

LESSON II THE ALPHABET

2.1 Introduction

In this lesson we give the remaining twelve letters. These letters are more difficult to recognize. Particularly the zeta and the xi seem similar. Give it your best effort to learn these letters by heart by writing them again and again. Besides this we treat of so-called diphthongs in this lesson. Also we discuss the rôle of the accent in Greek.

2.2 Again twelve letters of the Greek alphabet

Behind the letter we give again the pronunciation and the name of the letter between parentheses.

G g to be pronounced hard as the 'g' in 'girl' (gamma),

D d simply 'd' (delta),

Z z 'z'; (Attic is 'dz'), (zeta),

H h long as in the French 'bête' (eta),

Q q as in 'thing' (theta),

L l 'l' (labda),

X x 'ks' (xi),

P p 'p' (pi),

R r 'r' (rho),

F f 'f' (fi),

C c 'ch' as in 'Loch Ness' (chi),

Y y 'ps' (psi).

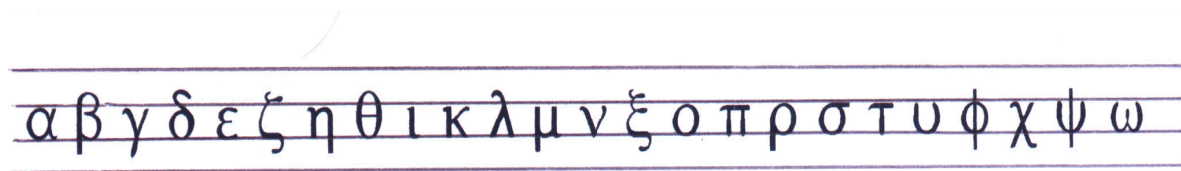
2.2a Ways to Write:

Learn to write the Greek alphabet till you can dream it!

N.B. Follow the arrow.

2.2b Again the Alphabet

N.B. Pay heed how some letters protrude above or under the middle lines.



2.3 Diphthongs

Just as English also the Greek language knows diphthongs: combinations of vowels that together are pronounced as a single sound. The Greek knows five long and five short vowels:

short a e i o u

long a` h i` w u`

With these vowels the diphthongs are composed. A diphthong always ends with an *i* or an *u* (pronounced like *y* resp. *w*).

First we give the diphthongs that begin with a short vowel.

ai as in 'high';

au as in 'cow';

ei as in 'fiancée';

eu as in 'dew' [for all practical purposes];

oi as in 'boy';

ou as in 'shoot' [others go by 'count'].

ui as *wi* in wine [again for practical reasons; more correctly as 'uj' in the French 'jujube' without the 'ube'. Scholars disagree about the original pronunciation as it cannot possibly be ascertained anymore].

Now the diphthongs with long vowels.

a/ as *ai* in 'aisle'

h/as 'èy'

hu as 'èw'

w/as 'ôy'

As you can see, in the case with diphthongs with a first long vowel and the *iôta*; the *iôta* is written under the long vowel. This is called a *iota subscriptum* (literally 'iota written under').

Under a capital there is never a iota subscriptum!

Letter combinations as gg in ἀγγελό and gk in ἀγκύρα are pronounced as 'ng' and 'ngk' [the ng of 'angle'].

2.4 Pronunciation

We do know that originally Greek was pronounced in a more or less singing voice with the tone going up and down. The going up or down of the tone was denoted with accents. These accents look like this:

∨ 'acutus', denotes the tone going up (like the line)

∩ 'gravis', denotes the tone going down (like the line)

ˆ 'circumflex', denotes the tone going up and then down (like the line).

In the course of time pronunciation changed however. Just as in English there came into force rules for stressing certain syllables. The accents, though, are still written! Nowadays two systems are being used. According to one system the (stress) accent is placed as in Latin:

- words consisting of two syllables: accent on the ultimate syllable
- words of more than two syllables: accent on the penultimate if it is long, on the antepenultimate if the penultimate is short.

Syllables are long if they hold a long vowel (see above, under 2.3), diphthong or vowels followed by two consonants.

The other system is the one by the Dutch scholar Erasmus. He wanted to place the emphasis on the syllable with the written accent. (The eta in accordance with this system is pronounced as the 'e' in the French 'bête'. But many others pronounce it as the long 'i' in the French 'ville'; more or less like in modern Greek).

We say this to make clear to you that the written accents you see, are of no consequence as to the meanings of the words. Only in a few rare cases do the accents bear on the meaning.

As it is impossible to ascertain the exact true original pronunciation, it is enough if you choose one way to pronounce the Greek and stick to it. All that counts is the written text. Some choose to follow the modern Greek in this regard, but then it can happen that other students of classical and Koinè Greek do not right away understand you. In such a case make sure that you also know the ways of pronunciation given in this course.

2.5 Again the Way to Write:

Pay heed how some letters protrude outside the middle lines. Capitals are about as large as four lines.

2.6 Homework:

Learn to read and write the following words. Transliterate them, that is write them with Latin letters (N.B. The English alphabet uses Latin letters).

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|---------|--------------|-----------|
| 1. εἶψω | 15. γυναῖξιν | 29. Δαυὶδ |
| 2. ὕψος | 16. Ζῆλος | 30. ὕψος |

- | | | |
|--------------|-----------------|--------------|
| 3. ajhr | 17. aijnigma | 31. *Ezekia" |
| 4. RWMAIOS | 18. jAGKURA | 32. yalmo" |
| 5. ajeo" | 19. uid" | 33. ejodo" |
| 6. KURIOS | 20. LOUOUSIN | |
| 7. swma | 21. Iuqhsetai | |
| 8. jAGGELOI | 22. TETELESTAI. | |
| 9. bibl ion | 23. jAcaz | |
| 10. TEKNA | 24. jAsaf | |
| 11. Iogo" | 25. Qamar | |
| 12. jALFA | 26. jRouq | |
| 13. wjnega | 27. jRacab | |
| 14. jOUDAIOS | 28. Zara | |

If a question occurs to you, do not hesitate to pose it!

2.6 The Background of the New Testament: The Jews

In the year 63 B.C. the Roman field general conquered the then Palestine. He annexed it to the province of Syria. In 40 B.C. the country obtained a restricted form of independence: Herod was appointed king under Roman sovereignty. He remained king till 4 B.C. Then the country was divided between his sons. However in 6 A.D. the south (Samaria, Judea, and Idumea) came under direct Roman rule. The north remained more or less independent under Herod Antipas.

A Jewish country under foreign government, what were the consequences of this? In foreign eyes the Jewish country remained an independent state. The governors had great personal authority. But the most important fact was that Jewry could hold on to their own religion. They were not forced to attend to other religious rites but their own. Jerusalem was to stay free from other religions and Jews were not held to the cult of caesar. Their monotheism was respected for some time. However under Caligula (37- 41 A.D.) problems arose. This megalomaniacal emperor desired to have his statue erected in Jerusalem. The contemporary governor Petronius was able to prevent this plan. Upon the death of Caligula his successor Claudius annulled this order. Under Claudius the country of Palestine experienced yet a period of great independence. But towards the year 66 tensions grew worse and worse. In that year war developed against Rome and it lasted till 73. In the year 70 A.D. Jerusalem was taken and the temple was destroyed. In 73 the last resistance, centered in Massada, was broken. After that Palestine became a normal province. There were almost no possibilities anymore to give shape to the own identity.

NOTES:

