

## Living Greek – Introduction to language and culture

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The subject of my lecture is the tradition of alphabetic Greek which has continued for more than 2700 years and is still continuing. The lecture will, first and foremost, deal with literature written in Greek, as well as the language itself from Homer up to the modern days. In addition, I will discuss the so-called cultural words and such "winged" expressions which have not been brought up very often. The field of culture is, of course, wider than language and literature alone, but I will leave for example religion, art and architecture for a later presentation.

The so-called Linear-B, the syllabic script of the second millennium BC, was followed by ancient Greek, the language extremely abundant in form, which we can find in inscriptions and in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* of Homer. In the Archaic and Classical Eras, a colourful variety of dialects appears, in an interesting manner, in literature which is based on dialects. This also applies to the Hellenistic Period and, to some extent, to the Imperial Era as well. The literature of the Byzantine Era is usually divided into Christian literature and profane literature, and, on the other hand, into vernacular literature and high-style literature. This division can also be seen in modern Greek: there is literature written as well in *Dimotiki* as in *Katharevousa*.

Many genres of ancient Greek literature are still alive, after having undergone some minor or major changes. Some of the metric genres, such as epics, (monodic and choral) lyrics,

tragedy, comedy, hymnography, dithyramb and epigram deserve to be mentioned, along with some prosaic genres, such as historiography, philosophy, epistolography, mytography, utopian literature, (auto)biography, rhetoric, grammatics, poetics, dialogue literature, etc. – all the terms mentioned above are of Greek origin. In addition, the roots of fable, satire and novel are to be found in Greek literature.

In our daily life, we, more or less unconsciously, use words based on ancient Greek, or neologisms of more recent times, especially technical terminology in the fields of physical sciences, theology, philosophy, philology, linguistics, jurisprudence, etc. Along with different discoveries and inventions, new words of Graeco-Latin origin come into use. There are thousands of Greek words as well in everyday language as in various technical languages.

Most of the so-called "winged" sentences are better known to us in their Latin form, because Latin, especially due to its use in schools and universities, continued its traditional role as the cultural language of Western Europe for a longer time and more intensively than Greek. It is, however, Greek literature where the original wording of many Latin "winged" expressions can be found. On the other hand, there are some well-known aphorisms or other statements which exist only in their Greek attire. My lecture will provide some examples of this – from Homer to Plutarch.