

Course outline: Level 1

Byzantine Greek Summer School 2014

Centre for Byzantine, Ottoman and Modern Greek Studies Department of Classics, Ancient History and Archaeology University of Birmingham

This course is designed for students with no previous knowledge of any form of Greek. Through 60 hours of teaching over a two-week period it introduces them to the basic morphology and syntax of Byzantine Greek. By "Byzantine Greek" we mean the dominant form of Greek written during the period of the Byzantine Empire (AD 330–1453). The spoken language continued to develop throughout the Byzantine period, and, when the vernacular becomes visible to us in the twelfth century as a language for new forms of literature, it is already recognizably Modern Greek. However most Byzantine historical, theological, rhetorical and literary writers, both before and after the twelfth century, use a conservative and almost static form of Greek based directly or indirectly on the established idea of Attic Greek of the fifth century BC, but influenced by the Hellenistic *Koine* and Biblical Greek, with additional Latin-derived vocabulary, particularly in matters of administration and law.

The purpose of the course is to enable students to take the first steps towards reading Greek texts of the Byzantine period. However, since the morphology and syntax which is taught is not significantly different from that of Classical Greek, this course is also a suitable preparation for reading Classical texts. The course introduces students to extracts of real Byzantine texts from the beginning, and, while some of the vocabulary is specific to the period, the greater part of it is equally useful in approaching pre-Byzantine Greek texts, including the New Testament.

Morphology.

This course covers nouns and adjectives of the first, second and third declensions; and verbs (including contract verbs) in the present and aorist, indicative and imperative, with infinitives and participles. Towards the end of the course we introduce the future and perfect tenses and the subjunctive mood, giving indications of how to recognize their forms. Full study of these elements is reserved for the Level-2 course.

Syntax.

While some students may already be familiar with another highly inflected language, we do not count on such familiarity, but focus on the differences in the ways in which Greek and English "work". We begin with the notion of *agreement* — agreement between articles, nouns, adjectives and participles, agreement between subjects and verbs. We consider prepositions as determiners of case, and show how the use of participles and infinitives allows the construction of complex and elegant sentences with limited use of finite verbs. In the early stages of text reading, full vocabulary is provided with each sentence, enabling students to concentrate on analysing the structure of the sentence through observation of the morphology of verbs and nouns etc., so as to establish their syntactical relations. Later exercises introduce students to the use of a dictionary. For those who do not have their own copy, we have a limited number of copies of the Liddell and Scott *Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon* which may be borrowed for the duration of the course.

Pronunciation.

Students are taught modern Greek pronunciation, since all the evidence indicates that this is closer to the pronunciation of Greek in the Byzantine period than is the Erasmian pronunciation, in any of its variants, generally used in the teaching of Classical Greek. However, students who wish to go on to further study in contexts where Erasmian pronunciation is in use can be introduced to that system towards the end of the course. Students get constant practice in reading Greek aloud. Having learned modern pronunciation they have a head start if they wish at some stage to learn the modern form of the language.

Teaching.

The basic idea is for two teachers to be involved, one teaching the morning sessions which concentrate on formal grammar and the learning of paradigms, and the other teaching the afternoon sessions where we work on Byzantine texts. In 2013 the principal teachers in Level-1 will be Anthony Hirst (grammar) and Michael Strain (text), perhaps with some contributions from one or two other teachers. Precise instructions are given as to what needs to be memorized at each stage, on a daily basis. The emphasis, though, is on understanding the principles of morphology rather than learning noun and verb tables by heart.

Assessment.

There are frequent short written tests, which are corrected by the teachers and returned to the students, throughout the course. At the end of the course there is written exam paper (two-and-a-half hours) and students who pass this are given a certificate to say that they have successfully completed the course.