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Ancient Greek

Introduction – Part 2: Writing Systems, the Alphabet



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Roadmap

- The standard Greek alphabet
- Quick phonetic details
- Linear B
- Epichoric alphabets

The Standard Greek Alphabet

A	α	ἄλφα <i>alpha</i>	N	ν	νῦ <i>nu</i>
B	β	βῆτα <i>beta</i>	Ξ	ξ	ξεῖ (ξ̄) <i>xi</i>
Γ	γ	γάμμα <i>gamma</i>	Ο	ο	ῷ μικρόν <i>omicron</i>
Δ	δ	δέλτα <i>delta</i>	Π	π	πεῖ (π̄) <i>pi</i>
Ε	ε	ὲ ψιλόν <i>epsilon</i>	Ρ	ρ	ϙῶ <i>rho</i>
Ζ	ζ	ζῆτα <i>zeta</i>	Σ,	σ, ι	σῖγμα/σίγμα <i>sigma</i> (also C/c)
Η	η	ῆτα <i>eta</i>	Τ	τ	ταῦ <i>tau</i>
Θ	θ	θῆτα <i>theta</i>	Υ	υ	ῦ ψιλόν <i>upsilon</i>
Ι	ι	ἰῶτα <i>iota</i>	Φ	φ	φεῖ (φ̄) <i>phi</i>
Κ	κ	κάππα <i>kappa</i>	Χ	χ	χεῖ (χ̄) <i>chi</i>
Λ	λ	λά(μ)βδα <i>la(m)bda</i>	Ψ	ψ	ψεῖ (ψ̄) <i>psi</i>
Μ	μ	μῦ <i>mu</i>	Ω	ω	ῷ μέγα <i>omega</i>

Other letters

- Ϝ digamma or wau
- Ϙ kappa
- Ϛ stigma
- Ϻ san or sampi

Further Signs and Conventions

Iota subscript

ᾳ η ω

Accents

acute ' : e.g. á, é, ó, áí, óí

grave ` : e.g. à, ù, áì, óì (only on the final syllable of a word)

circumflex ~ : e.g. ã, αũ, ã (only on long vowels or diphthongs)

Breathings

rough (*spiritus asper*) ' : e.g. ὅρος, αὕτη, ἦ

smooth (*spiritus lenis*) ' : e.g. ὅρος, αὔτή, ἦ

Further diacritical signs

diaeresis " : e.g. δαῆζω

coronis ' : e.g. ταύτο (= τὸ αὐτό)

Standard punctuation marks

Period .

Comma ,

High dot · (roughly English ; and :)

Question mark ? (English ?)

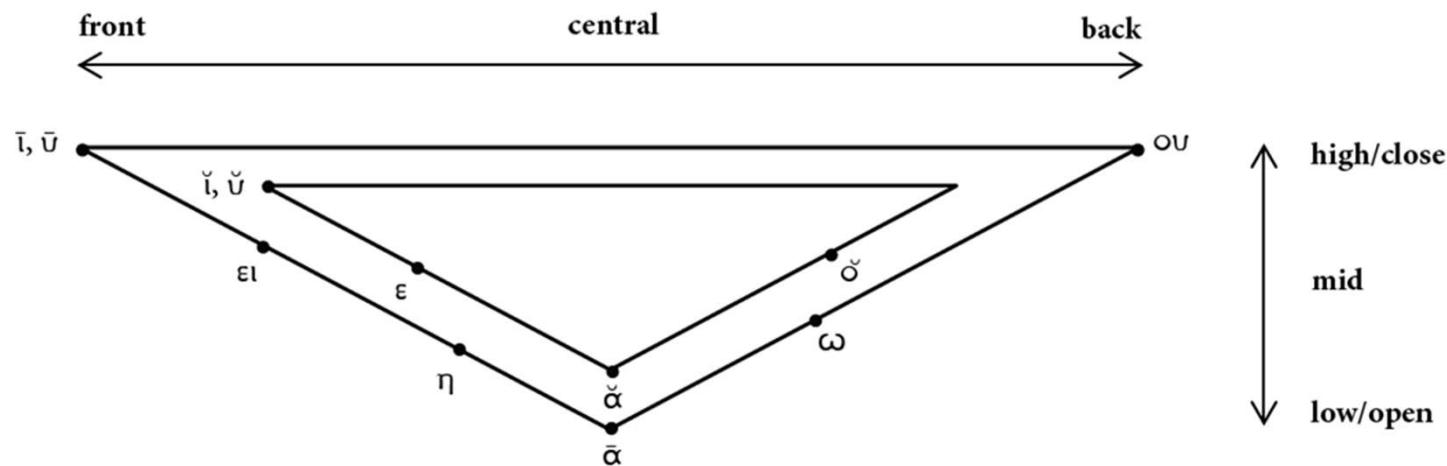
Apostrophe ' (for elided vowels)

