic features, and Smyrna (according to Herodotus) was originally an Aeolian city but was captured by Ionians from Colophon. The language of Homeric epic, as we shall see below, is largely Ionic, but with a noticeable mixture of Aeolic forms.

Greeks of the Classical period were equally uncertain about when Homer had lived. That he had lived many centuries earlier was not in doubt: for one thing, this would explain why the details of his life were not better known to them. His language was clearly archaic, and he (along with Hesiod) stood at the head of Greek literature both chronologically and ideologically. Most classical sources place Homer rather early, at around 300 years after the Trojan war (the early ninth century). Herodotus, however, says emphatically that Homer and Hesiod lived 400 years before him "and no more": this would put them in the late ninth century, with the implication that they may have been later.[1] Later scholars, including Aristarchus,

the great editor of Homer and head of the library at Alexandria, guessed a date around the time of the Ionian colonization of Asia Minor in the mid eleventh century (this perhaps because his language was thought to be an archaic variety of Ionic).

Many wild biographies (the "Lives") of Homer survive from antiquity: like most ancient literary biographies, they are a mixture of "facts" extracted from the poems themselves, and nonsense. The name *Homēros* also happens to mean "hostage" in Greek, and this gets woven into some of the traditions. A common belief was that he was blind, just as the bard in the court of the Phaeacian king Alkinöos is blind (*Odyssey* 8.62–64):

> The page then entered, leading the faithful bard – him
> the Muse had favored above all others, but had given good and evil
> combined:
> his eyes she took from him, but she gave him sweet song.

Phemios, the bard at Odysseus' own court in Ithaca, can see perfectly well, however. It has been suggested that *homēros* also meant "blind" in Greek: the word can be analyzed as "one who accompanies," and the idea is that this could be extended to a blind person (who follows a guide, as in the passage above). In fact, the word is attested in this sense in just a single recondite Alexandrian poem, where the author is clearly making a learned allusion to the poet and the legend of his blindness.[2]

Poets and Performance: Terminology

The Greek word for epic poetry was *epos* "word," or the plural *epē* (the adjective *epikos*, which gives the modern term "epic," is not attested before the first century BC). This was opposed to *melos* (plur. *melē*) "song," the general term for lyric poetry. The word is first attested in the *Odyssey*, when the bard sings the story of the war at Troy to the Phaeacian court: Odysseus, who has not yet revealed his identity, can barely disguise his emotion (8.90–92):

> But when the *bard* began once more to *sing* at the urging
> of the Phaeacian nobles – for they loved his *tale* (*epē*) –
> then Odysseus would cover his head again and weep.

The word for bard is *aoidos* "singer," which comes from the verb *aeidein* "to sing." When the bard sings *epē*, this appears to mean stories of heroic deeds: in another self-reflexive passage of the *Odyssey*, the bard in the house of the absent Odysseus sings to Penelope and her unwelcome suitors (1.325–326):

> The famous bard was singing to them, and they in silence
> sat listening: he sang of the sorrowful homecoming of the Achaeans …

The verb *aeidein* "sing" is also found in a couple of passages in the *Iliad* referring to the singing of "epic" themes: most famously, the opening words of the *Iliad*:

> *Mēnin aeide, thea* …
> *Sing, goddess, of the wrath* of Achilles son of Peleus

Themes suitable for commemoration in performance of *epē* are "famous deeds of men" (*klea andrōn*), which Achilles is singing when the embassy comes to find him in *Iliad* 9.186–189:

> Him they found taking pleasure in a clear-toned lyre,
> … he was singing of famous deeds of men.

The word *kleos* (plur. *klea*), "fame, renown, glory," is a central concept in Greek epic. The warriors, or "heroes," perform deeds of valor in order to win undying fame – and the way they achieve this is precisely through epic song, which glorifies their deeds. There is a symbiotic relationship between kings and bards, therefore, and it is noticeable that bards in the Homeric poems are treated rather well by their patrons.

In *Iliad* and *Odyssey* the singer is described singing to the accompaniment of a *phorminx*, a four-stringed lyre (as Achilles above). The performance may have been similar to modern recitative, in which the rhythm of the poetry and the accent on the individual words interacts with a fairly simple melodic pattern led by the instrument.

The Language of the Poems

The language of *Iliad* and *Odyssey* is like nothing else in the history of Greek. It is not a dialect of Greek, because it is a mixture of forms that was never spoken by any Greek at any time: it is a literary

language, for which the German term *Kunstsprache* (*Kunst-* "artistic, artificial" and *Sprache* "language") is often used. To an Athenian of the late fifth century it would have sounded predominantly Ionic, but dotted with forms that were reminiscent of Aeolic, and marked by the occasional word whose meaning was not at all clear, but which was nevertheless very familiar because he had heard it since early childhood. A substantial part of the vocabulary would have sounded "archaic" or "poetic," that is, comprising words (or grammatical forms) which were not used in contemporary spoken Greek (or even the formal written Greek of prose texts). At the same time, like the language of the bible or of Shakespeare in the nineteenth-century English-speaking world, Greeks were saturated in the diction from their earliest years: not only from hearing and learning the poems, but also because their diction penetrated all later poetry (including Greek tragedy) and was part of a reservoir of sayings and proverbs. Socrates, for example, though he professes to be unhappy about the influence of poets in Greek society (especially Homer and Hesiod), quotes frequently from Homer in the dialogues recorded by Plato and Xenophon. Sometimes he quotes a snatch of Homer to underpin an argument, as a moral premise to which all reasonable Greeks would subscribe; at other times a quotation seems merely to add ornament to his conversation.

In Plato's *Phaedrus* (260a), for example, Socrates replies to Phaedrus as follows: οὔ τοι ἀπόβλητον ἔπος εἶναι δεῖ, ὦ Φαῖδρε, ὃ ἄν εἴπωσι σοφοί, ἀλλὰ σκοπεῖν μή τι λέγωσι. "*That word* should *not be set aside*, Phaedrus, *that* wise men *choose to say*, rather, we should consider carefully whether they have a point." There is no reference to Homer, either by Socrates or Phaedrus, but it is taken for granted that Phaedrus, like any Greek reader, will hear the precise echo of Nestor at *Iliad* 2.361: οὔ τοι ἀπόβλητον ἔπος ἔσσεται, ὅττι κεν εἴπω. "*That word* shall *not be set aside*, *that* I *choose to say*."

In the passage of Plato the first four words are quoted verbatim from Nestor, while the second part "that I choose to say" is adapted to the structure of Socrates' sentence, and the language has been adapted (modernized) from Homeric *Kunstsprache* to classical Attic.

Epic language is not, however, a random mish-mash of elements. To use an archaeological metaphor, the language contains strata which reflect the contribution of different periods and different dialects in the history of the poetry. It seems likely that *Iliad* and *Odyssey* as we

now have them were composed between around 750 and 700 BC, the *Iliad* a couple of decades or so before the *Odyssey*.[3] This makes them the earliest surviving Greek literature; and they contain words and phrases which are earlier than the eighth century. The poems stand at the end of a long tradition of oral epic poetry in Greece, which is likely to have its roots in an Indo-European tradition of heroic poetry, to judge by parallels in other languages (Sanskrit, Old Irish, etc.). The Indo-European origins are mostly too hazy to shed helpful light on Greek epic; of more direct relevance is the contribution of eastern Mediterranean and Near Eastern cultures to Greek poetry. Themes in both Homer and Hesiod have parallels in texts from neighboring cultures, such as the great Mesopotamian *Epic of Gilgamesh*, and the Hebrew bible. The Greek epic tradition as it survives, however, is the product of centuries of singing in Greece, and in a distinctively Greek meter.

Most of the language of *Iliad* and *Odyssey* reflects the eighth century BC, the so-called Geometric period, with an increasingly small amount of material going back to the "Dark Ages" which followed the collapse of Mycenean control; there are, finally, a very small number of elements which seem to reflect the Late Bronze Age, the high period of Mycenean civilization.

The poetry was sung in a rather strict meter now known as the dactylic hexameter: dactylic means "like a finger," because each unit (or foot) in the line consists of one long syllable (marked –) followed by two short syllables (⏑ ⏑), giving the finger-shaped pattern – ⏑ ⏑ ; and hexameter means there are six (Greek *hex*) such units in the line. The last (sixth) foot has just two syllables: the difference in the rhythm makes the end of the line easy to pick out (the final syllable can be short or long). A line will therefore have the shape

– ⏑ ⏑ | – ⏑ ⏑ | – ⏑ ⏑ | – ⏑ ⏑ | – ⏑ ⏑ | – ×

In fact, in any of the first four feet it is possible to substitute – – for – ⏑ ⏑, since one long syllable was felt to be equivalent to two shorts. The first line of the *Iliad* scans:

– ⏑ ⏑ | – ⏑ ⏑ | – – | – ⏑ ⏑ | – ⏑ ⏑ | – ⏑

There is almost always a word end in the third foot: either after the first long, or (in a dactylic foot) after the first short: | – # – | or | – ⏑

⏑ |. This break, called a caesura, gives a natural break in the middle of the line, and acts as a counterweight to the end of the line. The Greeks called this simply the "heroic meter" (*metron hērōïkon*).

Two essential differences to note from English poetry are (a) Greek verse does not use rhyme, and (b) the rhythm is based on short and long syllables, not on the word accent. A short syllable in Greek is a syllable containing a short vowel, provided that this vowel is not followed by more than one consonant:

μέλι	[meli]	⏑ ⏑	"honey"
μέλισσα	[melissa]	⏑ – ⏑	"bee"

Note that the *i* in *melissa* is short, but the syllable is long because of the following double *s*. A long syllable is a syllable containing a long vowel or diphthong, or a short vowel followed by two (or more) consonants: both are seen in the Homeric phrase

μέλιτος γλυκίων	[melitos glukiōn]	⏑ ⏑ – ⏑ ⏑ –	"sweeter than honey"

The *o* in the last syllable of *melitos* is short, but is followed by more than one consonant (it does not matter that there is a word boundary between the consonants). Compare a (non-Homeric) phrase:

μέλιτος οὐδὲν γλυκύτερον	[melitos ouden glukuteron]
⏑ ⏑ ⏑ – – ⏑ ⏑ ⏑ –	"nothing is sweeter than honey"

This sequence was syllabified me.li.to.sou.den.glu.ku.te.ron. To be more precise, therefore, a syllable with a short vowel is scanned long if it is "closed" by a consonant: a single consonant will not close the syllable if a vowel follows, as this consonant will open the following syllable: me.li. But if it is followed by two consonants, the first will close the syllable, and the second will open the following syllable: me.lis.sa. The word γλυκύτερον [glukuteron] "sweeter" is the normal form of the comparative adjective in Attic dialect: it would be impossible to use it in Homeric verse, since the meter will not permit three short syllables in a row. Homer uses γλυκίων [glukiōn], the archaic form of the comparative adjective.

It is possible to represent the patterns of a hexameter in English, but the distinctions are based on accented versus unaccented syllables (rather than short versus long syllables);[4] thus the characteristic end rhythm of a hexameter is

pópulous cíty – ⏑ ⏑ | – ×

and the section (colon) from the caesura to the line end is

abúndant as ráin in the trópics ⏑ | – ⏑ ⏑ | – ⏑ ⏑ | – ×

One has to understand this strict metrical pattern in order to understand how Homeric poetry preserves language from centuries before the composition of the poems. The poet did not compose *Iliad* and *Odyssey* by writing them (it is unlikely that he could read or write): they are the product of oral composition. Like a jazz musician, the poet composes while he is performing, as did the poets he learned his technique from. The aspiring bard is saturated in the rhythm and diction of the poetry; when he starts to compose he will depend to a large extent on the phraseology and themes of his masters. Later, if he is a good poet, he will develop and innovate, and retell the stories in interesting and original ways (much of the thematic material is traditional, of course, but changing times will give rise to new narrative directions).

As an aid to composition while he sings, the poet uses fixed phrases which can be modified as necessary: these are sometimes called "formulas." It is important to note that the whole line need not consist of formulas: the poet says what he wants to say, but when (for example) he needs to refer to a character such as Achilles as the subject of the verb, it is often helpful for him to employ a formula consisting of [adjective + Achilles]. This collocation of name with adjective is designed to fill up a metrical chunk of the line: for example, the chunk from the caesura to the line end. As he sings this the poet can then be thinking of his next line. This use of the so-called "ornamental epithet" is one of the most characteristic features of epic verse: some epithets are generic ("godlike" can be attached to any male hero, for example), others are specific to an individual: only the goddess Athena is "grey-eyed" (50 times), and only Odysseus is "much enduring" (38 times). The epithets are ornamental in the sense that they are contextually redundant: at a given point in the narrative,

it may not be salient that Achilles is swift-footed, that the Trojans are masters of horsemanship, or that Hector has a flashing helmet. The use of such epithets is one of the clearest indicators of oral composition: the rarity of analogous epithets in written epic, such as the *Argonautika* of Apollonius of Rhodes, or Vergil's *Aeneid*, shows that they were not a compositional device in these poems, but rather designed to evoke a Homeric tone.

It is clear that the poet did not think of the verse as a row of six dactylic feet, as we tend to. He built up his line in rhythmic chunks, or colons. Common phrases, such as [noun + epithet] and [verb + object] evolved to fill out a colon: this means that a syntactic unit usually fills a colon. A colon, of course, has a specific place in the verse, because it has a specific rhythm. It also looks as though many nouns and verbs gravitated by themselves towards a specific place in the verse: in many cases the poet seems to have structured his verse around a central concept (noun or verb, for example) and then marshaled the rest of his material to fill out any remaining blocks in the line. Formulaic phrasing helped him to do this.

For example, when a character finishes speaking the poet will normally signal this with a phrase indicating explicitly that he or she has finished, which serves as a bridge to the reaction of the interlocutor(s). One way of expressing this is the collocation

ὣς φάτο [hōs phato] "thus s/he spoke" – ⏑ ⏑

This is a useful way of starting the next line after a character has finished speaking; in five cases in the *Odyssey*, and six in the *Iliad*, the reaction to the speech (after this formal ending) is a smile from the character being addressed:

μείδησεν δὲ [meidēsen de] "and s/he smiled" – – | – ⏑

The addition of this verb forms a chunk which gets us to the caesura:

– ⏑ ⏑ | – – | – ⏑ #

The verb "smiled" does not yet have a subject: all we need now is a name (or a noun) with an epithet to get us to the end of the line. This colon needs the shape of either

(i) ⏑ | – ⏑ ⏑ | – ⏑ ⏑ | –× or
(ii) ⏑ | – – | – ⏑ ⏑ | – ×

Examples of (ii) include: θεὰ γλαυκῶπις Ἀθήνη [theā glaukōpis Athēnē] "the goddess grey-eyed Athene" (*Odyssey* 13.286) and πολύτλας δῖος Ὀδυσσεύς [polutlās dīos Odusseus] "much-enduring godlike Odysseus" (*Odyssey* 23.110). In this last case we end up with the line "Thus she spoke, and much-enduring godlike Odysseus smiled" (Penelope has just spoken). At *Odyssey* 13.250 Odysseus learns from Athene that he has finally reached the island of Ithaca: "Thus she spoke, and much-enduring godlike Odysseus rejoiced." Here the poet has simply used the verb γήθησεν [gēthēsen] "he rejoiced" instead of "he smiled": since the final two syllables [-ēsen] form the grammatical ending of the verb it is an easy variation to the colon.

The realization that Greek epic is "oral formulaic" poetry grew out of the work of the American classicist Milman Parry (1902–1935). It put an end to much of the earlier debate on Homer, but raised a range of new questions and problems. In the early years the idea caused anxiety to a number of classical scholars, who imagined that the claim that the poetry is the product of oral composition, based on traditional diction which was to a large extent "formulaic" (a tricky and misunderstood term), was equivalent to a claim that the poet lacked creative genius. On this view *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were generated by a system of formulas over which the poet had little control; Parry was described as "the Darwin of Homeric studies." In a literate culture which had a low view of illiterate cultures, and little understanding of oral literature, it was also difficult for belle-lettristic scholars to imagine how superlatively great literature could be orally composed.

Decades of research on oral literature around the world has largely laid this anxiety to rest, and does not prevent us from making the critical judgment that *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are much greater than any other surviving oral text. There are still a small number of scholars who believe that the monumental creator of *Iliad* and *Odyssey* composed orally, but learned to write just as the new technology became widely available in Greece: he therefore composed the two epics with the aid of writing. This seems unlikely: apart from the legitimacy of the underlying assumptions, most (not all) scholars

believe that the two epics are not the creation of the same individual; and secondly, it is hard to see what the motivation would be for an oral poet to write down a composition (even assuming he had the vast amount of hugely expensive parchment which would have been needed). The notion of preserving a performance implies the intervention of a patron, or a group of disciples or artists (singers) who saw value in the freezing of a work by an extraordinarily great composer.

Parry's definition of a formula was an expression "regularly used under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea": this implies (a) that for each "idea" (e.g., Odysseus, or a ship, or the act of addressing another character) there is one formula for each of the important metrical chunks (colons) in the verse; (b) economy: there is generally one and only one formula for a given colon; (c) traditional diction (linguistic forms inherited from earlier phases of the epic tradition) is likely to be preserved in formulas.

For example, Parry's study of the 37 most important characters in *Iliad* and *Odyssey* found that they all have a noun-epithet formula (in the nominative) which fills the hexameter between the caesura and the verse end; and on the principle of economy, apart from three characters (Apollo, Aphrodite, and Hera), none has a second formula which could replace the first.[5]

In a very small number of cases critics have jumped on formulas which have been used "inappropriately." For example, Penelope at *Odyssey* 21.6 holds up a key χειρὶ παχείηι [kheiri pakheiēi] "in her mighty hand" (the formula covers the line end – ⏑ ⏑ | – –), where the adjective has been seen as unfeminine (usually used of warriors brandishing weapons in the *Iliad*). The swine-herd Eumaeus at *Odyssey* 14.121 has the description ὄρχαμος ἀνδρῶν [orkhamos andrōn] "leader of men," which usually describes an Iliadic hero; and when he kills a pig for Odysseus' supper (14.426), the death of the pig is described with a formula familiar from the death of a warrior on the battlefield: τὸν δ' ἔλιπε ψυχή [ton d' elipe psūkhē] "and his soul departed from him." In the context of over 27,000 lines of verse these are hardly noticeable, and poetic irony is not excluded in the last two cases.

The intense research generated by Parry's work led to a more nuanced and less rigid conception of how the diction works: for example, he probably overestimated the formulaic content of the

poetry. Later studies showed greater evidence of innovation than he had allowed, including a large number of words and expressions which occur only once.

Forms Invented by the Epic Tradition

A Greek bard inherited from his teachers, and from the performances of others, a stock of traditional words and phrases which fit into particular slots in the verse. He also inherited a range of grammatical doublets. Greek nouns, for example, inflect to indicate which grammatical case they are in: this generally involves changing the ending of the noun (as in English *dog* versus *dogs*: the *-s* ending indicates the plural). In Greek the stem of the word "dog" is *ku-/kun-*, and in the Ionic dialect the ending of the dative plural is *-si*, giving *kusi* ("to the dogs"). In Aeolic dialect, however, the ending of the dative plural is *-essi* (this was an innovation by Aeolic): *kun + essi > kunessi* "to the dogs." This is useful for the bard, as it gives him the same essential word with two metrical shapes: *kusi* (⏑ ⏑) and *kunessi* (⏑ – ⏑).

In addition, in Ionic (but not in Aeolic) it is possible to add an *-n* to the dative plural if the next word starts with a vowel: this is to avoid hiatus, and is exactly paralleled by the English indefinite article *a*(*n*). This gives a third (purely Ionic) form *kusin*. However, the bards took the liberty of extending this handy *-n* to the Aeolic form too, giving *kunessin*. This is a purely poetic form, being "incorrect" from the point of view of dialect: but it meant that the bard had four forms available, and could use whichever was most convenient in a given context. All four are found in the *Iliad*, with the spurious *kunessin* appearing in the first sentence of the poem (1.4–5): "made them [Greek and Trojan warriors] prey for *dogs and birds*," *kunessin oiōnoisi te*.

Analogously the infinitive of the verb "to be" has five forms in *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, each with a different metrical shape: three are dialect forms and two are innovated, or "artificial." This process of innovation within the poetic tradition is characteristic of epic, and explains why, in addition to Ionic and Aeolic forms, there are many forms which were never heard in any dialect, but which were easily understood by a Greek audience.

