

# **English Etymology**

## **Part I**

### **GREEK**

**Jacques Bailly  
Z. Philip Ambrose  
Brady B. Gilleland  
Robin R. Schlunk**

# Lesson 1

## The Greek Alphabet

Characters	Names	Sounds	English transliteration
A, α	alpha	f <u>a</u> ther	a
B, β	beta	<u>b</u> oy	b
Γ, γ	gamma	g <u>o</u>	g (sometimes n)
Δ, δ	delta	<u>d</u> o	d
E, ε	epsilon	m <u>e</u> n	e
Z, ζ	zeta	ad <u>z</u> e	z
H, η	eta	h <u>a</u> te	e, a (both as long vowels)
Θ, θ	theta	<u>th</u> ick	th
I, ι	iota	rav <u>i</u> ne	i
K, κ	kappa	s <u>k</u> i	c, k
Λ, λ	lambda	l <u>e</u> ave	l
M, μ	mu	m <u>o</u> ve	m
N, ν	nu	<u>n</u> o	n
Ξ, ξ	xi	w <u>x</u>	x
O, ο	omicron	h <u>o</u> rse	o
Π, π	pi	p <u>a</u> rt	p
P, ρ	rho	r <u>e</u> d	r
Σ, σ, ς (c)	sigma	s <u>o</u> ng	s
T, τ	tau	t <u>a</u> ke	t
Υ, υ	upsilon	like French <u>u</u> *	y, sometimes u, and sometimes v
Φ, φ	phi	p <u>h</u> one	ph, sometimes f
X, χ	chi	<u>ch</u> ey	ch
Ψ, ψ	psi	cap <u>s</u>	ps
Ω, ω	omega	v <u>o</u> te	o

\*To make a French u, round your lips while trying to say a long e.

**Letters already obsolete in ancient Greek:** used either for numerical notation in Greek or found in only some dialects.

Q, ϙ	koppa	obsolete letter used for numbers in ancient Greek became q in Roman alphabet: sounded like /k/	Ϻ	sampi	obsolete letter used for numbers in ancient Greek sounded like /ss/	F, Ϝ	digamma	obsolete letter: sounded like /w/ Greek <i>Ϝεργ-</i> > <i>erg, energy</i> , which is a cognate of <i>work</i>
---------	-------	---	---	-------	--	---------	---------	--

**DIPHTHONGS** (δι- di- "two" + φθογγος *phthongos* "sound")

A "diphthong" is composed of two vowels, but it only creates one syllable in words. In sound, it glides from one vowel into another.

#### The Greek diphthongs

Greek spelling	English transliteration	English pronunciation
αι	ae, æ, e (long e)	<u>h</u> e
ει	ei, i	<u>h</u> igh, by <u>e</u>
οι	oe, œ, e (long e)	<u>e</u> conomy
αυ	au	<u>a</u> uto
ευ	eu	<u>y</u> ou
ου	ou, u	loo <u>p</u>

#### NOTES:

- When **gamma** (γ) comes before itself or -κ, -χ, or -ξ, it is transliterated n: -γγ- > -ng-, -γκ- > -nk-, -γχ- > -nch-, -γξ- > -nx-
  - ἄγγελος is transliterated *angelos* (> *angel*).
  - ἄγκυρα is transliterated *ankyra* (> *anchor*: what is unusual about this transliteration? it's a "hypercorrection")
  - παρέγχυμα is transliterated *parenchyma*
  - φάρυγξ is transliterated *pharynx*
  - κ, -χ, or -ξ are called "palatal" or "velar," because the sounds they represent use the palate (the hard part of the roof of the mouth) or the velum (the soft part of the roof of the mouth)
- Sigma** has two versions:
  - Two-formed version (used in most Greek texts): in this version, sigma is σ at the start of or within a word (so-called 'initial' or 'medial' positions), but ς in final position (at the end of a word).