Quick Phonetic Details

- All consonant graphemes represent a single phoneme, except ξ /ks/, ψ /ps/, ζ /sd/
- /h/ (only word initial in Attic), is expressed by the rough breathing ‘
- The grapheme γ represents [g], but [ŋ] before γ, κ, χ :
e.g. συγγενής [syŋgené:s] ‘akin’

Quick Phonetic Details

- The Attic vowel triangle (with graphemes):



Quick Phonetic Details

- /a/ and /a:/, both written α
- /i/ and /i:/, both written ι
- /y/ and /y:/, both written υ

- Three e-sounds /e/, /e:/, /ɛ:/, written ε, ει, η
- Three o-sounds /o/, /o:/, /ɔ:/, written ο, ου, ω

Quick Phonetic Details

- 7 'normal' diphthongs: αι, *ει, οι, υι, αυ, ευ, *ου
- 6 long diphthongs: α, η, ω, ḁαυ, ηυ, ωυ

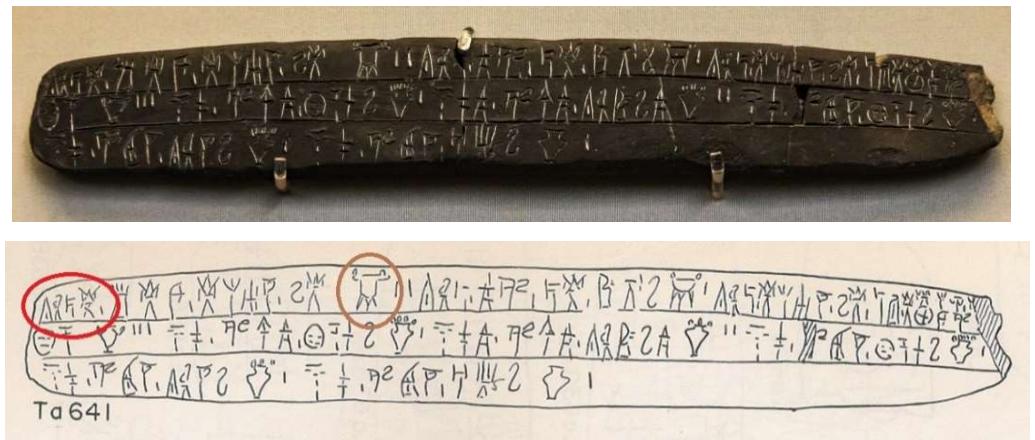
The Earliest Records: Linear B

- **Writing system:**

- syllabograms
 - V: /a/, /e/, /i/, /o/, /u/
 - CV: /ka/, /ke/, /ki/, /ko/, /ku/, etc.
- logograms

- **E.g.:**

ti-ri-po-de ($\tau\rho\acute{\iota}\pi\delta\varepsilon$) 'tripods' (nom. dual.)



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The Earliest Records: Linear B

■ Complications:

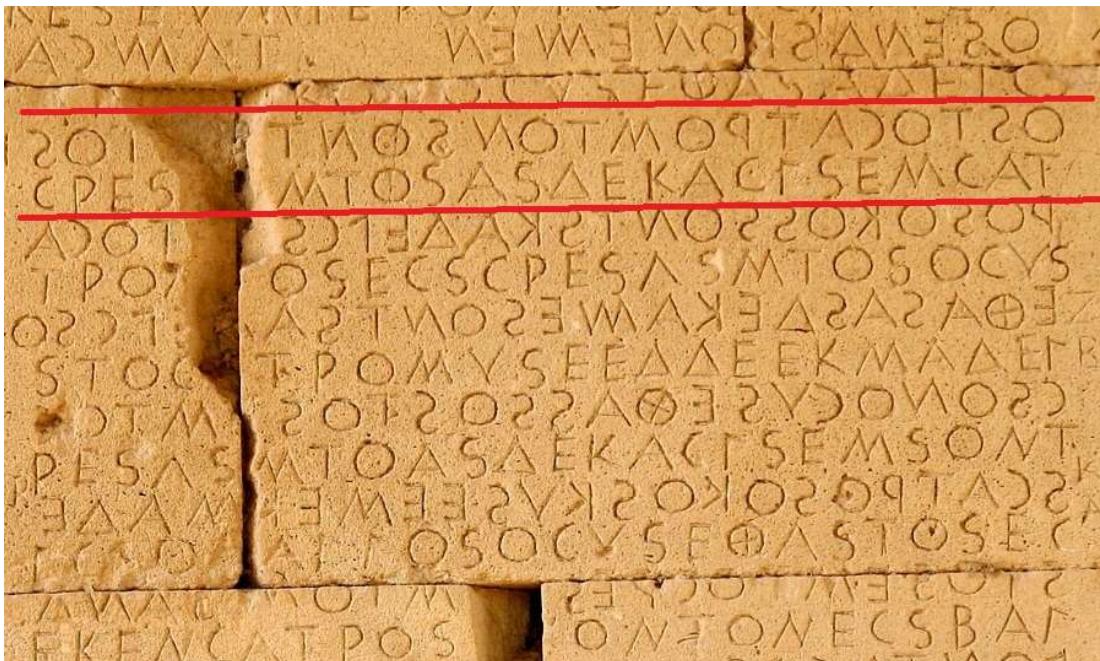
- No signs for voiced and aspirated plosives (e.g. /g/, /k^h/)
- CCV syllables
 - either by empty vowels: *ti-ri-po-de* τρί-πο-δε
 - by leaving out C (especially s + obstruent): *pe-mo* σπέρ-μο ‘seed’
- CVC/VC syllables
 - final C usually not represented: *pe-mo* σπέρ-μο
 - word-final consonants (/n/, /r/, /s/) ignored: *we-ke* φερ-γής ‘made’

Alphabetic Writing in Greece

Phoenician	Ionia	Athens	Corinth	Argos	Crete	Euboea	Modern	Phoenician	Ionia	Athens	Corinth	Argos	Crete	Euboea	Modern
𐤀	Α	Α	Α	Α	Α	Α	Αα	𐤍	Ϻ	Ϻ	Ϻ	Ϻ	Ϻ	Ϻ	Ϻν
𐤁	Β	Β	Ϻ	Ͳ	ͲB	Β	Ββ	𐤂	Ϛ	Ϛ	Ϛ	Ϛ	Ϛ	X	Ϛξ
𐤂	Γ	Λ	<C	ϺΛ	Λ	<C	Γγ	ஓ	ଓ	ଓ	ଓ	ଓ	ଓ	ଓ	ଓo
𐤄	Δ	Δ	Δ	D	Δ	▷	Δδ	ߛ	ߛ	ߛ	ߛ	ߛ	ߛ	ߛ	ߛπ
𐤆	ߝE	ߝE	ߝ	ߝE	ߝE	ߝE	Eε	ߝ	ߝ	ߝ	ߝ	ߝ	ߝ	ߝ	ߝ
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ߵ	ߵ	ߵ	ߵ	ߵ	ߵ	ߵ	Zζ	ߵ	ߵD	ߵR	ߵR	ߵR	P	P	Pρ
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Source: Lawrence Lo,
ancientscripts.com

An Example of Epichoric Script: Gortyn Law Code



οἱ ἔνδικον ἔμεν. νας. τὰμ πα-
[τ]ρῷοι[δ]κογ ὄπυίεθαι ἀδελπι-
δοὶ τῷ πατρὸς τῶν ιόντον τῷ
πρειγ[ι]στῷ. αὶ δέ κα πλίες πατ-
ρῷοιδοι ιόντι κάδελπι[ο]ὶ τῷ πα-
τρός, [τ]ῷ επιπρειγίστῳ ὄπυί-
εθαι. αὶ δέ κα μὲ ιόντι ἀδελπιο-
ὶ τῷ π[α]τρός, σιέεδ δὲ ἐκς ἀδελ-
πιῶν, ὄπυίεθαι ιόι τῷ [έ]ς τῷ π-
ρειγίστῳ. αὶ δέ κα πλίες ιόντ-
ι πατρῷοιδοι κυιέες ἐκς ἀδε-
λπιῶν, ἄλλοι ὄπυίεθαι τῷ ἐπ-
ὶ τῷ ές [τ]ῷ πρειγ[ι]στῷ. μίαν δ'

Old Attic and Euclides' Reform

"Εδοξεν τῇ Βουλῇ καὶ τῷ Δήμῳ
'The Council and People have decided'
ΕΔΟΧΣΕΝ ΤΕΙ ΒΟΛΕΙ ΚΑΙ ΤΟΙ ΔΕΜΟΙ →
ΕΔΟΞΕΝ ΤΗΙ ΒΟΛΗΙ ΚΑΙ ΤΩΙ ΔΗΜΩΙ ↓