The Preservation of Inherited Material

The bards inherited a stock of useful phrases which filled convenient slots in the line; apart from the utility, this traditional and poetic language must have been part of what marked off epic poetry as special, just as sacred texts in many cultures are marked by an archaic and unusual form of the language which is valued by the community for its distinctiveness. Aristotle touches on this at *Poetics* 22, in discussing the language of poetry:

> The best diction is clear without being commonplace (*lit.* "low"). The clearest is that made up of ordinary words, but it is commonplace … On the other hand, diction becomes dignified and non-prosaic by the use of unusual words. By "unusual" I mean a peculiar word (*glōtta*), a metaphor, lengthening, and everything outside common modes of speech.

"Dignified" here translates the Greek *semnos*, which is the normal term for "holy" as used of gods and the divine. The word *glōtta* survives (in its Ionic form) in English *gloss*, *glossary*, and is the technical term for a strange or poetic word, especially in Homer (its basic meaning is "tongue, language").

Older elements of the language were frozen or fossilized within phrases (formulas) that the bards found convenient. Where sound-changes had occurred, the bards would update the phonology or morphology of a formula if the metrical shape of the phrase was not affected: otherwise, if it was still comprehensible to a contemporary audience, they would leave it to become part of the "poetic" diction. So, for example, the phrase (name + epithet)

boēn agathos Menelāos "Menelaus good at the war-cry"

would, a couple of centuries before Homer, have been

**boān agathos Menelāwos* ⏑ | – ⏑ ⏑ | – ⏑ ⏑ | – ×

In the first word "war-cry," an easy change of $\bar{a} > \bar{e}$ has been made, reflecting the most characteristic sound change of Ionic. The form of

the name *Menelāos* is superficially puzzling, since the change *ā* > *ē* has not been made. In fact, this reflects the likelihood that a short time before Homer Ionian singers adapted the epic tradition from the neighboring east Aeolic dialect. Now, in spoken Ionic the following changes had taken place at around the time of the adaptation of the Aeolic epic tradition:

Menelāwos > *Menelēwos* > *Menelēos* > *Meneleōs*

The final change, in which the *e* is shortened and the *o* is lengthened, is peculiar to Attic-Ionic, and changes the metrical pattern. *Menelā(w)os* was borrowed when the contemporary Ionic form was *Meneleōs*, which would not scan: there was no incentive (therefore) for Ionian bards to change *Menelā(w)os* to *Menelēos*, since this form no longer existed in spoken Ionic.

Menelāos also illustrates the dropping of the sound [w] (the letter *digamma*) in Ionic (and neighboring Aeolic). This is a famous "ghost sound" in Greek epic: as Parry put it, Homer's language has traces of the digamma, but not the digamma itself. In a phrase such as

aithopa oinon – ∪ ∪ | –× "ruddy wine"

the hiatus between the two vowels is unexpected in Greek verse (we would expect the final vowel of *aithopa* to be elided, giving *aithop' oinon*). The explanation is the presence of the sound [w] in the original phrase:

**aithopa woinon* (*woinon* is cognate with Latin *vīnum* < **woinom*)

The sound had dropped from Ionic, but the vowels had to be kept separate (in hiatus) to preserve the metrical pattern. In fact, in over 80% of cases in *Iliad* and *Odyssey* where [w] was originally present, the ghost is preserved in the verse: usually by hiatus, but also by lengthening a previous syllable which ends in a single consonant, as in *Iliad* 2.271:

hōde de tis eipesken – ∪ ∪ | – – | – ∪ "Thus a man would speak"

Here the syllable *tis* "someone" has been lengthened by the original **weipesken* which followed. Those cases which ignore the original **w* in a word are evidence that an Ionian bard (without [w] in his dialect) had, relatively recently, created a new phrase. Thus, for example, the phrase

meliēdea oinon	⏑ ⏑ | – ⏑ ⏑ | –×	"honey-sweet wine"

is in the accusative (object of a verb): it has the ghost digamma causing hiatus before *(w)oinon*. The phrase is also found in the genitive case (only three times) as in *Iliad* 18.545:

depas meliēdeos oinou	⏑ | – ⏑ ⏑ | – ⏑ ⏑ | – –	"a cup of honey-sweet wine"

In this case it is clear that *oinou* is not concealing *woinou*, since this would lengthen the previous syllable and spoil the meter. A bard has extended the accusative-case formula which he inherited to the genitive: this could not have been done before **w* had dropped from the dialect he was composing in.

References to archaic objects or practices are sometimes preserved in formulaic expressions: in some cases these reflect the world of the Late Bronze Age. Archaeology tells us that the following pieces of military equipment were Mycenean, not Dark Age or later. (a) The "silver-studded sword" (the old word *phasganon* "sword" is found in Linear B tablets from Knossos):

φάσγανον ἀργυρόηλον [phasganon arguroēlon]	– ⏑ ⏑ | – ⏑ ⏑ | – –

(b) The large body shield: associated particularly with Ajax, and probably obsolete by the thirteenth century. It appears in a number of formulaic phrases:

ἀσπίδος ἀμφιβρότης [aspidos amphibrotēs]	– ⏑ ⏑ | – ⏑ ⏑ | – #
Noun + epithet in the genitive: "man-surrounding shield"	
σάκος ἠύτε πύργον [sakos ēute purgon]	⏑ ⏑ | – ⏑ ⏑ | – –
Noun (accusative) + descriptive comparison: "a shield like a city wall"	

In the case of *aspidos amphibrotēs* the formula runs from the start of the line to the caesura, but it will be noticed that *amphibrotēs* does not scan properly: *amphi-* needs to be – ⏑ even though the *i* is followed by two consonants (which should produce a long syllable). The scansion will only work on an earlier (Bronze Age) form of the word: **amphimr̥tās* with a vocalic *r* in the third syllable. The word is a compound of *amphi-* "encircling" and **mr̥t-* "mortal, man": the second element **mr̥t-* > **mrot-*, which became *brot-* owing to the awkwardness of pronouncing the sequence *mr-*. The same root gave Latin *mort-* (as in *mortalis* "mortal"). Since this expression (a) fills half a hexameter, (b) refers to an object which we know to have been obsolete by the end of the Bronze Age, and (c) will not scan unless rewritten in a linguistic form which belongs to the Bronze age, it suggests that epic poetry was sung in a dactylic meter in Mycenean Greece.

The Genesis of Epic Language

The early history of Greek epic singing is necessarily a reconstruction, and much of the detail is disputed. From a linguistic perspective, the presence in Homeric language of a small kernel of material that is close to Arcado-Cypriot and Mycenean suggests that the Greek epic tradition, as far back as it is sensible to reconstruct, has its roots in the Peloponnese in the Late Bronze Age (around 1550–1150 BC). A couple of the early features of Homeric language seem to be earlier than the language of the Linear B tablets (around 1375–1200 BC): these include (a) the presence of vocalic **r* in a small number of formulas and (b) tmesis ("severance"): Greek is rich in compound verbs, formed by the addition of a preposition to a simple verb (as in English *outlive*, *underwrite*). In Homeric Greek the prepositional pre-verb may be separated from its verb by one or more words. So at *Odyssey* 4.525, ὑπὸ δ' ἔσχετο μισθόν [hupo d' esk^{h}eto mist^{h}on] "and he promised a reward," the pre-verb ὑπό ("under," for which compare Engl. *undertake*) is separated by the connective δέ [de] from the verb; while at *Odyssey* 4.6 the undivided ὑπέσχετο [hupesk^{h}eto] "he promised" appears. In historical terms, tmesis is not really the splitting of a compound, but reflects a stage in the language when the two elements had not yet melded into a single word.

We imagine, therefore, that in the great "palace of Nestor" at Pylos, at which a substantial Mycenean archive was discovered, bards sang heroic poetry in a meter similar to Homer's. Nestor and his Messenian kingdom certainly form a notable part of the thematic matter of *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Other areas of western Greece, such as Ithaca and Aetolia, are also curiously prominent in epic (given their later insignificance), which suggests lines of poetic communication in the western part of the Greek world.

We noted above that there is an important Aeolic component in epic language. Elements of Aeolic phonology and morphology are preserved in formulaic phrases: both because they could not be transposed into their Ionic equivalent without disrupting the meter, but also because it was useful for the poets to have a range of metrical doublets at their disposal. So, for example, beside the normal Ionic form *einai* of the infinitive of the verb "to be," we find also *emmenai* (characteristic of Lesbian) and *emmen* (characteristic of Thessalian).

It is true that a couple of the features which look Aeolic from the perspective of eighth-century Ionic are probably just archaisms: a well-known example is the genitive singular ending *-oio*. In the phrase Ἕκτωρ τε Πριάμοιο πάις [Hektōr te Priamoio païs] "and Hektor the son of Priam," the genitive of *Priamos* "Priam" is *Priamoio*; the normal Attic-Ionic ending would be *Priamou*. Any masculine noun ending in *-os* (a very large class) can have the ending *-oio* or *-ou* in Homer, depending on metrical convenience. The genitive ending *-oio* survives in classical Greek in the Thessalian dialect, and thus could be considered an Aeolic form. But in fact this ending is simply the old ending of the genitive in Greek, and is the norm in Mycenean: e.g., *e-do-me-ne-u te-o-jo do-e-ro* [Edomeneus tʰeh<u>oio</u> dohelos] "Edomeneus the slave of the god" (PY Eo 224.3). The later ending *-ou* developed from *-oio* by regular sound change (*-oio* > *-oo* > *-ou*).

There are nevertheless a significant number of forms in epic language that are specifically Aeolic. The bards seem to have taken their hexameter poetry and moved to an Aeolic-speaking area (Thessaly and Boeotia) en route to Ionia: it has been speculated that this move was prompted by the crisis in the Mycenean palaces in the Peloponnese at the end of the Bronze Age. This would also account for the importance of Boeotian and Thessalian myth in epic: Thebes is an important centre of Greek saga, and the great Iliadic hero Achilles comes from Thessaly. Thence the epic tradition crossed the

Aegean to the eastern Aeolic region, where it remained in a dialect that was largely Aeolic until (a relatively short time before the Homeric *Iliad* and *Odyssey*) Ionic-speaking bards appropriated it and started to sing it (as far as they were able) in Ionic.

Homeric and all subsequent epic poetry was composed in a dialect mixture that was overwhelmingly Ionic. There are a few trivial Atticisms in our text, which merely reflects the fact that the text comes to us via Athens, and Athenian editorial activity. We have seen that some features of the language are "later" than others (for example, *-ou* is a later form than *-oio*): analysis shows that these late forms are concentrated in Homeric similes and other "digressions," and presumably reflect the contribution of the monumental composer to a large extent.

The Writing of Epic

If *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were composed orally, the questions remains when they were written down. There are two possibilities: either the poems were dictated by the poet to someone who could write, or they were preserved and transmitted orally by singers and committed to writing years later (perhaps over a century). It is clear in the Classical period there were singers who had committed both epics to memory, just as in the modern period many have committed important sacred texts to memory, such as the Sanskrit Vedas (transmission of these texts in the early period was also oral): Plato's *Ion*, for example, is a sarcastic comment on the professional reciter. It is traditional to draw a distinction between the poet, *aoidos*, and the rhapsode, *rhapsōidos*. The poet is the creator for whom composition and performance are the same process, while the rhapsode gives performances of memorized oral texts. The word "rhapsode" suggests an etymology "stitcher-together of songs," a connection which is made explicit by Pindar at the beginning of his victory ode *Nemean* 2 (1–3):

> Just as the Homeridae,
> Singers of stitched words, usually
> Begin with an address to Zeus …

The Homeridae, then, were rhapsodes: there is no consensus over whether they possessed a written text (as opposed to an oral one) from

the very start. There is some evidence that the Athenians produced an "official" Athenian text for recitation at the Panathenaic festival in the sixth century BC. Sources (which are vague and late) suggest that during the rule of the tyrant Peisistratos (560–527 BC), his son Hipparchos "compelled the rhapsodes to recite the Homeric poems successively, in regular order, at the Panathenaea, as they still do at the present day."[6] Rhapsodic competition presupposes a fixed text, and it may well be true that there was no written text of *Iliad* and *Odyssey* in Athens before this period (at least, not the whole poems in the familiar 24-book format). A standardized Athenian text would have been influential, and this putative sixth-century "edition" might lie behind the manuscripts which were collected and collated in the Ptolemaic library at Alexandria in the third and second centuries BC. Our modern text is the product of this editorial activity in Alexandria.

The Other Epics

The two surviving works attributed to Hesiod, *Theogony* and *Works and Days*, are each just a little longer than a book of the *Iliad*. Their language is more or less identical to the Homeric language, and it is generally thought that they, too, are the result of oral composition. A major difference from Homer is that the poet identifies himself in *Works and Days*, and gives some biographical details: he says that he comes from Ascra in Boeotia, and that his father had come to Ascra from Kyme in eastern Aeolis. Scholars have not been slow to suggest that the biographical detail may be part of the poetic fiction; but the language does contain a couple of "mainland" features which are absent from Homer. The language is that of the Ionic tradition, but if this tradition took root in Boeotia these features could be easily accounted for.

A corpus of 33 poems addressed to gods, known as the Homeric Hymns, also survives. They are of varying date and authorship: probably most were composed in the late seventh, sixth, and fifth centuries BC. Writing may have been used in the composition of all but the oldest of the Hymns. The language is in the same Ionic tradition as Homer and Hesiod. At least some of them were ascribed to Homer in the ancient world: Thucydides (3.104) cites 13 lines of the *Hymn to Delian*

Apollo as Homeric (including, significantly, line 172 in which the poet identifies himself as a "blind man who dwells in rocky Chios").

We know the names of a number of other epic poems which have not survived. These are sometimes referred to collectively as the Epic Cycle (*epikos kuklos*), because in an Alexandrian edition they were apparently arranged in "chronological" order, giving a mythological history of the heroic world up to and after the events narrated in *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. The poems probably belong to the mid-sixth century or later, and some were clearly composed to fill the gaps in the story of Homeric epic (the wooden horse and the fall of Troy, for example). Some modern scholars have argued that the poems of the Cycle, like the Homeric Hymns, were also widely ascribed to Homer in the Classical period. There is no good evidence for this view, and quite a lot of evidence to suggest the opposite. Herodotus, Xenophon, Isocrates, and Aristotle are all clear that important Cyclic poems like the *Thebaid* and *Cypria* were not by Homer.[7] The language of the poems is in the familiar epic tradition of Homer, Hesiod, and the Hymns. In their poetic structure they were said to be much inferior, being episodic and repetitive: the great Hellenistic poet Callimachus started a couplet "I hate the Cyclic poem," and this is picked up in epigram (Roman period) as follows:

> τοὺς κυκλίους τούτους, τοὺς "αὐτὰρ ἔπειτα" λέγοντας
> μισῶ, λωποδύτας ἀλλοτρίων ἐπέων.
> I hate these Cyclic poets, who say "And then …" (*autar epeita*),
> thieves who pick the pockets of other epic poets.

The idea is that the Cyclic poets glued disparate episodes together by repeating the phrase "And then …" The genius of the Homeric epics lies in the ability of the poet to maintain an organic unity in poems which are between 12,000 and 16,000 lines long.

Notes

1 Herodotus 2.53: this may be based on 10 generations at 40 years each. Elsewhere (2.142) he takes a figure of three generations per century as more realistic: this calculation would bring Homer down to the mid/late eighth century, a date which reflects modern assumptions rather closely.

2 Lycophron, *Alexandra* 422: the claim that Homer's name came from his blindness is made by the historian Ephoros of Kyme (*FGrHist* 70 F1 = Pseudo-Plutarch, *Vita Homeri* 1.2).
3 Absolute dates in this chapter, which are approximate, are based on the statistical analysis of the language of epic poetry in Janko (1982).
4 Examples here are taken from Arthur Hugh Clough's poem *The Bothie of Tober-na-Vuolich* (1848), an unusual attempt at English hexameters.
5 Parry (1930: 86–87), reprinted in his collected papers (1971: 277).
6 [Plato] *Hipparchus* 228B: Plato is bracketed as this dialogue is widely thought to be not his work.
7 Herodotus 2.117; Xenophon, *Symposion* 3.5; Isocrates, *Panathenaikos* 12.263; Aristotle, *Poetics* 23.1459.

8

The Language of Greek Poetry

Archilochus of Paros was born around 680 BC, and Aristotle died in 322 BC: this 350-year period in the history of Greek is one of unparalleled diversity and experiment in the language, as traditional sung genres encountered both the spread of literacy and greater degrees of communication and interaction across the Greek world. The period started as what might be termed a song culture, in which composition and performance were intimately linked; by the end it was to a great extent a text-based culture, in which prose was ascendant and the seeds of linguistic standardization had been sown. The first two centuries have traditionally been labeled the Archaic period, and the term Classical is reserved for the period of Athenian political and cultural dominance, conventionally set at 480 (Greek victory in the Persian wars) to the 320s (Macedonian hegemony in Greece).

These centuries produced a range of extraordinary literature, including texts which are regarded as foundational in Western science, philosophy, poetry, drama, and historiography. Poetry came first, of course, and from a linguistic perspective what is remarkable is that each genre of poetry (the Greeks may have thought of them as song traditions, at least in the early period) had its own specific literary language. These poetic languages coexisted, and indeed

A Brief History of Ancient Greek, First Edition. Stephen Colvin.

cross-fertilized: they had different dialectal components, but were readily comprehensible to all Greeks and constituted, collectively, a common linguistic heritage. Like all literary languages, they were formalized and stylized versions of the language(s) spoken across the Greek world; some were closer to the vernacular and others more remote, depending on their function and performance context.

We saw in Chapter 7 that epic poetry after Homer was written in the same Ionic-based diction as *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, regardless of the native vernacular of the poet. This link between genre and literary language continued throughout the Archaic and Classical periods, and is one of the most striking features of Greek literature. When it came to putting up inscriptions, it did not occur to Greeks to use any dialect other than the local dialect: the generic expectation for a public inscription was that it would be composed in a more or less formalized version of the regional dialect (verse inscriptions are an exception to this, and will be considered separately). For a literary composition, on the other hand, the expectation was that it would reflect the linguistic idiosyncrasies of the literary tradition in which it was set. That is to say, language and diction were dictated by genre: or rather, along with music, meter, performance context, and subject matter, language contributed to define the genre. Nevertheless, just as genres are not fixed in their form and conventions, but evolve with each new production, so too the literary languages of the Classical period are evolutionary and experimental rather than fixed. Authors within a genre have different styles, which reflect time and place as well as individual creativity.

These literary languages are often referred to as literary "dialects," and it is true that each of them is associated with, and to a greater or lesser extent characterized by features of, one of the major Greek dialect groups. The term is, however, misleading if it implies that Greeks switched from their native dialect to a different dialect in order to compose a particular type of literature. Poetic language has been described as "impeded, distorted speech," made deliberately different from normal language for artistic reasons.[1] For this reason, even when a poet chose to compose in a genre associated with his or her own region and dialect, the relationship with the vernacular was tangential rather than direct. Literary artists composed within a traditional diction, and in most cases this included a number of features alien to their own dialect.

The Greek literary dialects are named after the abstract higher groupings "Aeolic," "Doric," and "Ionic" rather than the real (concrete) dialects that we considered in Chapter 6. A good illustration of the distinction between real dialect and literary language can be found in the comic playwright Aristophanes: in *Lysistrata* and *Acharnians* he brings on characters speaking Laconian (Spartan) and Megarian respectively, which are both West Greek, or Doric dialects. Comedy is a realistic genre: the dialects are carefully represented, and distinguished from each other, and bear little relation to the literary Doric which characterizes Greek choral poetry.

The reason for the connection between the literary languages and the regional dialects lay in the perception that each genre of literature was particularly associated with the region of Greece where it had (supposedly) originated, or been perfected: (a) the Ionian world: epic, elegiac, and iambic poetry; (b) Lesbos (eastern Aeolic): lyric monody, which is poetry sung by an individual; (c) the Dorian world: so-called "choral lyric," poetry which in many cases was clearly composed for choral performance (some of it was also composed for solo performance).

The Greeks seem to have accepted these connections without worry: Tyrtaios, the national poet of Sparta, composed his martial songs in elegiac meter and (therefore) literary Ionic; nor would it have occurred to the Athenians to avoid the literary Doric of choral poetry on the grounds of a connection with the dialect of their Peloponnesian enemies during the wars of 431–404 BC. The idea that a literary genre reflects the dialect of the person or group most associated with the development of that genre reflects the Greek notion of the "first inventor" (πρῶτος εὑρετής), whereby just about any cultural practice or technology was attributed to an individual (divine, heroic or mortal) who "discovered" or revealed it to men (cf. section "Greek Views on the Alphabet" in Chapter 5). At the same time, Greek poets were clearly interested in experimenting with genres and dialects. Stesichorus of Himera, for example, blurs the boundary between epic and lyric: he writes in literary Doric, but his poems (which look like epic packed into a lyric meter) are so long that it seems more likely that they were sung by an individual than by a chorus.