2. "Lunate sigma" is c in any position (used in papyri, for example).
3. Our letter aitch (H or h) is not a letter in the Greek alphabet: it is represented by a "rough breathing" (aka "spiritus asper") above an initial vowel or diphthong. The rough breathing mark looks like a backwards apostrophe.
  - ἄ, ἐ, ἦ, ἱ, ὀ, ὠ, ὑ
  - αὐ, αἰ, οὐ, εὐ, οἰ, etc. (which are diphthongs)
4. Rho always has a rough breathing in initial position (at the start of a word). When rho starts a syllable in the middle of a word, it is doubled, and the second rho has a rough breathing.
  - ῥυθμός (> *rhythm*)
  - κατάρροους (> *catarrh*)
  - Now you know how to spell *logorrhea*, right?
5. Every Greek word that begins with a vowel has a breathing mark: to mark the presence of /h/, a "rough" breathing is used (aka "spiritus asper"), while to mark the absence of /h/, a "smoothe" breathing mark is used (aka "spiritus lenis"). It looks like an apostrophe.
  - ἄ-, ἐ-, ἦ-, ἱ-, ὀ-, ὠ-, ὑ-
  - αὐ-, αἰ-, οὐ-, οἰ-, εὐ-, etc. (diphthongs: note that the breathing mark goes on the second vowel of a diphthong)
6. Most Greek words have accents, which are the diacritics above the vowels
  - The acute (´) marks a rising tone (but most modern folks pronounce it as a stress mark).
  - The grave (`) marks a falling tone (but moderns can safely ignore it in pronunciation).
  - And the circumflex (˘) marks yet another tonal pattern (which English speakers make regularly but don't know how to make consciously).
7. Upsilon very occasionally becomes v, as in the diphthong ευ (usually *eu*) in *evangelist* and *evzone* (etymologically "well-girdled"), and the soup *avgolemono* (etymologically "egg lemon", from Modern Greek αυγολέμονο).

## EXERCISES

1. Write in Roman letters the Greek words in the following list. All are English words (you may have to change them slightly to get the English word). Look up their meaning in English too, if you don't know it already.

γνώσις  
ἀμοιβή  
σύριγξ  
διατριβή  
ψυχή  
λάρυγξ  
διάρροια  
δίφθογγος  
παρέγχυμα

φοῖνιξ  
ἄγκυρα  
φύσις  
νόμος  
λόγος  
θεσμοθέτης  
φαρμακεία  
ἀνακολούθον  
πάθος

2. Write in Roman letters the following Greek names

Ἀλκιβιάδης  
Ἡρακλῆς  
Υἰάκινθος  
ΔΗΜΟΣΘΕΝΗΣ  
ΣΑΛΑΜΙΣ

ΘΕΡΜΟΠΥΛΑΙ  
Ὡρίων  
Ζεὺς  
Ἑλένη  
Ἀριστοτέλης

3. Write the following names and English words in Greek letters (don't try to look up the Greek originals until after you try to transliterate them)

Oedipus  
Medea  
Alexander  
syringe  
phalanx  
hoplite  
politeia

Clytaemnestra  
Agamemnon  
Electra  
tragedy  
comedy  
drama  
stigmata

3. Look up words that begin with *leuk-* and *leuc-* in the *OED*. The *OED* gives the most prevalent spelling as the headword. In what century are the citations for headwords beginning with *leuk-*? what about headwords beginning with *leuc-*? What pattern do you notice and why do you think that pattern arose?

4. Give the meaning and etymology of the following English words:

alpha  
beta  
gamma  
delta  
epsilon  
iota  
lambda  
omega  
chi-rho  
pi  
jot  
zed

cedilla  
sigmoid  
deltoid  
hypsiloid  
lambdodont  
sigmodont  
etapteris  
deltiocephalus  
agammaglobulinemia  
gamut  
chiastic/chiasmus

5. More Greek words that are simply transliterations of Greek words: fill in the middle column.

Greek Word	English Transliteration	Greek Meaning
ἀνεμώνη		windflower

άνθραξ		hot coal
μάρτυρ		witness
σφίγξ		sphinx
φαινόμενο		thing shown
χαρακτήρ		engraver
βάθος		depth
τέλος		goal

## Lesson 2

### Stems and Cement -o-

An Observation: In English, the difference between verb stems and noun stems is often completely blurred: one can "fear a stop" and "stop a fear" or "voice your mind" and "mind your voice." In Greek, however, noun and verb stems are usually distinct and require different treatment.

Greek nouns and verbs usually consist of a stem plus an ending: the stem is the part most often used in English words.

#### 1. Noun and adjective stems: how to figure out what is the stem

- In the etymology section of each entry, English dictionaries give either the stem itself, the "nominative" form, or the nominative and "genitive" of Greek words.
- When the form has a hyphen at the end, it is the stem itself. When it does not, it is necessary to determine the stem.
- If you need to determine the stem, a practical procedure is to simply look at a Greek word and a few of its English derivatives: the parts that are common to both the English words and the Greek word constitute the stem most of the time.
- For those who want more than a simply practical procedure, the following explains some technical details.
  - First, some background about Greek nouns and adjectives.
    - In Greek, the ending of nouns and adjectives must be changed depending on what function they play in a sentence:
      - The subject of the sentence is in the "nominative" case.
      - Possessives are in the "genitive" case.
      - English still has a few such cases: "he" and "she" are nominative, while "his" and "hers" are genitive, and "him" and "her" are yet another case called "accusative" or "objective") (Proto-Indo-European had at least eight cases: