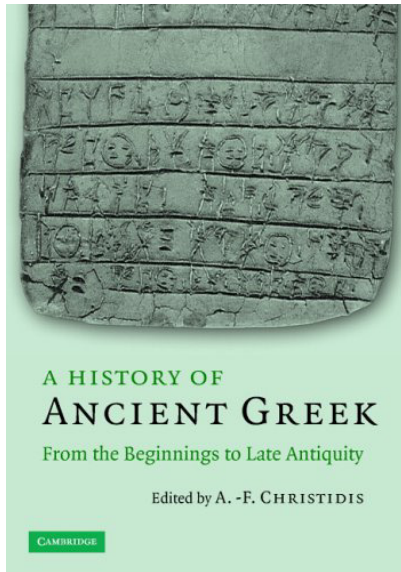


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**Christidis, A.-F., ed.**

***A History of Ancient Greek: From the Beginnings to Late Antiquity***

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. Pp. xli + 1617. Hardcover. \$277.00. ISBN 0521833078.

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*A History of Ancient Greek* is a sweeping survey of the development, usage, interaction, translation, and transformation of the Greek language spanning a period of more than two thousand years. Choosing to be a mile wide rather than a mile deep, the book considers major topics such as the development of Linear B alongside of obscure issues such as the relationship between Greek and Illyrian with equal effort and aplomb, making the volume near encyclopedic in its reach. The book includes contributions from over eighty scholars of Greek, history, classical literature, linguistics, culture, philosophy, and religion, almost of all of whom are from European universities. The Center for the Greek Language originally published the book in Greek in 2001; this English edition includes slight revisions and four new chapters.

As general editor, Christidis believes there are two concepts that underpin the entire effort: “the first is that of the ‘historicity of language’ and its reflection in specific attempts to chronicle the history of a particular language, and the second, which cannot be studied in isolation from the first, is the concept of the ‘management of data’” (2). When Christidis writes about the management of data, he means not just vocabulary and morphology but transferring “from the self-evident commonplace into the area of the problematic, thereby undermining any optimistic—and naïve—confidence in the datum’s validity” (1). This book takes this tact throughout its pages, presenting evidences and

arguments but leaving many issues unsettled. Given the amount of data, this serves a much higher purpose than would a more simplistic exposition of popular theories sans data.

In order to accomplish its monumental objective, *A History of Ancient Greek* divides its effort into nine sections. The first section introduces the reader to the nature and phenomenon of language. It includes chapters on where language came from and how it affects or informs the thought process of a person or society, defining units in linguistic analysis of language, and how the minds of users acquire and help to evolve language. Part 2 covers the ancestral tree of ancient Greek, with chapters on Indo-European civilization and language families, pre-Greek dialects, and the origin of writing. This section also includes quite a few chapters on the genesis of the written Greek language, from Linear A, Cypro-Minoan, Eteocypriot, Eteocretan, and Linear B, and how these scripts fared throughout the early evolution of ancient Greek as it entered the world stage. The third part covers the confluence of ancient Greek dialects on the mother tongue, with chapters devoted to taxonomy and then Mycenaean, Ionic, Attic, Arcado-Cypriot, Doric, Aeolic, and other dialects. The section also has a chapter on the dialect of Homer, plus several more on the role of dialects as the language evolved past its ancient zenith.

Section 4 investigates the use and adaptation of Greek in the ancient world, covering topics from morphology to pronunciation to Jewish Greek. There are also chapters on syntax, the peculiarities of Eastern Koine, the Greek of the New Testament, and the role and usage of personal names in ancient Greek. The fifth section traces the effect of the contact and interaction between Greek and other ancient languages, from expected chapters on Semitic languages and Latin to less influential languages such as Thracian, Phrygian, Carian, Lycian, Etruscan, and Iranian. Also included in this section are chapters on the influence of Greek on Hebrew and Latin, plus contacts between Greek and Coptic, Egyptian, Syriac, Celtic, Indian, and Arabic languages. Part 6 explores translation practices in the ancient world as they relate to Greek usage. Chapters included focus on the translation of the Septuagint and also how Greek translations fared alongside Latin, Syriac, and Phoenician languages (and vice versa).

Part 7 covers Greek language in various forms and various modes of ancient literature in three subsections. Included in the first subsection are chapters concentrating on the use of ancient Greek in comedies, tragedies, and epic poetry, plus a chapter on the use of dialects in literature and Greek poetic meter. Part 7 also contains a second subsection that looks at several types of specialized vocabularies, including the vocabularies of slavery, democracy, religion (traditional Greek, of which “many central concepts prove untranslatable” [1070] in heavily Christianized, Western languages), Christianity, legal, philosophical, and medical. The third subsection devotes space to five Greek terms with

significant cultural relevance: Ἑλληνισμός, φιλοτιμία, παράδεισος, ἅγιος, and ψυχή. The eighth section discusses ancient language education and how ancient writers regarded grammar. The final section broaches the end of ancient Greek as it passed through the rise of other languages and cultures. Included herein are chapters detailing the position of ancient Greek in the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, the pronunciation of ancient Greek in the modern era, and ancient Greek in light of modern Greek. There are many appendices that address topics ranging from specific oddities of ancient Greek to accentuation, punctuation, and language sounds. The book contains maps, pictorial alphabets, sample texts, archaeological images, glossary, bibliographies, indices, and much more.

All things considered, this book has few weaknesses. The introduction and first section on linguistics does bog the work down, though the information presented is useful. The size is intimidating, but once the reader passes through the first section, the book becomes surprisingly manageable. The greatest weakness is the price; this will keep the book out of reach for most people. Given its value not just as an encyclopedia for research libraries but as a useful, regular reference for Greek language classes, Cambridge University Press must find a way to release this book in some form at one-sixth of the original retail price.

There are many strengths to this work. First, the book is very well written for this type of volume (academic encyclopedia originally written in another language). While a good grasp of Greek is required for many sections, it is not required for all, and it even seemed that some if not many chapters could be digested by upper-level undergraduate students. Second, since the book is wisely broken down into very short chapters that range from five to fifteen pages, it is easy for the reader to feel the book is approachable (after getting past the cover and opening section). Third, there is a light amount of redundancy among related chapters, but this effect contributes to better comprehension without sandbagging the reading. Fourth, as mentioned above, the authors wrote the book with a view to explain the data, raise concerns, offer suggestions, but allow the reader to work through many of data-management issues themselves. This is “neutral” writing at its best. Combining these factors made the work a surprisingly nimble read for a volume of its size. The use of archaeological images, sample texts, and especially the depictions of all non-Latinized alphabets greatly aids both comprehension and interest.

Coming in at more than 1,600 pages, Christidis’s *A History of Ancient Greek* is nearly exhaustive in its scope but, more important, matchless in its quality of content for the field of Greek language studies. This book is a must-have for every ancient Greek curriculum. Highest possible recommendation for libraries and all scholars, teachers, and students of the Greek language.