We have only tiny scraps of the Greek archaic poets. No lyric poet before Pindar (around 520–445 BC) survives in a dedicated

manuscript tradition from antiquity to the Renaissance.[2] The small pieces of poetry that we have are either excerpts quoted in later Greek authors, or have been discovered on scraps of papyrus in Egypt in excavations since the late nineteenth century. The problems caused by centuries of copying Greek texts by hand are always considerable: they are even greater than normal in the case of these poets because they are written in non-Attic dialects, which were generally unfamiliar to scribes. Words were often "normalized" by changing them to Attic, or "corrected" by importing what a scribe or editor took to be an appropriate dialect form (since they had a shaky grasp of the dialects, this often led to the creation of "hyper-dialect" forms). This process of corruption was aggravated by the fact that the quoted excerpts are embedded in an Attic text (ancient texts did not have the use of spacing or indenting as a visual warning to a scribe, or a reader, that a quotation was coming up).

It is, therefore, difficult to estimate the difference between what has survived in manuscripts, or on papyrus, and what was sung at the first performance. It is possible that the first audience (or some early audiences) would have heard a greater number local dialect features than one might guess from our texts: for example, we cannot prove that the poetry of the Spartan poet Tyrtaios, which is in Ionic diction, was not (always or occasionally) sung with a Spartan "accent" in Sparta (ancient sources claim that Spartan youths had to memorize his poems). Some support for this suspicion comes from the fact that verses written on stone or other hard objects (mostly epigrams and dedications) do show a greater number of local dialect features than the high literature of the manuscript tradition. This written tradition may reflect a history of *performance* across the Greek world, culminating perhaps in performances in Athens: on this view, the dialect mixture of the poetry would have been accommodated to local poetic traditions or speech habits in performances across the Greek world.

The texts which have come down to us must also reflect the editorial decisions of editors in Alexandria and Pergamon who collected ancient manuscripts and produced "standard editions" in the third and second centuries BC. Texts which were written originally in a local (non-Ionic) alphabet must at some stage have been transcribed into the Ionic alphabet, by the Alexandrian editors or at an earlier period. This transcription necessarily entailed

some dialectal decisions: for example, the letter E in the earlier alphabets could be transcribed E, EI or H in the Ionic alphabet, which represents vowels more accurately, and in some cases this has dialectal implications.

Language and Context

Non-epic poetry after Homer (but before the tragic drama of fifth-century Athens) survives, in small quantities, because it was written down, but it would be a mistake to imagine that it was a post-Homeric development. Greeks across the Greek world had been singing long before our earliest attested poets, and in different styles and meters: these will have coexisted and to some extent interacted with epic poetry for many centuries before the first attested fragments. Poetry that survives from this post-Homeric period is often collectively referred to as "lyric" poetry: there is no necessary connection with lyres, and the types of poetry and song it includes have little in common apart from being distinct from epic, but it is a handy collective term.

Lyric poetry is particularly associated with the *symposion* ("drinking together"), a type of banquet which played an important role in elite social and political life. It took the form of a gathering in a private house for dinner and drinking (all male, unless courtesans and female musicians were present), at which poetry was often sung or improvised. *Symposia* were conducted in accordance with a relatively formal set of conventions, which included the election of a symposiarch to oversee the proceedings: he supervised the mixing of the wine in the *krātēr*, a large vase specially made for the purpose (wine was mixed with water in varying proportions, but was not drunk neat). Much, perhaps most, monodic poetry (poetry designed to be sung by one individual) was composed with the *symposion* in mind; and although choral poetry was written for public performance, it could also be adapted for solo performance at *symposia*. For example, in Aristophanes' *Clouds* (1354) the old man Strepsiades complains that his son is too sophisticated to sing classics such as Simonides: "We were feasting, as you know, and first I asked him to take up the lyre and sing Simonides' song, the one starting 'How the Ram was

shorn,' but he immediately said it was old-fashioned …" Ancient commentators tell us that this had in fact been written as a victory ode (*epinikion*) for a wrestler from Aegina.

The Ionic Tradition

Poetry composed in Ionic diction fall into two main groups: those in elegiac meter, and those in a lively meter in which long and short syllables alternate, either ⏑ – (iambic) or – ⏑ (trochaic). In the work of Archilochus of Paros, the earliest surviving lyric poet, it is hard to see a thematic difference between the two types: in later poets elegiac poetry is more formal than iambic poetry, which may be abusive or obscene.

Elegiac

The term elegiac refers to the meter rather than the subject matter: the surviving poetry covers a much wider thematic spectrum than the modern term *elegy* would suggest. The meter is straightforward: poems are written in two-line couplets: the first line is a hexameter, and the second line is half a hexameter (the first half, from start to caesura), which repeats itself. The pattern is thus:

1 *a* *b*
2 *a* *a*

Because the metrical pattern is so similar to epic, there is a large overlap between epic diction and elegiac diction: in some cases this is merely because the two genres developed in tandem, and in others it may reflect a desire on the part of the elegiac poet to echo epic language for a literary purpose. The language of the elegists from Ionia (Archilochus of Paros, Callinus of Ephesos, Mimnermus of Smyrna) is a mixture of epic diction and their own Ionic dialect; they avoid the Aeolic features of Homeric language. The elegists from other areas of Greece, such as Tyrtaios of Sparta, use the same poetic diction but without (of course) vernacular Ionic influence.

Iambic/trochaic

These meters are also straightforward: they are made up of a disyllabic rhythmical unit, either ⏑ – (iambic) or – ⏑ (trochaic). Shakespeare's plays are written largely in iambic pentameters (five iambic feet):

Good Hámlet, cást thy níghted cólour óff ⏑ – ⏑ – ⏑ – ⏑ – ⏑ –

Real trochaic meter is rare in English: Longfellow notoriously wrote *Hiawatha* in trochaic tetrameters (four feet):

Fróm his fóotprints flówed a ríver – ⏑ – ⏑ – ⏑ – ⏑

The meters that the Ionian poets used are built with the iambic metron | ⏑ – ⏑ – | or the trochaic metron | – ⏑ – ⏑ |. Iambic lines are trimeters (three iambic metrons):

⏑ – ⏑ – | ⏑ – ⏑ – | ⏑ – ⏑ –

and trochaic lines are tetrameters (four trochaic metrons). The rhythms are fundamentally similar. The iambic trimeter is the normal meter of spoken sections of Athenian tragedy (over 90%), and of comedy: Aristotle, *Poetics* 4 (1449a), claimed that this was because "the iambic meter is closest of all to speech: proof of this is the fact that we often fall into iambic rhythm in our conversation, while we rarely do this with hexameters …"

The language

There are differences between the language of elegiac verse on the one hand, and iambic/trochaic verse on the other. Elegiac diction is usually closer to epic, and thus more formal. Iambic/trochaic is closer to the spoken language, both in terms of phonology and morphology, and also in the use of informal words and phrasing. Linguistic features include the following:

Contraction between words

It is clear that in spoken Greek a word ending in a vowel was run into the following word if it started with a vowel (cf. Engl. *he's* < *he is*): words particularly liable to be merged with a following word were *kai* "and," and the definite article "the" *ho* (masc.) *hē* (fem.) *to* (neut.). This merging of words (*crasis*) was avoided in high poetry, and much more common in iambic/trochaic. In this trochaic fragment of Archilochus (fr. 119)

> **κἀπὶ** γαστρὶ γαστέρα / προσβαλεῖν μηρούς τε μηροῖς
> and onto stomach press stomach / and thighs onto thighs

kai "and" + *epi* "onto" gives *kāpi* (κἀπὶ).

Contraction of vowels

Connected with the above is the different treatment of vowels next to each other within words: in noun endings, for example, gen. sing. -εος [eos] and neut. plur. -εα [ea] are generally scanned as one syllable in iambic/trochaic verse, indicating that the two vowels have contracted (as in the spoken language): an example is in passage (iii) below. In elegy the endings are often uncontracted (which presumably sounded less naturalistic).

Ionian k-forms

There are about half a dozen words which start with a *p-* in Ionic inscriptions, and in the text of Homer, but which have a *k-* instead in the text of Herodotus, and in the Ionian poets Anacreon of Teos, Callinus of Ephesos, Hipponax of Ephesos, Mimnermus of Smyrna, Semonides of Amorgos. They are all from the pronominal stem **k*^{w}*o-*, which provides a number of important interrogative (and related) words in Indo-European: ποῦ [pou] "where?" πῶς [pōs] "how?" πότε [pote] "when?" etc. (Engl. *who? what?* and Latin *uter* "which?" come from this stem.) These *p-/k-* doublets were presumably associated with different social dialects, but it is hard to be more specific. They are not found in the non-Ionian elegists Tyrtaios of Sparta, Theognis of Megara, or Solon of Athens, which suggests they were thought too parochial to imitate. An example is in passage (iii) below.

Vocabulary

We have already touched on the epic ingredient in the language, particularly in elegiac. Lyric poetry is also characterized by unheroic and vulgar words, and vernacular expressions; and Hipponax has a number of foreign words borrowed from neighboring languages such as Lydian. After Archilochus this is mostly true of iambic/trochaic verse, rather than elegiac.

Literary Ionic: three examples

(i) Archilochus of Paros (fragment 5W, attested in overlapping quotations in a number of ancient authors, including Aristophanes, Strabo, and Plutarch), elegiac meter.

ἀσπίδι μὲν Σαΐων τις ἀγάλλεται, ἣν παρὰ θάμνωι
ἔντος ἀμώμητον **κάλλιπον** οὐκ ἐθέλων.
αὐτὸν δ' ἐξεσάωσα. τί μοι μέλει ἀσπὶς ἐκείνη;
ἐρρέτω· ἐξαῦτις κτήσομαι οὐ κακίω.

Some Thracian is delighted with my shield, which **I abandoned** (unwillingly) by a bush – it was a great piece of gear. But I saved myself – what do I care about the shield? To hell with it! I'll get another one soon that's just as good.

The verb κάλλιπον [kallipon] "abandoned" is Homeric, and lacks the normal prefix *e-* of the past tense (the augment, see section "Greek Language in the Linear B Tablets" in Chapter 3): this is an epicism which is very rare in Archilochus, and in general only found in elegiac. Archilochus has deliberately used a lot of Homeric vocabulary in the poem, but in a strikingly un-Homeric way.

(ii) Tyrtaios of Sparta (fragment 10W, quoted in a speech by Lykourgos, an Athenian orator of the fourth century BC), elegiac meter.

τεθνάμεναι γὰρ καλὸν ἐνὶ προμάχοισι πεσόντα
ἄνδρ' ἀγαθὸν περὶ ᾗ πατρίδι μαρνάμενον·
τὴν δ' αὐτοῦ προλιπόντα πόλιν **καὶ πίονας ἀγροὺς**
πτωχεύειν πάντων ἔστ' ἀνιηρότατον …

> **To die** is a fine thing, when a good man falls among the fighters at the front, doing battle for his fatherland. To abandon his city **and rich fields** for a life of begging is of all things the most disgraceful …

The verb τεθνάμεναι [tethnamenai] "to die" is an Aeolism from epic; much of the rest of the diction is also borrowed or adapted from epic, including καὶ πίονας ἀγρούς [kai pīonas agrous] "and rich fields" at line end (= *Odyssey* 8.560). There is no trace of Tyrtaios' native Spartan dialect.

(iii) Hipponax of Ephesos (fragment 34W, quoted by the twelfth-century AD Byzantine grammarian John Tzetzes), in "limping" iambic meter.

> ἐμοὶ γὰρ οὐκ ἔδωκας οὔτέ **κω** χλαῖναν
> δασεῖαν ἐν χειμῶνι φάρμακον ῥίγεος,
> οὔτ' **ἀσκέρησι** τοὺς πόδας δασείῃσι
> ἔκρυψας, ὥς μοι μὴ **χίμετλα** ῥήγνυται.
>
> Because you've never given me a woolly cloak in the winter, as an antidote to the frost, and you've not encased my feet in woolly **boots** to stop my **chilblains** from breaking out.

The meter "limps" because the poet has substituted ⏑ – – – in the final iambic metron of each line to dislocate the rhythm. See previous sub-section "Ionian *k*-forms" for κω [kō]. In ῥίγεος [rhīgeos] the two vowels in the second syllable have contracted to give a sound like [eus]. The word ἀσκέρα [askera] "thick boot" is a borrowing, probably from Lydian, and the word χίμετλα [khimetla] for chilblain occurs elsewhere only in Greek comedy. The complaint may be addressed to the Hermes, the patron god of thieves.

The Aeolic Tradition

The two surviving representatives of the Aeolic tradition are Sappho and Alkaios of Lesbos, and even these survive only in small fragments. It is clear that Lesbos was an early center of Greek music and poetry. Terpander and Arion were natives of the island: Terpander (early seventh century) is said to have worked also in Sparta, and

Arion (of dolphin fame) apparently worked at Corinth at the court of the tyrant Periander (ruled around 627–587 BC).

The poems of Sappho and Alkaios were designed for solo singing (monody). The poems are composed in short stanzas (two, three or four verses each), with a fixed number of syllables (so two short syllables cannot be substituted for a long syllable, which is possible in many other Greek meters). In a given poem the stanzas are metrically identical. Aeolic metrical patterns are generally thought to be the most archaic of the Greek meters, and have features in common with the metrical schemes of other Indo-European languages, in particular Sanskrit (Vedic).

The poetic dialect of Sappho and Alkaios is not contemporary vernacular Lesbian. It is a literary language based on Lesbian dialect, on a long tradition of Lesbian poetry, and with occasional epic features. Some of the epic features are alien to Lesbian dialect: these include a small number of Ionic forms, and also epic features that were equally alien to contemporary Ionic (the genitive ending in *-oio* for example). But it is hard to say whether epic features reflect interaction with, and influence from, Ionian epic (i.e., Homer) alone: it is likely that some may derive from traditional poetic (including epic) diction in Aeolic. The name of Priam, king of Troy, is *Priamos* in Homer; in the poetry of Sappho and Alkaios he appears in a Lesbian dialect form as *Perramos* (which scans differently). This implies that there was a tradition of singing about Trojan saga in Lesbian (and Troy is after all very close) which was independent of Homer.

Linguistic features of the poetry include many of the features of Lesbian dialect known from inscriptions. A feature which would not be evident from inscriptions, but which is marked in some manuscripts, is a peculiarity in the Lesbian accent, which is "recessive": on all words the accent falls as far back as possible. In Greek the accent can only fall on one of the last three syllables of the word (so if a word has four syllables, for example, the accent cannot fall on the first syllable). This means that in Lesbian the accent falls on the third syllable from the end, unless the vowel in the final syllable is long, in which case it will fall on the penultimate syllable. Thus (a colon [:] here indicates a long vowel):

Lesbian	*Attic-Ionic*	
κρύερος [krúeros]	κρυερός [kruerós]	"icy cold" (adj.)
κεφάλᾱ [kephála:]	κεφαλή [kephalé:]	"head" (noun)

In Attic-Ionic and the other dialects verbs have a recessive accent, but in nouns and adjectives (and other word classes) the accent can fall on any of the final three syllables (see section "The History of Greek Writing" in Chapter 5).

Literary Aeolic: example

Sappho fragment 16 (Oxyrhynchus papyrus, second century AD, published in 1914: larger gaps indicated by brackets).

οἰ μὲν ἰππήων στρότον, οἰ δὲ πέσδων
οἰ δὲ νάων φαῖσ' ἐπὶ γᾶν μέλαιναν
ἔμμεναι κάλλιστον, ἐγὼ δὲ κῆν' ὄτ-
τω τις ἔραται·

πάγχυ δ' εὔμαρες σύνετον πόησαι
πάντι τοῦτ', ἀ γὰρ πολὺ περσκέθοισα
κάλλος ἀνθρώπων Ἐλένα τὸν ἄνδρα
τὸν [πανάρ]ιστον

καλλ[ίποι]σ' ἔβα 'ς Τροίαν **πλέοισα**
κωὐδ[ὲ πα]ῖδος οὐδὲ φίλων τοκήων
πά[μπαν] ἐμνάσθη …

Some say that an army of horsemen, others of infantry, and others of ships, is the most beautiful thing on the black earth, but I say it is whatever one loves. Very easy it is to make this understood by everyone, for she who far surpassed in beauty all mortals, Helen, **leaving** her most noble husband went **sailing** to Troy, nor was she mindful of her child or her dear parents …

The feminine participles such as καλλ[ίποι]σ' [kallipoisa] "leaving" and πλέοισα [pleoisa] "sailing" show the characteristic [ois] (from earlier [ons]) of Lesbian (see section "Modern Classification of Greek Dialects" (Aeolic) in Chapter 6): in other dialects [ons] remained unchanged, or became [ōs]. This feature was adopted by the literary "Doric" dialect of choral poetry (from Alkman to Pindar), where it has nothing to do with real Doric, but must represent a deliberate borrowing from the prestigious Lesbian poetic tradition.

The Doric Tradition

Poetry composed to be sung by a chorus was associated with the third great literary dialect, Doric. The earliest surviving composer of Doric song is Alkman of Sparta (later seventh century), whose poems were so well-known in fifth-century Athens that Aristophanes expects echoes of Alkman in his comedies to be recognized. Terpander of Lesbos is said to have been active in Sparta in the generation before Alkman: almost nothing survives of his output, but the connection with Lesbos *may* explain a couple of puzzling Aeolic features of Doric poetic language.

For us choral poetry is recognizable by its meter and structure. It is composed in long stanzas: in some poems the stanzas are simply repeated, but starting with Stesichorus (*floruit* 600 BC) most extant poetry is "triadic" in structure, that is, composed in groups of three stanzas with the pattern *a a b*: the first stanza is called the *strophē* ("turn, revolution"), the second the *antistrophē* ("counter-turn"), and the third the *epōdos* ("sung after, added"). The terms strophe and antistrophe appear to be references to the dancing of the chorus while they sing. A song could consist of one or multiple triads (Pindar's longest victory ode has 13): the metrical pattern was repeated in all triads. Choral poetry was composed in a variety of complex meters, and each song had its own (unique) metrical pattern. The choral odes of Athenian drama often have strophe and antistrophe without the *epōdos*.

Poetry sung by a chorus (like music played by an orchestra) has an inherently public nature. Choral song, unlike "personal" genres such as love songs or invective, was associated with a recognized social or civic occasion, and was classified into types: Pindar's output, for example, was classified by his Alexandrian editors into Hymns, Paeans, Dithyrambs, Maiden Songs, Laments, Encomiastic Odes, Processional Odes (*Prosodia*), Dancing Songs (*Hyporchēmata*), and Victory Odes. These forms evolved in the context of specific public occasions: paeans, for example, were sung at religious festivals, and were particularly associated with the healer god Apollo and his sanctuaries at Delphi and Delos, and festivals of Apollo such as the *Gymnopaidia* at Sparta. Paean is a distinct healer god in Homer, and attested as a god *pa-ja-wo* [Paiāwōn] in Mycenaean. The national

and pan-Hellenic festivals, and competitions and games across the Greek world, must have played an important role in the development of these choral genres, and given the importance of Doric in the diction, it seems likely that much of the early crystallization in form took place in the Peloponnese. By the late Archaic period the poetry was not confined to public contexts: paeans were sung at weddings, and "choral" poetry could also be sung by individuals at aristocratic *symposia*.

The linguistic ingredients of literary Doric are:

- a large number of features in common with epic language (morphology and vocabulary), including some of the Aeolic features of epic;
- an important feature of literary Aeolic language that epic (at least, not in the form in which it has come down to us) does not share: this is the characteristic Lesbian diphthong [oi] in place of lengthened *o* in a limited class of words;
- features of Doric phonology, morphology, and vocabulary. For example, literary Doric maintains long [ā], avoiding the distinctive Attic-Ionic change [ā] > [ē]: the goddess Aphrodite is therefore Ἀφροδίτᾱ [Aphroditā] in Alkman.

Of the five Doric features (a)–(e) plus (f) listed in Chapter 6, all are found in Alkman and the Doric tradition down to Pindar, except that in the case of (e), the dative plural ending *-ois/-ais*, the poets also use the disyllabic endings *-oisi/-aisi* as a useful license imported from literary Ionic. The number of specifically Doric features varies from author to author: the texts as they have come down to us also present inconsistencies within individual authors, which may be due to the vagaries of transmission. As it stands, the text of Alkman has the greatest number; after Alkman, literary Doric is found in an increasingly watered-down form in (a) Stesichorus and Ibycus, (b) Pindar, (c) Simonides and Bacchylides, (d) choral parts of Athenian tragedy.

Stesichorus and Ibycus were from the western Greek world: Stesichorus from Himera on the north coast of Sicily, and Ibycus from Rhegion on the toe of Italy (Reggio). Both Himera and Rhegion were originally colonies of Ionian Chalkis, but Himera took in a number of refugees from Doric-speaking Syracuse, and Thucydides tells us that the dialect was mixed as a result. Pindar was

from Boeotia; Simonides and Bacchylides were uncle and nephew from the Ionian island of Keos. The Doric features in the language of Simonides and Bacchylides are more limited than in the earlier poets; while in Athenian tragedy the Doric gloss is feeble, and comes mostly from the substitution of [ā] for [ē] in a limited number of words.

The language of Alkman of Sparta is interesting in that it contains a couple of features of Laconian of the Classical period, which cannot possibly have been written by Alkman because the sound changes had not yet occurred. These include the change of the voiceless stop θ [t^h] to the fricative [θ] (the first sound in Engl. *thin*), which seems to have occurred in Laconian dialect during the fifth century BC. There was no letter for this sound in ancient Greek, so it was written with the letter *sigma*, which normally denotes [s], both in the text of the comic playwright Aristophanes and in Spartan inscriptions from around 400 BC. This spelling is found in the text of Alkman, where it was presumably imported by later editors looking to make the text look like "genuine" Spartan dialect.

Literary Doric: example

Pindar, *Pythian* 8.88–end (final antistrophe and epode): a victory ode (*epinikion*) for Aristomenes of Aegina, winner of the boys' wrestling at the Pythian games, 446 BC.

ὁ δὲ **καλόν** τι νέον λαχών
ἀβρότατος ἔπι μεγάλας
ἐξ ἐλπίδος πέταται
ὑποπτέροις **ἀνορέαις**, ἔχων
κρέσσονα πλούτου μέριμναν. ἐν δ' ὀλίγωι βροτῶν
τὸ τερπνὸν αὔξεται· οὕτω δὲ καὶ πίτνει χαμαί,
ἀποτρόπωι γνώμαι σεσεισμένον.

ἐπάμεροι· τί δέ τις; τί δ' οὔ τις; σκιᾶς ὄναρ
ἄνθρωπος. ἀλλ' ὅταν αἴγλα διόσδοτος ἔλθηι,
λαμπρὸν φέγγος ἔπεστιν ἀνδρῶν καὶ μείλιχος αἰών.
Αἴγινα φίλα μᾶτερ, ἐλευθέρωι στόλωι
πόλιν τάνδε κόμιζε Διὶ καὶ κρέοντι σὺν Αἰακῶι
Πηλεῖ τε κἀγαθῶι Τελαμῶνι σύν τ' Ἀχιλλεῖ.

> But he who wins some **lovely** new thing in the flower of his youth, his hope is high, and he flies on the wings of his **manly exploits**, his thoughts **above** the pursuit of riches. But in a short space of time the happiness of mortal men grows up; and as quickly does it fall to the ground, when shaken by a hostile purpose. Creatures of a day. What is a man? What is he not? A dream of a shadow is man. But when a gleam of sunshine comes, god-given, men live in bright light, and life is honey-sweet. Aegina, dear mother, prosper this city in her voyage of freedom, with Zeus and king Aiakos, with Peleus, and noble Telamon, and with Achilles.

The polymorphy of literary Doric is evident in the passage. Boeotian has much in common with West Greek, so the Doric "accent" of the poetic language would have been much closer to the native dialect of Pindar than to that of Bacchylides or Simonides (both Ionic speakers). There are hardly any features characteristic of Boeotian in the language of Pindar, and since those that exist are also found in neighboring West Greek dialects, it is hard to classify them as un-Doric. Much of the vocabulary is familiar from epic, though it has a Doric sound to it: in the passage above, for example, ἀνορέα [ānoreā] "manly deed" is Homeric ἠνορέη [ēnoreē] with Doric vowels. The adj. κρέσσονα [kressona] "greater" would be [krettona] in Boeotian dialect (as in Attic): the double *-ss-* brings it into line with the phonology of Doric, Ionic, and all the other dialects (Attic/Boeotian *-tt-* seems to have been regarded as a local peculiarity unsuited to high poetry). The adj. καλόν [kalon] "beautiful" keeps the short [a] of Doric and Boeotian, rather than imitating epic [kālon] with its Ionic [ā].

Epigraphic Poetry

From the earliest period Greek verse was written on objects: jokes and love poems scratched on cups (in *symposia*), dedications on objects in temples, and grave epigrams. The meter of these inscriptions is overwhelmingly dactylic: epic-style dactylic hexameters in the earliest period, with increasing use of elegiac couplets from the mid-sixth century (the elegiac couplet later became the meter associated *par excellence* with the epigram, especially the literary epigram).

There is no easy formula to capture the language of epigraphic verse: the two ingredients are (a) the local dialect (since inscriptions in general were written in the local dialect), (b) epic language (since the hexameter form lent itself naturally to epic borrowing).

The precise mixture varies, and also depends on the location and the date of the inscription. The use of epic language does not necessarily mean the use of Ionic dialect: epic words and phrases, and elements of epic morphology such as the genitive singular in *-oio* (see section "The Genesis of Epic Language" in Chapter 7) coexist organically with local phonology and morphology. Reading the epigraphic poetry of Archaic and Classical Greece reinforces the impression that there had developed a poetic *koine* with a large number of features that we tend to label "epic," but which were clearly not considered the property of the Ionic dialect (this in turn leads to the suspicion that epic, including Homeric, poetry naturally incorporated local dialect features when sung outside of Ionia).

In some cases the linguistic mix of the poems looks more Homeric than others: for example, characteristically Ionic phonological features such as the deletion of *h-* occasionally occur in regions where they would not be expected; in other cases nothing in the language looks out of place in the local dialect. The process of "koineization" can be seen in an interesting phenomenon which occurs sporadically in the poetry, namely an apparent effort to delete dialect features which were considered too local or specific to the dialect: for example, verse inscriptions from Thessaly avoid the genitive singular ending *-oio*, even though it has an epic pedigree, because this was (uniquely) a feature of the local dialect of Thessaly.[3]

The sympotic verse scribblings are distinct from the more serious types of epigraphic poetry: competitive poetic activity was an integral part of the elite drinking party. This took various forms, including the production of impromptu verses which were then capped by other participants. Most, of course, were not written down, but among the earliest surviving written Greek are two light-hearted verse inscriptions on pottery (given in section "The History of Greek Writing" in Chapter 5). The musical context of the *symposion* and the tradition of erotic poetry explains the use of verse for these compositions.

The decision to compose dedicatory inscriptions for temples and funerary epigrams in verse can be related to what Roman Jakobson

called the poetic function of language: the use of poetic form shows that the "messages" are not simply statements of fact (for which an unmarked code would be appropriate), but something more. Funerary epigrams, which are often explicitly initiated by a parent, evoke the pathos of the death (sometimes, but not always, with an echo of Homeric pathos). A dedication to a god, similarly, presents or creates the relationship between the mortal and the god in addition to stating the fact of the dedication.

Examples

(i) Corcyra (Corfu), late seventh / early sixth century BC, hexameters.

> Σᾶμα τόδ' Ἀρνιάδα· χαροπὸς τόνδ' ὤλεσεν Ἄρης
> βαρνάμενον παρὰ ναυσὶν ἐπ' Ἀράθθοιο ρ*h*οϝαῖσι,
> πολλὸν ἀριστεύ[ϝ]οντα κατὰ στονόϝεσ(σ)αν ἀϝυτάν
>
> This is the tomb of Arniadas. Fierce-eyed Ares destroyed him fighting by the ships at the streams of Aratthos, outstanding in valor amid the grievous shouts of war.

The vocabulary and phrasing of this are based on epic language; there are also some characteristic morphological features of epic which are inextricable from the phrases in which they appear. The phonology is entirely local, however, even in the epic borrowings.

(ii) Boeotia (probably Thebes), early seventh century BC, hexameters.

> Μάντικλός μ' ἀνέθεκε ϝεκαβόλοι ἀργυροτόχσοι
> τᾶς δεκάτας· τὺ δὲ Φοῖβε δίδοι χαρίϝετταν ἀμοιβ[άν].
>
> Mantiklos dedicated me to the Far-shooter of the silver bow, from a tithe. And you, Phoebus, grant a gracious recompense.[4]

In the first sentence the two characteristic epithets of Apollo are Homeric; in the second the final phrase "grant a gracious recompense" is found at *Odyssey* 3.58 at the end of the line (Odysseus

prays to Poseidon). The phonology of these epic borrowings has been changed to Boeotian, however.

Athenian Drama

The language of Athenian tragedy is rich and complex. Only Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides survive out of the many tragic playwrights who competed in the dramatic festivals of Athens: these three were already canonical by the late fifth century, when the comic playwright Aristophanes in his play *Frogs* (405 BC) compared and parodied the style and language of Aeschylus and Euripides.

The surviving plays run from 472 (Aeschylus' *Persians*) to 406 (Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* and Euripides' *Bacchae*). It is hardly surprising that there is some development in the language (as well as the dramatic technique) over this 70-year period, and the three playwrights naturally have individual styles and linguistic preferences. Nevertheless, the linguistic ingredients and their distribution are more or less the same across the three tragedians. The plays consist of spoken dialogue interspersed with song (choral odes) by the chorus; occasionally lines are sung in a form of recitative. Although spoken lines are in a more naturalistic language than sung lines, it is clear that the general expectation was that the language of tragedy should be grand, dignified, and considerably removed from the language of everyday life. Aeschylus is said to have called his tragedies "slices from the Homeric banquet."

Spoken dialogue is a poetic version of Attic dialect, with obvious influence of epic language, and some vocabulary items which appear to be archaic: this spoken dialogue is generally composed in iambic trimeters.

Choral odes and other sung sections are composed in lyric meters, and reflect the language of lyric poetry; there is also heavy influence of epic. Syntax, vocabulary, and morphology are highly poetic, and the tragedians make a bow in the direction of Doric choral poetry by giving the language of choral odes a Doric gloss. This consists mostly in undoing the characteristic Attic-Ionic sound change [ā] > [ē]: thus Doric νίκᾱ [nīkā] "victory" in place of normal Attic (and Ionic) νίκη

[nīkē]. If the manuscripts are to be trusted, this Doricism is not universally applied, but confined to a relatively restricted number of vocabulary items.

In general the language of tragedy gives the impression of being influenced by Ionic, and in this respect it mirrors the scientific prose of Thucydides' *History*. Attic words with [tt], such as *thalatta* "sea" (see section "Modern Classification of the Greek Dialects" (Attic-Ionic) in Chapter 6), have the [tt] replaced with the [ss] of Ionic in tragedy, even in the spoken sections (Thucydides does the same). Since almost all the other Greek dialects had [ss], this presumably made tragic language sound less provincially Attic.

In a discussion of the language of literature (and with an eye on tragedy in particular), Aristotle (*Rhetoric* 1404) observed that a speaker or writer who is aiming for maximum clarity should use normal, everyday diction: the artistic effect of this will be "low" (i.e., not artistic). "Exotic" language (archaic, dialectal, poetic) has its place in high literature:

> for departure from the ordinary makes *lexis* ["diction, style"] appear more dignified. People do not feel towards strangers as they do towards their own countrymen, and the same thing is true of their feeling for language. In this case one should give to everyday speech an unfamiliar air: people like what strikes them, and are struck by what is out of the way. In poetry such effects are common, and there they are fitting: the persons and things there spoken of are comparatively remote from ordinary life. (tr. W. Rhys Roberts, adapted)

The language of Sophocles and Euripides is slightly more naturalistic than Aeschylus. In Aristophanes' *Frogs*, Euripides and Aeschylus have an argument in Hades over who, in life, had been the better poet. Euripides depicts Aeschylus as a bombastic poet particularly fond of coining bulky compound words. Aeschylus' reply (*Frogs* 1058–1059) anticipates Aristotle's argument:

> But, you wretch, for great thoughts and ideas, you have to produce [lit. "give birth to"] words which are their equal. And in any case, it's right for demigods to use bigger words than us, just as they wear clothes that are much grander than ours.

Athenian comedy, on the other hand, when it is not engaging in parody of tragedy, is written in normal, non-poetic Attic dialect. Unlike tragedy, comedy was a genre that aimed at linguistic realism.

Eleven plays by Aristophanes survive complete (from the period 425–388 BC): some substantial fragments of other plays survive, as well as fragments of other comic dramatists. The earlier surviving comedies contains choral odes between the scenes, which are written in lyric meter and contain some poetic words, but these have disappeared from the later plays. Even though the dialogue in comedy is written in iambic trimeters, not prose, the playwrights avoid poetic forms and strive for a realistic effect. Aristophanic comedy is one of the three major sources of information for colloquial Attic: the other two are inscriptions from Attica, and the language of the fourth-century orators.

Postscript

The language of Greek poetry was to a large extent a cultural *koine*, and to talk of "borrowings" from one dialect to another is probably an over-rigid view of a number of overlapping traditions composed in a rich and complex form of Greek. A simple lack of data makes our view of literary dialect over-schematic: for example, we have (almost) no Doric poetry written in dactylic meter (the meter that we associate with epic and elegiac poetry, and with Ionia), but local sub-literary poetry on stone suggests that the Greeks took a rather more flexible view of this. The start of the great *parodos* (entry ode) of the chorus in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* also points to the complexity of a tradition of which we are largely unaware. The first sentence (lines 104–106) launches a choral ode in Aeschylean literary Doric:

> κύριός εἰμι θροεῖν ὅδιον κράτος αἴσιον ἀνδρῶν
> ἐκτελέων· ἔτι γὰρ θεόθεν καταπνείει
> πειθώ, μολπᾶι δ' ἀλκᾶν σύμφυτος αἰών·
>
> I have power to tell of the auspicious command of the expedition, the command of men in authority; for still from the gods am I inspired with persuasive power, my strength in song, by the life that has grown up with me.[5]

It is worth noting that these lines are dactylic (a dactylic hexameter followed by two dactylic pentameters), a meter that we normally associate with Ionic dialect.

Notes

1 Shklovsky (1929/1991: chapter 1).
2 The text of Theognis of Megara is sometimes quoted as an exception: but this text is a hopelessly contaminated collection of verses excerpted from a number of different poets.
3 For this leveling phenomenon, and other features of the language of verse inscriptions, see Mickey (1981).
4 Corcyra: *CEG* 145, Buck (1955: 94). Boeotia: *CEG* 326, Colvin (2007: no. 12).
5 Text of Denys Page; translation of Hugh Lloyd-Jones.

9

Bare Words: The Start of a Common Language

The Idea of Prose

Prose was a relatively late developer in Greece (since it needed writing); it developed in Ionia during the "Ionian enlightenment" of the seventh and sixth centuries BC. It seems natural to us to contrast poetry and prose; and, indeed, to take prose as the norm, or "unmarked" option, while poetry is the special or exotic option. This view is the product of a culture which is steeped in literacy and tends to think of all language in the framework of the written language: in particular, it privileges one function of language above all others, namely the "referential" function. This label is used for the communication of information from one language user to another (Lat. *refero*, to report or record a fact). It is a major function of written prose, and probably for this reason it has been seen as the fundamental or even essential use of language. This is tied up with a number of other conceptions of language, including: (a) the idea that we speak in prose, or, the confusion of prose with (non-poetic) spoken language; (b) the idea that grammaticality is the property of formal written prose: other types of language are (therefore) either ungrammatical, or need to be accounted for in some other way (artistic license, for example); (c) the idea that a

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given language is to be identified with the formal written variety: other varieties are to be filtered out of description and analysis of the language. They may be seen as variations or approximations of the written standard; or classed as so improper that they are simply elided from linguistic consciousness.

However, the sharing of information is just one function of language among many: both human and animal communication include warning, threatening, and social bonding (their evolutionary advantage is clear). Humans use language to create social bonds, and to influence the behavior of others; and in all human cultures the artistic use of language is of central importance (this has been called the poetic, or imaginative function of language).[1]

In the spoken language it is possible to distinguish between formal varieties of talk (for example, ritual language such as prayers and formulas) and informal varieties (day-to-day interaction). In preliterate or barely literate societies it is evident that the concept of formalized talk (verbal performances which are not metrical or musical) is likely to be radically different from our own. Cultures which are used to written prose naturally assimilate formal talk to prose: in other words, formal talk (such as a speech or sermon) is usually the verbal performance of a written text, or (if genuinely improvised) an attempt to approximate to this. This applies even to dramatic dialogue. This assimilation blurs the boundary between spoken and written language: nevertheless, prose is not merely the writing down of speech, but a linguistic form with separate rules and conventions, and which in many cases fulfils the criteria for artistic production.

Verbal productions that we would consider "poetic" have been used for a far wider range of communicative activities in other cultures: in Greece poetry could be used to expound principles of philosophy and natural science (by Parmenides, for example). In the Archaic and Classical periods poetry had a public and civic status in Greece, a role which was later increasingly usurped by prose. Lyric poets such as Pindar composed songs of lamentation (funerary dirges) and of praise (encomiastic odes): these gave way in the classical *polis* to rhetorical performances, in the form of the funerary oration (such as that of Pericles in Thucydides 2.34–46) and the encomiastic speech.

In the early history of the Greek language we are able to watch the development of a linguistic culture from a pre-literate stage (Homeric

epic), through the introduction and development of alphabetic literacy, and on to a stage where prose becomes dominant, the symbol and ideal representative of the national language. In this final phase (the Hellenistic period and beyond) the practical and ideological role of prose in the linguistic culture is not dissimilar to the one we are familiar with in the modern world. Historically, this is unlikely to be a complete coincidence. When the Romans came into contact with Greek culture they borrowed a wide range of literary and artistic forms, and inherited in addition linguistic baggage in the form of a grammatical and exegetical tradition which shaped their own attitudes to language. These in turn remained dominant in medieval and Renaissance Europe. Even in the Hellenistic period, however, poetry retained a place in civic life that is largely unknown in the industrialized world.

There are annoying gaps in the record of the early development of prose. Very little literary prose has survived from before the last half of the fifth century: we have only short fragments of some of the early Ionian writers, and of many we have nothing at all. Little or nothing survives of famous figures such as the early historian Hekataios of Miletos (born around 550), or the statesman and orator Pericles of Athens (495–429). This makes it hard to get a precise picture of the development of prose style in the early period, but (along with the evidence of inscriptions) it is possible to trace the emergence of prose and its gradual rise to a dominant social and literary position.

Bare Words and Pedestrian Prose

The term "prose" is ambiguous: in English, since at least the time of Chaucer, the word has been used both for written text and for spoken language without deliberate metrical structure. The word comes (via French) from Latin *prosa*, an adjective meaning "moving forward in a straight line, without impediment, complication, or deviation." Varro tells us of a Roman goddess Prosa, connected with biological rather than literary production: she was the patron deity of smooth childbirth, in which the child is headfirst in delivery. The phrase *oratio prosa* was used for literary

prose from the first century AD in writers such as Quintilian and Seneca; Cicero had used the term *oratio soluta*, literally "unfettered" or "unconstrained" speech.

There is in Greek an asymmetry between the various ways for designating prose, or unmetrical language, as opposed to poetry. The verb *poiō* is the normal verb meaning "make, do"; in a linguistic context it has the connotation "to make poetry," and the basic meaning of *poiēma* "poem" is simply "creation, that which is made" (compare the Scots term *makar* "poet"). We have seen that the term for epic poetry (*epē*, plural of *epos*) was simply "words." The implication is that in Greek, originally, the default mode of linguistic production was poetry; or rather, that linguistic activity which was creative (required skill, adhered to conventions) was *poiēma*.

In the earliest period Greek did not make a distinction between poetry and song, or between composing and performance: the general term *aeidein* "to sing" (see section "Poets and Performance: Terminology" in Chapter 7) gave the word *aoidē* "song" (in the Attic dialect the vowels contracted to give *ōidē* from which the English word *ode*): this was the term applied to epic performance, and used also by the lyric poets of their own work. The use of *poiō* and *poiēma* for the composition of poetry (first attested in the fifth century BC) made it possible to distinguish between composition and performance, which in itself represents a significant shift in the poetic culture: it marks the separation of the roles, with the implication that a poem can be performed on multiple occasions by different people, and yet retain its identity. In this new world the notion of unique authorship and intellectual (artistic) property becomes possible.

In contrast to the notion of artistic creativity underlying the term *poiēma* , the composition of non-poetic texts was denoted by the verb *graphein* "to write" (originally "to scratch"): this is the term used in the disputed passage of the *Iliad* (see opening section of Chapter 3) in which Proteus inscribes "baneful signs" on a tablet for the king of Lycia. In classical Greek the usual term for writing prose was a compound of this verb, *sungraphein*, "to record or compile (data)." This is the main verb of the opening sentence of Thucydides' *History*: Θουκυδίδης Ἀθηναῖος ξυνέγραψε τὸν πόλεμον τῶν Πελοποννησίων καὶ Ἀθηναίων … "Thucydides of Athens wrote [the history of] the war between the Peloponnesians and the Athenians …"

This verbal stem provides the term *sungrapheus* "secretary, scribe" (the officials who wrote up the decrees of the Athenian assembly in the "house style" of the Athenian bureaucracy). To specify that a verbal utterance or a written text is in "prose" rather than verse, Greek uses an adverb *katalogadēn*, which comes from the verb *katalegō* "recount, enumerate" (this verb also gives *katalogē* "list, catalogue"): the root meaning of the adverb would have been "in the style of one who [merely] recounts."

There are two more ways of referring to unmetrical language in classical Greek, which we find attested for the first time in Plato (around 428–348). The first is *psiloi logoi* "bare words," in which the adjective *psilos* "bare" can imply either without meter or without music. The second is the adjective *pezdos* "on foot, pedestrian." In a passage of the *Sophist* (237a) Plato says that the philosopher Parmenides drummed a certain dictum into his audience: πεζῇ τε ὧδε ἑκάστοτε λέγων καὶ μετὰ μέτρων "repeating it both in the pedestrian manner and in verse."

The implicit contrast may be with flying or with horses as a metaphor for poetry. Homeric words are often described as "winged," and by the late fifth century the image of soaring on the wings of poetry was so hackneyed that Aristophanes parodies it (*Birds* 1372). The adjective *pezdos* became popular in post-classical Greek to denote both prose and the popular (spoken) language. The Latin adjective *pedester* was used in imitation by the Romans (starting with Horace) in the sense "in prose, prosaic," and this was in turn borrowed by eighteenth-century English in the form *pedestrian* (the metaphorical meaning is attested in English before the literal one).

Writing Without Meter: The Beginnings

We have seen that a number of uses underpinned the spread of writing in Iron Age Greece: some mundane, such as merchants' lists and accounts (the only function of the Linear B script that we know of), and some less mundane, such as temple dedications and epitaphs. Literary prose developed subsequent to, and in some sense as an extension of, this epigraphic Greek: accounts, records, letters, dedications, laws, and decrees inspired chronicles of local history

and accounts of the laws of nature (natural science and ethics). The writing down of poetic texts must also have been influential in the genesis of a concept of literary prose; not simply in the echoes of poetry in early prose (which can certainly be heard in philosophical texts), but in the development of the idea that one could write down an extended text which lacked an immediate practical function.

It seems unlikely that there were extended prose texts such as letters or decrees before around 700 BC. The very earliest prose inscriptions are short dedications and graffiti from the end of the eighth century. Three of the very earliest such texts are:[2]

1. Inscription on a kylix (shallow wine) cup, Rhodes, 700 BC or earlier: "I am the cup of Korax."
2. Inscription carved on a rock, Thera, 700 BC or earlier: "By Apollo Delphinios, here Krimon screwed a lad, the brother of Bathykles."
3. Inscription on a vase, Thebes, 700–675 BC: "Wiswodikos dedicated [this/me] as consecrated property of the Pythian [god]."

These inscriptions show that the alphabet was being taught to the elite across the Greek world by at least 725 BC. During the seventh century longer texts began to be composed and put up on stone (or bronze). This was an age of political change, as the *polis* (city state) emerged as the characteristic political structure in many regions of Greece. The publication of laws was an important part of constitutional government, and the technology of writing provided a way to do this. Perhaps the earliest surviving prose text is a law from Dreros in northeastern Crete (650–600 BC):

> As god wills. The following was decided by the *polis*: if a man holds the office of *kosmos* [chief magistrate], the same man shall not be *kosmos* again for ten years. If he does act as *kosmos*, whatever judgements he hands down, he himself shall be liable for double the amount, and he shall be without authority for as long as he lives, and his decisions as *kosmos* shall be nullified. The swearers of the oath shall be the *kosmos* and the *dāmioi* [public officials] and the twenty of the city.[3]

If the laws of man can be written down it is not too great a step for a philosopher to think of writing down an equivalent account of

the laws of nature. The birthplace of literary prose, and indeed the cradle of the Greek intellectual revolution, was Ionia. By the end of the seventh century Miletos had produced Thales (born around 625) and Anaximander (born around 610). Thales was a scientific thinker and mathematician who famously predicted the solar eclipse of May 585 BC, and Anaximander may have been a student of his. It is not clear what written work Thales left: Anaximander was the author of a prose work called *On Nature*, of which a short two-sentence fragment survives:

> For all things which exist, the source from which they arise is also their destination when they perish, in accordance with necessity. For they must pay compensation and make good to each other for their mutual inequity, according to the prescription of time.

This may be the earliest extant piece of Greek literary prose: it is hardly a light read. It survives only in a commentary on Aristotle's *Physics* by the philosopher Simplicius in the sixth century AD. Simplicius calls the diction "rather poetic"; it is also rather legalistic (the word translated "inequity" is *adikia*, the normal Greek word for injustice).

The first extended passages of Greek prose which survive come from around 500 BC, in the form of fragments of the philosopher Heraklitos of Ephesos, and the historian and geographer Hekataios of Miletos. One of the very few fragments of Hekataios is written in a chatty style that is reminiscent of story-telling rather than a legal text or a poem:

> Orestheus the son of Deukalion came to Aetolia for the kingship, and his dog gave birth to a root, and him, he ordered it to be buried, and out of it grew a vine with many bunches of grapes. So he called his own son "Phytios" [*Phytios* is based on the word *phyton* "plant, vine" and implies "one who takes care of vines"].

However, the Persian invasion of Ionia in 547 stifled much of the intellectual activity of Ionia. Ionian thinkers and writers emigrated to cities across the Greek world, causing the intellectual center of gravity to move west, and to Athens in particular.

The Emergence of Attic Prose

Most of the early historians were from Ionia or the Ionic-speaking islands, and Ionic remained the language of historical and scientific prose until the appearance of Thucydides' *History* in the late fifth century. Thucydides' great predecessor Herodotus (around 485–425), the "father of history," was a native of Halicarnassus in Asia Minor. His native dialect may have been Doric, but he wrote in Ionic embellished with touches of Homeric language.

Thucydides took the decision to write in Attic, but he used an "international" or Ionicized version of the dialect, which avoided certain Attic peculiarities in the phonology (see section "Athenian Drama" in Chapter 8). With Thucydides the language of scientific, narrative prose comes together with the tradition of Greek rhetoric. The Greeks had a tradition of enjoying rhetorical performance which goes back as far as Homer. The ability to speak well in public is a much admired trait in a Homeric hero, and Odysseus (*Odyssey* 8.173) says that men look on a good orator "as on a god." However, the impetus for the growth of rhetoric into a major discipline and a prose genre was provided by the development of the radical democracy in fifth-century Athens. The popular assembly (*ekklēsia*) was dominated by the political oratory of men such as Themistocles and Pericles, and reforms of the law courts in 462 BC put judicial power into the hands of large citizen juries (generally comprising 200 jurors or more): persuasive speaking led to political power and legal success.

The demand for rhetorical training stimulated, and was doubtless also fed by, a body of intellectuals, largely of the Ionian diaspora, who claimed the ability to teach rhetoric and other skills necessary for personal and political success. These became known as sophists. The term "sophist" (*sophistēs*) originally meant little more than teacher or expert, but had acquired a vaguely pejorative sense by the late fifth century, being associated with the abandonment of traditional social values and religious beliefs, new tastes in literature and music, and so on. The famous Ionian sophist Protagoras claimed, not without reason, that in fact the term sophist was merely a new word for an old profession, and that Homer himself had been a "sophist" (Greek poets had traditionally been regarded as teachers of humanity).

Thucydides (8.68) makes a point of praising the intellectual and rhetorical abilities of Antiphon (around 480–411), the first orator that we know of who made a living composing speeches for others to deliver in court and the popular assembly. Antiphon's interest in the "theory" of rhetoric is demonstrated in his three *Tetralogies*, which are sets of fictitious law-court speeches (similar to a modern moot), each comprising two speeches for the prosecution, and two for the defense. The language is clearly influenced by Ionic, and the stylistic experiments with Greek prose anticipate some of Thucydides' own attempts in this area. Although Antiphon's surviving law-court speeches date to the last decade of his life, the *Tetralogies* were probably written as early as the 440s. It seems likely, therefore, that speeches had been written down in Athens by Antiphon and others from around the middle of the fifth century; and they constituted a new prose genre. They were probably not circulated owing to the prejudice against using the services of a professional speech-writer (and against the speech-writers themselves), which would explain why they have not survived.

The scientific Attic idiom that Thucydides helped to create is influenced by Ionic morphology, diction, and vocabulary. This expanded version of Attic became a written standard in Greece, independent of the local vernaculars, including Attic. Thucydides did not create it single-handed, and many of his stylistic innovations were dropped, but his work is an important linguistic landmark in the development of Greek literary prose.

Aristophanes and the Orators

In a fragment of Aristophanes' first comedy *Banqueters* (produced in 427), there is a familiar type of intergenerational argument between a "shameless" (*katapūgōn*) young man and his father:

Son: You've been downsized to a mortuary receptacle – bring on the myrrh and ribbons.
Fa:. Hark at you, "downsized" – that's one of Lysistratus' words.
Son: Really, you have not been future-proofed and are no longer fit for purpose.
Fa.: "Fit for purpose" – you got that from the orators.
Son: Be careful, your words will end in unpleasant collateral damage.

Fa.: Alcibiades – that's where "collateral damage" comes from.
Son: Why do you misunderestimate and critique with such negativity men who seek to move forward a best practice agenda?
Fa.: Oh Thrasymachus! Who is this that parrots the hair-splitting talk of the advocates?[4]

The translation is necessarily free, because the young man is using a range of outlandish new phrases which his father identifies as borrowings from the disreputable – but rhetorically effective – new men who are ascendant in the city. It gives the impression that there was a vigorous debate about language in Athens in the last decades of the fifth century (an impression reinforced by other passages of Greek comedy). The verb translated "misunderestimate" is a compound of the verb *tekmairomai* "estimate" with the preverb *hupo-* which means "down" and has the same negative implication as the English word; it is never attested again in Greek, but the compounding of verbs with preverbs to extend and modify their meaning was a characteristic of Ionic (and later of the *koine*). The passage points to the opening up of a gap between the old Attic dialect, which most of Aristophanes' audience would have spoken, and a new style associated with urban orators and sophists.

In the same year that *Banqueters* was staged, the orator Gorgias of Leontini in Sicily came to Athens on an embassy. He impressed the Athenians with his displays of rhetorical virtuosity: his style is striking, and marked by balance, antithesis, aural devices such as alliteration and repetition, and impudent paradoxes. This kind of rhetoric could not be used in a law court or in the assembly, where speakers had to avoid the impression of verbal tricks or over-polished rhetoric, but made a major contribution to display (epideictic) rhetoric. This was a genre much loved by Greeks until the end of late antiquity, especially when the withering of democratic structures in the Hellenistic and Roman periods curtailed political rhetoric.

The word *rhētōr* "orator" soon came to be synonymous with "politician" in Athens, and according to Thucydides the Athenians were already connoisseurs of political rhetoric in 427. In his account of a fraught debate in the Assembly during the summer of that year, Cleon (whom both he and Aristophanes portray as an unscrupulous demagogue) attacks the Athenians for changing their minds on a particularly unpleasant policy which he had advocated:[5]

> You treat speeches as a spectator sport and … judge the feasibility of future projects by the rhetorical skill of the proponents … No men are easier to deceive with innovative arguments … You are slaves to every new paradox, and despisers of familiar arguments: the first wish of every man being the ability to speak himself, but if not, to compete with those who can by seeming to anticipate the direction of their argument, applauding the speaker before he has finished his sentence … You are overcome by the pleasure of listening, and more like spectators attending a performance of sophists than counselors of a state.

This paints a vivid picture of the Athenian obsession with language at the time when prose writers were experimenting with versions of the Attic dialect. The following century (the period of political stability in Athens between the end of the wars with Sparta in 404 and the Macedonian invasions of the 330s) saw the emergence of Greek prose in its "classical form," the language which was to dominate the subsequent history of the Greek-speaking world. This was facilitated by a rapid expansion in book production at the end of the fifth century. Earlier in the century books had been a comparative rarity, but in Aristophanes' *Frogs* (405 BC) the chorus claims jokingly that everyone in the audience "owns a book," and in Plato's *Apology* (set in 399) Socrates claims that it was possible to pick up a copy of Anaxagoras' book in Athens for a drachma: a drachma would otherwise buy six loaves of bread, or a *chous* (3.2 liters) of olive oil, and was a day's wage for a laborer.

Lysias (445–380), Demosthenes (384–322), and Plato (424–348) have since antiquity been generally regarded, and imitated, as the great masters of classical Greek prose. Lysias and Demosthenes wrote speeches for delivery in the courts and the Assembly: they therefore kept their language free of overtly poetic or Ionic forms. They manage to give the impression of capturing vernacular speech, while at the same time writing Greek that is lucid, powerful, and elegant. If a word or a grammatical form appears in at least two categories of the following list, that is generally regarded as conclusive evidence that it was current in spoken Attic: (a) either Lysias or Demosthenes; (b) Aristophanic comedy (not in choral sections); (c) Athenian prose inscriptions.

Plato, whose philosophical position included professed hostility to the art of rhetoric, wrote prose dialogues of considerable

complexity in which participants, with the prodding of Socrates, explored philosophical issues by the dialectic method. His ideas are expounded in prose of striking beauty and artistry, which Aristotle is said to have called "something between poetry and prose."[6] Cicero captures this quality well:

> Many people have held that the language of Plato … which, though not in verse, has a vigorous movement and uses striking stylistic ornaments, has more right to be considered poetry than has comedy, which differs from ordinary conversation only by being in some sort of verse.[7]

During the course of the fourth century Attic dialect started slowly to creep into the inscriptions of other regions of Greece, as Athens became acknowledged as the intellectual center of Greece. Just as the Athenian elite started to adopt certain features of Ionic in the late fifth century, so the "reading classes" of other Greek cities seem to have started to adopt features of the new expanded Attic during the fourth century: some had traveled to Athens for part of their education, others had heard visiting sophists in their own cities or had read Athenian prose. In the 380s the rhetorician and teacher Isocrates, who attracted many students from outside Athens, wrote:

> our city has so far surpassed in thought and speech the rest of mankind that her students have become the teachers of everyone else, and she has brought it about that the term "Hellene" no longer implies a race but a way of thinking, and that those who share in our culture are called Hellenes, rather than those who share a common physical tie.

This is a striking anticipation of the Hellenistic world, in which large areas of the ancient Near East were hellenized by the import of Greek political structures and Greek culture (including language and educational traditions). Later in the century, in the same patriotic strain, Isocrates makes clear his view that the Attic dialect itself was central to Athenian intellectual success:

> In addition, people consider that the universality of our speech (*tēs phōnēs koinotēta*) and its moderate quality, as well as our educated wit and love of language, contribute greatly to the formation of an orator.[8]

Moderate is at first glance a strange word to apply to a dialect: Isocrates is suggesting that Attic is a compromise or golden mean between Doric on the one hand and Ionic on the other. It is true that Attic was a dialect in interaction with both Doric and Ionic dialects, and therefore shares features with both. But there is an ideological underlay, the roots of which can also be seen in Pericles' funeral oration, by which the Athenians combine the best qualities of the Ionians (who are intellectual but soft) and the Dorians (tough but boorish). The word *koinotēta* "common-ness, universality" looks forward to the term *koinē dialektos*, the *koine* or common language of post-Classical Greece. Implicit in the claim to universality is the notion that Attic is the dialect proper for communication in prose; and if it is also the dialect proper for rhetoric, as Isocrates suggests, that is not far from the claim that it is the dialect proper for educated men to converse in. And this indeed is what the future held.

The *Koine*: A Common Language

Attic had no serious competitors as the language of prose. Ionic continued to be used in a restricted circle of medical writers, who were self-consciously locating their texts in the prestigious Hippocratic tradition (the Hippocratic corpus dates from the late fifth century BC to the second century AD). A number of important scientists and philosophers in the Greek West (southern Italy and Sicily) wrote prose in Doric in the fifth and fourth centuries BC. Very little survives, unfortunately, though there are substantial fragments of the Pythagorean philosopher Philolaos of Croton (born around 470). But this tradition seems to have been submerged by the Attic *koine* in the Hellenistic period: the works of the famous mathematician Archimedes of Syracuse (around 287–212 BC) are written in what is merely a Doricized form of the *koine*.

From the third century BC the local dialects of Greek disappear rapidly from the written record. Inscriptions and other documents start to be written in the new, expanded form of the Attic dialect which became known as "the common language," or *koine*. This was

the first common standard language in the history of Greek, and it had two main sources:

1. The *lingua franca* of the Athenian navy and the Athenian sphere of influence in the Ionic-speaking Aegean (in the fifth century this had been the Athenian empire). This was an innovative (i.e., lower-class) variety of Attic with Ionic influence, which developed in "international" contexts such as the port of Piraeus and the Athenian navy (the navy used a large number of rowers from the allied or subject states).
2. The language that developed for the purpose of writing formal Attic prose: literary, documentary, and epigraphic. This was underpinned by, and probably contributed to, the adoption of certain Ionicisms by the Athenian elite in the late fifth century.

These were its roots: but the dramatic spread of the *koine* reflects the new political structure of the Hellenistic world, namely Macedonian power and the rise of a new Greek-speaking empire in the eastern Mediterranean.

Attic seems to have been adopted as the official language of the Macedonian court, perhaps as early as the late fifth century. The earliest surviving official inscriptions from Macedonia (from the early fourth century) are in Attic, and by the time of Alexander the Great – whose tutor was Aristotle – the Macedonian elite was clearly fluent in Attic. The Macedonians expanded into Greece in the late fourth century, and then under Alexander conquered the Persian empire and incorporated its territories (including Asia Minor, Syria, Egypt, and Mesopotamia) into a new Greek-speaking empire. They took with them the Attic *koine*, which was the language of the Macedonian army and administration, and which became the *lingua franca* of the new Greek East.

The *koine* remained true to its roots: it was a meeting of the bottom-up (spoken) and top-down (written) languages, never a unitary idiom. Both the spoken and written languages included a wide range of styles, all of which fell under the heading of *koine* Greek. The written language included – to name but a few – everyday documents written by the civil service, high literature by writers consciously emulating classical models (Polybius, Strabo, and Plutarch), and the relatively unsophisticated Greek of the New

Testament. The spoken language equally had a range of registers, from everyday interaction on the streets of Alexandria or Antioch, to the language of the educated elite which in formal contexts was probably rather close to the literary language. It is also easy for us to forget how long the *koine* was spoken and written. Languages do not have obvious start and finish dates (except in dramatic situations of language death). The Attic *koine* was clearly in use by the end of the fourth century BC: its end date is harder to specify (standard modern Greek, which is called the Neo-Hellenic Koine, is the descendant of the *koine*). It is mostly a matter of nomenclature: Greek starts to be designated "Byzantine" (by modern scholars) sometime between the foundation of Constantinople in 330 as the capital of the Eastern Empire, and the reign of the Byzantine emperor Justinian in the sixth century AD. The fourth-century AD rhetorician Libanius of Antioch was perhaps the last great classicizing scholar of the period.

The Greek-speaking Hellenistic world fell into two obvious linguistic constituencies: the old Greek-speaking world, and the new territories conquered by Alexander, where Greek arrived as a second language. There is no reason to suppose that in the "old" Greek world the dialects disappeared, merely because they disappear from inscriptions. It is likely that in most cases they continued to be spoken for many centuries, particularly by the rural and illiterate population (the majority): but even in the case of the urban elite, it seems reasonable to guess that the *koine* was spoken with a Laconian "accent" in Sparta, for example. In many regions inscriptions continue to show contamination from, or compromise with, the local dialect for several centuries, especially in West Greek areas, where unstable regional standards emerged for relatively short periods. When the Achaean and Aetolian leagues were fighting off Macedonian (and then Roman) interference in the Peloponnese and central Greece in the Hellenistic period, documents were produced in Doricized forms of the *koine* in territories controlled by the two leagues. These regions did not, on the whole, have a very ancient epigraphic tradition, and the light coloring of Doric and Northwest Greek (which turned *koinē* into *koinā*) seems to be an assertion of local identity in the face of the Macedonian *koine*.

