Introduction

This course is intended for all those who wish to acquire the ability to read ancient Greek texts without a dictionary. The Polis method is an introduction to Greek through the dialect which has given the most important literary works: Koine Greek. From Plutarch to New Testament authors, from Polybius to the Septuagint translators, from Plotinus to the author of the treatise *On the Sublime*, many writers have composed their texts in the common dialect (*koinè dialektos*) from which Western culture has sprung. As this language, at least in literary texts, spans over one thousand years, we had to choose a reference point : the Greek dialect from the first century AD. This dialect has the advantage of being intermediate between early (3rd c. BC – 2nd c. BC) and late Koine (3rd c.-10th c. AD). In addition, it allows us to read the most interesting Greek books of Antiquity and of the beginning of the Middle Ages.

Vocabulary

This method offers a series of Greek texts ordered according to a natural progression. To compose these texts we drew our material from different data bases : Apollonius Dyscolus' (grammatical vocabulary), Plutarch's (usual daily words) and New Testament concordances (common vocabulary). These three corpuses allow us to base the language of our texts on a very large collection of texts from the first century AD. Whenever these concordances did not provide the word we were looking for, the vocabulary of the Septuagint has been helpful.

In some exceptional cases, (such as *tèlephônon* : τηλέφωνον), we dared creating a neologism to refer to objects that were inexistent at the beginning of Christian era. It thus became possible to produce texts that show the full strength of a living language. All along the way we drew from the various concordances at our disposal frequent idioms and ways of speaking specific to first century Greek. This allowed us to produce some texts which could be considered as centos of the New Testament. In addition to the texts that were directly composed for the sake of this method, we included in this first volume of Polis three passages from the New Testament and one from the Septuagint that had to be lightly reworded in order to be understandable for the beginner.

Pronunciation

Lingua ex auditu : this book should be used with the recordings of the lessons. You are thus invited to make your own recordings during the intensive course. The question of the pronunciation of Koine Greek is a very sensitive one, since many pedagogical, emotional and identity factors are involved in this topic. Two main options are available for the student who wishes to pronounce an ancient Greek text: the historical and the modern one.

1. Modern Greek pronunciation

A growing number of Greek teachers advise to adopt Modern Greek pronunciation when studying Ancient Greek. Several reasons are usually given for that choice. First it is argued that nobody will ever get the exact pronunciation of Ancient Greek as no recording is extant for Antiquity. On the other hand, it seems clear that, at least Byzantine Greek pronunciation has been very close to Modern one. The continuity between the different periods of Greek culture would be lost if one had to adopt another way of pronouncing Ancient Greek. Then, it is argued, it would be a pity to cut the student from a natural link with Modern Greek culture, the natural heir of the Ancient Greek world. From that point of view, it goes without saying that Modern Greek pronunciation is the most natural way to pronounce Ancient Greek for a Greek student.

2. *Historical pronunciations*

Despite of these very powerful arguments in favour of Modern Greek pronunciation, we have nevertheless decided to follow an historical one. The main reason has to do with the communicational character of our method. Because of the main phonetic changes that Greek has undergone since Antiquity, many words have become impossible to distinguish for the hearer. True, Septuagint and New Testament texts are continuously read in the Orthodox liturgy with the Modern Greek pronunciation, without that affecting the understanding of the learned reader. There is yet a difference between reading a text and communicating. According to Modern Greek pronunciation, I should pronounce τεῖχος "walls of a city" exactly in the same way as τοῖχος "wall of a room": [tiħos]. More problematic even, the basic words ἡμεῖς "we" and ὑμεῖς "you" are impossible to distinguish according to the pronunciation. Both are heard as [imis]. In fact, Modern Greek has solved that ambiguity by developing two different words: εμείς [emis] and εσείς [esis].

True: no authentic recording of any Ancient Greek conversation is at our disposal. But this does not mean that phoneticians cannot reconstruct with a fair degree of certainty the historical pronunciation of a language spoken in Antiquity. Some precious clues have helped experts in their reconstruction: General Phonetics tendencies, spelling errors recorded in ancient inscriptions, spelling of Greek loan words in other ancient languages as Latin, and even descriptions of the Greek phonetics by ancient Greek grammarians themselves. Therefore, phoneticians have reached a very large consensus about the exact pronunciation of Ancient Greek at the different stages of its development. The different articles about this topic in Wikipedia, either in English, Greek or French, reflect that strong consensus among scholars.

In the case of Koine Greek, the historical pronunciation is more difficult to determine than in the case of Attic. For the latter, it suffices to adopt the historical reconstructed pronunciation of Athenian Greek during the 5th and 4th centuries BC. But Koine Greek is a language that spans for roughly one thousand years, from the 3rd century BC till the beginning of the Middle Ages, in large regions of the East Mediterranean.

a) Historical First Century AD pronunciation

For the First Century AD, Randall Buth has made extensive research about the pronunciation of New Testament Greek. Those who would be curious to know the real First Century Greek pronunciation will find in the CD audio of the *Polis* method (French, Italian or German editions) as a way of example, the reading of the beginning of the Prolog of John's Gospel as it could have been read by the time it was redacted.

b) Historical Early Koine Greek pronunciation

However, the pronunciation that has been chosen for this book is a more conservative one, quite close to the one that Erasmus reconstructed for Classical Greek (the so called *Erasmian pronunciation*), that of the cultural elite from the beginning of Koine Greek, save for the consonants ϕ, θ and χ. For the sake of commodity, these consonants are here pronounced [f], [θ] and [ħ] instead of the historical [p^h], [t^h] and [k^h] sounds.

Our decision might at first seem arbitrary. Why should we adopt the phonological system of the beginning of Koine Greek while the language that we are learning belongs to the first century AD ? The decisive factor in our decision was the pedagogical one. In first

century Greek, pronunciation has become far removed from spelling. Many diphthongs have coalesced with vowels (οι is pronounced as υ, αι as ε and ει as ι). Among many other changes, this phonetic evolution adds a new difficulty to a language that does not have the reputation of being easy to learn. As the unity of Koine Greek is based on its literary spelling, it seems advisable to adopt a pronunciation as close as possible to the written texts. This is why we distinguish circumflex from acute accent whenever we read the Greek texts.

Exercises

1. Physical exercises

This course draws most of its inspiration from techniques usually applied nowadays for teaching modern languages. During the first session, the student will manage without any written material. The focus will rather be on reacting to different commands in Greek (*total physical response technique*), following the recordings. Whenever a student hears a Greek order such as « δεῖξόν μοι καθέδραν» (*deixon moi kathedran* : 'show me a chair'), he or she is invited to physically react to the order, even if he or she doesn't know yet how to answer in Greek. This first session makes the student familiar with the usual requests and object names he or she will face during the Greek course.

Almost every lesson starts with some *total physical response* exercises. In a class with an instructor, they are very easy to be done: just act according to the instructions of the teacher. If you were to study alone, we advise you to leave these exercises for the end of each lesson, once you have had a first contact with the vocabulary. Just try to follow the instructions of the recordings that you hear in Greek and implement them. Stand up, sit down, put the book upon the table, according to the instructions: this will lead you to internalize the vocabulary in a very efficient way.

2. Oral exercises

Some exercises invite you to improvise a conversation in Greek, following the guidelines of a dialog that has been seen in the lesson. They are easy to implement in a class with a teacher. If you learn by yourself, you can either skip them or try to find another self-learner to interact with him or her.

3. Written exercises

Each lesson includes at least two or three study texts illustrated with many drawings that help the student to grasp their meaning. The method provides a rich variety of exercises (blanks to fill in, phrases to put together, questions to find, answers to give...) in order to avoid any routine for the reader. Some fifteen characters, most of them students, will show up in the texts that have been composed. They will follow us all along the *Polis* method. The strong personality of each character creates a context for the reader, a framework for interpretation and helps the student to understand the different texts.

How to study

Three different steps must be followed : hearing, reading out loud, reading silently. Our advice is to listen first three or four times to the recordings without reading the texts, even if you do not fully understand their meaning. It will then become possible to listen several times to the text having the printed version under your eyes. In the end, you might read the text without recordings, out loud first, and then silently.

As for any living language, regularity is the key to success. Find every day a fixed time to study Greek (about an hour). You will not manage to reach the goal by making a big effort one day and forgetting to study the following ones. Self-discipline is what matters. The student who is faithful to his or her hour a day of study will manage, at the end of the intensive course, to read directly an simple narrative text from the New Testament. He or she will understand most of the passage without feeling the need of translating. That will be the best reward of his or her effort. Good luck and good Greek intensive course!