

HISTORICAL GREEK PRONUNCIATION

A GROWING NUMBER of scholars today advocate the adoption of the *Historical Greek Pronunciation* (HGP).¹ The HGP is a sound system whose origins are traceable to the inscriptional record of Classical Attic, especially to the mid-5th century BC when Athens began to switch from the older Attic script to the more efficient 24-letter Ionic alphabet. The alphabet was ratified in 403 BC under Archon Eucleides and is thus known as ἡ μετ' Εὐκλείδην γραμματική “the post-Eucleidean grammar.”

The use of the post-Eucleidean grammar was to leave an unbroken trail of evidence of the development of the sounds of Greek from classical through Hellenistic and Byzantine times down to Neohellenic. Part of the evidence comes from official public records but mostly from the private epigraphic and papyrial records by the less literate subjects whose acoustically-guided spelling led them to substitute one letter for another letter (or letters) that stood for the same sound (e.g. τη**ι** βου**λ**ει for τη**ι** βου**λ**η**ι**, κ**ι**τ**ε** for κ**ε**ι**τ**α**ι**, τ**ο**ν for τ**ω**ν, η**μ**υ**σ**υ for η**μ**ι**σ**υ).

This nearly 2,500-year-old unbroken record of misspellings, judged by the same standard—the same historical 24-letter alphabet *and* spelling system—is the strongest evidence of the development of the historical sounds of Greek. The record helps us follow the mainstream Greek sounds that were already established or initiated within the Classical Greek period and prevailed through the centuries over all other peripheral pronunciations and evolved first into Hellenistic Κοινή “Koine,” and subsequently into what it is today. Neohellenic therefore preserves the still-living historical Greek sounds with a pronunciation that is not theoretical or reconstructed, but authentic, real, natural, consistent, and euphonic.²

¹ The term is most notably used by Prof. Chrys C. Caragounis, author of *The Development of Greek and the New Testament: Morphology, Syntax, Phonology, and Textual Transmission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006).

² The development of the Historical Greek Pronunciation is described in *Reading and Pronouncing Biblical Greek, Vol. I: Historical Evidence of Authentic Sounds*.