In the second century AD there is a sudden burst of inscriptions in Sparta in Laconian dialect, after centuries of using the *koine*. The

inscriptions in question are victors' dedications from a local festival for Artemis Orthia, and the dialect is a statement of Spartan heritage in the face of Roman rule (and Roman tourism). This has been called revival Laconian – but what was revived (temporarily) was the practice of writing in dialect; the dialect itself had clearly continued in use, at least at some social levels.

In the "new" Greek world the *koine* was imported by Greek soldiers and settlers, and learned by sections of the indigenous populations. In most of the Near East communication in Greek was probably a largely urban phenomenon, with rural populations continuing to use local languages perhaps as late as the Arab invasions of the seventh century AD. It is sometimes assumed by classicists that Greek killed off indigenous languages relatively quickly in these areas. This cannot be generally true, however, because for a number of obscure languages chance remarks in Christian authors show that they were still spoken in late antiquity: St Basil of Caesarea, for example, writing in the fourth century AD, says that speakers of his native language (Cappadocian) were saved from a certain heresy because the language did not distinguish "and" from "with." In Egypt we know that Coptic flourished up to (and beyond) the Arab conquest, with many speakers being perfectly bilingual in Greek.

Diglossia

To the question "When did the *koine* start in Greece?" one answer might be "As soon as the Greeks started to write." The introduction of writing has a profound effect on the language and the linguistic culture of any community. Since writing is inherently conservative, and since language is in a state of continuous development, the spoken language soon runs ahead of the written version. If, moreover, there is a corpus of written texts with canonical status, the language of the canon is likely to assume classical status: i.e., the forms and vocabulary will become normative, will be taught as the highest and correct form of the language, and so on. This has two implications: (a) there will be an increasing gap between the spoken language and the written standard, and an increasingly elaborate education will be needed to attain literacy; (b) the spoken language will be

thought of, and explicitly castigated as, a decadent, corrupted, and incorrect form of the "real" language.

In cultures in which literacy becomes deeply embedded, therefore, two distinct forms of the language may emerge: a formal variety, used for writing, and for speech in certain formal contexts, and the vernacular which all speakers learn as their first language. This situation is known as diglossia. All literate cultures are in a trivial sense diglossic, since a written language has its own rules and conventions which are separate from speech, and need to be learned. The term diglossia is reserved for communities where the two forms of the language have grown apart to the extent that they are functionally different languages: the formal variety cannot be used by, and may be largely or wholly incomprehensible to, an uneducated speaker of the vernacular.

The term diglossia was coined in the twentieth century to describe the situation in the Arabic-speaking world, where all educated speakers learn to write and speak standard Arabic (based on the classical language of the Qur'ân), and the vernaculars diverge from each other and from standard Arabic to roughly the same extent as modern Romance languages differ from each other and from classical Latin. (The situation could be compared to medieval Europe, where the educated elite wrote and could communicate in Latin, while speaking vernaculars that had already diversified into early versions of French, Spanish, etc.)

Arabic is a useful model for understanding the *koine*, which, like Arabic, is best understood as a continuum. At the High end, literary texts were written in a formal language whose grammar and vocabulary were based on classical Attic. Lysias would have been able to read these texts without difficulty, though he might have found some of the vocabulary oddly poetic: post-classical writers sometimes use words from the classical canon (including Herodotus and the poets) which were not in use in Attic prose. At the Low end was the Greek vernacular spoken by *hoi polloi* (the many) across the Greek-speaking world: local varieties of this vernacular, as spoken by laborers in (for example) Messenia, Thessaly, Phrygia, and Crocodilopolis in 50 AD would not necessarily have been mutually intelligible. Sub-literary documents (inscriptions, letters, tax receipts, etc.) were written in a language which approximated to the standard: how closely they approximated depended on the competence of the

writer and the formality of the document. Documentary prose is in general a compromise between the literary language and the vernacular, and can be used to track changes in the spoken language. Changes in the pronunciation are not easy to detect, because the spelling system was never changed (spelling mistakes are our best evidence for sound change); but documentary prose does tend to reveal changes in the grammar, and also in the vocabulary (new words, or changes in the meanings of words).

The question of how the elite of the Greek East spoke in the Hellenistic and Roman periods is more difficult. Presumably at home they spoke a version of the vernacular with slaves and family. In the cities public business may have been conducted in a variety that was closer to the written standard, and the Roman elite must have learned a classicizing variety. Rhetorical displays were in the best classical Attic that the speaker could manage.

Interaction in the High register of the *koine* must have been impeded to some extent by phonetic changes that took place in Greek in the post-Classical period, since some important grammatical distinctions in classical Attic are obscured by later vowel changes. For example: (a) the declension of nouns, as shown by the feminine noun χώρα [khōrā] "place":

	Nominative sing.	*Dative plur.*
	χώρα	χώραις
400 BC	[khōrā]	[khōrais]
150 BC	[khóra]	[khóres]

The problem is that [khóres] sounds like a nominative plural: compare the nom. plur. γυναῖκες [yinékes] of the feminine noun for "woman."

(b) The pronouns "we" and "you" in the genitive plural:

	ἡμῶν ("our")	ὑμῶν ("your")
400 BC	[hēmōn]	[hūmōn]
150 BC	[imón]	[imón]

It seems likely that rhetoricians giving a display declamation in purist Attic would have used a conservative, or archaizing pronunciation here.

When educated people from across the Greek-speaking world used the *koine* to communicate they may have adopted a compromise similar to the language of documentary prose: that is to say, in the general context of an idiom which recalled the classical language, which was both prestigious and easy for any educated person to follow, word order and some grammatical constructions were based on the spoken language, and some of the vocabulary reflected contemporary usage. This strategy has been reported for Arabic speakers, who choose an intermediate register of the language to communicate with speakers from other regions (labeled Educated Spoken Arabic by linguists), rather than the highest possible register.

Latin and the Atticists

The Romans took over Greece and the other Macedonian territories in the second century BC (apart from Egypt, which remained independent until the defeat of Cleopatra VII and Mark Antony by Octavian). Greek interaction with Rome had a significant effect on the Latin language; Latin had very little influence on Greek literary language, but spoken Greek borrowed a significant number of Latin words, many of which were Roman military and political terms: *koustōdia* "guard" (Lat. *custodia*), *legeōn* "legion" (Lat. *legio*). Crude transliteration of Latin words was sometimes avoided by pressing into service Greek words for Roman terms, such as *hupatos* "highest" for *consul*, and *Sebastos* "reverend" for the imperial title *Augustus*.

These did not, on the whole, survive into the modern language owing to their specificity. At the same time, however, Greek took over a number of Latin words which made themselves at home in the language:

Modern Greek	
spíti "house, home"	< *hospitium*
soúvla "skewer, spit"	< *subula* "shoemaker's awl, spike"
poulí "bird"	< *pullus* "chick, chicken; bird"
tavérna "bar"	< *taberna*

The depth of the engagement of the vernacular with Latin is also shown by the borrowing of a number of Latin suffixes. These endings (morphemes) were used to create nouns and adjectives out of existing words: for example, *-oula* (the Latin diminutive *-ula*): mod. Gk. *adelphoula* "little sister," for which cf. Lat. *puellula* "little girl."

Towards the end of the first century AD a movement began to purify Greek and return to classical Attic models. This was not merely a linguistic phenomenon, but part of a complex social and literary movement. The common language had until this period been a compromise between the vernacular, the documentary language, and the classical language. In this context there was room for a fair amount of overlap in written texts, and in an author like Polybius we find all the usages of classical grammar, alongside clear influence of the spoken language: for example, he uses prepositions more frequently than classical writers, and this correlates with a slightly attenuated function for the grammatical cases. This was an obvious flashpoint in the *koine*, which had the potential to be resolved by a gradual loosening of the diglossic *apartheid* and the development of a prestige written standard with its roots in the vernacular (more or less what Dante achieved with Italian). Greek took the opposite route. We have already seen in second-century AD Sparta a recrudescence of local dialect which recalled the glorious past in the face of the *pax Romana*: at least part of the explanation may be the political and cultural threat that Greek speakers felt in the face of Roman hegemony. As Isocrates had predicted, Greek language and culture became symbols of Greek identity, and this meant classical language and culture.

In the latter part of the first century AD Greek intellectuals competed with each other to return to writing a version of the classical language from which all trace of the contemporary language had been banished. This is particularly associated with a Greek obsession with rhetoric at this period: declamation dominated Greek cultural life for a century and a half, and the greatest "concert orators" gained celebrity status. Classicists call this period the Second Sophistic, a strange phrase which translates a term coined in a contemporary source: it suggests the idea of a second flowering of Greek education and rhetoric (the sophists of classical Athens having initiated the first). In this context *koine* became a negative term: it designated the contaminated *lingua franca* which the elite now wanted to rise above.

The famous rhetorician Dio of Prusa (nickname *Chrysostomos*, "golden mouth") gave a dazzling speech at Olympia around 100 AD to an international audience in elegant Attic: nevertheless, Lysias would have noticed that Dio uses the preposition *sun* "with" rather frequently. This preposition was rare in Attic prose and Attic comedy, but (starting with Xenophon) was used freely in later Greek, including the New Testament. The new linguistic regime was dubbed Atticism, and it had an obvious problem: Greeks were attempting to write and speak in a language that had been current half a millennium earlier. For those less skillful than Dio in recreating it handbooks were written, such as the "Selection of Attic words and phrases" by Phrynichus of Bithynia in the second century AD. This work is prefaced by the sentence "Whoever wants to speak in an archaic and prestigious way, this is what he must avoid." What he must avoid consists of over 400 entries: a typical entry comprises condemnation of a head word or phrase from the spoken language or *koine*, followed by the approved classical Attic equivalent (he is occasionally wrong in what is or is not correct Attic). His strictures cover vocabulary, morphology, and phonology:

> §11. None of the approved [sources] said *eukharistō*, but *kharin oida*. [This is the phrase for "thank you": the everyday word has survived into modern Greek *efharistó*, while Phrynichus gives the classical Attic phrase.]
> §29. On no account say *nēron hudōr* ["fresh water"], but *prosphaton* or *akraiphnes*. [The mod. Gk. word for water is *neró*, from ancient *nēron* "fresh," an adjective applied to *hudōr* "water." Phrynichus instructs his Atticizers to avoid the adjective, which was clearly already being used in place of the noun.]
> §134. Say *Hēraklea* [accus. of *Hēraklēs*] etc. adding an extra syllable, and do not say *Heraklēn*. [This morphological simplification can already be seen in classical inscriptions.]
> §101. *eiten* and *epeiten* ["next"] are the ultimate barbarism. You must say *eita* and *epeita*. [The condemned forms appear to be Ionic: Phrynichus often warns against Ionicisms, which were common in the *koine* and might (wrongly) appear sanctioned if they appeared in ancient texts such as Herodotus or Xenophon, or the poets.]

Other works of this nature contrast the usage of the *Hellēnes* "Greeks" (bad) with that of the *Attikoi* "men of Attica" (good); a

word to be avoided is also described simply as *koinon* "common" (i.e., of the *koine*).

It should be stressed that Atticism had little impact on the spoken *koine*: the Greek language continued to develop, and the written language at all but the most exalted literary levels continued to compromise. It just meant that the High end of the continuum was, temporarily, slightly higher. It did, however, entrench linguistic classicism in the Greek-speaking world, and echoes of this reverberated into the modern period.

Notes

1 For classification and discussion of the different functions of language see Jakobson (1960) and Halliday (1973).
2 (1) Jeffery (1990: 356.1), (2) Jeffery (1990: 323.1a), (3) Jeffery (1990: 94.2).
3 Jeffery (1990: 315.1a).
4 Aristophanes, frag. 205 *PCG*.
5 Thucydides 3.38 (Mytilenean debate). My translation steals freely from existing versions.
6 Aristotle, in Diogenes Laertius 3.37 (Rose frag. 73).
7 Cicero, *Orator* 67, tr. M. Hubbell (adapted).
8 Isocrates, *Panegyricus* 50; *Antidosis* 296.

10

Greek to Romaic and Back

After Classicism

The history of the Greek language in the medieval period (roughly 500–1500 AD) is chaotic, mostly because it lacks a narrative thread which is palatable to the modern scholar. The modern notion of a "language" is to a large extent a construct: the reality behind a national language or a literary standard is anarchic. There are countless dialects and social varieties, which change at different speeds, go in different directions, and are all liable to influence each other and to be influenced by the written language. The history of a language is written like a biography, and the interference of the biological metaphor may, as we have seen, be unhelpful. An animal is individual and autonomous, and the coherence of the historical narrative is not always a useful model for a language.

In the case of medieval Greek the narrative is split between West and East, and the lack of a clear direction in the history of the language merely mirrors the complex and confused history of people, events, and identities in this period. The fact is that people continued to speak varieties of Greek as they always did: the problem is that it is more difficult to bend the available data into a clear and attractive account of "the language."

A Brief History of Ancient Greek, First Edition. Stephen Colvin.

The history of Greek from Homer until late antiquity is structured around a canon of admired literature, and a written language which can be seen developing until the end of the fourth century BC, and which remains more or less crystallized after that. The narrative is easy to construct, since a tradition of education kept classical texts accessible to the elite, and the Greeks had a distinct identity within the Roman empire. After this period, however, the ideological history of the Greek language is fractured by two major events: the spread of Christianity, and the split of the Roman world into a Latin West and a Greek East, followed rapidly by the collapse of the Western Roman empire.

The "rediscovery" of Greek by the West took place in specific cultural contexts: the humanism of the Renaissance, which invented the concept of "medieval" history and sought to reestablish continuity with the classical world, and the philhellenism of the Enlightenment and the Romantic period. Western classicists have not found it easy to understand Christian Greek identity, or to reconcile it with what preceded. After the collapse of Roman power in the West, the eastern empire, which was Christianized and dominated by Greek rather than Latin, became the sole heir to the Roman empire. Greek and Roman identities merged to the extent that the Greek language became known as "Roman," which by no means implies that Greek national identity disappeared: it was maintained by continuity of language and culture, even at periods when the term "Hellene" had the pejorative implication "pagan."

The continuities in Greek culture and identity have proved harder for outsiders to follow. The new literary genres of the Byzantine period are less appealing to post-Enlightenment literary tastes; and it is ironic that the resistance to writing in vernacular language is frowned on by modern linguistic ideology, which tends to regard varieties which do not reflect the vernacular with disapproval, when at the same time Byzantine writers have been criticized by Western classicists when they do not write in pure classicizing Greek. The disagreement over pronunciation of the ancient language is emblematic of the tension between Greek and non-Greek classicists. All foreigners who learn ancient Greek pronounce it in a reconstructed pronunciation which reflects the Attic dialect at approximately the period of Aeschylus' earliest extant play *The Persians* (472 BC). A reconstructed pronunciation of both Greek and Latin was suggested by the Humanist Erasmus in a treatise of 1528: the early Humanists

had learned Greek from Byzantine scholars, who used the Byzantine (i.e., modern Greek) pronunciation of the Greek letters. Greeks on the whole continue to use the modern Greek pronunciation, and foreigners are generally ignorant of the Greek animosity to what is called "Erasmian" pronunciation in Greece, where it has come to symbolize Western appropriation of classical culture, and a humiliating rejection of the medieval and modern Greek claim to Greekness.

Italy and the West

It is telling that accounts of the history of Greek have often stated that knowledge of Greek disappeared in Italy and the old western empire. It is true that classical Greek ceased to be taught in the West, and that manuscripts of classical Greek texts became generally unobtainable. This meant that classical Greek was no longer part of an elite education after (roughly) the time of Boethius (b. 480) and Cassiodorus (b. 485). It is not true, however, that Greek disappeared from Italy and Sicily after the sixth century AD. Greek was spoken continuously in Italy until the Renaissance, and despite the vicissitudes of medieval history, there was always literacy in Greek somewhere in Italy – and literacy at this period meant the learned language, though in practice the language being read was ecclesiastical Greek rather than the pagan classics.

Southern Italy and Sicily had been settled by Greeks in the eighth and seventh centuries BC. In the third century BC the Romans took control of the area, which they called *Magna Graecia*, "Greater Greece," and it remained a largely Greek-speaking region under Roman rule. Germanic tribes (Vandals and Goths) invaded as the Western Roman empire collapsed in the fifth century AD, but within a century the Eastern Roman empire struck back: the Byzantine emperor Justinian took Sicily from the Goths in the 530s, and it remained a Byzantine province until the Arab invasions of the ninth century. Greek survived Arab rule, and then flourished in the period 1060–1174 following the Norman conquest of the island, with the Greek elite playing an important part in the Norman administration: it gradually declined under the subsequent Latin dynasties, but was spoken in small pockets until at least the fourteenth century.

The history of Greek-speaking southern Italy was similar, except that after Justinian's reconquest Calabria and Apulia remained (more or less) under Byzantine control until the Norman conquest in the eleventh century. The Greek communities in Sicily and southern Italy were augmented during the Byzantine centuries by refugees from the East: both from Greece itself, starting in the sixth century AD when refugees from the Peloponnese escaping the Slavic invasions arrived in the region; and sporadically from the eastern Empire during periods of turbulence and contraction. Greek dialects have continued to be spoken in villages in Calabria and Salento until the present day, though they may now be in terminal decline. Cut off from mainstream Greek development they are heavily influenced by local Italian dialects, and preserve certain elements lost in Standard Modern Greek: in addition to some archaic items of vocabulary (some of which may reflect the Doric dialect of the original settlements or later arrivals from the Peloponnese) there are some interesting structural differences. In the phonology, for example, double consonants are preserved (as in modern Cypriot dialect, but lost in Standard Greek), and in the morphology the infinitive is still in use in some constructions (also lost in Standard Greek). When it is written, the language is usually written in the Roman alphabet. The following stanza is from the serenade *Kalinífta* "Good Night" by Vito Domenico Palumbo (1856–1918):

Evó pánta se séna penséo	Εβώ πάντα σε σένα πενσέω
jati séna fsichí mu 'gapó	γιατί σένα φσυχή μου 'γαπώ
ce pu páo, pu sírno, pu stéo	τσαι που πάω, που σύρνω, που στέω
sti kardía pánta séna vastó	στη καρδιά πάντα σένα βαστώ.

I think about you always / Because, my soul, I love you/And wherever I go, wherever I fly, wherever I stay/In my heart I carry you always.

Most Greeks would not have very much difficulty in following this. The verbal phrase *penséo se* "I think about" is borrowed from Italian *penso a*, and there are some phonological and morphological differences (some of which are found in dialects of Standard Greek: e.g., [ke] > [tʃe] "and").

Vernacular Greek, then, survived the Middle Ages; but there were also Greek speakers in Italy and Sicily in the medieval period who

belonged to the small educated class (mostly but not exclusively clerics). Such people would have had some exposure to the archaizing learned language, which came either from religious texts, or from the educated standard of the Byzantine empire. In southern Italy there were Greek monasteries, some with important libraries, including one founded in Calabria by Cassiodorus. At Rome between 642 and 752 there were five Greek popes (the last, Pope Zachary, was from Calabria), and from the seventh century there was a continuous tradition of Greek monasticism in or near the city: Grottaferrata, founded in 1004, is still a working Greek Catholic monastery.

In northern Europe Bede (672–735) knew Greek, apparently self-taught. There was considerable interest in Greek in Ireland by the eighth century, and one of the most important scholars of the "Carolingian renaissance" who knew Greek was the Irish philosopher Eoin (John) Scotus (born around 810), who taught at the Palatine school at Aachen. This revival of culture and learning started in the reign of Charlemagne (768–814) and continued in the ninth century under his successors. Schools were founded, clerical education was reformed, and literary studies were encouraged: many ancient texts survive because manuscripts were recopied during this period. The emphasis was on Latin, but there was also a short-lived revival in Greek studies in monasteries and schools across the Frankish empire. In the tenth century, in general a dark century in western Europe, the emperor Otto II married Theophano, niece of the Byzantine emperor John Tzimiskis, in 972 (their son Otto III, 980–1002, was thus half Greek). Liutprand (around 920–970), bishop of Cremona, who spoke Greek and had acquired some knowledge of the ancient language, had conducted an earlier unsuccessful round of marriage negotiations in an embassy to Constantinople.

