

Enchiridion

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INTRODUCTION

This book has had a long gestation period. We hope that now it is as fully formed as Athena when she sprang full-grown from the head of Zeus. Frankly, we probably have had more headaches than even that immortal experienced.

Since the subject is ancient Greek, do not be surprised at the number of allusions to mythology philosophy, literature and etymology that we have included in our ἐκλεκτός (eclectic) effort. Contrary to that last sentence, let us express the motivating force behind what you will be reading.

We believe that far from being obsolete and/or elitist, Greek language and culture are indispensable for modern life. We believe that “parsing” (knowing why sentences in Greek are what they are) is NOT a prerequisite for reading Greek. We also believe that emphasis on memorization and details of spelling and accents may have a place--but not in an introduction to reading Greek. Our goal is to give you the tools to begin reading Greek immediately (in both abridged and original form).

Everyone, regardless of interests or education, can comprehend and use daily the knowledge of Greek language and culture.

Lest you think this is a new or frivolous idea, please be assured that we take this task as a serious one. Our product comes from many sources, including our own happy and unhappy experiences in Greek, but the impetus for us has been our deep respect and love for Dr. Joseph F. Desmond.

Dr. Desmond dedicated his life to teaching classics, especially Greek. His career spanned many years at the Boston Latin School, Boston College and Tufts University. The number of students that he inspired is legion; his impact has been lasting. Dr. Desmond sometimes spoke about writing a book about Greek and its teaching; unfortunately he did not accomplish his wish. If he had done so, our effort would not be necessary because his version would be an impossible act to follow.

We therefore dedicate this book to Dr. Joseph F. Desmond, our inspiration and mentor. Needless to say, any errors or lapses are totally our responsibility.

Acknowledgements

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HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This book will, we hope, be unlike most Greek texts that you will use. It has only one purpose--to allow all of you to enjoy Greek to the best of your ability. This goal can be accomplished in a variety of ways. If you intend to be a classical scholar, concerned with the details of accent marks, put the book down now. If you would like to learn to read Greek, you have chosen well. If your interest is in vocabulary words that come from Greek, great literature in the original Greek and in translation, stories of heroes, mythology and history, we hope you will use this handbook as a guide to further study in all these areas.

This effort has been designed to teach you how to find out about the Greek language and culture, not as a text to be memorized. In fact, you can use this with a traditional Greek text--as a guide to understanding the more formal texts. Even better, use this with a Greek reader that has a glossary/dictionary. That way, with the clues and charts that we give you, you can learn HOW to READ Greek without undue memorization.

The plan is to divide each chapter into several sections. The title of the chapter will tell you the main idea for that chapter. There will be some explanations in simple terms. Sometimes, technical names will be used, but you will not have to know the names to do the work.

The first section will have something to do with the structure of the language, and you will start reading Greek immediately, beginning with names and with words that come directly into English from Greek.

An etymology section will give you one Greek root and ask you to write as many English words as you can that come from that root.

There will be a section on translation help where you will find TWO Greek words to learn.

A mythology section will be a short paragraph in English about someone or something in Greek mythology, and it will be followed immediately by a short selection in Greek on the same topic.

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From time to time charts will appear. You are encouraged to learn the most common things, but you can refer to the charts most of the time. Sometimes there will be explanations in English that have a box around them. These are usually comparisons to Latin. You may skip these explanations if you wish. We think that they are reminders if you know Latin, or explanations if you have forgotten.

From time to time you may be asked to write Greek--just to give you practice with your Greek handwriting. You will not be tested with questions that ask you to translate from English to Greek--there is no real point to that.

We also ask that you read the Greek aloud before you try to find the English meaning. Homer, the great Greek poet, composed the Iliad (which you will soon read) relying on speech and rhythm rather than on writing. Only later was the Iliad written down, and only much later were accents included.

If you feel the need for more explanations, your teacher can help you with any questions you may have. We think that you will enjoy this method; we know that it works. With some work on your part you will learn the language quickly and enjoy the experience.