It was not easy for Westerners to learn to read the ancient language, and apart from a flickering interest in ecclesiastical Greek, there is little evidence that anybody was interested in doing so. It was known that Greek was one of the holy languages of scripture: indeed, references in the New Testament were a reminder of this ("I am the alpha and the omega", *Book of Revelation*). Clerics (such as Bede) who could get hold of a Greek bible were able to teach themselves some Greek simply by examining the Greek version of a

text which they knew by heart in Latin. An ancient schoolbook which became known as the *Hermeneumata* ("Translations") was discovered and copied during the Carolingian period, and then sporadically recopied until the Renaissance. It had probably been put together in the first century AD to teach Latin to students in the eastern empire, but then seems to have been adapted to teach Greek in the West at some point (not hard to do, as it consists of bilingual dialogues for beginners, and a glossary). It was clearly used in at least some monasteries as a first step in acquiring Greek.[1]

The Eastern Roman Empire: Fourth to Seventh Century

The Byzantine empire was the Eastern Roman empire, and the Byzantines thought of themselves as Roman, at least until the middle of the ninth century when the empire emerged from the turmoil of the seventh and eighth centuries (the so-called Byzantine "dark age"): the empire reached its greatest extent in the sixth century under Justinian, a native speaker of Latin. The Byzantines came to call their language Romaic, a term which remained in use until the conscious effort to revive a Hellenic identity in the nineteenth century, when Greek became the national language of the new state. The Arabs and the Turks called the eastern Romans *Rum*, and this remained the standard term for the Byzantine empire (the word persists in modern Turkish for Greeks living in Turkey).

In theory, the spread of an aggressively evangelical religion, which was hostile to pagan antiquity, and which had an interest in articulating its message in a medium designed to appeal to a mass audience, might have led to a new written standard based on a vernacular variety of Greek. However, the prudent adoption of the new religion by the elite, and its assimilation to the educational and political structures of the empire, guaranteed that political power remained in the hands of the traditional ruling class: this in turn meant that the classical language not only remained the symbol of imperial identity, but in an extraordinary fusion became also the symbol of Christian identity.

The written standard throughout most of the medieval period remains conservative: linguistically and ideologically it is a continuation

of the *koine*, in a similar diglossic culture, except that there is a new ingredient in the form of ecclesiastical Greek. The major sound changes that differentiate modern Greek from the classical language had been completed during the *koine* period in all but the most learned registers of the language; it is hard, however, to get a clear picture of the rate at which sound changes were happening, and in which registers, owing to the conservative spelling system. We rely on rare texts which stand outside the learned tradition for information on the development of spoken language. One such source is a number of inscriptions which the Bulgarian (Turkic) Khan Omurtag (ruled 814–831) made Greek prisoners erect in Bulgaria. The following comes from the Chatalar inscription, a stone column found near Preslav:

> Καναˑ Συβιγι Ωμουρταγ ὶc τιν γιν ὅπου ἐγενίθιν ἐκ θεού ἄρχον ἐστίν. ὶς τις Πλ<ι>σκας τον κανπον μένοντα ἐπύισεν αὔλιν ὶc τιν Τουντζαν κε με[τῖξεν] τιν δύναμιν του [ὶς τους] Γρίκους …
>
> The Kana-Subigi Omortag in the land where he was born is by God's will ruler. Staying in the plain of Pliska he built a palace at the river Tounja, and drew up his forces against the Greeks …

Apart from various phonetic spellings, and the Latin word *campus* "plain," this excerpt demonstrates some of the grammatical changes under way in Greek: for example, the old participle *menonta* is here an uninflected gerund, and [is] with the accusative means "in, at" (classical *en* with the dative). The Turkish name Istanbul comes from the medieval Greek *(i)s tim poli* "in *or* to the city": Greeks referred to Constantinople as "the city" (*i poli*).

The morphological framework of the Byzantine written standard is the ancient language: the highest varieties are classicizing. Everyday documents and letters, and popular literature such as saints' lives, were written in less exotic learned varieties which look to biblical and liturgical Greek as models, and make compromises with the spoken language as in the Hellenistic and Roman periods. However, the spoken language cannot be regarded as a fixed and uniform entity in a simple relationship of contrast with the "artificial" written variety. Like the written language, the spoken language was a plurality rather than a single idiom: there must have been many dialectal and social varieties at all periods.

Apart from a flurry of Atticizing texts in the late eleventh and twelfth centuries, Byzantine writers do not generally set out to mimic classical Greek, even in the highest register: models include all pagan authors to the end of late antiquity, and ecclesiastical writers from the early centuries of the Christian era up to their own day. In the sixth century Procopius wrote a history of Justinian's wars in elegant classicizing Greek, with an eye on Herodotus and Thucydides. The opening paragraph starts:

> Προκόπιος Καισαρεὺς τοὺς πολέμους ξυνέγραψεν, οὓς Ἰουστινιανὸς ὁ Ῥωμαίων βασιλεὺς πρὸς βαρβάρους διήνεγκε τούς τε ἑῴους καὶ ἑσπερίους, ὥς πη αὐτῶν ἑκάστῳ ξυνηνέχθη γενέσθαι, ὡς μὴ ἔργα ὑπερμεγέθη ὁ μέγας αἰὼν λόγου ἔρημα χειρωσάμενος τῇ τε λήθῃ αὐτὰ **καταπρόηται** καὶ παντάπασιν ἐξίτηλα θῆται …
>
> Procopius of Caesarea wrote the history of the wars which Justinian, king of the Romans, waged against barbarians in both the East and the West, in both cases relating events exactly as they happened, so that the course of time should not get the better of deeds of the highest importance through want of a written record, **abandoning** them to be forgotten and obliterating them utterly …

This is a complex sentence, and recalls the language of his classical predecessors: the opening verb "wrote the history of" is the same verb that opens Thucydides' history (see section "Bare Words and Pedestrian Prose" in Chapter 9). The vocabulary is not wholly classical, however: the compound verb "abandon," with its double prefix *kata-pro-*, is not found before Polybius. It is amusing that Procopius and others from around this period occasionally affect the need to explain to their readers the modern meaning of a classical word, in the manner that Herodotus might have explained a strange Egyptian term. These words are often related to the Christian religion: so, for example, Procopius (*Wars* 2.9) introduces the standard Greek word for church, *ekklēsia*, which in classical Greek denotes the popular assembly in Athens, and then explains it (as though his readers could possibly be unaware of its new meaning): ἐς τὸ ἱερὸν ἀπὸ τῆς ἄκρας κατέβαινεν, ὅπερ ἐκκλησίαν καλοῦσιν "from the high point he descended to the temple, which they call the *ekklēsia*."

A couple of decades after this Ioannis Moschos wrote an anthology of short devotional pieces, mostly hagiographic accounts of Christian virtue. Aimed at a very different audience, the writing sticks to the basic structures of the learned language, but admits occasional vernacular elements and avoids the complex syntax of classical literature:

> Διηγήσατο ἡμῖν πάλιν ὁ ἀββᾶς Πολυχρόνιος, ὅτι ἄλλος γέρων ἐκαθέζετο ἐν τῇ αὐτῇ λαύρᾳ τοῦ ἀββᾶ Πέτρου, καὶ πολλάκις ἀναχωρῶν, καὶ μένων εἰς τὰς τοῦ ἁγίου Ἰορδάνου ὄχθας, ὅπου ηὕρισκεν κοίτην λέοντος, ἐκεῖ ἐκάθευδεν. Ἐν μιᾷ οὖν εὑρίσκει δύο σκυμνία λέοντος εἰς σπήλαιον, καὶ φέρει αὐτὰ εἰς τὴν ἐκκλησίαν, εἰς τὸ παλίον ὃ ἦν περιβεβλημένος· καὶ ἔλεγεν, ὅτι εἰ ἐφυλάττομεν τὰς ἐντολὰς τοῦ Κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ταῦτα εἶχον ἡμᾶς φοβεῖσθαι· ἀλλὰ διὰ τὰς ἁμαρτίας ἡμῶν, δοῦλοι γεγόναμεν, καὶ μᾶλλον ἡμεῖς φοβούμεθα ταῦτα.
>
> Abbas Polychronius the presbyter told us another story, saying that another old man lived in the Laura of abbas Peter, and he often withdrew and spent time at the banks of the holy Jordan: if ever he came across a lion's den, there he would sleep. One day he found two lion cubs in a cave, and he took them into the church in the cloak which was wrapped about him; and he said, "If we were keeping the commandments of our Lord Jesus Christ, these animals should be frightened of us; but because of our sins we have become slaves, and it is rather we who fear them." (*Spiritual Meadow* 18)

While this passage uses the classical dative case for the expression of place "in the Laura," elsewhere it has the vernacular εἰς [is] with the accusative to express place ("in a cave," "in the cloak") as in the Chatalar inscription above. The verbs are classical in form, though used in a somewhat peculiar way from a classical perspective. Much of the vocabulary is Christianized: *abbas* "father" is borrowed from Hebrew, and *laura* "community of monks" meant "alley" in ancient Greek. Latin influence is seen in *palion* "cloak" from Lat. *pallium*.

Classical texts continued to be copied in Byzantium, particularly those considered suitable for the school curriculum: to a large extent this meant texts useful for the teaching of classical, especially Attic, Greek (which is probably why few dialect texts have survived). This came to an end in the seventh century, as classical scholarship went into a decline for two centuries. Those texts which could be found at

the end of this period, and recopied in minuscule script in the ninth century, are the ones which stood a chance of making it to Renaissance Italy and the modern period.

The Later Byzantine World: Ninth to Fifteenth Century

From the ninth to the twelfth centuries there was a revival in learning in Constantinople, during which surviving texts from the ancient world were recopied in the new and economical minuscule script. The Patriarch Photios (around 810–893) was a patron of classical learning, and the following centuries saw a flowering in Byzantine literature. There was a return to classicism in the high literary language, which persisted right up to the sack and capture of Constantinople by the fourth crusade in 1204: indeed, in the eleventh and twelfth centuries there was a conscious aspiration to even greater archaism (sometimes called Atticism) in the works of writers such as Michael Psellos (b. 1018), Anna Komnene (b. 1083), and Niketas Choniates (b. 1155).

A less exalted working language was countenanced for works with lower literary pretensions, though writers might preface their works with an apology for the language. The emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus (905–959), an important patron of the Byzantine literary revival, prefaced his "handbook" *On the Administration of the Empire*, which was addressed to his son, with the following:

> If I have used a clear and everyday language to set out my subject, one which lacks art and is pedestrian and simple, do not be astonished, my son. For I did not strive to create a display of fine writing or atticized diction, swollen with lofty phrases; rather, I tried to teach you what I think you need to know, in a common (*koinē*) and conversational style.

Nevertheless, in the eleventh and twelfth centuries the first literary vernacular texts emerged in a parallel development to the high classicism of the age. Most famous is the folk epic poem *Digenes Akrites*; but urban intellectuals also experimented with the vernacular. The twelfth-century satirical poems *Ptochoprodromica* ("Poems of Prodromos the beggar") were intended by their author to capture

popular language. In poem 1 the author presents himself as an impoverished courtier with a shrewish wife:

> Ἐγὼ δ' ὡς ἤμην νηστικὸς ἀπὸ τὸ φιλοπότιν,
> μὴ κρύψω τὴν αἰτίαν μου καὶ ἔχω πολλάκις κρίμα,
> ὡσὰν ἐμελαγχόλησα καὶ ἠγριολάλησά την,
> καὶ πάλιν τὰ συνήθη μοι συμφώνως ἐπεφώνει,
> τὸ «τί θαρρεῖς;» τὸ «τίς εἶσαι;» τὸ «βλέπε τίνα δέρεις,
> ποίαν ὑβρίζεις πρόσεχε καὶ ποίαν ἀτιμάζεις·
> οὐκ εἶμαι σθλαβοπούλα σου οὐδὲ μισθάρνισσά σου·»
>
> I was starving after drinking too much, and (I won't hide the reason, so no one can blame me) I flew into a rage and shouted at her – and that set her off in her usual way, yelling at the top of her voice "How dare you? Who do you think you are? You watch who you knock about! Mind your language and be careful who you insult – I'm not your Slavic serf girl, or your paid help." (1.138–144 Eideneier)

In this passage the forms of the verb *to be*, for example, are those of the modern language. From these and other works it is clear that a number of fundamental grammatical changes had taken place in Greek: the nouns had been reorganized into two broad classes (following the merger of the classical first and third declensions), and the dative case had disappeared. Changes in the verbal system included:

1. The elimination of anomalies in the classical system: for example, a small category of archaic verbs which ended in *-mi* in the first person singular rather than the normal *-ō* (already in the New Testament).
2. A far-reaching reorganization of the tenses: the old aorist and perfect merged into a single past tense. The pluperfect and the future disappeared, and were replaced by new periphrastic constructions (exactly as in English "I had arrived" and "I shall arrive").
3. The optative remained only in a few fossilized expressions, such as "God forbid!"
4. The ancient participles disappeared, and were replaced by a single verbal gerund, similar to the English "ing" form (as in "walking up the road they saw their mother"). In most registers these changes were probably well under way or complete by the time of the foundation of Constantinople in the early fourth century.

After the capture of Constantinople by the Fourth Crusade in 1204 the city and much of the empire fell under Latin rule until the Greek emperor in exile (Michael VIII) drove out the Latins in 1261. This was disastrous for the Greeks, but had a liberating effect on the language, since it weakened the control of the Byzantine hierarchy and exposed the elite to speakers of early French, Spanish, Catalan, Italian, etc., who were by now used to literature composed and written in vernacular rather than Latin. In the fourteenth century "we find the Greek vernacular accepted as the natural medium for fictional literature" (Beaton 1989: 347): this was not of course tavern Greek, but the usual compromise between written and spoken registers that is at the heart of a national literary language. This negotiation would no doubt have arrived at an acceptable written medium which both acknowledged the past and accepted the contemporary language, had not the Byzantine empire finally fallen to the Ottoman Turks in 1453.

The Ottoman Period: 1453–1821

After the fall of Constantinople the Greek language fragmented for several centuries, in the sense that there were no obvious reference points (written and spoken standards) of the sort which typically provide sociolinguistic stability for a language, and which are needed for a national language to exist. In particular, the development of a pan-Hellenic secular standard was arrested with the disappearance of the institutional structures of a Greek state. The old education system had gone, and the new Greek elite lived in Constantinople under Ottoman rule, performing a peculiar and restricted range of functions, none of which was particularly conducive to the growth of secular literature. The one clear reference point was the Orthodox church and the ecclesiastical Greek associated with it. The Ottomans allowed the Orthodox Patriarch a degree of authority over the Greek community, and also held him responsible for their behavior: the church thus became the symbol of Greek identity, and the written language reflected the needs and tastes of the clerical hierarchy. The possibilities for education were in any case minimal.

In areas which remained (temporarily or permanently) free of Turkish control a variety of regional standards emerged, and a flourishing literature. Cyprus was not an Ottoman possession until 1571: in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries an important literature emerged in the distinctive Cypriot dialect. Crete was captured by the Ottomans in 1669, but the Ionian islands remained under Venetian rule until annexed by Napoleon in 1797 (they ended up as a British protectorate, and were transferred to the new Greek state in 1864). In a golden age of literary and artistic production in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Cretan renaissance produced a wide range of literature, particularly poetry, in the first developed literary language of the modern Greek era. The language contains features of Cretan dialect, but Cretan is less removed from other types of Greek than Cypriot, and this literary vehicle contributed centuries later to the formation of a national standard. Cretan literature is regarded as the starting point of modern Greek literature, and survived until the advent of printing: the first vernacular text was a Cretan poem printed in Venice in 1509 (the *Apokopos* of Bergades). When Crete fell there was an emigration to the Ionian islands, an emigration which included the ancestors of Dionysios Solomos, the national poet of Greece, who was born on Zakynthos in 1798. His *Hymn to Liberty* (first two verses) became the national anthem of Greece:

Σε γνωρίζω από την κόψη
του σπαθιού την τρομερή,
σε γνωρίζω από την όψη
που με βια μετράει την γη.

Απ' τα κόκκαλα βγαλμένη
των Ελλήνων τα ιερά,
και σαν πρώτα ανδρειωμένη,
χαίρε, ω χαίρε, Ελευθεριά!

I recognize you from the dreadful blade of the sword, I recognize you from the searching vision that surveys the earth.

Arisen from the sacred bones of the Greeks, and brave as in the old times, hail, oh hail, Liberty!

This is written in the modern language. As befits a national poem, the vocabulary in these two verses is entirely Greek, though the

word *kokkalon* "bone" has a new meaning: it meant "pine nut" in the ancient language.

The dialects of modern Greek emerged in this period. If Greek, like Latin, had remained in place over a large swath of territory (undisturbed, say, by Arab, Ottoman or Frankish incursions), it seems likely that it would have undergone a development similar to Latin (and Arabic): namely, a number of different Hellenic vernaculars would have emerged with the potential (given the appropriate political conditions) to become separate languages belonging to a common Hellenic family, like the Romance languages. The dialect of Cyprus, for example, diverges to such an extent from Standard Modern Greek that it is hard for many Greeks to understand: just as Spanish and Portuguese are to a limited extend mutually intelligible, or Spanish and Italian. As it is, the dialects of modern Greek are now unified by the modern Greek state, and a national written standard.

The modern dialects fall into two broad groups, Northern and Southern: the dividing line runs north of Attica, and all mainland dialects north of the gulf of Corinth are classified as Northern (central Greece, Thessaly, Epirus, Macedonia, and Thrace). The Southern group can be subdivided into three further groups:[2] (a) Peloponnese and Ionian islands; (b) Crete and the Cyclades; (c) southeast Aegean (Dodecanese) and Cyprus.

Northern dialects are characterized by their treatment of unstressed vowels: in unstressed position the "high" vowels [i] and [u] are deleted, and the mid vowels [e], [o] are raised: [e] > [i] and [o] > [u]. Thus:

πουλί [puˈli] "bird" > [pli], σπίτι [ˈspiti] "house" > [spit]
άνθρωπος [ˈanθropos] "person" > [ˈanθrupus]

In Southern groups (b) and (c) velar stops are softened (palatalized) before the front vowels [i] and [e], especially in Crete and Cyprus:

[k] > [tʃ]	και [ke] "and" > [tʃe]
[x] > [ʃ]	χέρι [ˈxeri] "hand" > [ˈʃeri]

In Cypriot, and some of the other southeastern dialects, the double consonants of ancient Greek are preserved (in Standard Greek they are pronounced as single consonants, though they may be written double); and final *-n* is also preserved.

There are also, of course, morphological and syntactic differences between the dialects. A major syntactic difference between the northern and southern dialects is the way the indirect object is expressed: in English it is generally expressed with the prepositions "to" ("I gave a book to him"), though this can sometimes be deleted ("I gave him a book"). In the ancient language this was expressed with the dative case: when this case disappeared, dialects had the choice of the accusative or the genitive to do the work: the northern dialects use the accusative, the southern dialects use the genitive. Archimedes' aphorism "Give me somewhere to stand and I shall move the earth" in ancient Greek (Doric dialect) was:

δός μοι πᾶ στῶ καὶ τὰν γᾶν κινάσω
[dos moi pā stō kai tān gān kināsō]
give to-me where I-may-stand and the earth I-shall-move

In Standard Modern Greek (SMG, based on the southern dialects) this is:

δώσ' μου κάπου να σταθώ και θα μετακινήσω τη γη
[ðos mou ˈkapu na staˈθo ke θa metakiˈniso ti gi]
give to-me where [*particle*[1]] I-may-stand and [*particle*[2]] I-shall-move the earth

Here "to-me" is expressed by gen. *mou*, which in the northern dialects would be acc. *me* (exactly equivalent to the English acc. *me*). Other changes here between the ancient and the modern language are: (a) SMG uses a particle[1] *na* to introduce subordinate clauses, which comes from ancient *hina* "in order that"; (b) SMG uses the particle[2] *tha* to mark the future tense: this functions similarly to English "will/shall" and comes from earlier [θe(l) na], behind which lies the ancient verbal phrase *thelō na* "I want to"; (c) SMG has deleted the final *-n*: thus [ti gi] < [tin gin] "the earth."

In Cypriot dialect the aphorism would be:

δώσ' μου κάπου να σταθώ τζαι εννά ταράξω την γη
[ðos mou ˈkapu na staˈθo tʃe enˈna taˈrakso tin gi]
give to-me where [*particle*[1]] I-may-stand and [*particle*[2]] I-shall-move the earth

In Cypriot the future is formed with the particle[2] *enna* (geminate *n*), which also derives from earlier [θe(l) na]; the verb "change" comes from the ancient verb meaning "stir, shake up," and the final *-n* is preserved in the definite article [tin].

The dialects of modern Greek do not come from the ancient dialects, but emerged from the Hellenistic *koine*. An exception to this is a dialect called Tsakonian, spoken in a remote area of the Peloponnese, around the borders of Laconia and Arcadia (the modern municipality of South Kynouria). It is not clear what vitality the dialect still has: protected by its remote location, it had diverged markedly from the rest of Greek by the end of the nineteenth century. In the twentieth century, as in so many similar cases, it was gravely weakened by modern education and communications. Elements in the dialect are clearly derived from an ancient dialect similar to Laconian: for example, it has a phoneme [v] which goes back to ancient [w] (*digamma*). This sound is absent from the *koine*, since it disappeared early in the Attic-Ionic dialects on which the *koine* is based. Features of Tsakonian which bypass the *koine* and go back to a West Greek dialect include:

1. Retained features of Common Greek

   [ā] preserved as [a]: *hā mātēr* > Tsak. [a ˈmate] "the mother"; *koine*/SMG [ā] > [ē] > [ī] > [i]: [i miˈtera] "the mother"
   [u] preserved: *sukon* > Tsak. [ˈsuko] "fig"; *koine*/SMG [u] > [ü] > [i]: [ˈsiko] "fig"
   [w] preserved: *warnion* > Tsak. [ˈvane] "lamb"; *koine*/SMG [w] deleted: ancient *arnion* > SMG [arˈni]

2. Innovative features reminiscent of ancient Laconian dialect

   [θ] > [s]: Tsak. [ˈseri]; cf. *koine*/SMG [ˈθeros] "harvest, summer"
   [s] > [r] at word end: Tsak. [kaˈur]; cf. *koine*/SMG [kaˈlos] "well"

1821: The Greek State

The Greek war of independence broke out in the Peloponnese in 1821, and after a decade of fighting and negotiation the Ottomans and the western powers recognized the new independent kingdom

of Greece in 1832. The new state comprised the Peloponnese, Attica, and central Greece as far as the border with Thessaly; islands under Greek control were Euboea, the Cyclades, and the Sporades. By the outbreak of the First World War Greece had acquired the Ionian islands, Thessaly, Epirus, Macedonia, western Thrace, and Crete; in 1947 the Dodecanese islands were ceded by Italy. In the years leading up to and after the revolution the term Hellene was reclaimed by Greek intellectuals, and gradually replaced Latin-derived terms *Romii* and *Greki* as the self-designation of the Greeks (*Ellínes* in modern Greek).

The standard spoken language of Greece is not based on the old dialect of Athens, which was a small town at the foot of the acropolis until the war of independence. The origins of the old Athenian dialect are not completely understood. It seems not to derive from the Attic-Ionic *koine* in a straightforward way: for example, it preserved [u] from ancient [u], which had become [ü] in classical Attic and then [i] in the Hellenistic period. Athens became the capital in December 1834 (the first capital of the Greek state was at Nafplion in the northern Peloponnese), and the local dialect receded rapidly after that. Standard Greek is based on the dialects of the Peloponnese, the Ionian islands, and Constantinople, which were similar to each other, and represented the most important sociolinguistic constituencies in the new state. The Peloponnese, traditionally a center of resistance to Turkish rule, had been the cradle of the Greek revolution. The Ionian islands, as we have seen, had remained free of Turkish rule, and had developed a literary language whose roots could be traced back to the Cretan renaissance. Constantinople, where there was clearly already an educated spoken standard, was home to the largest urban Greek population, including an educated political elite. The modern spoken standard seems also to have gone through a process of koineization, whereby speakers dropped elements of their own dialects which were perceived as anomalous or minority features, and adopted instead the variable in use by the majority: and all of this took place, of course, in the context of the controlling influence of the classicizing learned language. The southern dialects are, for example, more conservative phonologically than the northern dialects, and hence closer to the appearance of the ancient language.

The Modern Written Standard

One element in Solomos's *Hymn to Liberty* was programmatic for the new Greek state in an important and not entirely helpful way: this is the reference to the ancient Greeks in the struggle to build a new state and national language. As soon as it became clear that Greek independence was a realistic prospect an almighty quarrel broke out amongst the educated elite which was not settled for over a century and a half. Greek identity was centered around the Orthodox church and the classical heritage. The Greek vernaculars of the crumbling Ottoman empire were seen by many Greek nationalists as corrupt, or even barbarous, and not fit to be the new national language of the Greeks.

In the course of the argument, which went on for decades, two broad camps emerged (though each contained fine gradations): on the one side was a movement to purify the language and return it to its classical roots. This did not quite mean reviving ancient Attic, but was the closest compromise that seemed possible: the grammar of the formal standard language was rewritten to take it as close to the grammar and vocabulary of the ancient language as seemed feasible. There was a precedent for this, of course, among the elite, who had used a more or less learned and archaizing written language throughout the Roman and Byzantine periods, and beyond. It meant a return to diglossia, since this variety, named the *katharévousa* ("purified" language), could only be mastered after an extensive education, and was far removed from the spoken language of most people.

On the other side was the desire to avoid diglossia as far as possible by creating a written standard that was more or less based on the modern spoken language: this language was called *dimotikí*, demotic or popular. While the institutions of the state produced documents in forms of the *katharévousa*, by the end of the nineteenth century most writers were using either demotic, or a mixed language. The national uncertainty blew up into a national controversy in 1888 with the publication by Yannis Psicharis (1854–1929) of a novel called *My Journey*, in an extreme form of *dimotikí* which refused all compromise with the learned language (to the extent that it was itself artificial in some respects). This gave an impetus to

demotic literary production, while conservatives named followers of Psicharis *malliarí*, "hairies" (on the grounds of the alleged hairy appearance of anti-establishment or bohemian writers).

The most serious incident occurred in 1901, when Alexandros Pallis, a Greek from Epirus living in Liverpool, published a translation of the gospels in demotic Greek in the newspaper *Acropolis* (as a result of the furor only the gospel of Matthew was published). This led to the "Gospel Riots" in Athens, after the translation was attacked by the church hierarchy and conservatives: eight people were killed by government troops during the riots, which led to the resignation of the prime minister and the bishop of Athens. Nevertheless, the 1911 constitution of Greece prohibited the translation of the Bible into any language without permission of the Orthodox Patriarchate. Contemporary political events also played a part in the controversy, but there were a number of important repercussions for the language issue: the translation made the claim that the language of the New Testament was not, in fact, comprehensible to contemporary Greeks. This was an affront to Greek identity insofar as it was bound up with Orthodoxy, which had traditionally symbolized continuity of language and identity over many turbulent centuries. It had the consequence that the proponents of the demotic language could be characterized as anti-Orthodox; in time they were also characterized as left-wing, communists even, and unpatriotic.

Schools in the twentieth century mostly taught the demotic form of the language, though in the nature of things the two forms of the language started to move together. Purists dropped the more absurd archaisms, and the demotic language compromised with the learned language, especially in the expansion of the modern Greek vocabulary. Paradoxically enough the *katharévousa* was never codified, in the sense that the state, which employed it, never produced a definitive grammar. In 1941 the linguist Manolis Triantafillidis (1883–1959) produced his government-commissioned *Neo-Hellenic Grammar (of the Demotic)* which established an intelligent and pragmatic basis for a modern written standard. The last gasp of the *katharévousa* came during the military junta of 1967–1974, when it was reintroduced by the regime as the official language and taught in schools. This had the effect of putting an end to the language argument in Greece: after the restoration of the democracy the demotic language was the undisputed national language. Standard

Modern Greek is an elegant compromise between the koineized spoken language and the learned written language.

This language (in Greek the "Neo-Hellenic Koine") is the official language of the Greek state. Cyprus, though it is a separate state, also uses Standard Modern Greek as a written and high spoken standard, with the result that Cypriots are to an extent diglossic. This may change, however, as Cypriot dialect is now fast receding under the pressure of Standard Modern Greek: some parents who speak to each other in dialect have made the decision to speak Standard Modern Greek with their children. When the Greek state was first established a range of languages were spoken in what is now Greek territory: Albanian, Vlach (a dialect of Romanian), Slavic, and Turkish. Thessaloniki was home to one of the largest Ladino-speaking Jewish communities in the world (Ladino is a dialect of Spanish spoken by Sephardic Jews in Spain until the expulsion of 1492). Ladino speakers came under severe pressure when the region was ceded to the Greek state in 1913, and the community was wiped out during the Nazi occupation of the city in 1941–1944. There are still small numbers of speakers of Albanian, Vlach, Slavic, and Turkish, though Turkish speakers are now more or less restricted to enclaves in Western Thrace.

Greek was widely spoken in Asia Minor and Istanbul until the Greco-Turkish war of 1919–1922, which was sparked by a Greek invasion of Turkey to recover territory around Smyrna (Izmir) promised to Greece at the end of the First World War in the treaty of Sèvres. The Greeks also hoped to take Istanbul and other areas which had been part of the Byzantine empire and which had significant Greek populations (this aim was known in Greek as the *Megáli Idéa*, "Great Idea"). The Greeks were defeated, and in 1923 Greece and Turkey signed an agreement to exchange populations: all the Greek Christians living in Turkey were forcibly moved to Greece, and vice versa for Turkish Muslims. Exceptions were the Greek community in Istanbul, and the Turkish community of western Thrace. This meant the end of some very extraordinary dialects of Greek spoken in remote regions of Asia Minor, in particular along the Black Sea coast (Pontic Greek) and Cappadocia (some Pontic speakers survived on the northern shores of the Black Sea, in Ukrainian territory). In Turkey a dialect of Greek survives in the province of Trabzon, in remote communities of Greek-speaking Muslims who were not subject to the population exchange.

Liberty and Language

In 1963 the Greek poet Seferis won the Nobel prize for literature, and in his Nobel lecture he quoted a famous line from the *Dialogos* of Solomos:

> Μήγαρις έχω άλλο στο νου μου, πάρεξ ελευθερία και γλώσσα;
> Do you think I have anything in mind except liberty and language?

Written in the 1820s, this is a dialogue between a poet (Solomos himself) and a scholar-pedant, in which the poet argues that he should write in the language of the people (the vernacular), while the pedant argues for a corrected or purified version of the language. The poet draws an explicit parallel between the struggle for national liberation, and the struggle to (re-)establish a national language which reflected the speech and creative genius of the people. Seferis made the point that the Greek language has a continuity (linguistic and literary) which does not depend on archaism, but on the creative engagement of living language with its long history. This is captured in a striking poem by the second Greek poet of the twentieth century to win the Nobel prize, Odysseas Elytis (*Axion Esti*, Psalm II):

> Τη γλώσσα μου έδωσαν ελληνική.
> το σπίτι φτωχικό στις αμμουδιές του Ομήρου.
> Μονάχη έγνοια η γλώσσα μου στις αμμουδιές του Ομήρου.
> Εκεί σπάροι και πέρκες
> ανεμόδαρτα ρήματα
> ρεύματα πράσινα μες στα γαλάζια
> όσα είδα στα σπλάχνα μου ν' ανάβουνε
> σφουγγάρια, μέδουσες
> με τα πρώτα λόγια των Σειρήνων
> όστρακα ρόδινα με τα πρώτα μαύρα ρίγη.
> Μονάχη έγνοια η γλώσσα μου, με τα πρώτα μαύρα ρίγη.
>
> I was given the Greek language;
> a poor house on Homer's beaches.
> My only care my language on Homer's beaches.
> Seabream there and perch

windbeaten verbs
green sea-currents amid the azure currents
which I felt light up my viscera
sponges, medusae
with the first words of the Sirens
pink shells with their first black shivers.
My only care my language with the first black shivers.[3]

Notes

1 See now Dickey (2012).
2 Newton (1972), Trudgill (2003).
3 Tr. Jeffrey Carson and Nikos Sarris, *The Collected Poems of Odysseus Elytis* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004).

Appendix: The Greek Alphabet and Pronunciation

Greek letter	*Roman*	*Sound in 450 BC as in:*	*Modern Greek sound as in:*
Α α *alpha*	a	"cat"	(same)
Β β *beta*	b	"bet"	"vet"
Γ γ *gamma*	g	"get"	"yet" before *i*, *e* [γ][1] before *a*, *o*
Δ δ *delta*	d	"dog"	[ð] "that"
Ε ε *epsilon*	e	"get"	(same)
Ζ ζ *zeta*	zd	"wisdom," "glazed"	"zero"
Η η *eta*	ē	"hair," Fr. "grève"	[i:] "meet"
Θ θ *theta*	[tʰ][2]	"tin," Hindi "thali"	[θ] "thin"
Ι ι *iota*	i	"meet"	(same)
Κ κ *kappa*	k	"skip"	(same)
Λ λ *lamda*	l	"lap"	(same)
Μ μ *mu*	m	"map"	(same)

[1]A voiced velar fricative: as in Spanish *amigo*. A voiced version of the sound in Spanish *ajo* "garlic" or (roughly) at the end of Scottish *loch*, German *Bach*.
[2]At the start of a word, English *t* (like *p* and *k*) is aspirated, accompanied by a rush of breath like an *h*: native speakers who do not believe this can test it by putting a hand in front of the mouth and saying *top* and *stop* (the *t* in *stop* is not aspirated).

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N ν *nu*	n	"nap"	(same)
Ξ ξ *xi*	ks	"tax"	(same)
O ο *omicron*	o	"top"	(same)
Π π *pi*	p	"spot," Fr. "père"	(same)
P ρ *rho*	r	"rat" (probably trilled)	(same)
Σ σ ς[3] *sigma*	s	"sip"	(same)
T τ *tau*	t	"stop," Fr. "tante"	(same)
Y υ *hypsilon*	u	Fr. "tu," Ger. "müde"[4]	[i:] "meet"
Φ φ *phi*	[p^h][2]	"pin"	[f] "fin"
X χ *chi*	[k^h][2]	"kin"	[x] Span. "ajo"
Ψ ψ *psi*	ps	"lapse"	(same)
Ω ω *omega*	ō	"paw"	"top"

[3]Written ς at the end of a word only.

[4]In Classical Attic the *u* vowel was the fronted *u* of French and German, IPA [y]. In most other dialects it seems to have remained a back [u] as in English *too*.

In addition to the above, many alphabets in the ancient Greek world had a letter which we know as *digamma* ("two gammas" from its shape: one gamma standing on another), but which the Greeks called *wau*:

F ϝ "digamma"	w	"will"

Abbreviations and Symbols

Abbreviations

acc.	accusative: indicates that the noun is object of the sentence (is being acted on by the verb): the dog bit *George*
aor.	aorist tense (simple past): *I sang*
CEG	Hansen, *Carmina Epigraphica Graeca* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1983–)
cf.	compare (Lat. *confer*)
dat.	dative: indicates that the noun is indirect object of the sentence (is the beneficiary of the verbal action rather than the direct object): she gave a book *to George* (or, bought a book *for George*)
fut.	future tense: *I shall sing*
gen.	genitive: indicates that the noun is the possessor of something: *George's* book
I-E	Indo-European
imper.	imperative (the verbal form used to give orders): *Go! Stand up!*
imperf.	imperfect tense (past continuous): *I was singing*
indic.	indicative (the most basic verbal category or "mood": it makes a statement): *he sang*, *she will be released*, *I am reading*
infin.	infinitive (no personal subject): *to sing*, *to go*, *to be*
IPA	International Phonetic Alphabet

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loc. locative: indicates a point in space (or time): *at home*, *in Athens*, *on the next day*

nom. nominative: indicates that the noun is subject of the sentence (is the agent of the verbal action): *the dog* bit George

OE Old English

opt. optative (a verbal mood with non-declarative or non-factual functions): e.g., If he *were to leave*, I *would follow* him

PCG Kassel and Austin, *Poetae Comici Graeci* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1983–)

perf. perfect tense: either present state (early Greek): *he has/is gone* or past perfective (post-classical Greek): *I have sung*

plur. plural

pres. present tense: *I sing*, *I am singing*

sing. singular

subj. subjunctive (a verbal mood with non-declarative or non-factual functions): e.g., I demand that she *be released*, they *are to leave* at once

Symbols

* reconstructed form, no longer extant

~ alternating with

< develops out of, is derived from

> becomes, develops into

ā long *a* [a:]

ē long *e* [e:], with an open quality (as in the second syllable of French *élève*, or British Engl. *snared*)

ō long *o* [o:], with an open quality (as in Engl. *more*)

ḛ̄ long close *e* (as in the first syllable of French *élève*, or Scottish Engl. *eight*)

ō̱ long close *o* (as in French *sauter*, German *Boot*, or Scottish Engl. *boat*)

m̥ vocalic *m* (so also for *n*, *l*, *r*)

[x] velar fricative, similar to the *ch* in Scottish *loch*

[ʃ] palato-alveolar fricative, spelled *sh* in Engl. *ship*

[tʃ] alveolar affricate, spelled *ch* in Engl. *chip*

Glossary

apical consonant made with the tip of the tongue against the roof of the mouth, either behind the teeth (e.g., French dental *t*, *d*), or at the alveolar ridge (Engl. alveolar *t*, *d*).

aspiration in Greek refers to the presence of [h]: either as a phoneme before a vowel (as in ὅδος [hodos] "road"), or as an integral feature of an aspirated consonant: θ [t^h], φ [p^h], χ [k^h]. The phoneme [h] and its written forms are sometimes referred to as "the aspirate."

Attic the dialect of Athens: from Attica, the region in which Athens is located.

bilabial a sound made with both lips: e.g., Engl. *p*, *b*.

cognate cognate words are related etymologically: exact cognates are morphologically identical (the phonology will reflect sound changes in the respective languages): e.g., Gk. *hex* "six" and Eng. *six*.

dual in addition to singular and plural, many languages (including Sanskrit and classical Greek) have a category "dual" for both nouns and verbs: the dual noun denotes two objects of the same type: e.g., "two vases." In a dual form, this will be expressed by one word, and an associated verb, e.g., "broke," will have a special form.

enclitic a word without an accent of its own (usually one syllable, occasionally two). It was pronounced in close association with the preceding word, with which it formed an accentual unit.

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Hellenistic the post-Classical period of Greek history (conventionally 323–31 BC), coinciding with the Macedonian conquest of Greece and the loss of independence of the Greek city-states. After 146 BC Macedonia (and therefore Greece) was under *de facto* Roman control; after the battle of Actium in 31 BC Augustus made Greece a province of the Roman Empire.

koine in linguistics, a compromise language which arises out of a number of related dialects, usually because speakers engage in "leveling" (the ironing out of local peculiarities). The word means "common" in Greek, and is also applied to areas of common cultural development.

logogram a sign in a writing system that denotes a whole word. In modern writing systems numerals are typically logographic: 1, 2, 3, etc.

morphology the study of word structure; the analysis of words in terms of minimum meaningful elements, as in the Engl. plural *teachers* (*teach*+agent *-er*+plural *-s*). In Greek the morphology plays an important part in the grammar (inflectional endings often determine the function of a word in a sentence).

palatal a consonant made by moving the tongue towards the roof of the mouth behind the alveolar ridge (the hard palate). Palatal sounds in English include the initial consonants of the words *young* and *ship*.

pharyngeal a sound produced at the back of the vocal tract with the pharynx: can be made in English by saying the word "and" with the *a* made as far back into the throat as possible, so that a slight gagging effect occurs. A pharyngealized consonant is a consonant produced with this effect.

phoneme the basic distinctive element of sound in a language; for example, the English word *bet* comprises the three English phonemes /b/, /e/, and /t/. Most languages isolate 30–50 phonemes for use, out of the hundreds of possible sounds that the human vocal apparatus can produce. Phonemes are language-specific: differences in sound which are phonemic in one language may be present but irrelevant in another.

resonant a class of consonants which can be sounded continuously without audible friction, and may act as a vowel in certain positions (typically, between two consonants): Engl. *m*, *n*, *l*.

root the historical core of a word which carries the basic meaning. The same root can be part of both a noun and a verb: e.g., Gk. *pherō* "I carry" and *phoros* "tribute" (the same I-E root **bʰ(e)r* is also seen in Engl. *I bear* and *burden*).

semivowel a sound which can be a vowel (the nucleus of a syllable) or a consonant (a syllable boundary): for example, [i]/[j] and [u]/[w]

stem the main body of a word minus the grammatical endings (the case endings of a noun, or personal endings of a verb). In I-E languages a stem often consists of the root plus a suffix. Thus the stem of Greek *lusō* "I shall release" is *lus-* (root *lu-*, plus future suffix *-s-*).

stop a consonant produced by fully stopping the air-flow: e.g., Engl. *p*, *t*.

suffix element added to the root of a word to form the stem.

velar consonant produced by the back of the tongue against the *velum*, or soft palate: as in Engl. /k/ in *cat*, /g/ in *get*.

voiced/voiceless a voiced consonant is produced with the vocal chords vibrating: e.g., Engl. *b*, *d*, *g*. The voiceless equivalents of these consonants in English are *p*, *t*, *k*.

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Index

Key treatments of a topic are in **bold**.

A Brief History of Ancient Greek, First Edition. Stephen Colvin.